

**Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience:
A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario**

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A Major Paper

submitted to the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in Environmental Studies
York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Date: July 27, 2022

Abstract

According to the City of Toronto Strategy (2019), Toronto has over 1,500 parks in approximately 7,700 hectares of land scattered throughout the City, equating to 28m² of parkland per person. This paper explores the provision of parkland throughout the City of Toronto, while intersecting the practice of urban and environmental planning with wider themes of environmental justice and equity. If parks are unevenly distributed, then so are the benefits that they provide. This research paper looks beyond the geographic distribution of parks, to critically examine the quality and user experience of these public spaces in socio-economically contrasting neighbourhoods to attempt to highlight themes of environmental inequity and environmental injustice in the context of the City of Toronto.

Through this essay, I will argue why the practice of urban planning and more specifically, parks planning in a neoliberal context such as Toronto, works to perpetuate injustices that already exist through the exclusion of participatory planning practices. I argue that it is vital to equitable parks planning to create meaningful community engagement opportunities that considers the varying needs of contrasting communities. This study will build on existing theoretical and empirical conversations on how the intersection of socioeconomic inequality, racialized poverty and environmental degradation disproportionately impact vulnerable groups in Toronto and how different levels of access to quality park spaces contribute to environmental justice.

Through intense site observations, a created site audit tool, as well as questionnaire responses, this study uncovers the different qualities and user experiences that exist at parks within four neighbourhoods which consist of contrasting socio-economic characteristics. The results of this study demonstrate that user experience and park quality are much greater in the

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neighbourhoods of higher socioeconomic statuses or that have recently received investment through urban revitalization processes. Findings also highlight the importance of considering the unique needs of a particular neighbourhood and the residents, rather than a one-size-fits all approach when planning and enhancing local parks.

Foreword

The following essay is a culmination to my Area of Concentration outlined in my Plan of Study (POS). The Area of Concentration for my POS was to explore how the field of environmental planning could be utilized to promote environmental justice, particularly through the equitable provision of public parkland.

The three components of my ‘Area of Concentration’ and the supporting ‘Learning Objectives’ involved exploring and understanding conceptualizations of ‘Urban and Environmental Planning’, ‘Environmental Justice and Environmental Equity’, and ‘Park Access’. My research objectives were to gain theoretical knowledge and practical competencies over the planning practice and associated participatory planning strategies, an understanding of how the field can be exercised to work for or against the goals of environmental justice and equity, and good comprehension of issues of park access and how they contribute to greater themes of environmental injustice. These components were investigated throughout my two-year MES academic experience within courses, workshops, and field experiences.

I finalize this Area of Concentration study through this Major Paper, which is an empirical investigation through an intersectional lens that focuses on access to, and experience of parks within the City of Toronto. Through this essay, I will argue why parks planning in Toronto can be enhanced further to ensure environmental equity and justice. This study will build on existing theoretical and empirical conversations on how the intersection of

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socioeconomic inequality, racialized poverty and environmental degradation disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups in Toronto and how different levels of access to quality park spaces contribute to environmental justice. I argue that equitable park access goes beyond numerical metrics and geographic location, to incorporate considerations of park quality and user experience. I engage with understandings of the field of urban and environmental planning within a neoliberal context and how the provision of parkland is linked to wider themes of environmental justice and equity. This final paper takes a critical look into park access and quality of parks in contrasting socio-economic neighbourhoods throughout the City of Toronto, and how these neighbourhoods currently match up to goals of the City's Parkland Strategy.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the numerous individuals who have provided me with guidance, constructive feedback, and insight throughout the entirety of my research process. More specifically, I would like to thank Professor Justin Podur and Professor Stefan Kipfer for their advice, support, passion, and commitment to guide me throughout this entire academic endeavor. Additionally, I would like to thank all of my questionnaire participants for expanding my knowledge of the topic, as well as my family members, friends and girlfriend for their unconditional guidance, motivation and support. My research would not be where it is today without these individuals.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization due to the high numbers of confirmed cases and deaths and has posed an unprecedented health crisis to human beings (Chan et al., 2020). As a result, stay-at-home orders were issued across the world which created the need for people to depend on their immediate surroundings for their everyday lives. Local parks and neighbourhood greenspaces became one of the only sources of escape and physical exercise. The pandemic and associated restrictions on public gatherings caused green spaces to become one of the only sources of resilience throughout the pandemic, partly because of their positive effects on psychological, physical, and social health (Geng et al., 2020). Through this heightened dependence on urban green spaces and parks, issues of inequity and injustice became visible. If parks are unevenly distributed, then so are the benefits that they provide. This research paper has looked beyond the geographic distribution of parks, to critically examine the quality and user experience of these public spaces in socio-economically contrasting neighbourhoods to highlight themes of inequity and injustice in the context of the City of Toronto.

In 2019, the City of Toronto released a parkland strategy which has been developed to address the planning, acquisition and development of parks to ensure that Toronto's park system will grow to support the needs of residents and ensure a livable city. According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), Toronto has over 1,500 parks in approximately 7,700 hectares of land scattered throughout the City equating to 28m² of parkland per person. This paper has examined what has been done to implement the strategy up until now, with a particular focus on strategies of equity. Toronto is often championed for its large number of parks and greenspace

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for residents and visitors. Through this essay, I have argued that participatory planning strategies must be at the forefront in developing a parkland strategy and implementing new parks. I have argued that in order to ensure equitable parkland provision, the voices of those who will be using these spaces must be prioritized, irrespective of their socio-economic statuses. This research paper is a case study within the City of Toronto to compare park access in higher income versus lower income neighbourhoods. This case study was broken up into four smaller case studies to critically compare equitable park access, beyond indicators of geographic access, to examine user experience and park quality. This has helped create a conversation on the different levels of access to quality parks within Toronto, as well as their associated benefits, and thus underscore issues of environmental inequity and environmental injustice, especially in a time where park dependence is at an all-time high.

Research Statement and Supporting Questions

As mentioned above, the aim of this study was to create an empirical investigation to critically examine different levels of access to quality parks within the City of Toronto and how these spaces are used. When park spaces are unequally distributed, so are the benefits that they provide. Ultimately, even when parks are “evenly” distributed geographically, important questions need to be asked about how the quality and user experience of local parks varies throughout different neighbourhoods and that is the goal of this research. Rather than trying to solely link parkland provision and the socioeconomic status of a neighbourhood, this study has strived to critically examine user experience at local public parks and how those experiences differ between the contrasting neighbourhoods. The overall research question that has guided my research inquiry was to understand how parks are experienced by different users in different

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communities – How do both the provision and experience of parks in contrasting socioeconomic neighbourhoods vary?

Supporting background questions that were used to inform this research include:

- How do the quality of parks (both from an ecological and amenity standpoint) and the level of access to parks differ in neighbourhoods of contrasting socioeconomic statuses?
- What are the benefits of urban parks (social, physical, mental, and environmental)?
- What is environmental justice, and how does the provision of parks in Toronto contribute to this?
- How does the City of Toronto approach issues of access and social justice in their Parkland Strategy? How is it translated into action? More forward... There is a city-wide park budget, why are some neighbourhoods receiving more attention than others?

Overall, these background questions came together through different forms of methodology to create an intersectional analysis as an attempt to answer the posed main research question above to examine the socioeconomic statuses of neighbourhoods, while comparing user access and experience of parks within these contrasting neighbourhoods.

1.1 Methodology

This major research project was based on a mixed-method approach within both a quantitative and qualitative paradigm. This research began with a literature review of scholarly articles to explore academic conversations that discuss current and historic thinking on environmental planning, parks and park access, as well as environmental justice. The literature review contains a variety of perceptions on the planning of parks and how different levels access contributes to environmental injustice. I have referred to the literature review throughout my analysis and I have used my research findings to challenge, support, and build on these theories and academic conversations within the context of the City of Toronto. I continued this analysis by examining planning-related reports and masterplans to understand how parks are planned and implemented throughout the City of Toronto, as well as the community engagement process

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behind creation of these plans. These reports were incredibly important in providing a background on the provision of parkland in Toronto and quantitative statistics to help me understand the current parkland situation and underscore gaps or issues of equity in what has already been done. 2016 Census data for the City of Toronto was also used throughout the research analysis to compare and contrast socioeconomic trends in the selected neighbourhoods of focus.

To identify and explore the lived experiences of residents and their experience with local parks, questionnaires were conducted with key informants who are park users in the four neighbourhoods of focus. The main purpose for designing and administering a questionnaire was to allow me to better-understand the every-day experiences of the residents or visitors with accessing and using local parks. The questionnaires were executed to further validate findings and trends present in my research and to gain feedback from a large sample size of residents. Throughout the research process, I have also conducted several direct site-visits in various selected communities of the city to examine park space, who has access, and what visitors are doing in the space. All methods used throughout this research process were designed and executed in respect of all COVID-19 precautions and protocols to keep the researcher and participants as safe as possible. I have discussed further down below why each of these research strategies were chosen and how they have contributed to my research objectives of answering the posed research questions above.

1.1.1 Questionnaires

As part of my research process, I handed out questionnaires to receive important insight from local residents, employees, and visitors at neighbourhood parks in selected communities. These questionnaires were handed out in person at site visits using pen and paper. I also created a web

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survey (using *Google Forms*) as a second way to administer these questionnaires to provide another vehicle to receive questionnaire participation. Online surveys were administered using a snowball technique as I first shared them with a few colleagues of mine who are residents of either Regent Park or Black Creek and then they shared it with neighbours and friends who live nearby. An invitation to participate was also posted on social media (Instagram and Reddit) for anyone who lives/works/visits one of the four neighbourhoods and was interested in participating. Using online channels to distribute the questionnaires helped increase the number of respondents, and therefore strengthened the overall analysis of this research project. This research method was especially helpful in answering research questions of who has access to parks and why they use them. An advantage of using questionnaires is that they were easy to administer and required minimal time to fill out and therefore allowed me to have more respondents and represent the insights of a larger sample size. A total of 107 questionnaires were filled out by residents across the four neighbourhoods of focus.

Cresswell (2007) lists five qualitative approaches to inquiry and one that aligns with my research goals is the “phenomenological research approach”, which works to describes the meaning for several individuals of a community with their lived experiences forming a phenomenon. It is important to note that my research was not able to account for the entire community and that my phenomena will not be generalized and will only represent the sample community of people that I interacted with. Overall, the questionnaires were used as a vehicle in helping me grasp a better understanding of the lived experiences and struggles of local residents or visitors and their use of local parks.

1.1.2 Site Visits

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Site visits were critical to this research project. Site visits included the capture of photographs and the creation of lists of observations of the routine and lived experience of the settings of focus. To prepare for the direct visits, I created a checklist (audit tool) that was used at to measure and assess the experiential (amenity, leisure, access, safety) and ecological qualities (shade, tree cover, habitats, ponds, etc.) of specific parks selected throughout the city in the neighbourhoods of focus (see Appendix C). This audit tool was developed in line with the research objective of analyzing park access and wider themes of environmental justice and equity throughout the City of Toronto. Access to a local park does not necessarily equate to equitable parkland provision, how this space is constructed, maintained, accessed and interacted with is also important.

Anderson (2004) focuses on the geographical archaeology of knowledge introduced me to the term “Bimbling” which is a word for the practice of walking aimlessly. Anderson (2004) states that Bimbling offers the opportunity to not only open dialogue between the body and mind of activists, but also between activist and place. Through my site visits, I was able to become aware of the routines that take place of the parks and what practices are tied to them and this is what Anderson (2004) describes as harnessing “co-ingredience”. Altogether, the numerous site visits worked to inform and strengthen my findings by connecting me to the settings that I am researching, where I examined the routine that takes place in these parks as well as the ecological and experiential qualities of these spaces (using the audit tool) in attempt to better-underscore themes of injustice and inequity.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Literature & Theoretical Approach

The Interpretivist theoretical approach best-reflects the methodology I used throughout this process to achieve my research objectives. Bryman (2016) argues that social scientists maintain the role to grasp the subjective meanings of people's actions through an interpretivist approach.

2.2 Environmental & Urban Planning

2.2.1 Urban Planning

The definition of urban planning is one that is very subjective as it has different meanings for different practicing professionals, urban scholars, as well as members of the public. The field of urban planning is often understood as a professionalized practice that engages with the strategic regulation and management of various economic social and environmental aspects of the built environment and the productions of space (Huxley, 2009). In Ontario, Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) are those who move beyond simply dreaming of inspired, sustainable and diverse communities and chose to start building tangible, actionable plans to bring them to fruition by using their skills and diverse opinions to visualize an outcome that will benefit our communities for generations to come (OPPI, 2022). In this common frame of thought where planners go through an accreditation process, urban planning decisions are based on technical competencies and this approach requires scientific and rational evidence which can only be done by the planners themselves. It is predicated on the assumption that better evidence necessarily leads to better results and should be given priority (Davoudi, 2015).

Davoudi (2015) suggests that rather than thinking of knowledge as something planners have, it is more useful to think about planning as a practice of knowing that involves knowing

what, how, to what end and doing. In this thought, planning is a practice where knowledge is something that planners do and provide which can be collective and distributed as well as mediated and contested. Planning is often viewed as a field where the practicing professional (planner) is the source of expert knowledge and evidence which guides the development planning process. Davoudi (2015) challenges this perception by describing the field of planning as one that is actively engaging in the struggle to broaden its scope and reach a more inclusive definition of evidence that incorporates all forms of knowing; a practice of knowing that considers the dynamic relations between individual planners, their communities and their conception of planning activity. Through this perspective on urban planning, the practice works for and with the interests of residents by including them in the source of knowledge and evidence.

I have also been exposed to scholars who while applying a Marxist critique, believe that urban planning is an ideological activity that serves the interests of local capital and dominant classes that promote myths of local governmental rationality and civic harmony, to legitimize the socially divisive character of the existing capitalist system (Harvey, 1985). Harvey (1985) states that planners find themselves confined, for the most part, to the task of defining and attempting to achieve a "successful" ordering of the built environment to become more useful, but an important question arises "more useful for what and whom?". The Marxist critique is centralized on the reality that we live in a society which is founded on capitalist principles that are focused on social reproduction. According to Harvey (1985) these principles include private property and market exchange, a society that presupposes certain basic social relationships with respect to production, distribution, and consumption which must be reproduced in order for the social order to survive.

Planners play a role in ensuring that this social order is followed and contribute to it by maintaining and mediating social class relations and the built environment. In order to perform the necessary tasks effectively, a planner needs to acquire an understanding of how the built environment works in relationship to social reproduction and how the competitive, monopolistic, and state production of the built environment relate to one another in the context of often conflicting classes (Harvey, 1985). The Marxist critique of the practice of planning argues that the commitment to the ideology of harmony within the capitalist history and social order is more about domination of capital over labor (Harvey, 1985).

Most recently, the practice of planning has been tied to the rise of neoliberalism. According to David Harvey (2005), the economy of the Western world has shifted from a model of embedded liberalism to one of neoliberalism. The basic tenants of neoliberalism are catering to the “human well-being that can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). The rise of neoliberalism has been predicated on the idea of providing more ‘freedom’ to the public, but what is not considered is the loss of social and economic security that was previously offered. Neoliberalism produced a privatized and deregulated market which favoured the pockets of wealthy individuals (Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberalism has been the dominant paradigm of urban governance since the 1980s in many urban regions around the world which has led to a realignment of relationships among the state, market and civil society (Drummond & Young, 2017). Urban planning in the neoliberal state increases the power of private interests through public-private partnerships in urban development and redevelopment or revitalization efforts. Governments have retreated from

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direct intervention in many aspects of urban life including cuts on social spending, the privatization of urban infrastructure, reduction in personal income or corporate taxes, as well as a loosening of urban planning and environmental regulations (Drummond & Young, 2017).

Narain (2012) argues that neoliberal projects work to marginalize and gentrify communities by promoting the privatization of public spaces. While economic disparity may be widespread, it is not always explicitly visible as neoliberalism tends to homogenize citizens (Narain, 2012). The unstated assumption of urban revitalization efforts in a neoliberal market is that there are model citizens of the neoliberal city, and that their uprightness will hopefully rub off on public housing residents when they live side-by-side (James, 2010), thus homogenizing residents in urban revitalization efforts.

These public-private partnerships that urban planners exercise in a neoliberal state gives more power to private interests that tends to favour capitalism, and therefore the interests of wealthy individuals at the expense of the urban poor, resulting in processes of gentrification. Urban revitalization projects that do not have policies or measures (i.e., rent control) in place that protect the existing residents from an inevitable increase of cost of living due to neighbourhood investment, forces pre-existing residents to move out once revitalization efforts are complete due to the higher living costs. Narain (2012) describes urban revitalization through a Toronto context where the urban poor are frequently moved from city-centres into inner-city communities or forced to buy homes that they may not be able to afford, for the more affluent to gentrify the space that was once home to the 'urban poor'.

In light of creative and cultural turn in neoliberal urban policy, the development of land involves contestations that exacerbate racialized and classed social exclusions (Bain & Baker, 2017). An urban discourse that has dominated urban planning in post-industrial cities has been

Richard Florida's (2002) argument that a creative class drives urban economic growth and innovation (Bain & Baker, 2017). Neoliberal-induced urban renewal during this time prioritized the attraction this "creative class" resulting in infrastructural development to market an improved quality of life to middle-class residents and tourists. Although urban planners may not exhibit financial or political power, their visions for the future of cities are often comprehensive and persuasive, in a way that labels urban development as a predominantly middle-class project through renewal and place-branding initiatives to promote profit driven urban development for the well-educated and culturally curious middle-class (Bain & Baker, 2017). The practice of urban planning is continuously shaped by the political climate in which it exists, and during the rise of neoliberalism, urban revitalization has been at the forefront of planning efforts as an attempt to 'correct' past mistakes and still is today.

2.2.2 Environmental Planning

Environmental and parks planning can be seen as branches of urban planning and are the branches in which this research project will focus in on. The practices are very similar, but environmental and parks planning give special consideration to the natural environment and the provision of parkland. Planning is a field that is steered in the direction of political and market ideologies which often clash with values of social justice and equity. Conventional planning is portrayed as progressive, reformist, and modernist, but far less attention is devoted to planning's advancement of regressive elements such as social oppression, economic inefficiency, male domination, or ethnic marginalization (Yiftachel, 1998). Yiftachel's article raises the important question of "if planning is a form of social reform or social control", which gives rise to a paradox that the tools which are used to assist social reform and improves people's quality of life can also

be used to control and repress peripheral groups. Yiftachel (1998) refers to the field of planning as a “double-edged sword”.

Urban planning involves the development of vacant land often with natural features therefore underscoring the need to incorporate a sustainable approach to existing and future urban developments to work better with local natural environments and that is what environmental planning is for. To develop and plan sustainably, we need to consider the impact of any proposed changes, not only on the natural environment, but also on economic and social factors (Beer, 2000). Environmental sustainability can benefit urban areas economically and socially by providing natural landscapes that possess natural benefits such as water absorption, filtration, as well as providing cooler surface temperatures while providing leisure and physical activity opportunities for local residents and visitors. Environmental planning is a process that is most commonly known for the undertaking of an environment assessment which is an essential part of the development application process on sites where there are natural features.

To make an assessment of the local environment during development, data first needs to be gathered about the local abiotic, biotic, social, cultural and economic conditions and once the basic data are assembled, the more challenging phase of developing an understanding of what it all means in the local situation can begin (Beer, 2000, p.153). This involves examining the interactions between the development and natural features such as topography, land use and energy consumption, or between built form, public open spaces and biodiversity (Beer, 2000). Daniels & Daniels (2003) define environmental planning as the theory and practice of making decisions about the natural environment, working landscapes, public health, and the built environment. In the 1920s, regional environmental planning emerged, and federal environmental impact statements were first required in the 1970s, while the current era makes sustainability the goal of

environmental planning, tying together the ideas and practices of the previous eras and blending regulation and financial incentives to address national and global environmental problems, such as climate change (Daniels, 2009).

More specifically, environmental planners make decisions around the provision and management of urban green spaces and park spaces in careful consideration of the population numbers and individual demands. Boulton et al. (2018) offer a conceptual model that explains the interaction between green space provision factors across different scales; findings from this model highlight the gaps that cities experience between planned and actual green space. The authors suggest the necessity of holistic green space planning approaches that better-recognize and respond to emerging demands of urban green space (Boulton et al., 2018). Localized participatory planning methods can help contribute to this holistic approach, as they can result in the meaningful involvement of all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds to incorporate the needs of local residents in the decision-making process around urban green space provision. This research project has examined what was done to create meaningful engagement and uncovered who was left out of the community engagement process during the development of the City of Toronto's Parkland Strategy.

2.2.3 Participatory Planning

In some cases, planning can be understood as a democratic process that involves democratic decision making through public involvement. Klosterman (1985) argues that urban planning is a political practice that provides a set of social functions and a process that involves contentious decisions from those interested in the development of the built environment. Public participation in urban planning includes the direct involvement of communities and residents in decision-making processes. Planners have acknowledged that involving affected people can

identify alternative values and solutions, increase fairness in decision making, resolve inequities in land allocation, reduce conflict, and ultimately lead to better decisions (Jackson, 2001).

Public participation in planning is very contentious and its success ultimately depends on the existing power structures that exist within the field of planning (Lane, 2005). There are many forms of public participation that each have different levels of impact on the final development project and the extent of power granted to the public in each of these forms of engagement depends on the existing power structures that surround. Arnstein (1969) conducted a study that lists and examines eight forms of citizen participation. This influential article describes the multiple approaches to public participation in theory and in practice as well as the different levels of decision-making power that they possess. Debates around the different levels of participation are due to exacerbated rhetoric and misleading euphemisms (Arnstein, 1969). Public participation can sometimes be perceived as tokenism; essentially it is taking place to check a box rather than create meaningful engagement thus creating confusion around what is defined as true citizen participation. Arnstein (1969) defines citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the citizens who presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future.

The importance of public participation has been tied recently to the famous term “right to the city” coined by Lefebvre (1968). David Harvey (2008) summarizes the term by connecting it to public participation:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization (p.23).

It is evident from the analysis above that meaningful public participation is vital to the success of urban planning and the ability of urban planners to develop in a way that benefits those who live nearby. The planning and provision of parkland falls within the realm of urban planning and therefore public participation should be a key consideration. Jennings et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of listening to the needs and experiences of the public when approaching the provision of urban green space and parks through the lens of environmental justice. In order to truly deal with the inequitable distribution of green space, there needs to be a localized and case-specific approach to the provision of urban green space. Since different communities can vary in their needs and overall context, a one-size fits all approach may not be favourable for green space projects (Jennings et al., 2017).

Public engagement could not only help align the provision of urban green space with local interests and needs, but also promote environmental justice by providing a voice to those who are often left out of the decision-making processes in the field of planning. Munthe-Kaas & Hoffman (2017) mention that planners can use design experiments to stimulate publics around their projects, to lift new voices into the planning process, and to enable new connections between previously disconnected actors. Intersecting parkland provision with environmental justice has allowed me to uncover how the provision of parks in Toronto can become more equitable and inclusive using an environmental justice and equity lens.

2.3 Environmental Justice & Equity

2.3.1 Environmental Equity

A central principle of urban environmental planning with respect to achieving environmental justice must be to emphasize equal access to natural resources and equal environmental quality (Nabalamba et al., 2001). “A fundamental question in environmental justice research concerns

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environmental equity –whether the spatial distribution of environmental risk is indeed equitable among different racial and socioeconomic groups” (Mennis & Jordan, 2005, p.249). In urban environments, where a specific community or population experiences greater levels of environmental risk (i.e., pollution), this is described as environmental inequity. Mennis and Jordan (2005) mention that urban concentration is a critical factor in explaining environmental inequity. Historical research and findings on environmental equity suggest that disadvantaged groups have experienced greater environmental risks since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution which saw a massive migration from rural to urban areas. This surplus of people moving into congested and poorly sanitized cities led to inadequate and substandard environmental conditions, particularly for the poor in areas with a lower cost of living (Geddes, 1968; Mumford 1961). When environmental costs are spatially concentrated in areas where people with lower income live, wealthier people can isolate themselves from these environmental costs and risks (Jerret, 1997).

The connection between environmental justice and equity to civil rights issues has been most prevalent in the USA than anywhere else in the world. This divergence between the USA and other countries is also evident within scholarly literature, with very little recent empirical research on environmental equity in Canada (Jerret, 1997). The study published by Jerret (1997), attempts to contribute to the environmental justice debate using a Canadian context, and results agree with findings of recent US studies where manufacturing, employment, urbanization, dwelling value, and household income were all significantly related to pollution emissions exposure. Environmental equity is not only achieved by mitigating and eliminating the disproportionate distributions of environmental risks among different socioeconomic and racial

groups, but also when these populations are provided with the power and resources to seek and influence change.

The groups that suffer the most from environmental injustices, the urban poor, new immigrants, and visible minorities have the least power to have a voice in changing their circumstances and as a result, their concerns are not prioritized by municipal governments (Ollevier & Tsang, 2007). When there is environmental justice (fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all), environmental equity is achieved, where no single group of the population faces disadvantages in dealing with climate and environmental-related challenges. This can only happen by recognizing that individuals and social groups face unique challenges and require different levels of support based on their specific needs.

2.3.2 Environmental Justice

Environmental justice movements emerged during the 1980s in the United States in response to the realization of distributive injustices resulting from the disproportionate burden from environmental degradation and polluting industries experienced by marginalized communities (Bullard, 1990). Environmental justice is a movement and a complicated history of political, social, and economic interactions that emerged in response to issues of environmental racism and environmental inequality (Sze & London, 2008). “Environmental injustices occur when a certain minority of the population is forced, through their lack of access to decision-making and policymaking processes, to live with a disproportionate share of environmental ‘bads’ and suffer the related public health problems and quality of life burdens” (Agyeman et.al., 2003, p.6). Environmental justice has different meanings for different people, but the common goal among the various definitions is the achievement of environmental equity. “Environmental justice is the principle that all people, regardless of gender, age, race or socioeconomic status, are

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entitled to equal protection under environmental laws and to participate in environmental decision making in their community” (Mennis & Jordan, 2005, p.249). According to Todd & Zografos (2005), environmental justice is a concept that promotes the equitable treatment of people of all races, incomes and cultures with respect to environmental laws, regulations, policies and decisions. Through these various definitions, I was able to understand how systemic tools can be used by decision makers to either promote environmental justice, or further exacerbate existing injustices.

Environmental injustices are created and exacerbated by a number of factors in addition to the climate crisis and disproportionate exposure to pollution. “The problem of environmental injustice is one not only created by science and technology, but also created by an economic political and sociological power struggle” (Pritchard, 2009, p.41). Some scholars have also explored the link between environmental justice and sustainability to acknowledge the interdependency of social justice, economic well-being and environmental sustainability (Agyeman et al., 2002; Haughton, 1999). More forward, Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) argue that environmental justice broadens conceptions of the environment, by bringing together concerns for health, economic equality and species preservation as well as concerns for diversity, democracy, and human rights. In addition to understanding how environmental justice promotes change at the decision-making level, this definition allowed me to understand that the quality of life of all members of the population can be improved through environmental justice. Although there are many perspectives around the term environmental justice, marginalized communities are central to all definitions.

Many academics argue that the definition of environmental justice must be expanded. Teelucksingh (2001) argues that Canadian environmental researchers need to avoid simply

borrowing American theoretical approaches that may be inappropriate to Canadian context and she demonstrates the need to challenge the dominant thinking that race does not matter in Canadian contexts because most Canadian cities do not have American-style racial segregation. Another example that highlights the need for expanding the definition of environmental justice; Anguelovski (2013) argues that traditionally, environmental justice researchers have centered around “brown” cases of injustice (pollution, water contamination and toxic spills), but research focusing on struggles around “green” environmental justice (projects that improve livability through parks and green space) is still very preliminary. I have focused more on the “green” environmental justice through my research with the goal to contribute to this preliminary field of research by examining the provision of parkland throughout the City of Toronto. To unpack this idea of “green” environmental justice further, Agyeman et al. (2002) mention that environmental justice has been extended to encompass not only environmental risks and harms to disadvantaged groups, but also access to environmental goods and amenities, such as those provided by urban spaces. Parks provide countless good and amenities for residents to enjoy, but if they are unevenly allocated, so are the benefits that they provide.

2.3.3 Equity, Justice & Parks

Parks and access to parks certainly contribute to wider themes of environmental equity and justice. If access to a park is unequally distributed, then so are the benefits that they provide. Access is often highly stratified based on income, ethno-racial characteristics, age, gender, (dis)ability, and other axes of difference (Byrne, Wolch, & Zhang, 2009; McConnachie & Shackleton, 2010). Over the last few decades, the uneven accessibility of parks has become recognized as an environmental justice issue that focuses on how to measure access to urban greenspace, primarily parks; the relative access of socio-demographics to these spaces; and how

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a lack of access affects public health (Wolch et al., 2014). Addressing park-poverty in communities of colour and/or low income can create an urban green space paradox; one where as more green space is made available, neighbourhoods become more desirable, causing housing costs to rise which can lead to gentrification processes (Wolch et al., 2014). Cole et al. (2017) refer to this process as ‘green gentrification’ which is an unintended consequence of the benefits associated with greening a neighbourhood. The benefits of greening can only be fully understood relative to the social and political environments in which the inequities originally persist at and it is also important to ask questions of who benefits from newly added greenspace in the short and long term (Cole et al., 2017). This paradox is important to my research as gentrification can often result into the displacement of residents into more affordable and lower-income neighbourhoods that may experience lower access to quality parks and urban greenspaces, therefore exacerbating inequities that exist. This is a theme that this research has studied through the context of Toronto.

Access to parks does not necessarily mean equal parkland provision (environmental equity). When looking park access from an environmental justice and/or equity lens, the quality and use of these parks must be considered. Given that in many cities, low-income and racialized communities are often placed where public health challenges tend to be the most critical— they often have relatively poor access to safe and well-maintained parks (Wolch et al., 2014). A study by (Otero Pena et al., 2009) focused on the design and implementation of parks in low income, minority-majority neighbourhoods and emphasized that if social and political access to parks is not guaranteed and enhanced, then the benefits of parks (i.e., physical health or social cohesion) may never be realized. Through this literature review of intersecting park access with wider themes of environmental justice and equity, one can begin to see the connection between social

and political trends and parkland provision. The success and benefits of parkland-enhancing initiatives can further exacerbate injustices by unforeseen consequences such as gentrification. These potential risks and consequences highlight the importance of nuanced thinking in parkland provision, to understand how these interventions can be better supported by policies to ensure sustainable and equitable benefits for all residents.

2.4 Parks & Park Planning

2.4.1 Park Planning History

Geographic research around the evolution of urban parks has been wide-ranging and can be traced back to Frederick Law Olmsted's work as an American landscape architect. Olmsted became one of the nineteenth century's leading park builders and advocates, predicated on an intuitive understanding of the link between nature and human well-being that is the underpinning of what we today know as ecosystem services (Eisenman, 2013). During the first era of environmental planning, the parks and playgrounds, city beautiful, and garden cities movements all attempted to use physical planning and urban design to respond to the deplorable conditions of industrial cities (Daniels, 2009). In the later stages of the nineteenth century, urban reformers called for parks that served entire cities and served as neighbourhood playgrounds (Girardet, 2004). This could be traced back to the work of Frederick Law Olmsted who argued that parks were places where nature and the built environment met in harmony, where all classes of society could interact peacefully (Girardet, 2004).

Olmsted is famously known for his design of New York City's Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park as well as Boston's Emerald Necklace which makes up a 1,100-acre system of parks and parkways. These projects formulated a progressive era in environmental planning which prioritized aesthetics, social belonging, sustainability, and nature protection to

create a sense of place to serve as an escape from urban life (Daniels, 2009). Daniels (2009) describes a few other eras of environmental and parks planning including: the rise of regional ecological planning and the introduction of science-based environmental planning; the rise of modern environmental planning which focuses primarily on pollution cleanup and control; as well as state-level planning and sustainability within the global environment as a response to a changing climate. The first era of environmental/parks planning is arguably the most influential on the practice today as projects from this era still influence decision-making processes around the provision and design of parkland. Influential projects and movements include the Olmsted American projects mentioned above, the City Beautiful Movement which was part of a larger progressive social reform movement (Daniels, 2009), as well as the Garden Cities movement.

The Garden Cities movement is a Britain-influenced method of urban planning influenced by Ebenezer Howard which aims to capture the primary benefits of a countryside environment and an urban environment while avoiding the disadvantages of both (Howard, 1902). The goal of the movement was to combine the best features of country and city life, balancing development with nature which was experimented in the suburbs of London and later experimented in America during the 1920s and 1930s (Daniels, 2009). In the late twentieth century and up until today, parks planning has been intrinsically linked with capitalism and more recently, neoliberalism. The production and provision of parks has experienced a shift in the twenty-first century as it has been linked to the gentrification of neighbourhoods; for example, Regent Park in Toronto (James, 2010). Improving parkland provision in some instances, has led to a paradox where increased access to park spaces within a neighbourhood results in a higher cost of living and processes of gentrification (Wolch et al., 2014).

By familiarizing oneself with the eras and milestones of parks planning history, one could gain a sense of how parks planning has always been more than simply about the provision of parkland, parks planning has intervened in the social and economic regulation of society. For example, in the United States, people of colour and low-income typically occupy the urban core and/or inner-ring suburbs where green space is either scarce or poorly maintained while in contrast, wealthier households often reside in the suburban periphery where green space is abundant and well-maintained (Heynen et al., 2006). The reasons why green space is differentially distributed within urban areas vary, including the philosophy of park design, history of land development, evolving ideas about leisure and recreation, and histories of class and ethno-racial inequality and state oppression (Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

In the context of Toronto, a rapidly increasing population and a booming real estate market makes it difficult to find land for new parks and to protect existing greenspaces because most priority is given to the housing market (Pelley, 2015). Some scholars such as Byrne & Wolch (2013), have recently underscored the discriminatory history of parks planning by intersecting park use, environmental justice, socio-economic processes and political-economic processes that operate through, and in turn shape park spaces. Overall, the history of parks planning is integral to this paper in an attempt to understand how these processes have influenced and continue to influence the provision of parkland throughout the City of Toronto.

2.4.2 Perceived Benefits of Parks

Linking parks, nature, and resident well-being can bring themes of equity and justice to the forefront of parkland provision in dealing with contemporary issues. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis, the value and importance of urban green space for urban residents has been underscored through increased dependence. According to an

article by Geng et al. (2020), park visitation has increased significantly since February 2020, compared to visitor numbers prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This increased dependence is seen as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions at a global scale – due to the important role and benefits provided by parks, especially urban and community parks. Numerous authors attempt to unpack the various social, economic, health, and environmental benefits provided by parks and urban greenspace. Sugiyama et al. (2018) discuss using public green spaces as a way of reducing the risk of chronic diseases by providing opportunity for physical activity.

Kim and Jin (2018) argue that urban nature and parks provide space not only for the improvement of public health, but also for social interaction and community cohesion, focusing on the social and mental health benefits of urban green space. They found that urban parks in Seoul, Korea are associated with residents' subjective well-being and that individuals are willing to pay part of their household income to increase their access to urban parks. This finding raises concerns of inequity and injustice, as not all members of the population have the ability to pay part of their income for access to public parks. This research article in particular was very relevant to my research project as I have attempted to conduct a similar intersectional study that examines the income levels of specific neighbourhoods and their different levels of access to parks. Through this literature review, I found it difficult to find any completed intersectional analyses of income and park access from a Canadian context. I have attempted to contribute to filling that gap through my focus on Toronto, Ontario.

Urban scholars often associate the use of parks with human-health benefits and improvement of one's quality of life (Kondo et al., 2018; Braubach et al., 2017). The use of greenspace has been found to positively influence the mental health of visitors in many ways. Some examples include by improving the cognitive function of users (Gidlow et al., 2016), mood

and emotion (Barton et al., 2012), depression (Gubbels et al., 2016), stress reduction (Beil & Hanes, 2013), and behavioral problems (Richardson et al., 2017). More forward, some authors have looked beyond mental-health benefits associated with the use of urban parks and greenspace and have examined its impact on mortality (Takano et al., 2002), cardiovascular health (Gidlow et al., 2016; Song et al., 2014), respiratory health (Fuentes et al., 2014), violence (Kondo et al., 2016), birth outcomes (Cusack et al., 2017), and physical activity, which is not only impacted by accessibility, but also features, condition and safety of the physical surrounding environment (Owen et al., 2004). Although studies have positively linked access to parks and green space with associated benefits, there is still an issue of uncertain geographic context (Kwan, 2012) and that exposure to parks and green space goes beyond physical access, to include considerations of cultural access, political access, quality, quantity and temporality of these spaces (Kwan, 2012; Frumkin et al., 2017). This ideology was critical in shaping this research project which was carried out with the objective of looking beyond geographic access to parks by looking at the quality and usability of these spaces.

If green space is associated with mental and physical health outcomes, access to green space would inextricably also be tied into issues of equity, justice, and access (Lee et al., 2020). When assessing parks and associated green space in a city from an environmental justice lens, questions of uneven access arise. In cities where parks and urban greenspaces are unequally distributed, so are the benefits that they provide. The environmental justice, cultural landscape, and political ecology literatures around parks planning have all been effective in highlighting problems associated with urban parks, especially the public health and ecological consequences of the uneven spatial distribution of greenspace within cities (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). Overall, although I agree that there are countless benefits of parks on the surrounding environment and

park users, there are also issues of distributional inequity when exploring research that uses an environmental justice framework. This is an area of research that this paper has strived to contribute to.

3 Case Study: Parkland Provision Within the City of Toronto

3.1 City of Toronto Parkland Context: City of Toronto Parkland Strategy – 2019

According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), Toronto has over 1,500 parks in approximately 7,700 hectares of land scattered throughout the City equating to 28m² of parkland per person. The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division in partnership with the City Planning Division developed the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy to provide the City with a long-term vision and framework for the enhancement of Toronto's parks system which will occur through the creation of new parks, and the expansion of improved access to existing parks. Overall, this report and strategy has been developed to address the planning, acquisition and development of parks to ensure that Toronto's park system will grow to support the needs of people and ensure a livable city. The strategy is broken up into two phases, the first phase focuses on developing a new, modernized approach for assessing parkland provision and the second phase examines parkland need and how the City makes decisions relating to prioritizing investments.

3.1.1 Community Engagement

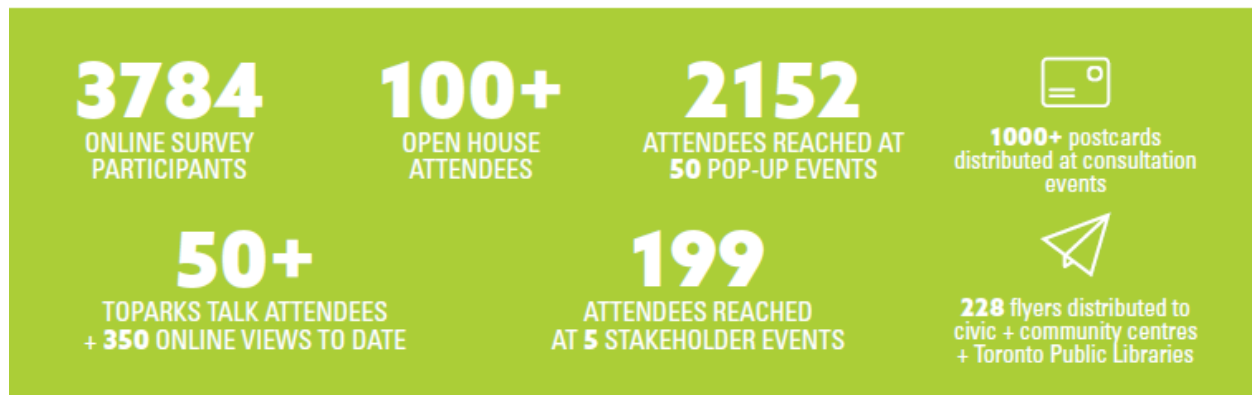
Prior to launching the Parkland Strategy in November of 2019, the City of Toronto engaged with the public and other stakeholders to help set priorities for the strategy. The first phase of engagement took place May to October 2017, which supported the formation of an updated parkland provision measurement and assessment methodology. The second phase of

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engagement took place from January to September 2018, where a vision for the future of Toronto's park system was articulated and created in tandem with public stakeholders. Special attention was given to engaging participants in developing strategies for parkland acquisition and improvement priorities at both the local and city-wide levels. According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), an equity lens was applied in all approaches of consultation so that voices of under-served and equity-seeking communities were brought to the forefront. How effective were these strategies in ensuring that equity-seeking neighbourhoods were aware and included in the formation of this Parkland Strategy? The City of Toronto Parks and Recreation staff conducted both in-person consultations and online surveys through social media platforms with goals to involve harder to reach populations.

Figure 1

Community Consultation Summary. Source: City of Toronto Parkland Strategy, 2019



3.1.2 Status of Toronto's Park System

The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019) developed a parks classification system which has been used for the purposes of this research paper. Toronto's parks are broadly categorized into two categories – planned parks and natural parks. Planned parks can be defined as lands that have been acquired, designed, and conceived for public use, while natural parks can be defined as lands that have been preserved in its natural state. For the purposed of this research

project, focus is solely on the City of Toronto planned parks. More forward, the Parkland Masterplan (2019) defines different park spaces according to their differing functions, including passive and ecological, sport and play, as well as community and civic. The parks classification system was also developed using a park size breakdown which includes Legacy Parks (> 8 hectares in size), City Parks (5 to 8 hectares), Large Parks (3 to 5 hectares), Medium Parks (1.5 to 3 hectares), Small Parks (0.5 to 1.5 hectares), and Parkettes (<0.5 hectares). 59 percent of parks in Toronto fall under the parkette or small park categories, while 10 percent fall under the legacy and city park categories (City of Toronto, 2019).

The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019) is accompanied with a developed park catchment tool which examines the amount of parkland available per person within a walkable distance (500 metre walking distance). It is important to note that the amount and variability of parkland distribution varies across the city due to a combination of factors such as population density, existing park areas, and the walkability of a neighbourhood. This paper is an effort to look beyond the numeric value attributed to the definition of “park access”, by examining the usability and quality of these parks that are available.

3.1.3 Examining Toronto’s Parkland Need

This Parkland Strategy was developed with six lenses to examine Toronto’s parkland need. In 2016, as a city-wide average, Toronto residents had access to 28m² of parkland per person, with areas located close to the ravine system having the highest provision (City of Toronto, 2019). Six lenses were used to examine parkland need across the city including parkland provision, the impact of growth, park range and distribution, equity, access and connection, as well as climate change, which all pose their own unique issues and opportunities for parkland provision. The impact of population growth and employment growth increase has

resulted in an increase of parkland use and need. According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), achieving equity is a key consideration for this strategy and it means addressing or removing systemic barriers so that all people have equal opportunity to the use and benefits from public parks. The identification of parkland need in this strategy has incorporated low income as a key factor in showing where more parkland is needed, in order to align investment to support communities comprised of equity-seeking groups. This research highlights that park equity goes beyond the simple definition of access, to include the usability, experience, and investment of these spaces. Through direct site visits to both lower-income and higher-income neighbourhoods, I have had the opportunity to experience first-hand, how much investment was targeted in low-income neighbourhoods over 2 years later since this strategy has been approved.

3.1.4 Parkland Strategy Framework

The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), has provided a framework on how to make informed decisions on how to expand, improve, and connect Toronto's park system and it acknowledges that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution and that a multi-faceted approach is needed to address the increasing demand for parks which has been exacerbated through the Covid-19 pandemic. This strategy was broken up into 4 large strategic actions which are coupled with individual objectives and actions, and these are Expand, Improve, Connect, and Include. "Expand" is a systems approach to ensure Toronto's system of parks expands as the city grows and evolves by advancing and updating the implementation process of park projects. "Improve" is a commitment to continue improving existing parks, especially where land for acquisition is scarce. Improvements include enhancing the prominence, comfort, accessibility, utility, safety, and quality of design.

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The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), states that improvements to existing parks is especially important in low-income communities where parks play a vital role in supporting the quality of life for residents. “Connect” is a strategic action about creating better connections to and in-between new and existing parks and ultimately creating a seamless public realm. Lastly, “Include” is a strategic action championed on the idea that parks are for everyone. This strategic action aims to remove barriers to Toronto’s park system, ensuring that people of all ages, cultures, genders, abilities, and income levels across the city are a priority, therefore reflecting the diversity of Toronto in its system of parks. A supporting action listed was the inclusion of local communities and equity-seeking groups in park planning processes to ensure that different social and cultural needs are reflected in new and improved park design (City of Toronto, 2019). I am critical of this strategy as there were not many concrete sub-strategies that accompany this larger objective, and this research paper further-examines the success of the outreach process that took place in the design and implementation of this Parkland Strategy.

The City of Toronto Parkland strategy was developed with associated implementation tools. These include leveraging opportunities to enhance Toronto’s Parks System (such as public-private partnerships), a Parkland Assessment Tool to determine if a site should be acquired for parkland purposes, and the development of indicators to measure success of the strategy. Measurements include park area per person, total parkland acquired, number of residents within a 500m walk of a park, visitation counts, park plans developed, and amount of money invested in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and low-income neighbourhoods (City of Toronto, 2019). This targeted focus on improvements in areas of low-income aligns very closely with the objectives of this research project in comparing and contrasting park access and user experience in low income and high-income neighbourhoods. This focus within the strategy has

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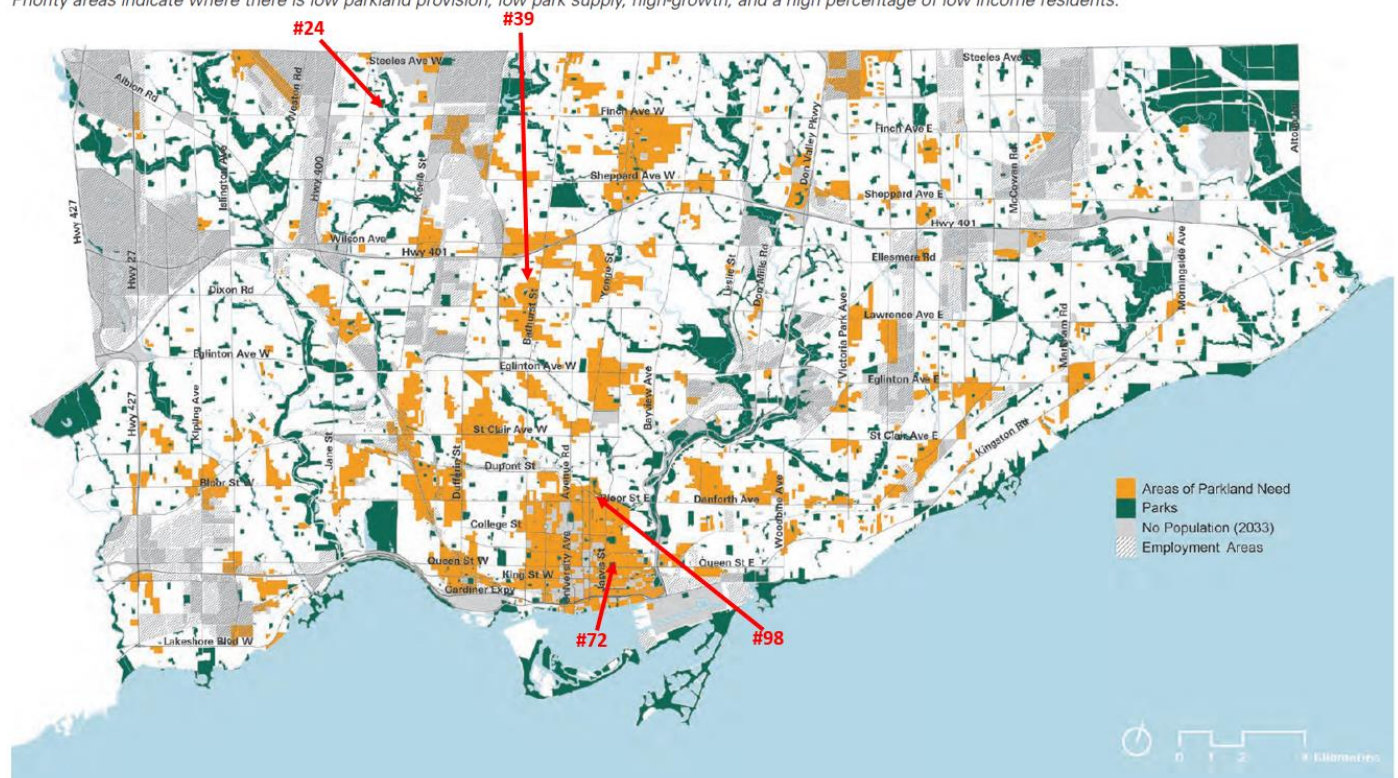
contributed to the identification of “Parkland Priority Areas” in order to support the acquisition and improvement of Toronto’s park system by prioritizing parks planning in special-priority neighbourhoods. According to the Parkland Strategy (City of Toronto, 2019), priority areas were identified based on factors of parkland provision (projected less than 12m² per person in 2033), low park supply (less than 1.5 hectares of total park space within 500m in 2016), impact of growth (projected over 5,000 people/hectare in 2033), and low-income residents (25 percent or more of residents are low income as of 2016). This research project was designed to further-examine some of these priority areas with hopes to see if there is any progress of the strategy in these neighbourhoods and to compare and contrast the status of parks in priority and non-priority neighbourhoods (low-income versus high-income neighbourhoods).

Figure 2

Parkland Study and Acquisition Priority Map. Source: City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019)

Figure 18: Parkland Study and Acquisition Priority Map

Priority areas indicate where there is low parkland provision, low park supply, high-growth, and a high percentage of low income residents.

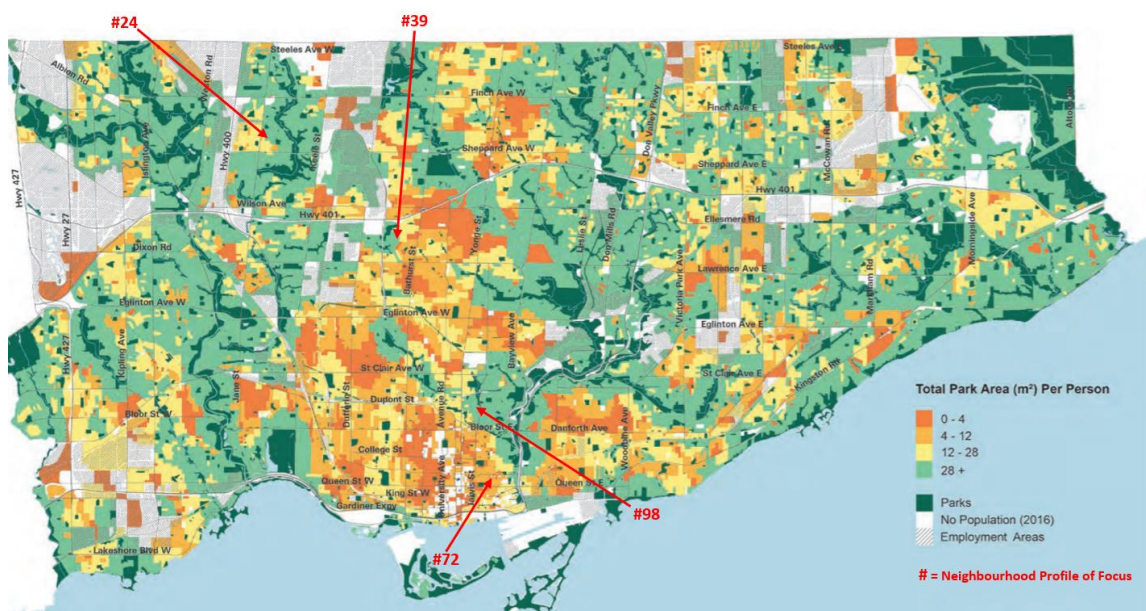


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The map in figure 2 above showcases areas across the City of Toronto that have been designated as areas of parkland need. This research paper was designed to compare park access and user experience in four City of Toronto neighbourhoods. Two low-income and two high-income neighbourhoods were selected according to 2016 census data and City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profile reports which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. The four neighbourhoods selected for analysis for the purpose of this research paper are Black Creek (Toronto neighbourhood profile #24), Bedford Park Nortown (#39), Regent Park (#72) and Rosedale (#98). Black Creek is not located within an area of parkland need, while Bedford Park Nortown (#39) and Rosedale Moore (#98) have pockets designated as areas of parkland need. All of Regent Park was designated as an area of parkland need when this report was released. These four neighbourhoods have been analyzed in relation to objectives of the parkland strategy, and each have been compared to examine what is currently provided in terms of parkland provision as well as the user experience of these parks.

Figure 3

City of Toronto Parkland Supply per Person (4 Neighbourhoods of focus). Source: City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019)



The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019) also contains a map which showcases the parkland per person by neighbourhoods throughout the city. There are four classifications including red (0-4 m² total park area per person), orange (4-12 m²), yellow (12-28 m²), and green (28+ m²). Black Creek is primarily ranked in the yellow and green category, Regent Park is primarily ranked in the orange and yellow category, Bedford Park – Nortown is primarily ranked in the yellow and green category, while Rosedale – Moore Park is primarily ranked in the green category. It is important to note that equitable parkland provision goes beyond measuring park supply per person. Ultimately, even when parks are “evenly” distributed geographically, important questions need to be asked about how the quality and user experience of local parks varies among different neighbourhoods. Rather than trying to solely link parkland provision and the socioeconomic status of a neighbourhood, this following case study was executed to critically examine user experience at local public parks and how those experiences differ between the contrasting neighbourhoods.

3.2 A Comparison of Four Neighbourhoods Within the City of Toronto

Taking this analysis of parkland provision within the City of Toronto further, four neighbourhoods were selected in order to create a context-specific case study. As mentioned above, two high-income and two low-income neighbourhoods were selected to assist in answering the posed research question of “How do both the provision and experience of parks in contrasting socioeconomic neighbourhoods vary?”. Rather than only looking at numerical values associated with physical parkland provision and the socioeconomic status of these neighbourhoods, this research has critically examined user experience and the quality of these parks and how they contrast among these neighbourhoods.

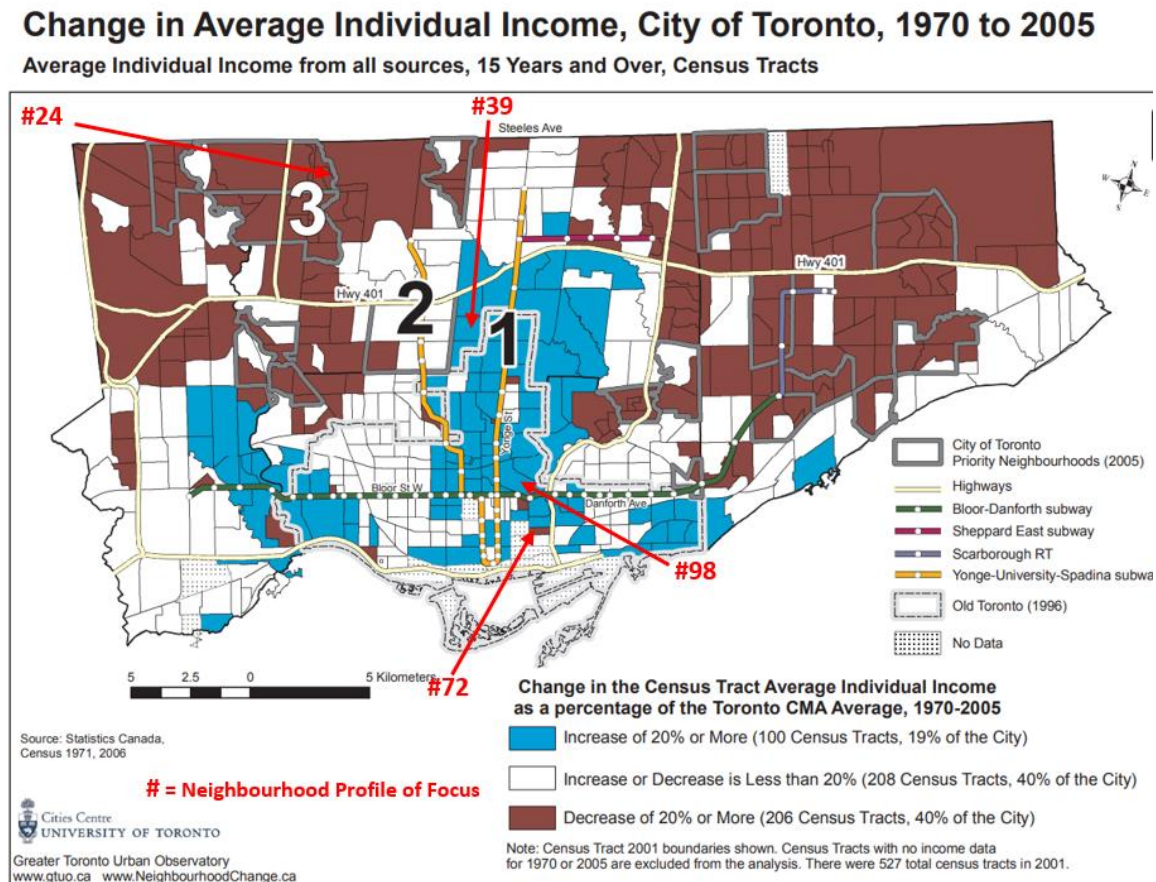
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The selection of neighbourhoods that I wanted to specifically focus on for this research project began with examining David Hulchanski's "Three Cities Within Toronto Report" (2010), which focuses on income polarization among Toronto's neighbourhoods from 1970-2005. My research was designed with goals to build on this report as I have selected 2 neighbourhoods from City 1 (increase in income) and City 3 (decrease in income) with hopes to achieve two outcomes through comparative analysis. First, I compared the "Change in Average Individual Income" map from the Hulchanski report with City of Toronto 2016 Census data which helped me finalize the selection of four neighbourhoods (Black Creek, Regent Park, Rosedale – Moore Park, and Bedford Park - Nortown).

This map (see figure 4 below), was created according to Census data from 1970 – 2005 and reflects the "three Cities of Toronto" which led to me selecting two neighbourhoods from City 1 and two neighbourhoods from City 3. I then used 2016 Census data for the four selected neighbourhoods to validate that these neighbourhoods still reflect their low-income or high-income statuses attributed through the David Hulchanski (2010) report. I used the 2016 Census data to begin my comparative analysis between the four selected neighbourhoods by comparing socioeconomic statistics such as immigrant population, income, visible minority population, and more (see created summary chart in table 1 below). This comparative analysis was taken further by comparing and contrasting parkland provision and potential disparities in park quality and user experience between the neighbourhoods through direct site visits, participant questionnaires, and by using an audit tool.

Figure 4

Four Neighbourhoods of Focus - Change in Average Individual Income (1970 – 2005). Source: David Hulchanski "Three Cities Within Toronto Report, 2010"



Income Polarization in Toronto 1970-2005

The Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010), provided a new way of looking at Toronto's neighbourhoods, by focusing on socioeconomic statuses of residents and their surrounding neighbourhoods and how these statuses have changed over a 35-year period, which lead to the creation of three categories – creating three distinct Toronto's. City 1 is predominately a high-income area of Toronto, in which neighbourhood incomes have risen a great deal in comparison to the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). These neighbourhoods were generally found in the central city, and close to City of Toronto subway lines (see figure 4 above). In contrast, City 3 is a mainly low-income area, where neighbourhood incomes have

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fallen substantially in comparison to the CMA average (20 percent or lower). These areas were found to be primarily prominent in the northeastern and northwestern areas of the city. In between, there is City 2, a mainly middle-income area, where neighbourhood incomes have remained relatively close to the CMA average. Over the 35 years of this study, the three groups of neighbourhoods were changing at different rates and were moving further apart, with the middle-income area shrinking dramatically and the low-income neighbourhoods (City 3) expanding (Huchanski et al., 2010).

Findings from this report have found that neighbourhoods categorized as low-income grew from 19 percent of the total city to 53 percent, and extremely low-income neighbourhoods grew from 1 percent to 9 percent of the total city. This conclusion highlights that poverty and income inequality has grown drastically over the 35 years of the study and findings suggest that poverty has moved from the centre to the edges of the city (Hulchanski, et al., 2010). The report concludes to state that City number 1 not only has the highest average individual income, but income increased by 99 percent over the 35 years and by 29 percent between 2000 and 2005 alone. In City number 1, 37 percent of all households had incomes of \$100,000 or more, compared to the citywide average of 18 percent. In Cities number 2 and number 3, average household income as a proportion of Toronto CMA income declined between 1970 and 2005, with City number 3 declining the most, by 37 percent. Overall, the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010) was very influential in providing me with a background and a starting point for the four selected neighbourhoods for this case study which are highlighted in the map above (figure 4).

Modern Social Trends: City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles (2016)

To further validate the socioeconomic characteristics of the four selected neighbourhoods discussed above and bring them into a more present context, I also analyzed each of their City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles and supporting social statistics income (using 2016 census data). This comparative analysis between different timeframes was beneficial as I was able to build on the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010) for purposes of my own research, by looking to see if these trends were still in place 10 years later. The social planning neighbourhood profiles of Toronto are based on 2016 census data and were developed to help government and community agencies with their local planning by providing socioeconomic data within a geographic area. The four neighbourhood profiles selected are Black Creek (neighbourhood profile #24), Bedford Park – Nortown (#39), Regent Park (#72), and Rosedale – Moore Park (#98). In line with the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010), both Black Creek and Regent Park fell under the City #3 category, while Bedford Park – Nortown and Rosedale – Moore Park were categorized as City #1. The social statistics are summarized in table 1 below and were used not only to further validate the findings from the Three Cities Within Toronto report, but also to provide a socioeconomic background for each of the neighbourhoods which are unpacked in greater detail below.

Table 1

Neighbourhoods Social Statistics (2016 Census Data). Source: City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles, 2016.

Social Statistics (2016)	Black Creek (Neighbourhood Profile 24)	Bedford Park – Nortown (Neighbourhood Profile 39)	Regent Park (Neighbourhood Profile 72)	Rosedale - Moore Park (Neighbourhood Profile 98)	City of Toronto (total/avg)
Population	21,737	23,236	10,803	20,923	2,731,571
Median Household Income	\$46,580	\$116,672	\$42,369	\$106,740	\$65,829

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Median Family Income	\$52,839	\$178,300	\$52,506	\$179,068	\$82,859
Renter Households	66.0%	30.3%	74.6%	44.7%	47.2%
Immigrants	58.9%	29.5%	46.9%	26.7%	51.2%
Visible Minority Population	80.9%	21.0%	70.0%	18.1%	51.5%
Low income (LIM-AT)¹	33.0%	9.4%	42.3%	10.2%	20.2%
Low income (LICO-AT)²	25.2%	8.2%	35.2%	9.8%	17.4%
Poverty (MBM)³	33.5%	10.8%	44.4%	11.6%	21.9%

*Note this data was retrieved using the City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles based on 2016 Census data.

¹ Low Income LIM-AT = is the percentage of people in private households in low-income status according to the Low-Income Measure, After-Tax.

² Low Income LICO-AT = is the percentage of people in private households in low-income status according to the Low-Income Cut-Off, After-Tax.

³ Poverty (MBM) = is the percentage of people in private households in low-income status according to the

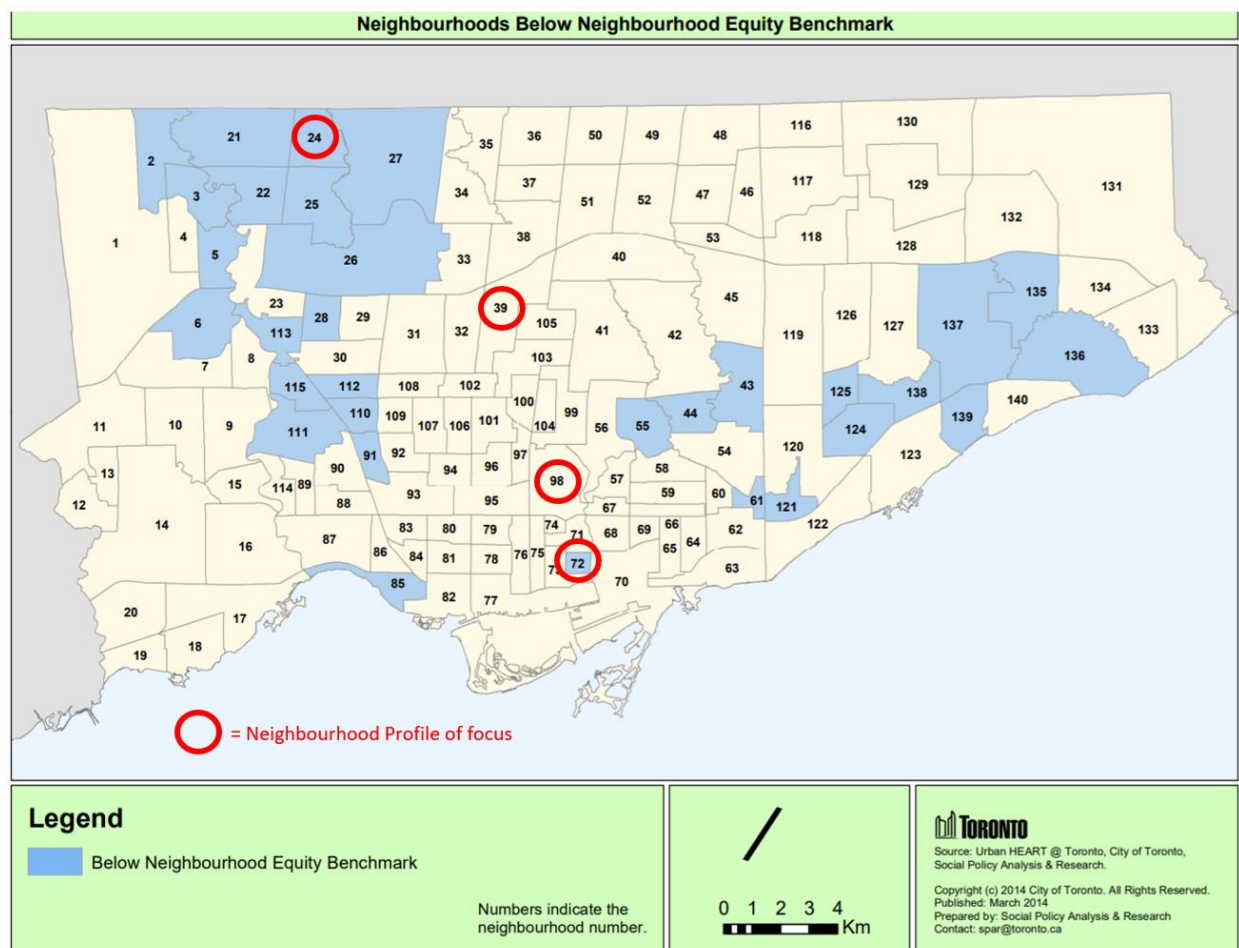
In 2014, the City of Toronto identified thirty-one Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas as they fall under the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 (TSNS2020). As part of the TSNS2020, a methodological report was created to describe the development of a Neighbourhood Equity Index support of identifying Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (City of Toronto, 2014). This report was completed by the City of Toronto in consultation with various public and academic stakeholders using Urban HEART which stands for Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool. Urban HEART Toronto provides a resource that measures neighbourhood-level indicators of health and well-being in five main domains: economic opportunities; social and human development; civic engagement; physical environment; as well

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as physical and mental health. This City of Toronto Report (2014), measures how well Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles are doing in these five domains with hopes of informing the TSNS2020 by determining Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.

Figure 5

Four neighbourhoods of focus on the 'Below Neighbourhood Equity Benchmark' Map. Source: Urban HEART @ Toronto, City of Toronto, Social Policy Analysis & Research, 2014



As seen in figure 5 above, Regent Park (72) and Black Creek (24) are labelled as neighbourhood improvement areas as they fall below the benchmark score of the TSNS2020 Neighbourhood Equity Index of 42.89. This is important to highlight as both neighbourhoods were also categorized as “City #3” in the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010). In contrast, Bedford Park-Nortown and Rosedale Moore-Park did not fall under the TSNS2020

Neighbourhood Equity Index benchmark and were also categorized as “City #1” in the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010). These consistencies between reports demonstrate that socioeconomic statuses and social trends in these four neighbourhoods appear to be relatively consistent in the four selected neighbourhoods from 1970 to today. From this analysis, it is evident that there is a stark difference in socioeconomic trends and statistics between the four selected neighbourhoods, and this research was designed to examine a potential relationship between these socioeconomic trends and statuses, with the provision of parkland and user experience. An in-depth analysis of each of the four neighbourhoods was completed to examine the parkland provision and user experience in these contrasting neighbourhoods.

3.2.1 Rosedale Moore-Park

Rosedale Moore-Park was one of Toronto's first suburbs in the late 1800s and is bordered by Moore Avenue in the north, Bayview Avenue in the east, Bloor Street East in the south, and Yonge Street in the west. Today, Rosedale is better known for its tree-lined streets, big houses, advantageous transit access (Rosedale subway station), great shops and restaurants. This neighbourhood is home some of the most beautiful natural areas and ravines in the city of Toronto (Rosedale Valley) which is overlooked by the famous Glen Road Bridge providing urban-natural interface for residents and visitors. Moore Park suburbs were first marketed in the 1890's with the focus of bringing transit to the area by extending the Beltline Railway from Union Station which only lasted for two years until it went bankrupt (Matei, 2018). Today, these tracks have been repurposed to become the famous Beltline Trail which is a multi-purpose recreational trail that cuts through the natural Rosedale Valley and provides residents with a natural escape from the city.

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Rosedale Moore-Park is Canada's first example of a garden suburb (Matei, 2018). The Garden City Movement (Howard, 1902) was very influential on suburban development throughout the late 1800's. In the context of Rosedale, the Garden City Movement was followed in trying to merge urban living along with the natural landscape, but unlike the Garden City Movement, public spaces were not successfully developed as community magnets in Rosedale (Matei, 2018). According to Daniels (2009), the Garden City movement influenced planning of suburbs in cities across North America and this can be seen through the case study of Rosedale-Moore Park. Rosedale has resulted in becoming a neighbourhood with a disproportionate number of privately-owned luxurious homes that lack a sense of inclusion within the community and one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods across Canada (Matei, 2018). The Rosedale Valley has historically separated two very different neighbourhoods, Rosedale (to the north) and St. James Town (to the south) are formally and demographically disparate neighbourhoods which are separated by the ravine (Matei, 2018). It is important to note that both communities were designed with an attempt of taking advantage of this unique location, with an intent of creating connections to outdoor space; the Garden Suburb on the one hand, and the tower in the park on the other (St. James Town).

This is just one example in Toronto where two neighbourhoods that are so close geographically, are so different from a socio-economic standpoint. According to the Neighbourhood Social Statistics summarized in table 1 above, Rosedale-Moore Park has a median household income of \$106,740 and a median family income of \$179,080 which are 38 percent and 53.7 percent higher than the City of Toronto average respectively. The area of focus also has a poverty rate of 11.6 percent, which is 10.3 percent less than the City of Toronto average. As a result of analyzing these social statistics, it is evident that the neighbourhood is

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still consistent with its “City #1” status from the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010). The questionnaires exercised as part of this study also further-validated the wider socio-economic statistics for this area as 19 out of 29 of the participants from Rosedale-Moore Park have an annual household income of \$90,000.00 or more.

Residents of Rosedale have used their influence to maintain this affluent neighbourhood living style with large, manicured lots and big houses. According to an article (The Globe and Mail, 1936), the theme of Toronto Planning Board’s Rosedale Planning Appraisal was predicated around the idea that it was important to the entire city that Rosedale should remain a residential area which is attractive to as many as possible of those who are high financial, social, and professional statuses. This led to the development of a planning report which hardened zoning policy that prohibited all apartment construction in all areas of Rosedale except for outside the subway station, thus ensuring the maintenance of the Rosedale physical and social character. In the early 1900s, there were plans to purchase 5.8 acres of land to provide a park for the Moore Park district which received an immense amount of unexpected opposition as residents felt that the money could be used in areas that were more important such as the construction of sidewalks, which is ultimately what City Council elected to do (The Globe, 1923). This point highlights an important point on how the interests of the residents of this wealthy neighbourhood are carefully considered in planning efforts and in the allocation of funds, which is a perfect example of ‘participatory planning’ (Munthe-Kaas & Hoffman, 2017; Jennings et al., 2017; Klosterman, 1985; and Arnstein, 1969).

This research project was designed to compare participatory planning practices with parkland provision throughout the City of Toronto, more specifically in high-income versus low-income neighbourhoods. One question asked in the questionnaire associated with this study

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asked residents if they were aware of the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy and if they were ever asked to participate in community engagement for parkland provision. There was a total of 107 participants, of which 29 total were from Rosedale-Moore Park. 35 percent of total respondents answered that they were aware of the City of Toronto Parkland Masterplan (26 percent of which are from Rosedale-Moore Park and Bedford Park-Nortown). This finding is alarming because not only was there a low representation of participants who were aware of the strategy, but there was an even lower representation from the two lower-income neighbourhoods of focus (9 percent). This finding raises the important question of how effective engagement efforts were throughout the development of the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy, especially in low-income neighbourhoods, which were described as target neighbourhoods throughout the masterplan.

According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy, Rosedale-Moore Park is primarily ranked in the green category in terms of parkland per person (see figure 3 above). According to the TSNS2020 (City of Toronto, 2014), Rosedale-Moore Park had the 9th highest Park Equity Index Score out of 140 total Toronto neighbourhoods, with a Green Space score of 66.5 (City of Toronto average = 45.5) and a Mental Health score of 86.6 (City of Toronto average = 73.4). The Park Equity Index score examines the provision and benefits of parkland on residents, designed to provide an environmental consideration in the strategy for the specific neighbourhood. These socio-economic trends and statistics are extremely crucial in providing background context for the neighbourhood, but themes of environmental equity and justice go beyond numerical reports, therefore user experience and park quality were carefully examined.

Integral to this study were the direct site visits to each of the four neighbourhoods and their existing park spaces. When visiting Rosedale, I could not help but notice all the large houses, manicured lawns, traffic-calming streets, and clean park spaces. In comparison to the

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three other neighbourhoods, Rosedale-Moore Park most certainly had the most usership of the local parks. There was one park (Moorevale Park – see figure 6 below), that had 37 total people using the space in the span of 30 minutes and an additional 16 who were walking or cycling through. This park was sports themed, had public restrooms, tennis courts, a tennis clubhouse, a newly renovated playground, accessible seating and picnic areas.

Figure 6

Moorevale Park Seating Area and Tennis Clubhouse. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete



As part of this study, I created amenity checklists as well as a ranking system which looked at user experience divided by three categories which were access, participation, and if the park was inviting/safe to stay (see appendix 6.3 for blank audit tool sheet). Of all parks visited between the four neighbourhoods, Moorevale Park and Rosedale Park received the highest user experience ranking both with cumulative rankings over 92 percent. All five parks visited within

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the Rosedale-Moore Park neighbourhood received cumulative user experience scores of 80 percent or higher. A noted limitation of this site visit audit tool is that I am the only person filling them out, therefore the results are not representative of diverse perspectives and this study acknowledges that everyone perceives space differently. This was one of primary reasons for coupling these audit tools with questionnaires, so a wider variety of perspectives could be considered. My perspective of the parks in this neighbourhood was further validated through the questionnaire results as 24 out of 29 respondents for this neighbourhood were satisfied with the cleanliness of their local parks and 21 out of 29 feel safe when using their local parks. Overall, my analysis for this neighbourhood concludes that user experience is primarily positive within the Rosedale-Moore Park neighbourhood as all five parks visited were well-maintained, inviting to stay, easy to find, and used by many local residents and visitors. Rosedale-Moore Park was one out of two higher-income neighbourhoods selected to examine parkland provision and user experience in. A second neighbourhood (Bedford Park-Nortown) with similar socio-economic statistics was selected with hopes to see if there are similar findings.

3.2.2 Bedford Park-Nortown

Bedford Park-Nortown is a suburb in northern Toronto which is bordered by Highway 401 in the north, Yonge Street and Glen Rush Boulevard in the east, Hill Hurst Boulevard in the south and Bathurst Street in the west. There is very minimal academic literature that speaks about this neighbourhood, therefore an online search was completed to obtain a contextual background for this neighbourhood. According to Wikipedia (2022), Bedford Park began as a farming hamlet which was a popular stopover for farmers making their way to markets in the city and in 1890, Bedford Park was incorporated into North Toronto, also when the Metropolitan Street Railway of Toronto began service to the area, encouraging residential development which

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was built mostly in the early 1900's and makes up most of the existing housing stock today. Bedford Park-Nortown was conceived as a middle-class housing development which became increasingly popular in 1909 when more space was made available for residential development which as a result, drastically increased the property values for the homes of this neighbourhood. Bedford Park's quiet streets, mature trees, good schools and parks, proximity to Highway 401, and good transit make the area very appealing to young professionals and their families (Neighbourhood Guide Toronto, 2022).

According to the Neighbourhood Social Statistics (City of Toronto, 2016), Bedford Park Nortown has a median household income of \$116,672 and a median family income of \$178,300 which are 43.6 percent and 53.6 percent higher than the City of Toronto average respectively. The area of focus also has a poverty rate of 10.8 percent, 11.1 percent less than the City of Toronto average. As a result of analyzing these social statistics, it is evident that the neighbourhood is still consistent with its "City #1" status from the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010). Wikipedia (2022) states that Bedford Park-Nortown was Canada's wealthiest neighbourhood in 2011. The questionnaires exercised as part of this study also further-validated the wider socio-economic statistics for this area as 14 out of 23 of the participants from Bedford Park-Nortown have an annual household income of \$90,000.00 or more. According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy, Bedford Park-Nortown is primarily ranked in the green and yellow category in terms of parkland per person (see figure 3 above). According to the TSNS2020 (City of Toronto, 2014), Bedford Park Nortown had the 13th highest Park Equity Index Score out of 140 total Toronto neighbourhoods, with a Green Space score of 17.5 (City of Toronto average = 45.5) and a Mental Health score of 87.0 (City of Toronto average = 73.4). It is important to mention that the borders of this neighbourhood do not account for the very large parks that are

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immediately outside the easterly boarder which could explain the low Green Space score. Although it is not calculated in the score, residents still have access to these green spaces.

A total of six parks were visited on multiple occasions for detailed site visits throughout Bedford Park-Nortown. Like Rosedale, the neighbourhood was very clean, with big homes, manicured front lawns, traffic-calmed streets, with very nice parks to be enjoyed by local residents and visitors. All six parks that were visited were well-maintained and had relatively new infrastructure demonstrating that there is investment from the City of Toronto to upkeep and maintain parks in this neighbourhood. Some general trends of parks in this neighbourhood include big trees, large eating areas, quiet surroundings, family-oriented, and the feeling of being safe. There were a lot of smaller parkettes that seem to have been intended to be used as resting spaces or spaces to take a seat and socialize. For example, Brookdale Park (see figure 7 below), which is situated within the course of a multi-purpose recreational trail only has seating areas which I imagine was intended to act as a rest area for trail users.

Figure 7

Brookdale Park. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete



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I also noticed that parks in Bedford-Park Nortown were not as busy with users in comparison to Rosedale-Moore Park, but there were a lot more cyclists and people walking and moving through the parks. This point creates the sense that parks in Bedford-Park Nortown are viewed less as destination parks in comparison to Rosedale. There was one park “Old Orchard Park” (see figure 8 below), which was newly renovated with new accessible seating areas as well as a new children’s playground and it was very busy with children and families. It was obvious that the park was recently renovated as there were very unique features to the playground such as a really large 4-person teeter-totter, foam floor, water park, and a water-bottle refill station. Another common theme I noticed for parks throughout this neighbourhood was that the parks were all located on quiet, residential streets, surrounded by single-family homes with very minimal street parking available for park visitors, indicating that these parks are intended to serve local residents who can get there by walking or cycling.

Figure 8

Old Orchard Park Seating Area and Playground. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete

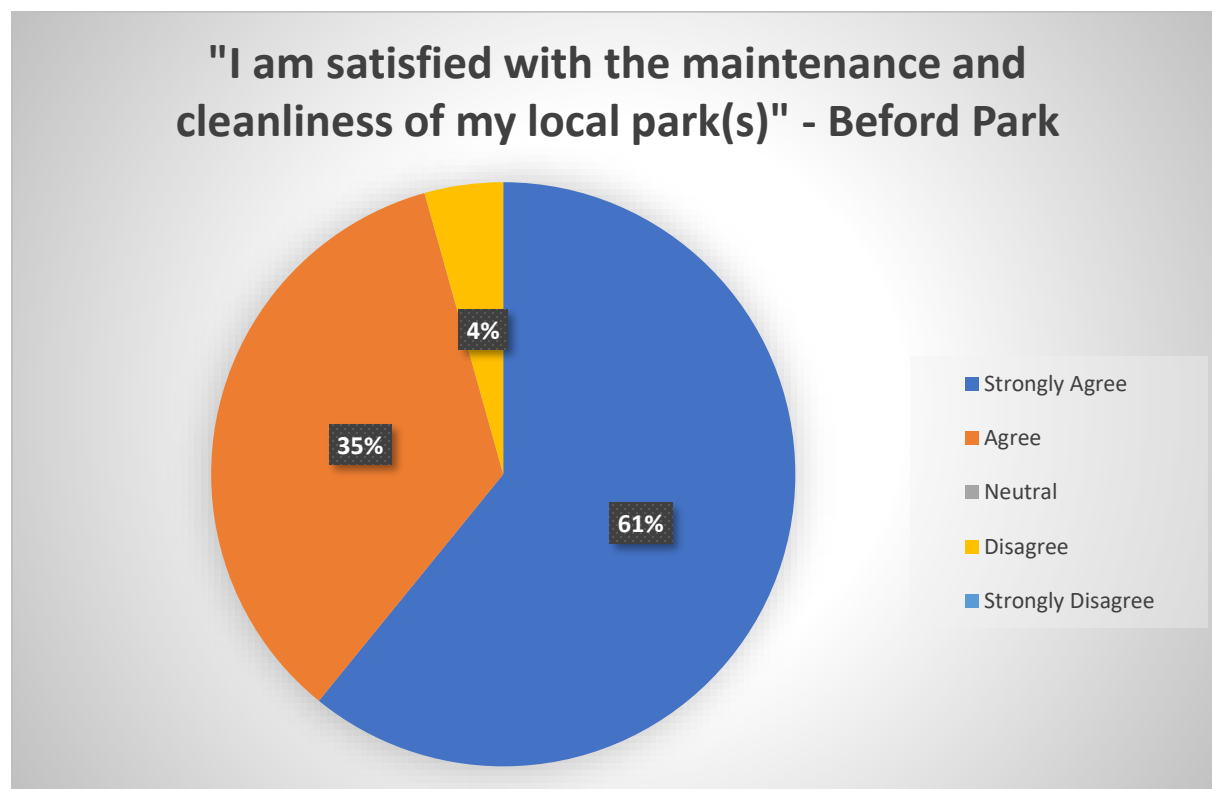


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I noticed in all four neighbourhoods, but especially in the two higher-income neighbourhoods, there were a large number of dog-walkers who let their dogs off-leash which demonstrates the increasing need of dog parks throughout the City of Toronto which was highlighted in the City of Toronto Parkland Masterplan. All parks visited within the Bedford-Park Nortown neighbourhood received cumulative user experience scores of 75 percent or higher except for one, which was primarily a resting area and had a very low participation score. My perspective of the parks in this neighbourhood was further validated through the questionnaire results as 22 out of 23 respondents for this neighbourhood were satisfied with the cleanliness of their local parks and 20 out of 23 feel safe when using their local parks.

Figure 9

Bedford Park Questionnaire Participant Results



The City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019) describes this neighbourhood as one with a good level of parkland provision and this analysis has taken that further to examine user experience at these local parks. Overall, my analysis for this neighbourhood concludes that user experience is primarily positive within the Bedford Park-Nortown neighbourhood as the parks are easily accessible, inviting, safe to stay, clean, and well-maintained. Bedford Park-Nortown was the second of the two higher-income neighbourhoods selected to examine parkland provision and user experience in. It can be concluded that both neighbourhoods offered parks that act as safe public spaces to be enjoyed by all residents and visitors and spaces that have received priority and investment from the City in the past, with minimal need for improvement today.

3.2.3 Black Creek

Both neighbourhoods compared above are very similar from a socio-economic standpoint and after analyzing park access as well as user experience in both neighbourhoods, they appear to be very similar in that sense as well. This analysis was taken a step further by comparing these findings with two neighbourhoods that contain contrasting socio-economic trends (Black Creek and Regent Park) to see if there is also a difference in park access and user experience. The Black Creek Community is a suburban and post-war tower community located in the north-western portion of the City of Toronto and is bordered by Steeles Avenue West in the north, Highway 400 in the west, Black Creek River in the east, and Finch Avenue West in the south.

The Black Creek neighbourhood is home to Jane and Finch. This area was originally developed in the 1960's as a model suburb with a large stock of public housing to host a socially diverse population with considerable waves of immigration (Ahmadi, 2018). Today, this community is accommodating more youth, single-parent families, low-income households and

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public housing tenants than any other neighbourhood in Toronto and the landscape of the neighbourhood consists predominantly of high-rise tower blocks, wide streets and large green areas (Ahmadi, 2018). Hulchanski (2010) mentions that neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty and low socio-economic status often tend to exhibit high racial diversity. This part of the city is often always perceived as an area in “high need” and the community has become a laboratory for academics and researchers seeking to examine marginalization, poverty, stigma, and associated blight (Peake, 2015). This has created a reputation for the community which is centered around racial diversity therefore social cohesion is often assumed to be the answer for addressing the exclusion of these marginalized groups. Ahmadi (2018) argues that an overemphasis on the impact of ethnic and racial diversity on social cohesion euphemizes the problem of structural inequality rather than solving it by advocating for what ‘normal’ should be.

The City of Toronto has been recipient of increased immigration and diversity due to globalization and population movement, but new immigrants continue to face challenges such as discrimination in the labour market and difficulty in accessing affordable housing. As a result, many new immigrants have settled within inner-suburban areas of Toronto which are characterized by concentrated poverty, high resident turn-over, poor infrastructure and violence (Joy and Vogel, 2015). The racialization of Jane and Finch has resulted in the “othering” of the residents and has created an association of fear in the media, political discourse as well as popular belief (Narain, 2012). These stigmas associated with the Black Creek neighbourhood have heavily influenced decision making around infrastructure and public space investment. An example described by Narain (2012) is the rebranding of the neighbourhood as “University Heights” which began in 2006 and has rapidly transformed the community through the subway expansion, development of new housing complexes, and commitment to York University.

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Narain (2012) argues that this re-branding process has contributed to further-marginalizing community voices through neoliberal projects that work to gentrify communities by promoting the privatization of public spaces. Through this re-branding project, it can be seen how a community like Jane and Finch, which has been constructed by popular media as a dangerous place, experiences change and urban processes that attempt to erase this sense of fear by creating a new neighbourhood, while simultaneously erasing the neighbourhoods past. Narain (2012) describes it as erasing the existence of the “other”. This is just one of the many examples of how urban planning processes within the City of Toronto were impacted by the larger neoliberal political ideology with hopes of creating “better” neighbourhoods.

According to the Neighbourhood Social Statistics (City of Toronto, 2016), Black Creek has a median household income of \$46,580 and a median family income of \$52,839 which are 36.2 percent and 29.2 percent lower than the City of Toronto average respectively. The area of focus also has a poverty rate of 33.5 percent, 11.6 percent higher than the City of Toronto average. As a result of analyzing these social statistics, it is evident that this neighbourhood is starkly different in comparison two neighbourhoods analyzed above and is still consistent with its “City #3” status from the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010). The questionnaires exercised as part of this study also further-validated the wider socio-economic statistics for this area as 26 out of 28 of the participants from the Black Creek community have an annual household income of \$60,000.00 or less.

According to the TSNS2020 (City of Toronto, 2014), Black Creek had the lowest Park Equity Index Score out of 140 total Toronto neighbourhoods, with an overall score of 21.38, a Green Space score of 64.1 (City of Toronto average = 45.5) and a Mental Health score of 58.41 (City of Toronto average = 73.4). The Green Space score is higher than the City of Toronto

average due to the close proximity to the Black Creek River, which can be deceiving when developing strategies such as the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), because equitable park access should consider more than simply numerical values, such as parkland per person.

The City's identification of Black Creek, and more specifically, Jane-Finch as an area in need of improvement ("Neighbourhood Improvement Area") through the TSNS2020 has made it eligible for special funding and focused policy efforts. The biggest question that I have after reading this strategy is who gets to define what that "improvement" should look like and how investment and policy efforts get utilized. Peake (2015) states that these strategies of improvement are often short-term goals with no sustained funding, ultimately what we have encountered is a lack of real interest in investing in Jane-Finch and a lack of clear policy initiatives that are informed by community input. This idea sparked the desire to create a research project which solely looked at what "improvement" meant to the community of Jane-Finch which was conducted through a community-based participatory action research model. Findings from this study highlighted demands from residents must inform "improvement" strategies and actions and these were divided into 4 main domains which were economic domains, healthy lives domains, social development domains, and governments and institutional improvements (Peake, 2015). This study by Peake (2015), highlighted a clear disjuncture between the TSNS2020 priority indicators for the Black Creek community and the specific needs identified by the community to create improvement.

More forward, the TSNS2020 is a municipally led policy response to the inequitable socioeconomic and geographic distribution of wealth and public infrastructure throughout Toronto (Horak, 2014). The concern with this strategy is that the idea of "improvement" is treated as a one-size-fits-all solution by developing key indicators for all 31 designated

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Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Peake (2015) argues that there is an obvious need to situate the TSNS2020 strategy within the broader neoliberal policy context that informs its emergence, stability, and limitations. Bradford (2007) argues that the TSNS2020 is part of a greater provincial and federal international policy milieu that is characterized by austerity, unstable federal commitment to urban development and urban restructuring. Some examples of other neoliberal-led city interventions include urban revitalization efforts in Regent Park and Lawrence heights which is discussed in greater detail below.

The geographic patterning of the city's investment in socially mixed redevelopment projects demonstrates the complacency of the groups who are responsible for building and planning Toronto's urban fabric in consolidating gentrification trends, rather than fostering policy responses to the issues underpinning concentrated poverty (Peake, 2015). This point forms a connection between wider gentrification efforts throughout Toronto with the improvement strategies developed as part of TSNS2020, which were both severely influenced by the neoliberal context in which they took place in, ignorant of the opinions of residents of the communities who will ultimately be impacted by these decisions. This flawed approach of the TSNS2020 as highlighted by Peake (2015), reinforces the assumption often made in the context of modern, neoliberal policy that those who hold power, unconnected from the system of inequality, are viewed as the experts with knowledge who should be making the decisions to "save" those in need (Nixon, 2019). Instead, those who are victims of inequality and injustice should lead responses and improvements, while being supported by those with power and privilege just as Peake (2015) argued in the context of Jane and Finch.

According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy, Black Creek is primarily ranked in the green category in terms of parkland per person (see figure 3 above). It is important to note

that this is due to the Black Creek River that spans across the easterly border of the neighbourhood, which inflates the perceived access to parks. This is one of the driving forces of this research project which is to examine this “perceived access to parks” from a lens of environmental justice and equity to better understand the user experience of these parks. Just because there is a park available for residents, that does not necessarily mean residents are comfortable with using the space. For example, a study conducted by Galankis (2016), which looks at the importance of public spaces in the formation of identities of marginalized immigrant youth in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood, interviewed youths to present their fears, socio-spatial practices, and aspirations for social inclusion and urban spaces. I want to draw upon two responses received as part of this study. The first was a young male participant who mentioned that he avoids going to local parks because there is not much to do at the park (Galankis, 2016), which highlights the important point that different residents of different neighbourhoods have varying desires and needs of a park space. According to Galankis (2016), focus group participants were asked for their perspective on their ideal public spaces and answers unanimously emphasized inclusivity and safety. This study is just one of the many examples on why it is important that parks planning is done with the community and why equal parkland provision (geographically and numerically), does not necessarily equate to equitable parkland provision.

A total of six parks were visited on multiple occasions during my site visits to the Black Creek neighbourhood. At the beginning of each site visit, I made sure to take a few notes on the community overall and I noticed that the Black Creek neighbourhood was much more automobile centric as opposed to the two wealthier neighbourhoods, likely due to it being located farther north in the city. Streets were wider and there were much less people seen walking and

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cycling in this neighbourhood. I also noticed a stark difference in the housing stock. Rosedale and Bedford Park primarily consisted of a modern, single-family housing stock whereas in contrast, Black Creek consisted of older single-family homes blended with a great amount of older residential towers (many of which that are operated by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation).

Figure 10

Black Creek Aging Housing Stock. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete.



In terms of the actual parks visited within this neighbourhood, I noticed a stark difference in the quality of park infrastructure within Black Creek in comparison to Rosedale and Bedford Park, as the seating areas and playgrounds were a lot older and in need of repair except for Elm Park. Elm Park seemed to be recently renovated with new playground and seating infrastructure and is located west of Jane Street, behind a local community centre and elementary school,

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which might explain the reasoning behind the recent revitalization efforts that took place. The remaining five (5) parks that were visited all did not come close to the quality of Elm Park as they were all in a state of disrepair (some more than others). Four out of five of the remaining parks visited were located east of Jane Street, which is an important consideration as I noticed a stark contrast in the quality of public space and housing as soon as I crossed over Jane Street from the west side to the east side. All four parks on the east had very old playground structures, a lack of wayfinding signage, and had very low counts of usership. The most park users seen during my park visits within this community was 7, with an average of 5 at each park and it is important to note that I visited this community during March break, which should typically increase the likelihood of children playing outside. I also noticed that three out of the four parks on the east side were in need of maintenance and litter pick up.

Figure 11

Driftwood Park Underutilized Playground. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete.

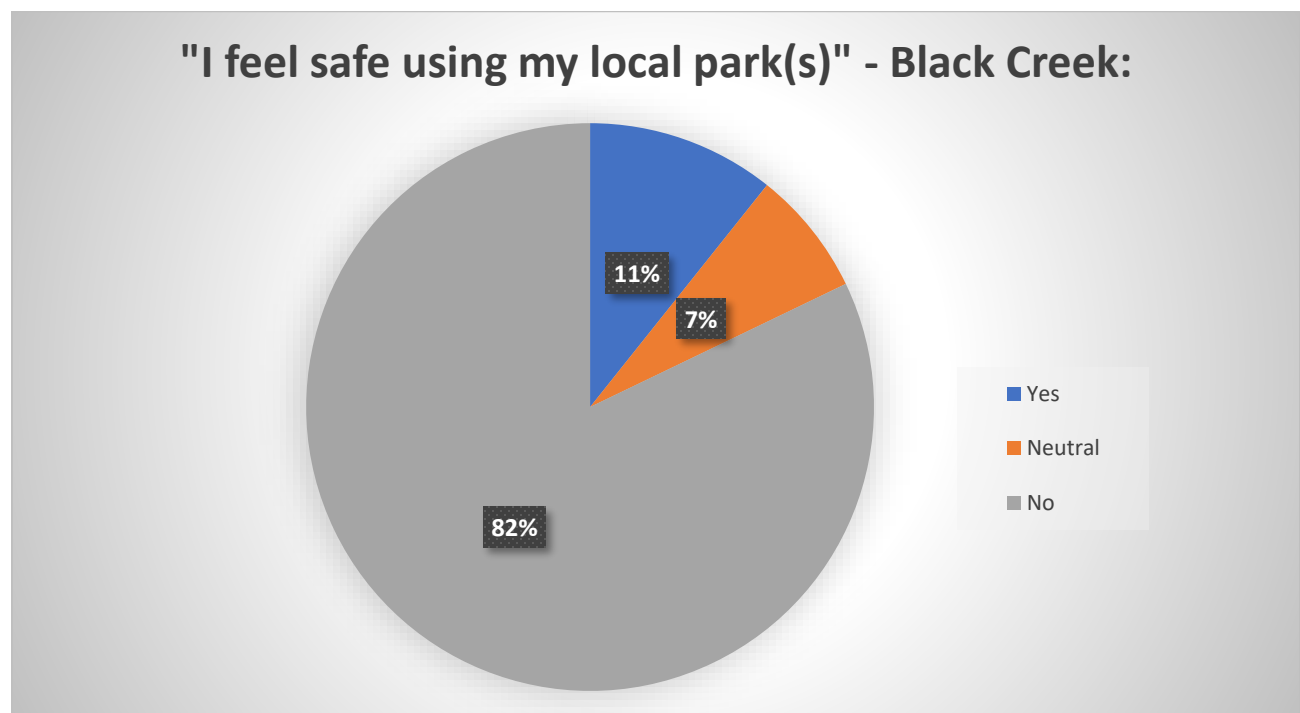


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These observations highlight the important need for funding and resources at parks in this neighbourhood. Elm Park received the highest user experience ranking with an average of 65 percent, while Hullmar Park (also on the west side of Jane) received an average user experience score of 54 percent. The four parks located east of Jane Street received average scores all less than 45 percent due to their aging infrastructure, lack of safety, lack of participation, and difficulty of access. While I was exploring the parks, I felt quite uncomfortable at times as I was often alone. When I spoke to a few residents, they explained their hesitation to stay at these parks due to a lack of safety and fear of crime and they prefer to just walk through them instead. This observation is further validated through the questionnaire results for Black Creek residents as 23 out of 28 respondents selected that they feel unsafe using their local parks.

Figure 12

Black Creek Questionnaire Participant Results



Additionally, 18 out of 28 respondents either disagreed or strongly-disagreed that they are satisfied with the cleanliness and maintenance of their local parks which reinforces my observation on the need for increased resources attributed to maintaining these public spaces. One final important finding from these questionnaires was that 27 out of 28 respondents were not invited to participate in any form of community engagement for parkland in their neighbourhood and 24 out of 28 were not aware that the City of Toronto had a Parkland Strategy. This is alarming because the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019) mentioned that community engagement was to be targeted especially in lower-income neighbourhoods. This raises the important question if that goal was followed up with meaningful action or was it listed without a plan. This reminds me of what Arnstein (1969) refers to as where public participation can sometimes be perceived as tokenism; essentially it is taking place to check a box rather than create meaningful engagement thus creating confusion around what is defined as true citizen participation. To conclude analysis on the Black Creek neighbourhood, although this community experiences greater amounts of parkland per person according to the Toronto Parkland Strategy (2019), my own perception of these spaces, the physical quality of these spaces, and user experiences all vastly contrast the two previously examined neighbourhoods which contained higher socio-economic statuses, and better-quality park spaces.

3.2.4 Regent Park

Regent Park is the second selected neighbourhood defined as “City 3” in the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010), which is located closer to the city core to see if these trends are similar to those of Black Creek. In the context of socio-economic statistics, the neighbourhoods are very similar. According to the Neighbourhood Social Statistics (City of Toronto, 2016) (as seen in table 1 above), Regent Park has a median household income of \$42,369 and a median

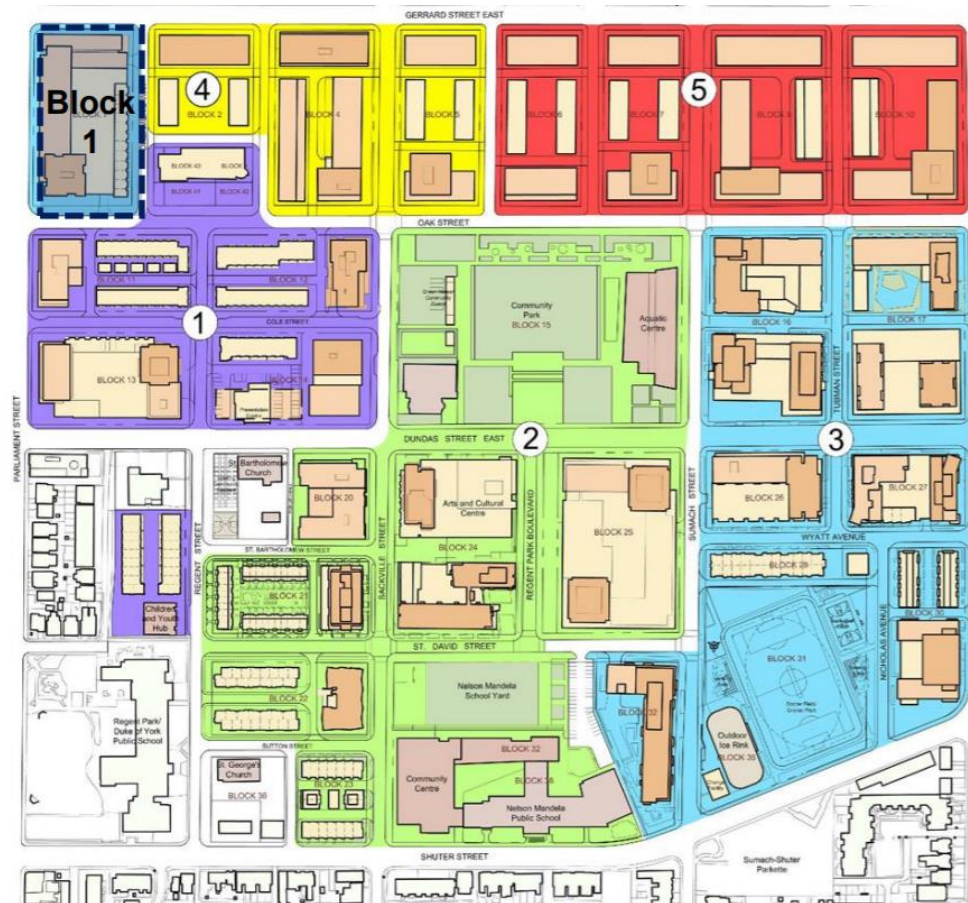
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family income of \$52,506 which are 35.6 percent and 36.6 percent lower than the City of Toronto average respectively. This neighbourhood also has a poverty rate of 44.4 percent, 22.5 percent than the City of Toronto average. As a comparison, Rosedale-Moore Park has a poverty rate of 11.6 percent and Bedford Park-Nortown has a poverty rate 10.8 percent. As a result of analyzing these social statistics, it is evident that the neighbourhood is still consistent with its “City #3” status from the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010). According to the TSNS2020 (City of Toronto, 2014), Regent Park had the eighth lowest Park Equity Index Score out of 140 total Toronto neighbourhoods, with an overall score of 29.81, a Green Space score of 34.4 (City of Toronto average = 45.5) and a Mental Health score of 61.3 (City of Toronto average = 73.4).

Regent Park is bordered by Gerrard Street east in the north, Parliament Street in the west, River Street in the east, and Queen Street East in the south. Since the beginning of its existence, Regent Park has been home to low-income residents and new immigrants. In 1948, construction began breaking ground on what became Regent Park as a result of clearing slums that existed before-hand (The Urbaneer Team, 2016). As a result of this construction, buildings were built with their backs facing the city, creating a disconnection from the core with large greenspaces in between each building. Most towers developed were all residential, with no commercial or retail space so there was really no reason to be in Regent Park unless you were a resident, thus strengthening the disconnect from the rest of the City (The Urbaneer Team, 2016). Decades after completion, the entire Regent Park development fell into a state of disrepair, lowering the cost of living, making Regent Park one of the few areas that newcomers to Canada could afford.

Figure 13

Regent Park Revitalization Five-Phase Masterplan. Source: Toronto Community Housing, 2010



After many failed attempts to revitalize the neighbourhood throughout the 1990's, in 2003, Toronto City Council formally endorsed the blueprint for a new Regent Park in collaboration with the Daniels Corporation, which was a five phase, 1 billion dollar revitalization effort with aims to transform an area that was built solely for social housing, into a thriving mixed-income neighbourhood (City of Toronto, 2017). Demolition and construction as part of this revitalization project began in 2006, with phase 3 anticipated to be complete by 2023, with hopes of creating a vibrant community with a mix of residents and uses by adding new parks, retail locations, and an art complex (City of Toronto, 2017).

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Regent Park was selected as a neighbourhood of focus for this research project because of its “City #3” designation from the Three Cities Within Toronto Report (2010) and low socio-economic status. Regent Park and its history is a prime example of neoliberal urban processes of urban revitalization and gentrification. David Harvey (2005) discusses how the economy of the Western world has shifted from a model of embedded liberalism to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism homogenizes citizens and the urban poor are frequently moved from city-centres into inner-city communities or forced to buy homes that they may not be able to afford in order to allow more affluent to gentrify the space which was once home to the ‘urban poor’ (Harvey, 2005). Urban revitalization processes can result in gentrification if measures are not in place to protect the existing residents. There can be benefits to gentrification, but only to long-term residents who are not pushed out, development without displacement is key. Displacement can be prevented through rent-control tools such as community land trusts, rent control, or community benefits agreements (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019).

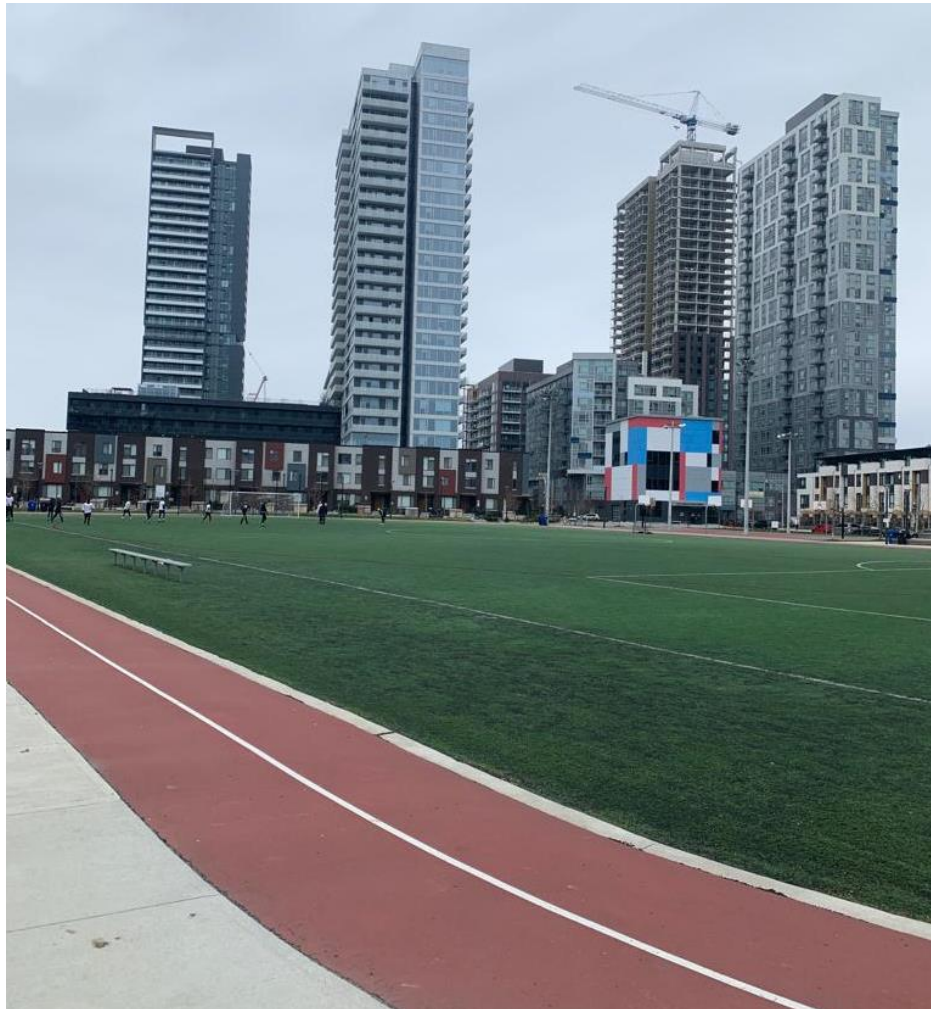
Regent Park is currently undergoing a 1-billion-dollar state-led revitalization project (see masterplan in figure 13 above) aims to transform the neighbourhood into a mixed-use, mixed-income community, while harnessing the collective power a private-public partnership between the TCHC, three tiers of government, and a major private developer (Daniels Corporation) (Day, 2017). Regent Park was a place built on the assumption that what is best for both individuals and the market is a massive public investment in a neighbourhood that was pre-designed to instill a sense of community for residents, and eventually became a liability by various levels of government that embraces the neoliberal ideology that began in the 1970s (James, 2010). It can be argued that this neoliberal ideology shifted solutions of urban revitalization to focus more on changing the tenants and residents themselves, as opposed to the social and economic policies

that govern them. James (2010) argues that the current neoliberal political economy and the secular individualism that constitutes it, has given rise to a new moral regulation which aims to turn public housing residents into clean-living, productive, and legitimate users of urban space.

As a result of these urban processes that took place throughout Regent Park, investment was allocated from the City of Toronto order to implement new parks (such as Regent Park Athletic Grounds in figure 14 below), but a question arises of who these new parks are intended to benefit, new residents or former residents? Additionally, addressing park-poverty in low-income communities can create an urban green space paradox; one whereas more green space is made available, neighbourhoods become more desirable, causing housing costs to rise which can lead to gentrification processes (Wolch et al., 2014). This could be exemplified through the case of Regent Park. During one of my site visits to Regent Park, I decided to travel a few blocks north to North St. Jamestown, which is also a neighbourhood of low-economic status, to compare investment in park spaces and the quality of these spaces in both neighbourhoods. I noticed that parks in North St. Jamestown were very similar to the Black Creek community, as they were visibly in disrepair and were very empty. This point raises an important question if investment and park improvements are only executed in tandem with gentrification processes as seen immediately to the south in Regent Park.

Figure 14

Regent Park Athletic Grounds. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete



According to the City of Toronto Parkland Strategy, Regent Park is primarily ranked in the yellow and orange category in terms of parkland per person (see figure 3 above). This demonstrates that this neighbourhood has a relatively lower parkland provision per person in comparison to the three other neighbourhoods that make up this analysis. A total of four parks were visited throughout Regent Park, which was a relatively walkable community surrounded by a vast majority of new housing complexes, with the exception of the few original public housing units that are left north of Oak Street in northern Regent Park (see figure 15 below). Through my visits to this neighbourhood, I was able to notice a stark difference in the housing stock of

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northern Regent Park, versus the rest of Regent Park, which has experienced revitalization throughout the last decade and is therefore much more modern and livable.

Figure 15

Regent Park Pre-Revitalization Social Housing. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete



This stark difference in quality was also apparent in the public spaces which were available for residents in the different areas of Regent Park. In the pockets that have not yet been revitalized, parks were older, under-utilized, polluted, empty, and surrounded by older housing, in comparison to newly renovated parks such as Regent Park or Regent Park Athletic Grounds, which are new, with modern playgrounds, a clean environment, populated with many park users,

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and are surrounded by community facilities which are owned by the City (such as the Aquatic Centre which surrounds Regent Park). The two parks located in Regent Park that have yet to be revitalized received an average user experience score of under 60 percent due to their lack of maintenance, usership, and safety. There was a sign present at one of these parks (Sumach-Shuter Parkette) that had a “notice of revitalization sign” posted, which is anticipated to begin this year (see figure 16 below). This lower-quality public space was directly across the street from the new Regent Park Athletic Grounds, which was busy with people participating in recreational sports including ball hockey, basketball, and soccer. This observation highlights the stark difference in areas of Regent Park that have received investment from the City and have been revitalized, versus those that have not.

Figure 16

Sumach-Shuter Parkette Improvement Sign. Image captured by Nicholas Del Prete



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The final park visited was Regent Park, which was one of the nicest parks visited between all four of the neighbourhoods and received an overall user experience of 94 percent (see figure 17 & 18 below). This park was conveniently located right at the steps of Dundas Street, which has a great number of new shops in mixed-use towers, along with the Dundas streetcar line. This park is also located next door to an aquatic centre, community food oven and a community garden. Additionally, there are multiple modern playgrounds available and a large open grass field with plenty of seating areas. There were plenty of people using the space in comparison to the other parks in this neighbourhood and there were also great amounts of pedestrians travelling through the central path of the park in order to get to the Dundas streetcar loading area. Immediately north of the park is the social housing left over from prior to when revitalization commenced, highlighting yet another clear example of the juxtaposition of revitalized Regent Park and non-revitalized Regent Park.

Figure 17

Regent Park Community Garden. Image Captured by Nicholas Del Prete

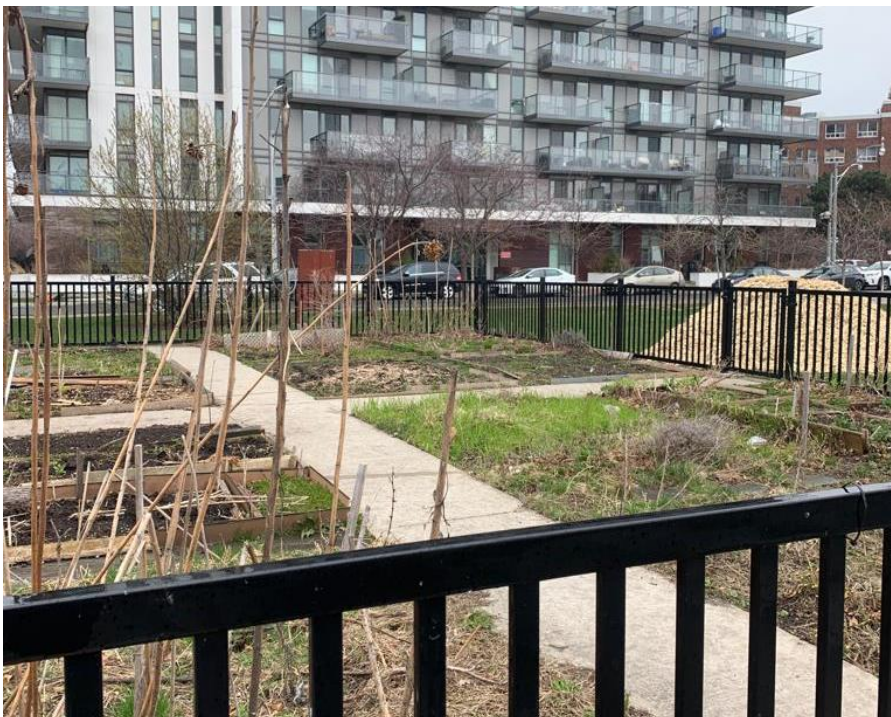


Figure 18

Regent Park Pathway to Dundas Streetcar. Image Captured by Nicholas Del Prete

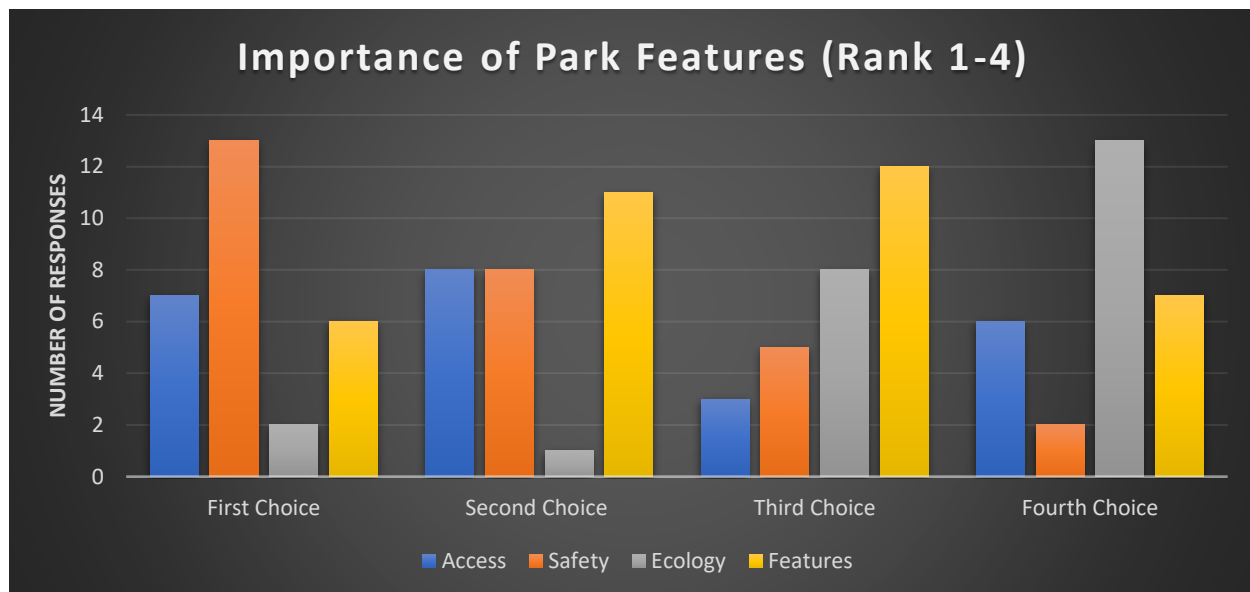


Safety is an important consideration in this neighbourhood and was central to revitalization efforts. When visiting the four parks, the feeling of safety was vastly different in the two revitalized, newer parks in comparison to the two older parks. There was great visibility, security cameras, and great amounts of people using the spaces, thus increasing the feeling of safety for park users. The questionnaires executed as part of this study, highlight the importance

of safety was listed as the most important feature of parks according to respondents from the Regent Park community.

Figure 19

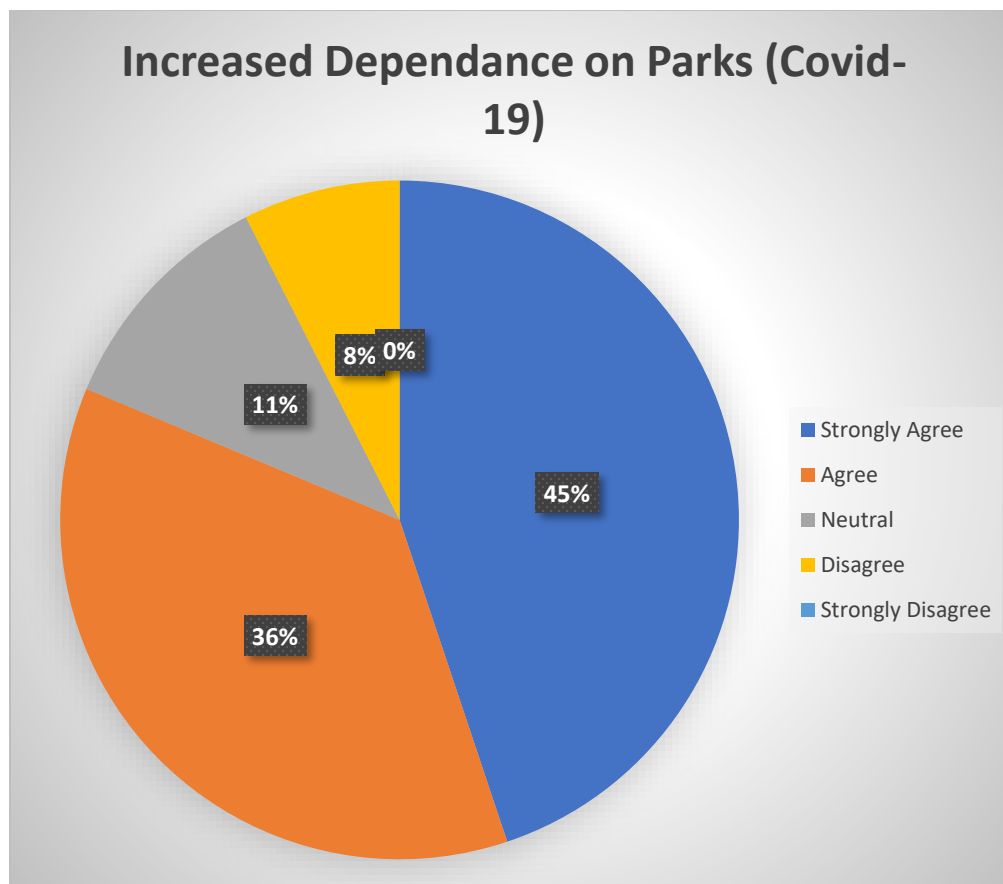
Regent Park Questionnaire Participant Results.



To conclude my analysis on Regent Park, this neighbourhood was similar to Black Creek as two of the four parks visited were of low maintenance, low physical quality and provided an overall low user experience, which vastly contradicted my experiences in the neighbourhoods of higher economic statuses (Rosedale Moore-Park and Bedford Park-Nortown). What makes this neighbourhood unique was the finding that the remaining two parks visited in the revitalized areas of Regent Park, significantly contrasted the parks in areas that have yet to receive revitalization and could be compared to parks visited in Rosedale and Bedford Park. These parks were new, clean, used by residents, and clearly a recipient of City investment and priority. The biggest question associated with my experience and analysis of Regent Park was if these newly developed parks were designed and implemented to benefit residents who existed before revitalization began, or the residents that the urban process was undertaken to attract.

Figure 20

Increased dependance on Parks (Covid-19) – All Participant Results.



4. Conclusion

Since the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in 2020, park dependance in Toronto and across the world has increased drastically. Out of 107 questionnaire participants that took part of this research project, 81 percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they have experienced dependence on parks since the start of the pandemic. These trends demonstrate a unique opportunity for research in urban studies to examine park access and provision practices while park usership is at an all-time high. This essay has explored park access beyond numerical measures, by examining the actual experience of users of parks in socio-economically

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contrasting neighbourhoods through the completion of four case studies in the context of the City of Toronto.

Two neighbourhoods that possess higher socio-economic statuses, received higher park user experience rankings as they were well-maintained, safe, easy to access, and consisted of relatively new infrastructure. Parks that were visited in the two neighbourhoods with lower socio-economic statuses, received much lower user experience rankings, as these spaces were not as well-maintained, underutilized, with aging infrastructure, and in some instances, felt unsafe. These findings raise a very preliminary correlation that the quality and user experience of parks in neighbourhoods of contrasting socio-economic statuses are vastly different. This paper has also referenced a unique case study of Regent Park, where findings suggest that the improvement of park spaces is tied to greater neoliberal urban processes of urban revitalization and gentrification, which often work to disregard participatory planning practices and instead “improve” the residents, rather than work together with them in developing solutions.

Through this essay, I have argued the importance of democratic and meaningful public involvement within all parks planning processes. Public involvement is an essential component for ensuring equitable parkland provision or revitalization and is needed for the future success of Toronto’s parks planning processes. Rather than a one-size-fits all solution to parks planning practices, this paper highlights the importance of local and direct public involvement, as different neighbourhoods have varying needs of public spaces such as parks. Given Toronto’s reputation of a City of diversity, understanding the varying needs of the population is a critical first step in ensuring equitable parkland provision. This research project is a great starting point in truly understanding how the equitable provision of parkland needs to be considered beyond numerical values, especially in a post-pandemic world, where we see a new level of appreciation and

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importance develop for these public spaces in urban areas. The findings of this study highlight preliminary trends that could be further supported through future academic studies which examine equitable parkland provision on a wider scale to encompass the entire City of Toronto, and further, other cities across North America.

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6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Blank Participant Questionnaire (Paper Version)

Nicholas Del Prete, York University: Exploring the Disparities in Park Access: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario.

Questionnaire: Please help my research by answering the questions below (3-5 minutes)

***NOTE: To show my appreciation for your contribution, please put your email address down below (if comfortable – **this is completely optional**) and you will be entered for a chance to win a \$20 Tim Hortons Gift Card which will be gifted to one (1) lucky winner in June 2022.

If interested in the draw mentioned above, please provide your email address:

Participant Consent: There is a separate informed consent letter which describes the purpose of this research project, benefits of the research, your participation, confidentiality, and provides you with faculty contact information. Please send me an email at nickdel@yorku.ca if you want a copy of the full Informed Consent Form.

1. The major intersection of where I live is:

_____.

2. What is your age?

- a) <18 years
- b) 19-29 years
- c) 29-39 years
- d) 39-49 years
- e) 49-59 years
- f) 60+ years

3. What is your estimated household income?

- a) Under 30k
- b) 30-60k
- c) 30-90k
- d) 90+k
- e) Prefer not to answer

4. I mainly travel to my local park by (think of the closest park to your home that you visit):

- a) Driving and parking
- b) Getting dropped off by a family member / uber or taxi
- c) Walking
- d) Public Transit
- e) Other: Please specify: _____.

5. I use my local park(s) _(#)_ times a week:

- a) 1



Your contribution to my research is greatly appreciated.

Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario

Nicholas Del Prete, York University: Exploring the Disparities in Park Access: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario.

Questionnaire: Please help my research by answering the questions below (3-5 minutes)

- b) 2
 - c) 3
 - d) 4
 - e) 5 or more
6. It takes me _(#)_ minutes to get to the park(s) that I visit:
- a) Less than 5 minutes
 - b) 5-10 minutes
 - c) 10-15 minutes
 - d) 15 + minutes
7. What time of day do you typically find yourself at your local park(s)?
- a) Morning hours (before 12:00pm)
 - b) Afternoon hours (between 12:00pm and 4:00pm)
 - c) Evening hours (between 4:00pm and 10:00pm)
 - d) Night hours (10:00pm – 5:00am)
8. I am satisfied with my commute to and from my local park(s).
- a) Strongly Agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neither agree or disagree
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
9. I use my local park(s) to: (please circle all that apply)
- a) To relax and decompress (get away from work, home and any stress)
 - b) To spend time with friends/family
 - c) To take a child to play
 - d) To play a sport or physical activity (run, walk, hike, etc.)
 - e) Leisure (bird watch, picnic, etc.)
 - f) Other: Please Specify: _____.
10. I have become more dependent on parks since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- a) Yes
 - b) No
11. Please list one amenity you wish your local park had that you need to travel elsewhere for.



Your contribution to my research is greatly appreciated.

Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario

Nicholas Del Prete, York University: [Exploring the Disparities in Park Access: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario](#).

Questionnaire: Please help my research by answering the questions below (3-5 minutes)

12. Do you feel comfortable/safe using your local parks?

- a) Yes
 - b) No (If selected, please specify why)
-

13. I am satisfied with the maintenance and cleanliness of my local parks.

- a) Very satisfied
- b) Satisfied
- c) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- d) Dissatisfied
- e) Very dissatisfied

14. I am aware that the City of Toronto has a Parkland Master Plan:

- a) Yes
- b) No

15. I have been invited to participate in any community engagement events with the City of Toronto to give my opinion on local parks:

- a) Yes
- b) No

16. Order the following Park Features from 1-4 in level of importance to you:

- _____. Safety (lighting, barriers, maintenance, security cameras, open sight lines)
 - _____. Access (wheelchair accessible features and benches, short travel distances, location)
 - _____. Ecology (nature, trees, rain gardens, trails, nature information boards)
 - _____. Features/Use (shade structures, playground, trails, benches, sports field, leisure, splash pads, bike racks, etc.)
-


Consent: Please note that by completing this questionnaire, you consent to full anonymous participation to this research project and to providing data which will be securely stored for up to 2 years. If you would like to read the entire Informed Consent form, please send me an email (nickdel@yorku.ca) and I will happily send it your way.

Thank you again, for participating in my research.



Your contribution to my research is greatly appreciated.

6.2 Appendix B: Blank Participant Questionnaire (Online Version)



Exploring the Disparities in Park Access and Experience

Online Participant Consent: Please note that by completing this questionnaire, you consent to full participation in the study.

To show my appreciation for your contribution, please put your email address down below (if you wish to be contacted for future research):

Short-answer text

The major intersection where I live is:

Short-answer text

What is your age?

☐ <18 years

☐ 19-29 years

☐ 29-39 years

☐ 39-49 years

☐ 49-59 years

☐ 60+ years

What is your estimated household income?

☐ Under 30k

☐ 30-60k

☐ 60-90k

☐ 90k +

☐ Prefer not to answer

Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario

I mainly travel to my local park(s) by (think of the closest park(s) to your home that you visit):

- ☐ Driving and parking
- ☐ Getting dropped off by a family member/uber or taxi
- ☐ Walking/Cycling
- ☐ Public Transit
- ☐ Other...

I use my local park(s) # of times a week:

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 or more

It takes me # minutes to travel to my local park(s):

- ☐ Less than 5 minutes
- ☐ 5-10 minutes
- ☐ 10-15 minutes
- ☐ 15+ minutes

What time of day do you typically find yourself at your local park(s)?

- ☐ Morning hours (before 12:00pm)
- ☐ Afternoon hours (between 12:00pm and 4:00pm)
- ☐ Evening hours (between 4:00pm and 10:00pm)
- ☐ Night hours (10:00pm - 5:00am)

I am satisfied with my commute to and from my local park(s):

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

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I use my local park(s) to: (please check all that apply)

- ☐ To relax and decompress
- ☐ To spend time with friends/family
- ☐ To take a child/children to play
- ☐ To play a sport / for physical activity (run, walk, hike, etc.)
- ☐ Leisure (picnic, bird watch, etc.)
- ☐ Other (please specify below)

If you selected "Other" above, please specify:

Short-answer text

I have become more dependent on parks since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Please list one amenity (or multiple) you wish your local park had that you need to travel

Short-answer text

I feel safe using my local park(s):

- ☐ No (please specify why in next question)
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Yes

If you answered "no" in the previous section, please specify why:

Long-answer text

Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario

I am satisfied with the maintenance and cleanliness of my local parks:

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

I am aware that the City of Toronto has a Parkland Masterplan:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

I have been invited to participate in any community engagement events with the City of Toronto

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Order the following Park Features from 1-4 in level of importance to you (first choice = *)

	Safety (lighting, ba...	Access (wheelchai...	Ecology (nature, tr...	Features/Use (sha...
First Choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Second Choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Third Choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fourth Choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thank you

Thank you very much for taking the time to provide your important contribution to my research project. It is greatly appreciated.

6.3 Appendix C: Site Audit Checklist

Research Project: Exploring the Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario.

Purpose: I will be creating a checklist (audit tool) that will measure and assess the experiential/functional quality (amenity, crowded, park size [using Toronto maps], leisure, access, AODA [accessible for all], inclusivity [gender and BIPOC], & safety) and the ecological quality (shade, tree cover, habitats, ponds, etc.) at specific parks selected throughout the city. As part of this research, I will be comparing parks that serve high income neighbourhoods versus low income neighbourhoods.

A) General

Park Name: _____

Neighbourhood: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Weather: _____

B) Tally of People

Moving: for example a person walking through, on a wheelchair, rollerblading, or on a bicycle.

--

Staying: for example a person, sitting, playing, standing, watching, talking or laying.

--

Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario

C) Self Observations

What can you hear?

- ☐ Birds/wildlife
- ☐ Trees/foilage
- ☐ Music/performance
- ☐ People socializing
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Traffic
- ☐ Wind
- ☐ Children playing
- ☐ Other: _____

What can you smell?

- ☐ Garbage
- ☐ Nature/fresh air
- ☐ Dust/pollution/gas
- ☐ Food from local vendor or restaurant
- ☐ Other: _____

Any observations you want to make note of (i.e. need for improvement, damage, construction/renovation, unique feature, etc.):

How would you rank the overall quality of this public space?

- ☐ High
- ☐ Medium
- ☐ Low

D) Experiential & Functional Evaluation

What features can you see? – tick off which features you see at the location.

Functional:

- ☐ Furniture/seating
- ☐ Shade structure
- ☐ Playground
- ☐ Stage/event space
- ☐ Sports field/court
- ☐ Public restrooms
- ☐ Accessible public restrooms
- ☐ Way-finding signage
- ☐ Waste receptacles
- ☐ Recycle bin
- ☐ Information board
- ☐ Educational program/space
- ☐ Recreational trails
- ☐ Public community centre
- ☐ Safety cameras / CCTV
- ☐ Police presence
- ☐ Public art
- ☐ Bike racks
- ☐ Waterpark
- ☐ Heritage elements/building
- ☐ Nearby building construction
- ☐ New park construction/revitalization
- ☐ Automobile parking spaces (lot or on-street)
- ☐ Other: _____

Ecological:

- ☐ Mature trees/shade
- ☐ Wetlands/river/stormwater management pond
- ☐ Maintained flowerbeds/gardens
- ☐ Community food gardens
- ☐ Animals / wildlife
- ☐ Environmental information boards
- ☐ Connections to natural trails / woodlot trails
- ☐ Primarily permeable surfaced (i.e. grass, geotextile, rain garden etc.)
- ☐ Other: _____

Exploring Disparities in Park Access and Experience: A Case Study of Toronto, Ontario

User Experience: Please fill out the following evaluation. At the end, divide the total score by the number of answered questions in each of the four themes. The average provides an overview of this location according to the experiential theme. N/A = not applicable, **1** = strongly disagree, **2** = disagree, **3** = neutral, **4** = agree, **5** = strongly agree

Access:

Description	Rank
The park is easy to find/access from a network of streets/sidewalks/paths with multiple entry points	
The park is easily accessible by public transit	
The park has wayfinding signage at entry points	
Walkers and cyclists are protected from automobile traffic	
People of all ages and abilities can access the park safely and comfortably	
Average score	

Participation:

Description	Rank
There are a variety of opportunities to participate in a range of activities, including playing, exercise, watching, recreation, socializing, and learning opportunities	
People of all ages and abilities are able to comfortably stay, relax, participate and/or socialize (i.e., benches, seating tables that can be used by all, including users who depend on mobility assistant devices)	
There are programmed social and cultural events	
There are nearby shops, cafes or restaurants	
There are nearby community facilities (i.e., public library, community centre, eldercare centres, etc.)	
Average score	

Inviting/safe to stay:

Description	Rank
Park space feels safe during the day	
Park space feels safe during nighttime hours	
Park space is clean and well-maintained	
The park is well-lit, CCTV cameras present, has clear sight lines and good visibility	
There is infrastructure to protect users from the wind/sun/rain/snow (i.e. shade structures, or mature trees)	
Users are protected from uncomfortable situations (i.e. loud noises, unpleasant smells, pollution, etc.)	
The park space has great scenic qualities and feels like you are away from the hustle and bustle of the city (I.e. not surrounded by towers or is surrounded by trees)	
There are opportunities for cultural activity or learning (i.e., stories of historic significance, environmental stewardship, cultural performance, and/or public art	
The park is not overcrowded and users are able to stay in the space comfortable or in a socially-distanced manner (COVID-19)	
The park is welcoming and invites users to return	
Average score	