Differential Participation of Ethno-cultural Groups in Nature-based Activities in Rouge National Urban Park

A Major Research Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies

MES (Planning) Program
York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Yinuo (Yvette) Guo, MES Candidate 2015 __________________________
Associate Professor Dr. Jennifer Foster, MES III Supervisor __________________________

January 20, 2015
Abstract

Rouge Park – a near-urban nature park crossing the City of Toronto, the York Region and Durham Region – is currently undergoing transition to federal (Parks Canada) management. The park represents a major nature-based recreation destination within driving distance of seven million residents in southwestern Ontario, where populations are becoming increasingly diverse due to immigration. The changing demographics insofar as emerging user demands are concerned, present an interesting challenge for parks planning and management in Rouge Park, where the focus has traditionally been on promoting natural history and conservation. In light of this, the present research attempts to answer the following questions: How ethno-culturally diverse are the park users? How do users from ethno-cultural minorities (and particularly immigrant populations) relate to the park? What can environmental service providers/managers/planners do to encourage inter-cultural learning about the environment? While interviewees generally agree that there is evidence of demographic diversity among Rouge Park users, the extent of diversity of users and uses in the park is debatable. The fact that the presence of minority groups in Rouge Park is statistically incongruent with their proportions in the wider geographic area suggests that a sub-portion of visible minorities or immigrants have not made the park a recreational destination. Interview findings suggest that both socio-economic and cultural factors are responsible for differential participation of minority and newcomer groups. How these factors interact to influence perceptions and behaviours in nature-based activities, however, is unclear. Review of literature reveals several distinct theoretical frameworks which serve to explain the relationships between ethnicity and recreation. Nevertheless, several recommendations resulted from a combination of literature reviews, document analysis and interviews. These will allow practitioners to better respond to emerging user demands as well as to appreciate different views of nature informed by diverse identities and lived experiences.
Foreword

This research project most directly addresses Component 3: Culture and the Environment in my Plan of Study. Within this component, I have set a broad goal to understand the quality of lived experiences of ethno-cultural minorities in a contemporary liberal democratic society, as well as the perceptions of the social, natural and built environments of first or second generation immigrants and how they prefer to behave in these environments. By undertaking a case study of the Rouge Park (Objective 3.2), I am able to investigate (a) factors contributing to differential participation of ethno-cultural minorities in outdoor recreation as compared to the mainstream culture, and (b) develop competency in research methodology and theoretical frameworks most appropriate to responding to the research question. To some extent, this research also touches upon environmental discourses (in Component 2: Issues in urban ecology) specifically as they pertain to the Rouge Park. Through background research and attendance of Parks Canada consultation meetings, I gained insights into the roles that municipalities, citizens, advocacy groups and other stakeholders take on in attempting to bring about change in the biophysical environment – a learning outcome directly corresponding to Objective 2.2. Finally, as a prospective planner, attendance at public consultations and interviews with individuals in their professional capacities relevant to the park provided me with real-world perspectives within the planning process. These exercises address Objective 1.2 under Component 1: Regional and urban planning concepts and policies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Jennifer Foster for her patience, encouragement and wisdom in guiding me throughout the research process. I thoroughly enjoyed Jenny’s presentations in Environmental Planning, not only for her unique ability to explain difficult
concepts in clear and thought-provoking way, but also because they helped me articulate the intellectual curiosities I have long had about culture and the environment. I am very grateful for my advisor Dr. Peter Victor for astutely guiding me through the initial stages of my MES program, offering timely advice and moral support, which encouraged me to pursue my Plan of Study and research questions with confidence. To Dr. Frehiwot Tesfaye, I owe my thanks for her thoughtful critique of my research methods and for my initiation to the fascinating field of ethnography. I would also like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the individuals who imparted unique perspectives, knowledge and/or expertise pertaining to the Rouge Park, both through interviews and personal communications. Their contributions are the very essence of this research project, which I hope will benefit the ongoing dialogues and practices aimed at advancing intercultural understandings of nature.

Without the following sources of financial support, I would not have been able to carry out my research project or the MES program with confidence and peace of mind. In no order of importance these are: the Wilkinson Family Graduate Award in Environmental Studies (2013), Faculty of Environmental Studies graduate funding, Faculty of Graduate Studies bursaries, SSHRC-Joseph Bombardier CGS Masters Scholarship (2012-2013) and the Faculty of Environmental Studies Graduate Research Scholarship (2014).

Last but not least, this paper is dedicated to my parents, to whom my thanks are beyond words.
Tables of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................1
Design & Methodology ....................................................................................................4
Terminology .....................................................................................................................7
Caveats and limitations .................................................................................................8
Ethnographic research reflections ..............................................................................10

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................13
Background on Rouge Park ..........................................................................................13
History of Rouge Park’s management .........................................................................13
Community recreation and stewardship ......................................................................15
Park issues and stakeholders .......................................................................................17
Culture and the Environment .....................................................................................19
Parks as social institutions .........................................................................................24
Studies in ethnicity and recreation ...........................................................................25
Demographic Trends ....................................................................................................32
GTA-wide demographic trends ..................................................................................32
Rouge Park proximate population ................................................................................34
Canadian trends ..........................................................................................................36

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS & DISCUSSION PART A - FIELDWORK FINDINGS .................38
Interviews .......................................................................................................................38
Statistics of interviewees ..............................................................................................39
Rouge Park managers and staff ...................................................................................40
Roles of interviewees in PC and Rouge Park Alliance ..................................................40
Assessment of park user diversity and cultural uses .....................................................41
Successes and challenges in outreach activities ............................................................42
Park vision and view of the user-environment relationship ..........................................43
Community service providers .....................................................................................45
Role within organization and membership demographics ...........................................45
Nature and scope of involvement with Rouge Park .......................................................47
Attitude to Rouge Park ................................................................................................47
Motivations and barriers for members in Rouge Park ...................................................48
Ideas about how to be culturally inclusive .................................................................50
Councillors .....................................................................................................................52
Community members ...................................................................................................54
Identity and community affiliations .............................................................................54
Knowledge about Rouge Park .....................................................................................54
Aesthetic and affective evaluation of Rouge Park .........................................................55
Motivations and barriers .............................................................................................57
Ideas about human-nature relationship, ecology, or environmental stewardship .........59
Suggestions about improving the park .........................................................................60
Other general insights ................................................................................................61
Awareness of Rouge Park ............................................................................................63
Excursions and observations .......................................................................................64
Socio-economic variables ..........................................................................................65
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The philosophical basis for my research is influenced by Charles Taylor (1992)’s seminal piece “Politics of Recognition,” which spells out the need to develop equitable social practices across cultural groups, and to devise policies which strive to reasonably accommodate cultural differences when they prove to be fundamentally incompatible. The same philosophy has influenced many urban scholars, including Mohammed Qadeer, whose articulation of diversity or multicultural planning in Canada inspired my current work: “Multicultural planning is not a distinct genre of urban planning. It is a strategy of making reasonable accommodations for the culturally defined needs of ethno-racial minorities on the one hand, and reconstructing the common ground that underlies policies and programmes on the other. A set of policies is recommended for making urban planning more inclusive” (Qadeer 2009).

One of the guiding principles for Rouge National Urban Park developed by stakeholders is to “honour diversity, local heritage, and cultural inclusiveness both past, present as well as for the future” (Parks Canada 2012a). Parks Canada operates under a mandate that identifies the role of “protecting and presenting nationally significant examples of Canada’s natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations” (ibid).

Parks Canada is experiencing declining visitor numbers (Parks Canada 2012b; CBC 2012). With the establishment of a near-urban federal park the agency has the opportunity to (a) better engage with Canadians, 80% of whom live in urban areas (Statistics Canada 2001) and that (b) inspire Canadians to visit other federal parks, which are typically located in remote, wilderness areas. Rouge Park in the past was not specifically branded and marketed to
encourage wider awareness by the public. The lack of unifying vision and park interpretation are recognized as gaps in public relations and areas which Parks Canada has considerable expertise (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010). An unprecedented opportunity exists with branding Rouge Park as “environmental or wilderness gateway experience” for seven million inhabitants of the GTA (many of whom are newcomers) within an hour drive of the site (Parks Canada 2012a; Parks Canada 2013).

The assertion that “broadening of the processes and products of urban planning to reflect the evolving mix of cultures in a city is a critical element of multicultural planning” (Qadeer 2009) could be equally applicable to planning in nature settings such as parks. Using Rouge Park as a case study, I am interested in examining the extent to which the park (its landscape, planning, programming, etc.) reflects the experiences and preferences of immigrants and ethno-cultural minorities. If we regard parks as sites where “reproduction of space and place power relations” (Lovelock 2012), it is possible to consider Rouge Park as a place where different environmentalisms intersect; where only a subset of these environmentalisms are allowed to flourish, a certain set of power relations may have established. In this regard, the current study has set out to determine whether and how fixed power relations may be manifested. For instance, are certain activities encouraged or discouraged in Rouge Park on the basis of certain environmental knowledge being emphasized over others? Thus, this research is concerned with spatial planning practice from a cultural diversity perspective. Since little to no systematic analysis exists of ethno-cultural minorities in a multicultural metropolitan area like the GTA, the research is considered preliminary in that it will help to set the stage for more detailed and nuanced studies in the future. Some questions guiding the initial development of this project are: relative to European-Canadians – (a) Whether

---

1 Building on Choi (2011)’s definition of *environmentalism* in Asian countries (p. 3), my usage of the term refers to political support, environmental participation, and awareness of consequences of actions related to environmental problems and is based on values and beliefs of a given ethno-cultural group.
ethno-cultural minorities visit and use the park as frequently? (b) What activities do they participate more or less frequently in? (c) What motivates individuals to come to the park? What inhibits them? and (e) In what ways would individuals like to see the park improved?

Another theme I am interested in exploring is people’s views of the biophysical environment. For instance, what types of feelings does being in Rouge Park evoke for different park users? Are there differences in expression and emphasis of feelings or environmental views along cultural lines? Finally, what attitudes do people hold in regards to potential conflicts between human activities and ecological integrity in the park? By posing the question of how various ethno-cultural groups in a society can exhibit different attitudes and behaviours toward the environment, I hope to contribute to broader discussions about (a) one’s sense of belonging in a society and (b) ways in which environmental activities can be conceptualized and designed to be more sensitive to cultural diversity so as to encourage greater participation by ethno-cultural minorities.

The creation of Rouge Park as a site of recreation and environmental conservation is owed to civic and political activism. On the one hand, the high level of civic engagement has meant that many community members historically familiar with the park tend to feel a strong sense of ownership and a certain shared understanding of user etiquette. On the other hand, those who do not have the same history (many of whom immigrants) are less likely to see themselves as stakeholders of the park: some of whom may use and perceive the park differently than the majority of the users; others are not even aware of the park’s existence or have not made the park their recreation destination. These findings are supported by interviews and my attendance at Parks Canada’s September 2014 consultation meetings. Staff from the former Rouge Park Alliance had succeeded to some extent in broadening civic
engagement to hosting nature walks and environmental stewardship activities in partnership with various ethnic and faith-based organizations. From my interview outreach attempts, however, it appears that few of these partnerships which managed to sustain did so largely due to the initiative of individual community service providers.

Researchers studying the perceptions and behaviours in nature settings with ethno-cultural identifiers as intervening variables are increasingly attentive to the historical, global and socio-economic contexts affecting people’s wellbeing and livelihoods. The awareness of these contexts is obvious from interviews I conducted with community service providers with clienteles from diverse ethno-cultural and immigrant backgrounds. More often than not, community service providers and environmental educators identify and address socio-economic, linguistic and psychological (e.g. fear and lack of trust) barriers that hinder nature-based activities by minority populations. Interviews with community members partially reflect this reality. From some interviews and document analysis, it is clear that there is some recognition that different cultural perceptions of nature and environmental practices could play an important role in individuals’ sense of belonging. These factors have yet to be thoroughly examined or integrated into practice within the GTA context. The New South Wales National – Parks & Wildlife Services (NWS NPWS) is a leader in this regard (see Thomas 2001 and Thomas 2002). To truly enhance socio-cultural responsibility as a national park agency, there needs to be a cultural shift within Parks Canada to recognize national parks as social institutions, as well as culturally responsive park programming and staffing.

*Design & Methodology*

The conception for this research project can be traced back to a group project I undertook with
three classmates in 2012 regarding Rouge Park, where we examined key issues in major stakeholder interests, mechanisms for environmental protection, archaeological heritage and community stewardship related to the Rouge Park. In an interview with Sheryl Santos (pers comm. 2013), we learned of initiatives that the Rouge Park Alliance (RPA) undertook to enhance community stewardship and visitor experience. The Alliance commissioned a document which details the types of environmental and cultural heritage that is to be protected and appreciated, as well as the best way to “inform, inspire and involve” current and future visitors to the park. In contextualizing recommendations for “Analysis of Audiences and Markets,” the HAVE (Heritage Appreciation and Visitor Experience plan (E.27) specifically recognizes the increasingly diverse cultural fabric of the GTA and the potential for visitors to bring with them “significantly different views and behaviours towards the natural world and toward history and historic sites.” The rationale for the present study is partially based on this progressive view of park user engagement, and is seeking to evaluate the extent to which such analysis and engagement vis-à-vis culturally diverse visitors have been taking place.

With basic information regarding Rouge Park and theoretical interest in culturally diverse park users, concrete ideas for the research project started to emerge. To further understand the potential relevance of this project to the current situation, I used a combination of preliminary literature research and scoping interviews with RPA staff2. I was informed that Parks Canada had completed a visitor survey in Autumn 2013. After talking to RPA staff to learn more about how Parks Canada’s survey was implemented, I opted against surveying for my own project as it would likely cause respondent fatigue. Later in the research process, Parks Canada provided me with its survey findings, which I will discuss in Results & Discussions.

The methodology ultimately settled on a combination of interviews, document analysis and

---

2 Then employed in the interim by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)
literature reviews. With the approval of the ethics review committee, I began systematically searching and contacting community organizations that served immigrants, ethno-cultural groups close to the park and/or offering an environmental activity. Query methods included keyword search on non-profit databases online, followed by emails and cold calls for contact referrals. A few groups were also referred to by Parks Canada and RPA, but requests for interviews were unreturned. At the same time, I had also contacted the Multicultural Connections program coordinators at the TRCA, since the programs and mandates (TRCA 2014) appeared highly informative for my research questions, specifically those relating to diverse views and behaviours of ethno-cultural groups vis-à-vis the environment. Please see Appendix 1 for a sample of the letter of invitation to participate in this research, Appendix 2 for a list of research interviews, and Appendix 3 for a sample list of interview questions.

I conducted in-person interviews with several staff members associated with the former Rouge Park Alliance, community service providers (e.g. YMCA Scarborough, the Malvern Family Resource Centre, Centre for Immigrant and Community Services and Across U-Hub). Through the help of these organization contacts, I was able to conduct in-depth discussions with four clients from the Malvern Family Resource Centre, one volunteer from Across U-Hub and a participant from the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services hiking group. After each discussion, I reflected on potential findings and very importantly, some limitations to the ways in which the discussions responded to my research objectives. For various reasons, research requests tended more to be declined or unreturned by (a) cultural communities which have been targeted for outreach from Rouge Park staff and (b) environmental service providers who advertise expertise in reaching out to ethno-cultural minorities in the GTA.
In mid-September, Parks Canada held four public consultations in Markham, Pickering, East Toronto (Scarborough) and Downtown Toronto. Of these, I was able to attend the Markham and Downtown meetings, during which I took notes concerning participant commentaries relevant to my research interests. During the same period, I decided to supplement activities with in-person visits to the park to observe user demographics and predominant activities. The reasons for this are that (a) user demographics were not tracked by Parks Canada’s visitor survey; (b) late summer and early fall weather is generally ideal for park visitors, and a variety of users might be reasonably expected; and (c) to take more detailed notes about the park’s landscape features and facilities.

Lastly, I also searched for municipal councillors in Toronto, Markham and Pickering who either have been involved in previous Parks Canada consultations or have constituencies within 15min drive of Rouge Park. Of the email requests sent out, only regional councillor Jennifer O’Connell (Durham Regional Ward 1 - Pickering) and city councillor Ron Moeser (Toronto Ward 44) were available for interviews.

**Terminology**

The terminology ethnic minority and majority have been used widely throughout the literature (Rishbeth 2001; Roberts and Chitewere 2011; Floyd 2001; Lovelock et al 2012) to denote the fact that those with European ancestry have been the numerical majority in many British colonies countries. This relationship is changing in many parts of North America (Statistics Canada 2010; Shinew et al 2006; Winter et al 2009). The majority/minority terminology to the extent that place of origin is concerned, may be becoming increasingly obsolete. This paper acknowledges that the debate on multiculturalism, ethnicity and race are still ongoing;
departing from the premise that power imbalances may well exist, the present study seeks to advance practical solutions in the promotion of inter-cultural understanding. This approach, I believe, would be most helpful for park staff, ENGO’s and community service providers.

Caveats and limitations

When commencing this research project, I had hoped to obtain a range of different views about Rouge Park from ethno-culturally diverse users. This turned out to be a quite daunting task for the reasons below.

All of the individuals who responded to my interview requests are repeat visitors to Rouge Park and therefore have developed familiarity with the landscape. Among the community members I interviewed, the general sentiment for the landscape has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic; further, there was a great deal of convergence in some themes conveyed (see subsection Interviews). This convergence is consistent with the level of satisfaction that the vast majority of respondents recorded in Parks Canada’s 2012 Survey. High level of satisfaction in turn would encourage repeated visitations, breeding familiarity and affection for the landscape. Evidence from interviews generally supports this notion. Going further, it is quite likely that community members who did not come forward with interest in being interviewed may have felt differently about the park. Having realized that the research context I had presented to community organizations focuses on Rouge Park, I encouraged whenever possible that prospective interview participants take into account their experiences in nature parks as a whole. However, this effort was constrained by the fact that the term “Rouge Park” appeared several times on the research consent form and in verbal introductions both by myself and community service providers.
Recruiting participants, as I surmise for this project, was also subject to selection bias and non-selection bias in that users who felt “eligible” for participation are more likely to perceive Rouge Park in affectionate terms. Those who exclude themselves from the park may have perceived themselves as “ineligible.” As mentioned, changing the wording from “Rouge Park” to “nature parks” in general may have been more inviting to community members considering participation in the study. Rouge Park is not a particularly well-known recreational destination (like High Park) among GTA residents in general, a point on which many interviewees and attendants at Parks Canada’s consultation meetings concurred. However, what constitutes a “nature park” per se is subject to a wide range of opinions and no single definition exists. To keep the subject matter more focused on parklands in which relatively few human-made infrastructures exist, Rouge Park seemed fitting as an example that participants can draw upon. Thus it was a fine balancing act between attempts to zero in on the research question and potential participant inclusion/exclusion.

Difficulties also arose during the interviews with community members as I attempted to frame questions gauging their perceptions of Rouge Park and nature spaces in general. Questions were open-ended, requiring participants to elaborate rather than answer “yes” or “no. On the one hand, some questions were broadly worded so as not preclude a range of answers beyond my anticipation. I suspect that, however, interviewees were sometimes equally broad in their responses when they could have been more descriptive with respect to their mental imageries. On the other hand, the concept of cultural uses and perceptions of nature spaces proved to be elusive for community members since they were likely not accustomed to contemplating their visits to Rouge Park in those terms. To help the discussion along, I sometimes used a couple of examples I had read in literature to see if they are consistent with my interviewees’
experiences. However, I elected not to prompt responses from discussants as prompting could produce unreliable data for its tendency to elicit biased responses. One area of improvement would be to test these interview questions beforehand with similar audiences. Or, as I found much later in the process, a few research projects conducted outside of Canada are surprisingly comparable in research context. Sample questions and interview structures from these projects would have been useful.

There were some limitations to the inquiry of my research. Despite email and phone outreach I had been unable to recruit community members from the Philippines, Africa or the Middle East, which are significant sources of immigrants residing near Rouge Park and the wider GTA (please see Demographic Trends). It is quite possible that I had missed some of the ethno-cultural and religious organizations relevant to my study. I also acknowledge the lack of discussion on Aboriginal cultures in this study. This gap is mainly due to my own limited knowledge on the topic in general and also somewhat to the fact that a very small percentage of the nearby population officially identify themselves as Aboriginal. Even though First Nations presences in the site now known as Rouge Park have been recognized by Rouge Park Alliance and Parks Canada, the importance of their cultural heritage is almost entirely celebrated as an archaeological artifact. There is little to no indication that Aboriginal culture practices will be encouraged in the park in the future.

*Ethnographic research reflections*

In “Decolonizing Anthropology” (1997), Faye Harrison contributed a piece titled “Ethnography as Politics.” In it, Harrison reflects upon her fieldwork in Oceanview, Jamaica in 1978, when the country was going through tumultuous political struggles to gain economic
independence. While reading, I noted some key points which parallel my own research, serving as points of reflection. Harrison found that actively participating in community activities helped her gain the trust of research informants. Participation for the sole purpose of gaining access to informants may be disingenuous on the part of the researcher, since it can be perceived as exploitation. Like Harrison, I took a genuine interest in the community organizations I approached. Participating alongside community members not only allowed us to establish mutual trust and understanding, but is also an opportunity for me to contribute back to the organization whose information is sought. As a highly educated, female university student of Asian descent, I expected and indeed fielded inquiries by curious community members about my own cultural and education background. Despite having little to no foreign accent, as I am often told, I informed people that I too have an immigrant background and retain a strong hold of my Chinese identity. I sometimes went further by explaining that having somewhat ambiguous cultural identities (that is, Canadian and Chinese) was an important impetus for my research topic. While I could not claim that community members empathized with my mentality, the opportunities for reciprocity of information exchange may have put them more at ease. Importantly, by ensuring that they understand my research objective (I provided a quick introduction based on the content of my consent form voluntarily before every interview), I have hopefully minimized the potential for exploitation, actual or perceived. Since this research project is exploratory in nature, it was also open to some adaptation. For instance, while some informants stated that they did not believe cultural background to be a significant factor in recreational preferences and attendances of ethnic minorities in Rouge Park, they were nevertheless curious about why I had developed the research question to begin with. In explaining, I had relied on the strength of my literature review but at the same time acknowledged my own uncertainties about the outcome of the research. Again I deemed that engagement in “mutual exchange” of information as well as
questions (Harrison 1997), while not ethically obligated, to be a crucial part of my research process.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background on Rouge Park

- History of Rouge Park’s management

The history of Rouge Park as it exists today can be described as being “born out of a history of community activism” (Parks Canada 2012a). The park spans across “municipal jurisdictions of the City of Toronto, Region of York (Markham, Richmond Hill, and Whitchurch-Stouffville) and Durham Region (Pickering)” (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010). Please see Appendix 4 for a map of the Rouge Park study area.

In 1988, the Canadian Government announced that it would provide $10 million for a wilderness reserve to protect the Rouge River Valley system (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010). In 1990, a private members bill was introduced in the House of Commons advising the federal government to formally enter “into negotiations with the Government of Ontario to establish a wilderness reserve or heritage park to protect the environmental uniqueness and importance of the Rouge River Valley System in Scarborough” (ibid). The bill was passed unanimously. The success of the creation of Rouge Park can be attributed to activism by politicians such as Ron Moeser and Glenn de Baeremaeker as well as by various environmental groups and community organizations that rallied to the cause. In 1990, the Province of Ontario created the Rouge Park Advisory Committee. This was a multi-stakeholder group tasked to create a park plan (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010). In 1994 the Rouge Park Management Plan was released after an extensive planning process that “included intensive public, agency and interest group consultation which forwarded its recommendations to the Province” (ibid). In 1995 the federal government fulfilled its earlier announcement by depositing $10,000,000 for Rouge Park to the Waterfront Regeneration Trust. David Crombie,

---

3 The following subsections were adapted from an earlier report submitted as part of a group project in ENVS 6124, produced in collaboration with J. Joudrey, T. Hu and Z. Khan on April 25, 2013.
former mayor of Toronto and working with the Trust, asked the provincial government to recommend a management structure. This marks the creation of the Rouge Park Alliance.

The Rouge Park Alliance was the board of directors for the Rouge Park, comprising of 12 government organizations and one not-for profit group working on a voluntary basis (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010). In 1997, with consultation the Alliance decided on a funding model with 50% contribution from the provincial government and the rest provided by various municipalities through which the parkland crosses. The primary source of provincial funding was the original endowment from the federal government; park programming was then funded entirely from the interest accrued thereof. Due to uncertainty in funding after 2012 (when it the model was set to expire) and lack of clear management vision in light of a multitude of stakeholders, as well as disparate land holdings – all significant challenges in the park’s smooth governing – the Alliance had commissioned third party consultants to advise of best governance scenarios going forward. The consultants identified the National Parks governance system as the preferred option since it is best able to “deliver ‘ecological integrity [with] the lowest level of active use’ when compared with conservation authorities. The latter are generally ‘operated to a standard of ‘environmental management,’ which implies a higher level of active use.” Uses that are recognized to be “active” by the report take place in campground and group activity areas.

During the March 2012 Federal Budget announcement, the Government of Canada announced a commitment of $145 million towards the creation of Canada’s first national urban park (Parks Canada 2012a). This money would be used over a period of 10 years towards the creation of various trails, restoration projects, programming, an education and interpretive centre, cultural events, and sustainable agricultural projects (ibid). While Parks Canada moved into the process
of acquiring management and ownership agreement of the park, the Rouge Park Alliance was disbanded in July 2012. In 2011 and 2012, Parks Canada launched its round of first public engagement and consultation in the GTA that served to both (1) promote the newly established Rouge National Urban Park as well as (2) actively seek diverse perspectives and visions from many stakeholders. In 2014, the agency proceeded with another round of consultations (elaborated in Appendix 5) for a draft version of the management plan, containing more specific goals and targets. This plan awaits finalization before an implementation plan with concrete details of management and operations can be produced. This latter plan will also be tabled in the House of Commons and will undergo 10-year reviews (Lavoie 2014).

- Community recreation and stewardship

The major active uses in the park include hiking, canoeing south of Highway 401, camping at Glen Rouge Campground, swimming in Lake Ontario, fishing, geocaching and picnicking at shelters in the York Region (Rouge Park 2013). North of Steeles Avenue, the York Region invested $6 million in capital works in the Bob Hunter Memorial Park, as part of the “planning, approval and implementation of the York Durham Sanitary Sewer System (YDSS)” (BHMPEP 2010). Bob Hunter Park (200-hectare) is scheduled to open in 2015 (York Region 2011). The site used to be agricultural and is currently slated for recreational uses which will include trail infrastructure, signage and kiosks, restoration and tree planting, as well as pedestrian bridge crossing (BHMPEP 2010). A paved, multi-use trail is undergoing construction, marking the first of such trails for Rouge Park in the York Region.

The Rouge Park Alliance had previously developed a “Heritage Appreciation and Visitor Experience” or the HAVE plan. It contains “a suite of programs, activities and services that can assist Rouge Park and its partners and stakeholders in achieving the park’s mission, vision
and goals.” This master plan details the types and phasing of educational programming that would have achieved the purposes of informing, inspiring and involving its visitors. The partnerships with community groups described have been mostly retained as Parks Canada takes over. Interpretive and educational programs during the Alliance years had been primarily delivered by groups such as 10,000 Trees for the Rouge Valley, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, Rouge Valley Foundation and the Toronto District School Board. As such, many of the recommended actions described in HAVE were tailored towards these entities. The plan advocates that visitor behavior be guided through a combination of strategies such as education, leading-by-example and two-way communications.

The Alliance had been successful at engaging the community in tree planting, stream and wetlands restoration work, as well as the winter bird count event, which typically drew the highest level of participation. Reptile/Amphibian day, the Hoot and Howl, FrogWatch and marsh vegetation surveying was popular with visitors of all age groups. While Parks Canada carries out its own animated programming, some future restoration work is still expected to be conducted with partner organizations and community volunteers (Santos 2013, pers. comm.). Volunteers with the Alliance on a yearly basis (over 7500) easily outnumbered those engaged in all of the national parks put together (ibid). This is a very impressive feat which is enthusiastically acknowledged by Parks Canada (Lavoie 2013, pers. comm.).

Fostering a sense of natural heritage stewardship in youth is at the core of the outreach strategies by Parks Canada (Parks Canada 2012a): not only will the park space be animated to appeal to youth, their participation will be encouraged through community association and summer employment. As well, citizen science and environmental stewardship will again be encouraged by the agency.
As of 2012, visitor profiling had been fairly limited in the park and largely derived from anecdotal evidence. The Alliance did not have the institutional capacity to carry out a systematic visitor experience and profiling study, but in the HAVE it identified major data gaps. It is unknown whether some parts of the wider community are less likely to visit the park than their population proportions would suggest. In other words, are visible minorities and immigrant populations under-participating in Rouge Park? Filling these gaps may be of particular interest to Parks Canada as it fulfills the mandate of promoting cultural inclusivity and in developing a self-sustaining tourism management plan (Parks Canada 2012a). Taking into account the demographic trends in the GTA, it is important for the long-range planning of Rouge Park to consider an aging population and an increasingly ethno-culturally diverse GTA population (please refer to Demographics trends). HAVE points out that new Canadians born outside of Canada may have “significantly different views and behaviours toward the natural world and toward history and historic sites” (E. 27). In order to reach out to newcomers, the Alliance has partnered with groups such as the YMCA and FutureWatch (Santos 2013, pers. comm.). The initiatives provided a mutual learning experience regarding how the Park is perceived by individuals (for instance, as resourceful, dangerous or spiritual) (ibid). This will be elaborated as part of Results - subsection Interviews.

- Park issues and stakeholders
The site on which Rouge Park is located has seen tens of thousands of years of nomadic and settled human existence (Rouge Park 2013). Burial and portaging by the various First Nations (notably the Seneca) have left traces of their settlement in the site. Previous staff members at Rouge Park had attempted to make use of this cultural heritage by integrating it into various programming initiatives. Both the preservation and celebration of this cultural heritage are
expected to function at a higher level under the current management of Parks Canada. Rouge Park sits on the northern edge of the Carolinian Zone\(^4\) and the ecological significance of the parkland includes "its diversity of species, community composition, habitat niches, moisture gradients, community structure, successional states and community interspersion" (Rouge Park 2013). Threats to ecological integrity include habitat loss from nearby urbanization, species at risk, excessive foraging and human-introduced invasive species (Wilson 2012). The Rouge River Watershed has been estimated to contain 1006 plant species, 262 bird species, 65 fish species, 40 mammal species, and 21 reptiles and amphibian species (TRCA 2013). The agricultural industry also represents a major stakeholder in Rouge Park. Agriculture has been in the Rouge Valley for about 200 years (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010). There are 75 working farms, accounting for 60% of the total land base in the Rouge Park study area (ibid). Under Parks Canada, natural resource harvesting and extraction will be prohibited for the most part, but allowances could be made “in support of farming or clearance for hydro corridors” (Parks Canada 2012a). The agency has been actively negotiating with farming lessees regarding longer leases and environmental farming practices, as well as potential agro-tourism (Lavoie 2013, pers. comm.)

Various environmental groups have been vying for enhanced ecological integrity in and around the Rouge River Valley, which they believe would be achieved via minimization of recreational and resource extraction and production activities. The aforementioned agricultural industry is also significant both for the history of farming in the area as well its contribution to local food production. Environmentalists and agriculturalists have often been at odds over the issues of conducting farming practices in an environmentally sound way (Bender 2013, pers. comm.). Land parcels north of Steeles Avenue, which are more open to development

\(^4\) According to Wilson (2012), the Carolinian Zone is a rare ecozone which provides habitat “for more species than any other life zone in [Canada]” (pg. 8).
proposals, are particularly contentious. The interests of local municipalities in and around the Rouge parklands have mainly been expressed in terms of residential development, hard infrastructure and servicing (highways, pipelines and landfill expansion) (Macaraig 2013). Environmental organizations such as Friends of the Rouge Watershed have consistently and vehemently opposed such projects (ibid). While often unsuccessful, they have been instrumental in wetland creation and restoration projects both north and south of Steeles Avenue. Even though both the Rouge Park Alliance and Parks Canada have recognized the significance of Aboriginal heritage – the latter having established First Nations Advisory Circle for consultation purposes (Parks Canada 2014) – little is known about interests Aboriginal groups have expressed in the future use, planning and legal implications of Rouge National Urban Park lands, aside from celebration of archaeological heritage.

Culture and the Environment

“[I]t is argued that NPWS cannot hope to work effectively as a cross-cultural communicator unless it is acknowledged that national parks, having emerged from former colonial societies, are imbued with particular values and ideals concerning land use […] it is suggested that those in government must acknowledge their own history – their own cultural and ethnic specificity – in order to acknowledge the cultural experience of others.” (Thomas 2001, p. 1)

One of the leaders in institutional research on the “cultural construction of open space” (Thomas 2001) is the New South Wales (NSW) National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). By focusing on the relationship between people and landscape, the NPWS commissioned two in-depth studies using focus group discussions with members of the Macedonian and
Vietnamese communities in Australia, published in 2001 and 2002 respectively. Martin Thomas who penned the first of the series premised the article by situating the Australian national parks system in its cultural and historical contexts:” In Australia, national parks express certain national ideals, continuing a well-established pattern in which ‘the bush’ provides key images in defining ‘who we are’ and ‘where we are’. National parks function as sources of nationalist imagery as well as providing physical spaces in which the citizen can participate in activities like bushwalking, camping swimming, barbecues – often regarded as national traditions” (pg. 29). An important insight to be gleaned from these studies is that the predominant environmental view of the Australian landscape had been largely defined by European settlers. Taken for granted, this view needs to be critically evaluated for its cultural relevance not only to the Aboriginal people who had lived before, but also the continually immigrant-driven Australian population in the present time. Many similarities exist between Australia and other former British colonies such as New Zealand, United States and Canada – in terms of general immigration histories, raison-d’être of national park systems and research efforts in ethnicity and recreation. Thus, even though several of the studies reviewed here took place outside of Canada, lessons are considerably applicable to the Rouge National Urban Park.

At this point, the term “culture” as relevant to our discussion should be clarified. Culture as defined with respect to ethnicity is not static with respect to individuals or groups; it undergoes of dynamic changes (Rishbeth 2001). Nevertheless, to assert outright futility in the definition of culture or ethnicity in given contexts would risk ignoring differences in social constructs that have real significance for groups of individuals. Thomas (2001) defends the use of “ethnic” as a term that: “allows groups of people to classify and defend their own historical ad cultural distinctiveness against the homogenising tendencies of a dominant group” (p. 15).
Scholars in the field of ethnicity and nature-based participation have gainfully employed various definitions of culture, ethnicity, race and other related terms. A few of them along with some critiques are reviewed in the following section. Thomas points that American scholars on ethnicity and recreation studies have tended to define “ethnicity” as pertaining only to people who are not perceived to be in the “mainstream.” This turns a blind eye to the fact that the “mainstream” individuals may also define themselves as belonging to certain ethnic groups. Having said this, the term “ethnic” has evolved historically from its initial use in distinguishing between the Christian or Jewish nations and heathens, to a more recent alignment with terms like “race, groups and nations in a more general sense” (p. 15). In this sense, the equating of ethnic minorities with immigrants arriving after European settlement in former British colonies is often accepted and implied.

Contemporary multiculturalism is a troubling concept, for on the one hand institutionalization of multiculturalism reflects the ethos of respecting cultural diversity; this was considered as a departure from assimilative and discriminatory public policies prior to the 1970’s (Qadeer 1997; Moodley 1987). On the other hand, critics hold that “the spread of culturally diverse social forms and processes was happening regardless of assimilation and [...] that the recognition of diversity did not cause diversity to happen” (Hage 1998, cited in Thomas 2001, p. 18). Underpinning this interpretation of multiculturalism in the national public policy context is the criticism that those in power (i.e. predominantly European settlers) defined and continue to define the term in such a way as to sustain their position as power-brokers and decision-makers (ibid, p.17).

In the present study, the term ethno-cultural was chosen in order to evoke key elements in the definition “a group having a real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical
past, and cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood” (Baas et al, cited in Thomas 2001, p.14). A very similar definition was used by Rishbeth (2001) citing Hutchinson and Smith (1996) in the examination of ethnicity in landscape architecture. “Ethnocultural groups” is also used as a catch-all term for policy discussions regarding ethnic ancestry, religious affiliation, language use and visible minorities (Statistics Canada 2011a).

Noting that the terms minority status, ethnicity and immigrants are sometimes used interchangeably, Lovelock et al (2012) explain that “groups can be differentiated from each other according to the ability or inability to share a common ancestry and shared cultural practices including language, diet, religion, values and norms” (p.206). Oftentimes, this group membership is not voluntary, erroneously placed on individuals based on their skin colour and place of origin, despite their desire to be otherwise identified (ibid). Despite the pitfalls of reductionism, the practice of inclusion and exclusion whether by oneself or others, is still prevalent in society (ibid). For this reason, some critics prefer to use the term “race” to underline the inherently political practice of social typing. One way to encourage voluntary cultural identification would be using ethnographic research methodology. The term “visible minority” has been used as one of the demographic variables measuring employment equity in Canada (Mentzer 2002). Formally defined as “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” by Statistics Canada (2011a), the visible minority identity is attributed to 19.1% of the population in all of Canada and 47% in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area. Within the Toronto CMA, cities such as Markham hosts even higher percentages (Statistics Canada 2011). Increasing shares of visible minorities are second or higher generation immigrants, and even within first generation immigrants, some may be more integrated into the traditional, “mainstream” society than others. Statistics Canada also tracks “ethnic ancestry” defined as
“the ethnic and cultural origins of the respondent’s ancestors [who] is usually more distant than a grandparent (ibid). Adopting this definition, the survey results then generally reflect immigration trends throughout the years. For many first-generation immigrants, ethnicity overlaps with place of origin considerably. This overlap generally decreases with successive generations with more inter-ethnic unions.

Of course, concepts need to be operationalized in specific ways appropriate to the research context. Ari (2004) investigates the extent to which ethno-cultural minorities living around two Turkish national parks have been included or excluded in decision-making surrounding the parks. The management of these parks has generally followed a European conservation model, which takes a relatively restrictive approach to allowing human presence (p.1-2). Historically, mythology is a significant aspect of these park spaces. Contemporarily, they have regularly become sites of commercial trade and socialization for resident communities near the parks. These communities, or settlements, can be discerned according to migration history, place of origin and predominant livelihood activity (p. 7-8). The ethnic/cultural status used by Ari as a unit of analysis is mainly composed of the place of origin (e.g. Greece, Caucasus, Kuban region of Russia, etc.) plus somewhat more localized biological or religious ancestry (e.g. Turkish, Pomaks, Christian, Mixed, etc). Together, these characteristics allow articulation of important and often understated diversity of residential communities under-engaged in the park planning process. The wider socio-economic shift towards neoliberal policies resulting in tourism development, residents’ displacement and drastic changes in nomadic livelihood are also highlighted (p. 9). As well, where a western conservation model prioritizing ecological diversity has become the focal point for planning in the parks’ more recent development, residents have been further marginalized in the decision-making process. By delineating the diversity in ethnicity and livelihood, it is hoped that that park planners would better understand
how the wellbeing of these communities too is tied to the landscape (p. 10).

Parks as social institutions

Rouge Park has been variously called a nature park or wilderness park. As Lovelock et al (2012) remark, “[w]ilderness and national parks are important social institutions in contemporary society and as such reflect normative understandings of what constitutes nature and how nature should be interacted with” (p. 208). As stated elsewhere, the idea that parks are not neutral spaces or socio-cultural blank slates, borrowing from Henri Lefebvre’s theory on social production and reproduction of space, underscores the spirit of the present study (ibid; Lovelock et al. 2011). With respect to natural resource management, in particular, we often take for granted the existing and “dominant cultural conceptions” (Lovelock et al. 2011, p.515). Though programs and planning regarding urban greenspaces have often been targets of criticism for not meeting “diverse needs of different racial and ethnic groups (Floyd 2001), Roberts and Chitewere (2011) also urge critical reflections of “possible cultural and class biases associated with wilderness” (citing Johnson et al. 2005). They also call on social justice framework based on the “right to the city” in the advocacy for the accommodation of ethnic minority group interests in pursuing specific leisure activities. The connections have often been made in academia between many North American urban parks and European landscape ideas from as far back as the 1600’s appropriated onto these spaces and further inscribed into park designs by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. (Lanfer and Taylor 2005; Agyeman 2011; Byrne and Wolch 2009). The connection between wilderness, conservation and culture and ethnicity is less obvious. Among studies which have looked at this relationship in detail, the most illustrative is Thomas’ (2001) “A Multicultural Landscape: National Parks & The Macedonian Experience.” The concern – that cultural minorities are marginalized in parks, are
under-engaged in the park planning process and minority identities are not reflected in the
design, staffing or programming of parks – seems to be equally applicable to greenspaces with
various degrees of urbanization and conservation (Lanfer and Taylor 2005; Agyeman 2011;
Roberts and Chitewere 2011).

In sociological terms, the ability or inability to “read and interact with particular social
markers and signs” influences how individuals perceive and experience nature (Franklin 2002,
referenced in Lovelock et al. 2012, p.515). Insofar as nature and recreational preferences are
laden with values and norms, some scholars have attempted to measure value orientation in
different cultural groups. Deng et al (2006) focused on three value orientations identified by
Stern et al (1993) putatively underlying environmental attitudes and behaviour differences
between Chinese- and Anglo-Canadians: “social altruistic,” “biospheric” and “egoism or
self-interest” (Deng et al. 2006, p. 23-24). In addition, acculturation was analyzed as a
potential process for environmental value convergence between the two subpopulations.
Variables used to assess acculturation include “social interactions, language preference, ethnic
identity, self-construal5, gift giving and holiday celebration and food and community
preferences” (p. 28). The survey population was of residents sampled from Edmonton,
Alberta, with respondents identifying as Anglo-Canadians or Chinese.

*Studies in ethnicity and recreation*

The scholarship on the role of ethnicity and recreation goes back three decades. Starting in the
United States with studies focusing on environmental racism in urban parks, the field has
slowly but steadily grown in scope and in geographic settings. Despite repeated calls to pursue

---

5 In Dent et al (2006)’s work, this can be understood loosely as interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints in decision-making at the individual level (pg. 90)
further research work in this field, growth in scholarship has been sporadic. That said, the
general trend in recent years has seen scholars in Australia and New Zealand leading the field
in terms of refining anthropological (or qualitative) methods of inquiry, while those in the
United States using mixed methodologies (qualitative and quantitative). Surprisingly, similar
scholarship in Canada has been slow to develop and scantly published for the most part. The
United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are all former British colonies with rich
indigenous histories prior to European settlement. All of these countries have established
national managed park systems with similar mandates as well as environmental ideals (see
Thomas 2001; Ari 2004; Parks Canada 2014; Lovelock et al 2011). This point facilitates
comparison among case studies involving national parks, and will be explored in the following
sections.

Studies on users from ethno-cultural groups in nature settings can be categorized by (a) the
country in which the study is based, e.g. the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand have
experienced different waves of migrations and different composition of ethno-cultural
minorities; (b) the type of park setting, be it highly urbanized, semi-urbanized or in remote
areas where active use by humans are discouraged (as some would call “wilderness”); (c) the
mode of inquiry, or methodology (-ies) used, e.g. interviews, surveys, roundtable discussions,
or a mix of these. Surveys are the most frequently used as they tend to be a more reliable way
of (i) collecting a wide range of views representative of a certain population, (ii) being
designed as to test specific theoretical framework and to permit varying levels of quantitative
analysis such as factor analysis. These studies involve comparisons between at least a cultural
minority group with a majority (or mainstream culture) group. Interviews have also been
popular, especially in the New Zealand studies detailed below. They are also more commonly
used by social anthropologists or historians, who have focused on delving into nuanced
perspectives of specific cultural groups with regard to their lived experiences in landscapes, views of nature, perceived and actual constraints as park visitors, among other things.

Floyd (2001) and Stodolska and Walker (2007) have provided some of the most comprehensive reviews of the scholarship on the role of ethnicity in recreation. They identified several theoretical approaches employed by scholars in the field, including (a) the marginality hypothesis; (b) intra-racial hypothesis; (c) “perceived” discrimination acting on the ethnic minority user; (d) assimilation, adaptation and/or acculturation theories explaining why certain individuals from minority groups adopt certain mainstream recreation behaviours and other do not; (e) examination of interracial or interethnic interactions in leisure settings; (f) the role of religious beliefs; (g) role of social class, gender, race, income level; (h) social network theory explaining why social isolation occurs in the context of leisure activities; and (i) social capital theory explaining why some get access to neighbourhood resources. In particular, the authors noted a conceptual framework by Gomez (2002), which identifies acculturation, subcultural identity, socio-economic status, perceived discrimination and benefits of recreation as contributing significantly to recreational behaviour. Even the transnational phenomenon has been studied in its own right in the context of recreation. Given the wide ranging theoretical approaches and research findings, one should resist homogenizing ethnic communities. Far from being theorists, researchers in this field of inquiry are urged to make useful connections to practitioners. As final advice for future endeavours, Stodolska and Walker (2007) note important research ethics considerations, some of which are discussed in the Results section. In particular, they warn researchers about enlisting the help of ethnic organizations and failing to confer potential benefits from the research activities undertaken.

---

6 Some elaboration: In the marginality hypothesis, low rates of participation is explained by socio-economic barriers, with some resulting from “historical patterns of racial discrimination” (Floyd 2001, p. 43); additional variables such as social class and gender (intra-racial hypothesis) serve to explain low rates within particular racial or ethnic group (Stodolska and Walker 2007, p.7). Individuals in minority cultures may adapt to mainstream culture of recreation to varied degrees. In the assimilative framework, perceived discrimination is often one of the variables investigated (p.11)
Most studies considered thus far make use of sociological, anthropological or historical analytical approaches. Cultural affiliations or ethnicity as variables on their own, however, explain little in the way of the cognitive processes behind nature-based activities. I find Rainisio and Inghilleri’s “Culture, Environmental Psychology, and Well-Being: An Emergent Framework” (in Knoop and Fave 2013, eds) to be a valuable companion to the literature review. Like Swyngedouw (2010), the authors assert that “[n]ature is one of the most complex and polysemic concepts for human imagination” (p. 103). And like Tuan (1990) in “Topophilia,” they note a moral switch in the significance accorded to nature in the context of the “urban-wilderness dynamic”, traced back to the Judeo-Christian (and more generally the Western) tradition (p. 103-4). The fundamental difference between most Western and Eastern thought traditions regarding nature and culture has been that the former “supported a deterministic relationship between” the two, whereas the latter viewed them as mutually interdependent (p. 104). For additional discussion of “Topophilia,” please refer to Appendix 7. While environmental degradation should not be relegated to the realm of existential crisis, the authors propose that “nature” insofar as “it conveys cultural information” is an artifact (p. 104) or different “expressions of the same entity” (Honey-key Yoon 2003, quoted in Rainisio and Inghilleri 2013). Cross-cultural studies that they have reviewed demonstrate a propensity for individuals from Eastern traditions to prefer nature settings which are more managed and controlled. In Buijs et al (2009) analyses involving Dutch natives and immigrants also reflect religio-cultural differences between the Christian and Islamic traditions, respectively. These expressions are particular evident in cases of people from different cultures using the same space. Even though little consensus exists in the field of research involving ethnicity and recreation, Rainisio and Inghilleri (2013) have found more support in the recent scholarship
for underlying socio-cultural explanations than socio-economic (p. 106). Cultural factors most cited are “assimilation, place identification and peculiar backgrounds of the subgroups” (p. 106). The authors also attempt to make connections between cultural psychology and environmental behaviours and perceptions, by highlighting research on culturally differentiated preferences in landscapes and interior designs (p. 106). Intriguingly, their review makes further connections to theoretical frameworks and pathways postulated for the positive effects that nature has on human beings. Without delving into details, socio-cultural factors may be directly or indirectly mediating positive cognitive effects for the individual and the environment; the Buijs et al (2009) study in the Netherlands has provided evidence for “cultural belonging as an explanation of the shared satisfaction about a public natural area” (p. 109). Research elsewhere has shown that place attachment is intimately related to “identity-definition function” (referenced in Rainisio and Inghilleri 2013, p. 109). Thus, when much of the research in environmental behaviours and perceptions has been dominated by evolutionary determinism (e.g. based on genetic and cognitive processes), the authors herein propose significance of socio-cultural mediators (p. 111). Analogous to the ways that “genes transmit information to future generations […]”, a “biocultural entity” in the form of the human nervous system might be producing and reproducing memes that contain cultural information; that the two systems (genetic and biocultural) complement each other to produce experiences of well-being linked to a natural space (p. 112).

A report by Lees & Associates examined the current and future demands for outdoor recreation activities in Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley Regional District, or FVRD (Metro Vancouver and FVRD 2011). Despite changes in demographics in many Canadian metropolises, this demand study is one of the few analyzing the under-participation of specific ethno-cultural minorities in Canadian parks. To understand some of the enablers and barriers
contributing to levels of park use by residents in both regions, the study employed focus
groups, individual interviews, web and telephone surveys. Some of its major findings relevant
to my major research project are:

- Canadian-born’s are more likely to use parks
- Ethnic Chinese and South Asian immigrants are less likely to use parks
- Chinese- and Punjabi- speaking households are less likely to use parks
- Persons of physical disability as well as those of European descent value
  well-maintained trail facilities
- South Asians in particular prefer picnicking and field sports, and demand better
  washroom and seating facilities
- Chinese residents favour ocean settings somewhat more than other groups

These findings reveal similarities with those from studies predominantly conducted in the U.S.
comparing recreational patterns by ethno-cultural majority versus minorities. For example,
minority groups in Lincoln Park (an urban park in Chicago) were found to prefer
group-oriented and passive activities compared to the White majority (Gobster 2001); in their
research of urban park activities in Atlanta and Philadelphia, Sasidharan et al. (2005) found
similar trends with six ethnic groups (White, African American, Hispanic, Chinese, Japanese
and Korean), though they did not find linguistic acculturation (approximated by the frequency
of language being used at various social settings) to be influential on the type of recreation
activities engaged by minority groups. Wolch and Zhang (2004) uncovered differential use
levels and patterns by Blacks and Asian Pacific Islanders (a categorization which the authors
acknowledge to be overly broad) compared to White subpopulations at Californian beaches.

In her detailed study of under-participation of Chinese residents in Vancouver, Hung (2003)
employed a more robust measure of acculturation\(^7\) (compared to Sasidharan et al. 2005) and found it to be positively correlated with the level of wilderness activities by the Chinese. Canadian-born and young immigrant Chinese were found to be relatively more acculturated and engaged in wilderness recreation. More recent immigrants encounter various barriers (linguistic, socio-economic and cultural) which deter their participation in wilderness activities. Their reluctance to participate may have been further compounded by their perception about the lack of park safety, preference for more human-made infrastructures and amenities, and lack of awareness about wilderness recreation opportunities (ibid; Loukaitou-Sideris 1995).

Newman (2008) points out that ecological restoration planning and activities have historically been dominated by White, middle-class participants, and have not been successful at involving culturally diverse populations. The author contends that socio-economic marginalization (particularly as it relates to time and monetary costs of participating in restoration activities) and the activities’ disconnect from cultural values of racialized minorities could explain the latter’s lack of participation.

Blacks, U.S.-born Latinos, and Asians are “significant less likely than Whites to engage in nature-based recreation” (Johnson et al. 2004, p. 172). Including factors such as acculturation, rather than simply a measure of ethnicity, may account for some of the inter-ethnic differences seen relative to their White counterparts. For instance, it was found that overall Asians (no sub-categories of Asian were employed in this study) seem to be more pro-environmental than other ethnic minorities. The stronger sense of environmentalism\(^8\) in Asian participants also appeared to be correlated with higher education obtained and income earned. The researchers

\(^7\) “Acculturation” in its simplest form can be understood as occurring when “minority groups [adopt] the cultural behaviours (e.g. language and diet) of the dominant group.”

\(^8\) Analyzed as a set of environmental behaviours: environmental reading, household recycling, participation in environmental or conservation groups and participation in nature-based outdoor recreation activities (pg. 164)
conclude that Asians seemed to be “more integrated into the American social structure,” though not adopting the view that Asians are therefore “conformist, model minorities.” Interestingly, foreign-born Latinos were found to be more likely to partake in nature-based recreation activities. It is not known whether this is a direct challenge to the notion that nature-based recreation as strictly *White Nature*, or perhaps alternatively the reasons for partaking in these activities for foreign-born Latinos had little to do with their having similar environmentalism as Whites. Seen as a whole, ethnicity was able to explain many of the variations in environmentalisms, but it is uncertain exactly how they function in a causative pathway towards environmental behaviours.

Demographic Trends

- GTA-wide demographic trends

The Ontario Trillium Foundation released a report titled “Diversity in the GTA” based on the population censuses in 2001 and 2006, when they were last made obligatory for respondents. Since the Rouge Park is within an hour driving distance of most GTA residents, the findings from this report are especially relevant, some of which are emphasized here.

i. With 43% of the GTA population being foreign-born in 2006 (46% as of 2011, from the 2011 National Household Survey), the percentage is projected to grow. More than three-fourth of newcomers to Ontario settled in the GTA. A large majority (70%) of them came from Asian and Middle Eastern countries. New arrivals accounted for significant growth of the immigrant populations in Durham (20%), York (33%) and Peel (33%). However, of all GTA newcomers 60% settled in Toronto.

---

9 On this note, the term “environmental behaviours” deserves some critique since it is possible that nature participation is qualitatively different from activities such as recycling and environmental group joining (Johnson et al., 2004)
ii. Even though many individuals identifying as visible minorities are also immigrants, 28% are Canadian-born. Chinese, South Asian and Black are the commonest visible minorities.

iii. In the York Region, 31% of the population has a Chinese language as mother tongue

iv. Newcomers and visible minorities as a whole are younger than the general population due to having fewer seniors and more children and youths.

v. In both York and Durham regions, newcomers are more likely to have advanced education than the general population. However, across the GTA immigrants and visible minorities have significantly lower income than the general population. Women immigrants are especially noted in this regard. Comparatively fewer recent immigrants occupy a management position in the labour force.

The York Region overall is fairly affluent compared to the rest of the GTA (York Region 2014). The research branch within the regional government released a diversity report based on the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). The NHS resulted from the Federal Conservative Government’s decision to replace the compulsory Census long form. The voluntary nature of the NHS has worried researchers from various professional sectors regarding a potential decrease in data quality. Response rates are lower in the NHS (69% versus 94% in the long form), which is likely to compromise data quality at smaller geographic levels. The non-response rate is said to be disproportionately high among lower income and newcomer groups. As subsequent information is presented, this cautionary note may be relevant.

i. Lower-tier municipalities closest to Toronto (Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan) are home to 75% of York Region residents. The senior subpopulations are growing faster than the other age groups. Newcomers between 2006 and 2011 come from
China (28%), Iran (9%), India (6%) and the Philippines (6%). 90% of newcomers also settle in the aforementioned three municipalities.

ii. 47% of all residents know a non-official language and 29% speak it at home. Commonest languages include Chinese, Russian, Farsi, Italian and Tamil.

iii. Despite its overall affluence, i.e. second highest median household income in the GTA, York Region has 32% of households whose incomes fall under $60,000. About 70% of all households spend greater than 30% of their income on housing.

iv. Three-fourth of residents of working age (25-40) have access to a vehicle in order to drive to work.

- Rouge Park proximate population

The Federal Electoral Districts were chosen as the best geographical level for analysis because it is best able to capture the socio-cultural demographics of residents in closest vicinity of the Rouge Park. Certainly, differing patterns and concentrations of the same demographic variables can be viewed at the neighbourhood level. For the purposes of this work, however, it was not feasible to conduct such fine-grained analysis. Relative to the GTA (approximated by the Toronto CMA), several patterns – immigration history, immigrant birth countries and household income – are noteworthy.

i. The majority of immigrants living in Pickering-Scarborough arrived in Canada before 1990. Between 1990 and 2000, there was a surge of new arrivals accounting for one quarter to one third of immigrants in Ajax-Pickering, Oakridges-Markham and Scarborough-Rouge River. In all of the Districts, the proportions of recent immigrants (2006-2011) from the total population are below that of the Toronto CMA/regional average. This suggests that the vast majority of immigrants living near Rouge Park are settled.
ii. Pickering-Scarborough and Ajax Pickering have more than twice the percentage of immigrants from the Americas compared to the Toronto CMA. All of the Districts have lesser percentages of immigrants from European countries, especially Scarborough-Rouge River, which is also home to an astounding 91% of visible minorities in its total population. With the exception of Ajax-Pickering, the other Districts have slightly lower percentages of African immigrants. Finally, lower percentages of Asian immigrants reside in Ajax-Pickering and Pickering-Scarborough, whereas significantly higher percentages reside in the Oakridges-Markham and Scarborough-Rouge River Districts. Please refer to the following table for a list of major sources of immigration in each District.

iii. The most significant finding for household incomes is that Scarborough-Rouge River appears to be the worst off. Relative to the GTA, lesser percentages of households in the other three Districts earn collective incomes <$79,999 annually. The same Districts perform better than the GTA average at income levels higher than $80,000 (with the exception of the $100,000-$124,999 range). Scarborough-Rouge River exhibits the opposite trend.

Immigrant source countries accounting for the numerical majority or the highest percentage of immigrants (under broader continental categories) within the federal electoral districts specified are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ajax-Pickering</th>
<th>Oakridges-Markham</th>
<th>Pickering-Scarborough</th>
<th>Scarborough-Rouge River</th>
<th>Toronto CMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>Jamaica,</td>
<td>U.S., Jamaica,</td>
<td>Jamaica,</td>
<td>Jamaica,</td>
<td>Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad &amp; Tobago, U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guyana,</td>
<td>Guyana,</td>
<td>Guyana,</td>
<td>Guyana,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trinidad &amp;</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp;</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp;</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tobago</td>
<td>Tobago</td>
<td>Tobago</td>
<td>Tobago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>U.K., Italy,</td>
<td>U.K., Italy,</td>
<td>Predominantly U.K.</td>
<td>U.K. and Italy;</td>
<td>Mostly U.K. and Italy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Russia, Greece;</td>
<td>and Italy</td>
<td>Germany and</td>
<td>Poland and Portugal also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Romania and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greece also</td>
<td>significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ukraine also</td>
<td></td>
<td>significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35
Data source: Statistics Canada 2011. National Household Survey viewed at the level of Federal Electoral Districts, identified as being closest to Rouge Park between Steeles Avenue East and Lawrence Avenue East. Data extracted at the level of Toronto CMA (Census Metropolitan Area) encompassing vast majority of municipalities in the GTA are used for comparison.

- **Canadian trends**

Of all immigrants to Canada between 2006 and 2011, Asian (including Middle Eastern) countries accounted for the majority, followed by countries in Africa and the Americas (Statistics Canada 2011a). South Asian, Chinese and Blacks make up 61% of visible minorities. Following them, Filipinos, Latin Americans, Arabs, Southeast Asians, West Asians, Koreans and Japanese also have significant representations. As of 2011, around 65% of visible minorities were foreign-born. Among immigrants speaking non-official languages, Chinese languages were the commonest, followed by Tagalog, Spanish and Punjabi. With respect to religion, two-thirds of the population affiliates with a Christian religion (mostly Catholicism), one-quarter has no affiliation and the most others affiliate with Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Judaism.

For the nation as a whole, Statistics Canada (2010) conducts a thorough demographic projection of the population between 2006 and 2031. By 2031, three in 10 Canadians will belong to a visible minority, accounted disproportionately by younger age groups. South Asians and Chinese will continue to be the largest visible minority groups, though West Asians and Arabs will be growing the fastest. One-quarter of all GTA dwellers will classify as a South Asian visible minority. With respect to religion, non-Christians in Canada will double, with significant growth accounted for by Muslims. Three in 10 Canadians will also have a non-official language as mother tongue, mostly driven by immigration which will make
one-quarter of the population foreign-born. With inter-ethnic unions becoming more prevalent, diversity in religion, mother tongue and visible minorities will increase within Canadian-born’s. As of 2011, mixed unions (defined as a conjugal relationship with at least one partner being from a visible minority) had gradually increased in rate over the years (Statistics Canada 2011c). Younger persons and those living in metropolitan area are more likely to be in mixed unions. It is found that the same mother tongue and religious affiliations do not necessarily dictate the likelihood of such unions. Interestingly, South Asians and Chinese are the least likely of all visible minorities to engage in mixed unions.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS & DISCUSSION PART A - FIELDWORK

FINDINGS

Interviews

Interviews were sought primarily from individuals who were serving in their official (or professional) capacities as well as from community members with familiarity of the Rouge Park. In the former category, I was able to secure interviews from (a) community service providers who have worked with clients from diverse, and often immigrant, backgrounds, (b) park managers and staff, who were known to me through previous research work as well as their referrals, and finally (c) political representatives familiar with issues surrounding the park.

Through conversations with community service providers, I sought to understand the nature and extent of organized activities in the Rouge Park and any partnerships that were formed with the park’s management staff in the process. Following questions about socio-cultural demographics of the organization’s membership, I took to broadly gauge members’ recreational preferences, motivations as well barriers in participating in activities in the Rouge Park. Similar questions were asked of political representatives with respect to their respective constituencies.

With respect to park managers and staff, the interviews were set up to elicit their experiences, insights and knowledge about the park’s management, planning, programming and servicing. Where possible, discussions were focused on understanding practitioner’s approaches to working with diverse audiences, such as immigrants and ethno-cultural minorities.
Finally, seven interviews with community members were secured following an open call for research participation with the assistance of community service providers. To protect participant confidentiality, coded names (Community Member or CM) are used. There were four participants from the Malvern Family Resources Centre (CM 1-5), one from Across U-Hub (CM6) and one from a hiking group organized by CICS Canada (CM7).

Statistics of interviewees

Overall, I successfully conducted interviews with 14 participants with seven individuals in their official capacities and the other seven community members who were introduced to my research topic via community service providers. Informally, several staff members from the former Rouge Park Alliance also lent invaluable assistance to my research. Around 40 further research requests (not counting follow-ups) were sent to staff from a variety of non-profit organizations (10), political representatives (15), public service providers (8), and entities otherwise classified (2) and individual community members by referral (2), who may have some insights relevant to my research. Confirmed and probable reasons for non-responses included personnel changes, unavailability and perceived lack of relevant input to the research topic. Among those who kindly declined interview requests some indicated that programming at their establishments (e.g. the Rouge River Community Centre, Cornell Community Centre, and the West Rouge Sports and Recreation Association) does not involve the park itself. There were other surprises in this process. For instance, three staff members from the David Suzuki Foundation were not able to provide insights directly corresponding to my research topic despite being directly involved in communicating with cultural organizations during the 2012 Rouge Park campaign. It was explained to me that the Rouge National Park Initiative
campaign, as it was referred to by DSF, was to raise awareness of the park among community partners who “cared about nature” and subsequently helped to promote the initiative (Sheppard 2014, pers comm.). Rather than having DSF directly involved, it was hoped that local people can be more engaged in the planning process (ibid). Civic organizations from whom I had anticipated responses but received none were the Tamil Congress, Federation of Chinese Canadians in Markham (FCCM) and FutureWatch. The Tamil Congress had been referred to me by both staff from the Alliance and Parks Canada as an organization that had partnered on more than on occasion on tree planting activities in the park. The FCCM is one of the biggest Chinese organizations found in vicinity of the park, and has been active in Markham’s political scene over the years. It also offers a wide variety of recreational programs (http://fccm.ca/sports.html). FutureWatch is one of the few environmental organizations which specifies in its mandate an environmental justice framework that respects culturally diverse ways of participation. Furthermore, it has partnered with the TRCA (as per FOI document review) and the Alliance (Santos 2013, pers comm.) in the sharing of best practices by environmental services and programming for immigrants.

Rouge Park managers and staff

- Roles of interviewees in PC and Rouge Park Alliance
Through previous communications with the Rouge Park Alliance, I was able to connect with staff members with intimate knowledge of the park’s programming during the Alliance years. These staff members were heavily involved in enhancing visitor experience, stewardship and biodiversity activity leadership as well as guided nature walks in the park. Additionally, one member was also recruited in Fall 2013 as part of the fieldwork team conducting in-person surveys, which provide crucial baseline visitor information for Parks Canada as the latter
moves forward in the planning process. Louis is Senior Advisor, Community Engagement and Industry Relations at Parks Canada. He is the first point of contact for Parks Canada and Rouge Park with the public at large. Louis was able to provide first-hand account of Parks Canada’s public engagement and planning process.

- Assessment of park user diversity and cultural uses
According to RPA staff, the overall park user population is substantial, though a large portion of which seems to enjoy the park more when it not heavily used. Most of the visitors can be described as local residents and long-time users who are familiar with each other. They also tend to be fonder of unofficial trails, which provide them with more wildlife viewing and overall more “natural” experience. By contrast, main, official trails tend to be used by larger groups. Some local users are anxious of Parks Canada’s planning of the park. Campground users (towards the southern portion of the park) may be motivated very differently from local residents since some of the former may come from the city (i.e. central Toronto) and use the campground as an escape from their everyday experiences. Lastly, big families tend to frequent the beach area, where more amenities are found.

For the park overall, visitor demographics are becoming increasingly diverse ethno-culturally, which is largely a reflection of the changing demographics of Scarborough in general. A few survey respondents were also new immigrants. When asked about potential barriers for ethno-cultural minorities and immigrants, staff commented mostly on the lack of time, interest and/or knowledge about the park.

In terms of cultural groups observed in the park, staff could not comment definitively on whether discernible trends exist since visits tend to be “sporadic.” However, in the southern
portions of the park notably near the beaches, staff have seen many East Indian and Tamil speaking visitors. Photo shoots seem to be especially popular amongst these groups. This may be due to the fact that the beach area is more scenic and equipped with amenities, which are conducive to active and creative uses. Other culturally specific uses of the park, which have frustrated staff conservation efforts, are also noted. For instance, signs in English and Chinese have been erected advising against foraging behaviors which are considered to be poaching. Many of the harvesters of mushrooms and fiddleheads come from the Chinese community. Visitors of Italian and East European descent may also go for mushrooms. Some visitors have taken evergreen boughs from the park space for holiday celebrations. When confronted by staff or other visitors about these behaviours, some harvesters “would not speak English or pretended not to know English” (Steinberg 2013, pers. comm.)\textsuperscript{10}. Staff are especially concerned about the “resource” view of the park held by some users, since they are seen to only forage and caring little about the park’s ecology.

- Successes and challenges in outreach activities

Parks Canada operates under a mandate to serve all Canadians. Community engagement and consultation exercises do not target specific ethnic groups (as this would be perceived as discriminatory). The outreach process to date is described as “opportunistic” (Lavoie 2014). Besides holding town hall meetings, Parks Canada and major community stakeholders also actively promoted the Rouge National Park initiative at various community events and broadened the outreach at popular mid-summer family-friendly events in downtown Toronto. Because demographics were not tracked in these settings, it was not possible to ascertain the diversity of the audiences. Postal code mapping as part of the 2012 online engagement survey,\textsuperscript{10} In some of these cases, some foragers (presumably of immigrant backgrounds) may have exaggerated their language barrier. This evidence is anecdotal for the most part (Steinberg 2013, pers. comm.). In cases where language could be a real barrier to understanding park etiquettes, signs in foreign languages (e.g. Chinese) have been put up in certain parts of the park (ibid).
however, indicates that the Rouge Park initiative has attracted interest from areas with high concentrations of Tamil speakers and South Asians. In its overall approach to consultation, Parks Canada has not targeted particular ethno-cultural groups, though it has identified under-engagement and under-participation by youth and new Canadians. New Canadians in particular “may not have embraced the traditional park experience”. As a result, since Parks Canada began undertaking planning roles for Rouge Park in 2012, a youth visioning workshop (Modern Agora 2012) and an annual Learn to Camp program were implemented. The latter is a subsidized weekend-long program that introduces camping to new Canadians in an effort to build the next generation of park stewards and visitors. From anecdotal feedback, it is believed that the program has been successful: participants find the park accessible by walking as it is not remote; the park is relatively safe, therefore initial fear of perceived dangers are allayed; and some even felt empowered and “more connected to protected areas”. At the youth visioning workshop, where participants were recruited from the University of Toronto (Scarborough Campus), the vast majority were first- or second-generation Canadians with large families. An interesting finding was that this youth group tends to value families and traditions more, and would like to see these aspects being emphasized in the park experience. One participant for instance suggested that First Nations fashion be celebrated. Owing to early stages of its consultation efforts, the agency seems to have performed better than the average public engagement in the GTA in attracting new audiences rather than “usual suspects.” To have almost a half of the online survey respondents being non-regular users provide feedback about the park’s future, asserts Louis Lavoie, is “significant.”

- Park vision and view of the user-environment relationship
Under Parks Canada’s management, Rouge Park has been touted as the “People’s Park.” This motto was conceived in respect of the local activism instrumental in protecting greenspace
from development during the last three decades, in recognition of a long history of human presence in the Rouge Valley (notably by First Nations and later by European settlers) as well as volunteerism in the form of environmental stewardship. As to how “people’s environmentalism” as practiced in the park is understood, it is defined in terms of “normal people’s involvement in it”, including promoting ecological conservation and farming practices while celebrating First Nations, who have had a different history with the land (Lavoie 2014). There is a limit as to the type of human behaviour encouraged in the park space. For instance, the next stage for Rouge Park’s planning involves enhancing its ecological functions, “a more holistic view” promoting the park’s connection to other ecosystems. “Human nature [can] get in the way” (ibid), perhaps implying that people may not always have the best knowledge when it comes to conservation. According to Rouge Park managers and staff, tree planting, an activity having the highest community uptake, is not the only thing that needs to happen for a healthy ecological system, but also wetland and meadow restoration. Unofficial trails or “socially creative trails” as referred to by Louis are discouraged in Rouge Park, citing concerns about safety, ecological integrity and farmland trespassing as concerns. Some current visitors will go where they want despite the main trails, but Parks Canada will “encourage their exploration in an ecologically sound way”. Mostly this will be implemented with preventative measures such as expert trail design, patrol and education with the expectation that “once people have spent enough time in an area, they will care for it”. In extreme cases, ticketing and arrest (enabled with Parks Canada wardens) are possible. It is clear that in planning a “People’s Park,” there is an element of risk aversion and management, as expressed by “you don’t design a park for failure, you design a park so it flows right”.

Parks Canada’s view with regards to visitor management is largely consistent with, or inherited from that of major stakeholders (e.g. RPA, Ron Moeser) who were active in the
shaping of the park in recent history. Among RPA staff, there is general agreement that a healthy balance (whatever this might mean) has to exist between use and protection. Individual members may lean slightly in different directions. The general sentiment conveyed was that stewardship efforts and the enhancement of ecological features should be placed at the forefront of the parks planning, and where they are not compromised, recreational uses (including some active ones) can be accommodated. However, staff who have worked closely with Parks Canada during the park’s transition, are prepared for a management direction more focused on visitor experience than natural history as was the case during the Alliance years.

*Community service providers*

- Role within organization and membership demographics

**The Young Men’s Christian Association** (YMCA) is a worldwide community organization with several establishments in the GTA. Despite the history of the organization, YMCA’s membership in North America is neither male nor faith-based. The Newcomer Youth Leadership Development program has sought and maintained partnership with Rouge Park staff over the years on stewardship activities (Andrew Kowalchuk 2014). Some of these activities, including tree planting can be undertaken by youth leaders towards their volunteer hours. Cultural diversity as represented by youth leader demographics in the Scarborough branch (where Andrew is based) is not necessarily consistent but largely reflective of demographics of the area. During the school year, it is easier to recruit newer immigrants (i.e. one to two years in Canada), often via referral by friends. Thus, cultural demographics (Filipino, Sri Lankan, East Indian and Chinese) tend to change in waves. Due to employment or school commitments these volunteers are often absent in the summer when environmental activities are organized. Andrew also points out that Scarborough is a transitional community
for many immigrant families, who may ultimately settle elsewhere. The Malvern Family Resource Centre (MFRC) offers many programs to children, youth, women, families and seniors (see mfrc.org). An Eco-Fitness weekly offering is available to seniors. Starting in 2010 on the initiative of a MFRC intern, the fitness program has organized outings throughout the year to Rouge Park (Semenuk 2014). The organization as a whole has a high Sri Lankan and West Indian (Caribbean) membership and comparatively fewer East Asians, which are reflective of the demographics of Malvern. Due to the popularity of the program, membership has grown over the years. The Centre for Immigrant & Community Services (CICS) provides settlement programs, including a monthly hiking meet-up open to members and the general public. Attendance at the hiking program, which started in 2009, has grown from 20 people to as many as 60 per outing, being somewhat weather dependent. Participants of the meet-up are predominantly of Chinese heritage and immigrants (recent and settled), with the majority being Cantonese speakers though having little trouble with English (Enid Liu 2014). Elsewhere in the agency, however, some clients are more recent immigrants, somewhat older and presumably have more of a language barrier. Across U-Hub (AUH) is a Christian faith-based community organization serving Canadian youth (see acrossuhub.com) whose membership has primarily attracted immigrant youths (ages 16 to 30) from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam. There is a good mix of recent and settled immigrants, visa students, first- and second- generation Canadians. In 2012, AUH was accepted as one of 10 community groups applying to be a part of the Camp Suzuki program, an initiative by the David Suzuki Foundation. This was the organization’s first exposure to Rouge Park. Having gained positive experiences, AUH has participated annually in Parks Canada’s Learn to Camp program at the Glen Rouge Campground (Chan 2014).
Nature and scope of involvement with Rouge Park

With the understanding that many senior members at MFRC are nearby residents and had had little awareness of Rouge Park, Amy had started organizing regular outings to the park “for fitness, for nature trips, stress reliever […] all those things that come with the outdoors” (Semenuk 2014). While primarily branded as a progressive exercise program, walks in the park were sometimes guided by Rouge Park Alliance staff, which taught participants about hiking and biodiversity. YMCA NYLD has collaborated with RPA on many small stewardship projects besides tree planting, such as building a demonstration garden with native plants at the Glen Rouge Campground, installing bird houses in the hydro corridor, building bat houses and attending biodiversity presentations. Other tree planting and camping activities were organized with Ontario Nature. Andrew has also connected with Parks Canada when the latter held educational games in biodiversity, which were reportedly well-received by youth. On one occasion, staff at TRCA Multicultural Connections delivered a native and invasive species presentation to his group. AUH maintains partnerships with Rouge Park staff and the DSF which have resulted in tree planting, camping and hiking. Recently, youths have been actively involved in creating an upcycling demonstration project supporting the Foundation’s Blue Dot tour and campaign. Lastly, the CICS hiking group visits various parks in the GTA and goes to Rouge Park once or twice per year. They typically follow their own hike leader

Attitude to Rouge Park

All service providers have had positive experiences in Rouge Park. Amy and Andrew in particular seem to be well-versed in biodiversity knowledge, inspiring them to organize biodiversity projects with which their respective groups have assisted. Though aware of wildlife activities such as the FrogWatch and the Hoot-and-Howl offered by RPA staff, Teresa believes that to be truly motivated to attend, one needs to be “brought up with all this […] to
connect with the wildlife.” This could mean a combination of education and other means of acculturation.

- Motivations and barriers for members in Rouge Park

Service providers repeatedly pointed to socio-economic factors inhibiting park use such as lack of time and/or money. Rouge Park, as a wilderness park, may also represent a relatively foreign setting to some participants. The perceptions of danger, coupled with a lack of promotion of the park as a destination within certain ethno-cultural communities and the sense of “not knowing what to do” all contribute to a lack of exposure to the park’s landscape. Age-related factors (such as physical and mental disabilities as well as family obligations) can be significant constraints to senior clients. While systemic factors are undoubtedly important at the practical level, there appears to be no single all-encompassing theoretical framework for understanding nature-based recreation decision-making among practitioners.

A sense of trust that comes with having a reliable service provider is a recurrent theme for the community groups I interviewed. For the seniors at MFRC and hikers from CICS, the presence of peers as source of security and positive motivation cannot be understated since most of the promotion is by word of mouth. Being able to challenge themselves on various walks, experiencing different sceneries and getting the sense of accomplishment from physical exercise are positive associations participants have had to the park space. Previously unfamiliar of the park’s existence, many participants have expressed amazement that this experience “is in our backyard” (Semenuk 2014). Paradoxically, proximity to the park is a positive factor also because participants “needed to be reminded that they are in the city, and are able to see the skyline, not too far away from home” (ibid). For camping enthusiasts like Teresa, the park represents a get-away wilderness experience easily accessible for urban
Torontonians.

According to Andrew, receptiveness to and learning ability regarding environmental knowledge of youth leaders seems to vary on the individual level. Youths typically only attend Rouge Park activities that count for volunteer hours such as tree planting. In his experience overall, newcomers tend to be keener participants in park settings with fairer weather. They also “tend to pick up on signage in Rouge Park that had to do with their own safety”, an observation which corroborates with other informants on newcomers’ perceptions of fear inside wilderness parks. Andrew agrees that the beach area by contrast, is more frequented by newcomers both for its accessibility, amenities and better educational signage helping people navigate their recreational options there.

For her part, Teresa emphasizes the importance of a sense of belonging by having her youth group engaged in the Rouge Park campaign. She feels that, by being involved in the park’s stewardship youth are in an unprecedented position to be part of the park’s creation and history. While youth have not specifically provided feedback on their involvement, there are indications that they have benefited from partaking in the campaign. First, most of the participants did not know or go to Rouge Park prior to 2012, even if they lived close to it. In the Chinese community in general, there is very little promotion of the park. Now becoming aware of the “importance of [its] development,” their level of keenness has increased. Second, while some participants take pride in planting trees in a park they would otherwise view as “raw” and “not very developed;” Teresa believes that this setting evokes different feelings in the youth compared to more urbanized environments, where parks are more developed (ibid). Tree planting often took place in seemingly empty spaces, which participants did not anticipate as a park. Some previous volunteers have gone back to see what they have planted.
Many of the youth had also never been camping previously. Though they perceive the activity to be “dirty and messy,” Teresa believes their experience to be a net positive, as “they saw the stars [...] and lots of fireflies.”

- Ideas about how to be culturally inclusive

For several service providers, to be inclusive with clientele often means reducing systemic barriers. They are also keen about sharing best practices in inspiring and engaging their clientele, although the specific expertise in this regard remains somewhat elusive. Amy wonders about the possibility of training seniors to be hiking leaders and to be more engaged in the community. If enough knowledge, experience or expertise about biodiversity or conservation is shared with others, she believes that seniors can become stewardship leaders. For Amy’s group in particular, language barrier is not an issue in participation since most clients (from the Caribbean and India) arrived with some English fluency. Culturally, however, there may be some particular challenges. For instance, seniors from South Asia are less likely to be independent from their family members relative to their Afro-Caribbean counterparts. Oftentimes seniors are sponsored by families to come take care of children. These responsibilities, contends Amy, take away from seniors’ ability to explore other activities. Taking another approach, some East Asian seniors bring youngsters to MFRC’s Middle Years while socializing with similar aged peers. Through the inter-generational program, Amy had attempted to bring seniors and their youth together in the nature setting. Lack of youth enjoyment in these activities is sometimes a source of frustration.

Andrew contemplated the ways in which newcomers may come to perceive wilderness environments and environmental education in the west. The environment in which one was brought up could affect how well wild nature is perceived by the individual. Some newcomers,
suggests Andrew, may know about the outdoors through horror movies, and this first exposure can be scary. He also remarks that cultural minorities “tend to picnic in groomed parks, but not so much in other nature settings [because] they know what to do in those parks.” The Rouge Park on the other hand, might seem foreign and purposeless. With a guided tour, reasoned Andrew, it would be easier for newcomers to be immersed in the new setting. With respect to providing environmental education, Andrew has observed that some educators can be assuming, which is a turnoff for newcomers. For instance, mentioning “Bob Hunter” as if he should be honoured is a turn-off for some newcomers since they do not share a history of the land. Rather than strictly focusing on outcomes of stewardship such as number of trees planted, Andrew has found more meaningful success in developing the process, for instance, youth engagement strategies.

Teresa suggests that Rouge Park and environmental activities need to be better promoted in the Chinese media. However, she admits that the “environment” is not currently a hot topic, especially with first-generation immigrants. Even press releases AUH sends to the community about youth environmental activities receive little coverage. Proper environmental education also encounters hurdles with the older generation. Her optimism lies with youth, some of whom she says have begun to take up environmentally-oriented professions such as environmental technician and urban planning. It is possible for youth to eventually make a difference to their parents.

Although each nature program offered is unique, its successes seem to be driven by community service providers, who share characteristics such as their love of the outdoors and the ability to provide their members with a sense of security that has been crucial to the latter’s introduction to new forms of experiences in new environments. An interesting observation is
that the types of outdoor program these groups have undertaken seem to be influenced by outdoor interests of the service providers themselves (e.g. hiking, camping, stewardship). They were also branded as conferring multiple benefits to participants, for whom learning about biodiversity and conservation is often a secondary benefit.

_Councillors_

Councillor Moeser (Toronto Ward 44) had little to say about ethno-cultural diversity of Rouge Park users, being of the view that ethnicity or culture does not play a fundamental role in recreational preferences, although he did cite some observations of culturally distinct uses in his ward. When asked about the possibility of accommodating different recreational preferences and culturally diverse practices, the councillor spoke in broad concepts such as keeping to the “principles” and “balance” laid out in Parks Canada’s plans. He is unambiguous about protecting natural features first and foremost, satisfied that Parks Canada’s plans appear to carry over many of the principles and perspectives from the RPA years. Proud of having protected the green spaces in his ward during his time being elected, the councillor sees no place in setting any development precedents (e.g. real estate, sports field) in Rouge Park.

Councillor O’Connell (Regional Councillor, Ward 1, Pickering) served on the board of the Rouge Park Alliance from 2006 and 2010. She was able to offer many interesting insights in the roles that ethno-cultural identities have played and could play in the context of Rouge Park. In her ward, the cultural demographics are not particular diverse relative to other parts of Pickering, being “fairly white, middle class” (O’Connell 2014). The more eastern and northern portions of Pickering are changing faster demographically, mainly driven by residential development. O’Connell talked about burial ceremonial practices, prevalent in the Hindu
community, sometimes posing an environmental concern due to the river offerings depositions (jewellery and synthetic materials) not being biodegradable (the role of the TRCA and other agencies in this regard is detailed elsewhere in this paper). The outreach effort has resulted in much improvement but occasional difficulties still linger. Rouge Park, in O’Connell’s assessment, has not really been planned for community uses; further to this, the RPA which has traditionally emphasized the protection over the usage aspects of the park would be interested in keeping the status quo. The key site where active uses such as camping or sports field are currently up for debate is in Markham (Bob Hunter Memorial Park). The Markham site is particularly interesting in that, compared to other parts of the park, it has not had a lot of “history;” politically, it might be more amenable to accommodating newer needs. Cricket, an increasingly popular sport owing to growing immigrant communities, currently happens in more informal spaces in Pickering. In both Pickering and Markham, greenspaces for sport field are scant. The Rouge Park is not a homogenous space, in her view, but has always been “a mix of different things.” She points out that RPA chairs over the years did not always have the same visions and beliefs about use and protection. For instance, there are significant stakes in farming and biodiversity/conservation. It is conceivable, at both the theoretical and practical level, to split up the Markham site to accommodate different needs.

On whether environmental outreach has been successful to different cultural groups, Councillor O’Connell states that indeed cultural associations have been involved in adopt-a-park programs and tree planting. It is very difficult to ascertain whether their active involvement can be attributed more to the success of environmental outreach or to the pressure to be exposed to local environmental knowledge. It may well be that these associations are just “very organized.” Environmental stewardship is one of many ways that associations can demonstrate they can “give back to the community.”
Community members

- Identity and community affiliations
Every participant is an established immigrant and fairly fluent in the English language. Of the seven participants in total, two emigrated from Hong Kong, two from Trinidad and Tobago and three from India. The first two were recruited from Across U-Hub and CICS respectively, with the balance from MFRC. At risk of being presumptuous, I inferred the age range of all participants as being roughly between middle aged and senior. Detailed demographic questions such as ethnicity, religious affiliations and socio-economic status were not asked of individual participants. Additionally, the general format and length of interviews (30-60 minutes) was not conducive to detailed discussions. Place of origin, however, was voluntarily provided by participants.

- Knowledge about Rouge Park
MFRC members did not know about the park’s transition to federal management. Except for trail guides (from the RPA), they generally had little knowledge of the park’s management. One interviewee had previously thought that it belonged to Ontario Parks. CM6 is a long time volunteer with AUH and a hiking enthusiast. He has known the Rouge Park for 20 years and is familiar with the current management change. CM6 acknowledges that his peers in the Chinese community are generally not aware of the park’s existence and shared some insights on this matter. CM7 regularly attends the hiking group from CICS. Having participated in many nature walks, he has gained considerable ecological and historical (aboriginal and archaeological) knowledge related to Rouge Park. He has also kept up with the latest news about the park’s federal transition and attended Parks Canada consultation meetings.
Aesthetic and affective evaluation of Rouge Park

MFRC members are attentive to specific features such as animals and plants (ostensibly learned from guided walks) and recalled specific events. Environmental features and phenomena were often recalled using simple language, e.g. “river, bird chirping,” “frogs mating,” “climb the hills, a lot of wild plants,” “the lake with all the swans,” “I’d like to see the birds, I like to see the swans. I like to see the water [the river] that runs all the way back to Lake Ontario.” One interviewee described the group’s participation in a trivia game about Rouge Park where the trail guide “asked us questions about the landscape [and] wildlife” at each of 10 points in the park (CM2). Two interviewees fondly recalled winter visits to Rouge Park, and learning to buy the proper winter jacket and boots for the occasion. Despite living in Toronto for many years, participants were quite new to the Rouge Park, which is for them “a natural park […] not man-made.” For them the senses of wonder, novelty and adventure figured prominently in their descriptions.

CM6 is an avid hiker and has visited many nature settings in Hong Kong and Toronto. The natural landscapes in the two cities and their surroundings are very different. In Hong Kong, the mountainous landscapes are generally more rugged and in close succession. He explains: “In Hong Kong, when you go up, you see mountains after mountains. In here, when you go up you don’t see anything. I would say in here there is no view. In Algonquin, when you see White Mountain in the northeast, you will see spruces, spruces, spruces.”

CM6’s account of Rouge Park is an expression of animation and variation, as well as being somewhat of an antithesis to city life:” Trees, leaves, branches, the landscaping, the hills […] you know when you go uphill, downhill and uphill. There [is] the nature. Sometimes you see
the water, the chipmunks, the small animals. By the time you go up on the top, you see a nice view, you see lack of pollution. Full of nature.” Having a nice view from the mountaintop, seeing varied landscapes and walking in a looped trail are some of the key ingredients for a satisfactory nature park visit. CM6 is fond of exploring these places independently and is not fearful of getting lost in unmarked paths.

In CM7’s account of Rouge Park, the focus is less on the specific features and landmarks as much as the history surrounding and environmental ideals embodied in the park. When asked about his first experience with the park, he recounts:” Because there is a Rouge conservation house [the Pearse house] that just moved there from the park somewhere. They have walks. I went with my friends […] every Sunday there, for a walk. They start anywhere in Rouge Park, sometimes the Rouge Beach, down by Twyn Rivers, anywhere where there is a path. And after a while they go through all the trails in one morning. I went there to look at the foliage change […] It used to be that you can look at the landfill to look at the Pickering power plant. Now I don’t know what happened there. They put a fence there […] it used to be very muddy (around 10 or 15 years ago.” Similar to CM6, CM7 relishes the wilderness experience. “It’s a new experience when you go to these places, like the national forests or something. I like going to those places. Especially the Mast Trail, it’s like an old-growth forest […] except for the trail, it is almost untouched. Hardly anybody goes there. It’s nice to walk or just sit down to take a break […] to relieve stress.” Interactions with trail guides and field naturalists are most valued in CM7’s experience in the park. He remarks that lone hikers walking by themselves might go through the park fairly quickly yet learn little besides an aesthetic appreciation. Though also a native of Hong Kong, CM7 was otherwise preoccupied with academics before emigrating to North America and only explored the mountainous landscapes upon visits later in adulthood. According to him, not many people go to the “country parks.” Those who do go seem to have
luxury of the time and are very well equipped for the trip.

- Motivations and barriers
The ability to exercise while enjoying the natural environment is a popular motivator among adult participants. Seeing wildlife and vegetation thrive in a setting devoid of urbanization is a source of great enjoyment for MFRC seniors. Having more trails to access sceneries and diverse vegetation would be particularly motivating. For them, the ability to have a group experience is not only reassuring for safety reasons, but also for socializing and bonding – thereby reinforcing a sense of community. One participant also finds peace in solitude: “according to where you are and what kind of mind you are, it is then a nice place to sit and meditate.” Inside the Rouge Park, one finds varied topography both between and on top of the hills, which prompted one participant to remark “because the terrain is up and down […] each route is different, [so it is a] different experience afterwards” (CM2). Another participant appreciates having an overlook point from the top.

Similar to MFRC participants, CM6 is motivated by the aesthetic experience in Rouge Park, and access to viewing wildlife. Variability appears to be a key element in his excursions, evident both in terms of the number of parks he has explored and viewing areas within a park. Looped trails, he suggests, are essential since doubling back on the same trail can be a repetitive, boring experience. Very little can deter CM6 from visiting nature parks in general, but bringing family and peers he suggests is another story. On one occasion he had thought about bringing a group of 15-20 peers to the park, but knowing that parking is limited at the Twyn Rivers area, this idea was abandoned. It has been difficult coordinating trips to nature parks with family members, who have different priorities and may not always enjoy the wilderness experience. He believes that recreational preferences are largely a matter of
personal inclinations, though he agrees that among his Chinese peers very few like to hike or camp. CM6 is hesitant to attribute specific cultural reasons to this relative under-representation and prefers to comment on the lack of exposure and experience among the Chinese as underlying reasons. “Backcountry, potage […] if people didn’t know about this, then there is no point in doing the activities.” From his observations in Hong Kong, where it is close to the ocean, people tended to do water sports. Curiously however, despite the popularity of hiking in Hong Kong, CM6 points out that that “not many [immigrants] go hiking. They go shopping. We’re from the city.” Lack of time is also suggested as a barrier, but this may be for urbanites of certain socio-economic status in general, and not just for the Chinese. Many people might go to the nearest urban parks and community centres for recreation rather than making a trip to the Rouge Park since “in Toronto, there is fresh air everywhere” as opposed to Asia. For that matter, suggests CM6, some people living further away may not see the difference between visiting the East Don Parklands and Rouge Park. As for his observations of families, CM6 believes that “they don’t explore. Like, you go to the beach, you go BBQ and you come back.”

Even though the Markham site is relatively inaccessible, CM7 has made the trek (30-45 minutes) from the last bus stop on Steeles Avenue to Reesor Road. Where lack of transit accessibility is an issue for some visitors, this is beneficial for CM7 since he is able to enjoy the nice views and not having to encounter too many people. The only barrier to visiting the park is time, as he lived further away and is not always able to arrive early for activities in the park. For his friends, many of whom are immigrants, Rouge Park does not have a particular appeal. He is unsure about reasons for this, but believes that a lack of promotion and lack of exposure to the land and its history explain the under-participation among the Chinese. Therefore, more advertising should be done in ethnic media using Chinese.
• Ideas about human-nature relationship, ecology, or environmental stewardship
Although participants from MFRC were unable to provide concrete visions for what they consider to be appropriate use-protection balance, and opinions were somewhat divided as to whether more visitors should be encouraged. Some remarked about park use etiquette, such as that picnicking and cooking seem to be discouraged in much of Rouge Park. It is unclear if they know of reason for the etiquette; when asked, they were willing to entertain the idea of having BBQ facilities at rest areas in the park. The extent of participants’ ecological knowledge or environmentalism is inconclusive; most commentaries were made about the aesthetic rather than functional aspects of the environmental features.

CM6 appears to be most appreciative of the natural settings for their aesthetic components that distinguish nature from the city. He is generally aware of land conservation and stewardship practices, and is in favour of leaving things in their natural state, “without artificiality.” CM6 has enjoyed tree planting and helping his friend build a path by hand that would lead toward a wetland on the friend’s property. A desire to interact with nature is apparent, though the understanding of ecological systems and functions is less so from our brief interview.

Of the community members interviewed, CM7 is arguably the most knowledgeable about the park’s ecology. His environmental worldview can be described as ecocentric and he believes that active recreational uses (camping, biking and picnicking) pose risks to the ecological integrity of the park and should be minimized. He also briefly touched on environmental injustices in terms of inequitable resource uses. Highly educated and a veteran in the financial industry, CM7 laments:” People are using more resources […] The world is so unfair. Some people have nothing [and] we’re wasting resources. They used to say that what is renewable resources, you can use as much as you want. Now it’s changed.” However, he believes with
more awareness of climate change, people would become keener about conservation issues. As well, his perspective of public access to open spaces is clear from his enthusiasm about the development of the Waterfront trails and regret about the lack of access to Highland Creek from a private golf course. Nature-city dichotomy is apparent in his conception of the wilderness experience, notably in the case of Rouge Park.

- Suggestions about improving the park
The overwhelming priorities for all community members are about lack of washrooms, of parking and of clear way-finding. A few participants also mentioned littering, but much of it seems to be under control and appear to be somewhat of a minor nuisance. Comparatively fewer suggestions were made about protecting habitats and ecological functions. When it comes to off-limit areas and barriers, MFRC seniors are primarily in support of erecting barriers to prevent slippage and falling, rather than for habitat protection. On the one hand, they enjoy the park for its psychologically and physiologically restorative qualities and desire little change. On the other hand, the park does not look like a visitor park. Opinions were divided on how much visitor accommodation should be made since “we wouldn’t have that kind of solitude” or be able to hear the birds. For some, urbanized parks represent a place for children. There is a desire to bring children to Rouge Park, and some form of recreational facilities such as swings, playgrounds or a pool are seen to facilitate family-oriented visits.

According to CM6, designing looped trails and making various trailheads transit-accessible would help make the nature park experience more exciting for the Chinese. “Nature park is just not something we are familiar with. Some people when they go hiking, they don’t want to take the same path. Coming back is pretty boring.”
CM7 is relatively unenthusiastic about the prospect of having more visitors and believes that access should be fairly restrictive since having wide access and facilities for group activities will take away the wilderness experience. “To me it’s good that it’s becoming more popular, but that defeats the purpose, you know, not a wilderness park anymore. So you have to do a balance, somehow.” Conservation education in general should be increased in general, though it is more difficult among the older generations. He is very uneasy about urbanization and commercialization of Rouge Park and suggests that it should be left as it is, unlike “Yellowstone, you know, so many people go there. It’s hard to keep it wild.” CM7’s only park design suggestions is to have river crossings in the park, since having none visitors are having to take great detours or double back significantly to get to the other side.

*Other general insights*

Views expressed by community members have revealed some common themes, but individual experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards the Rouge Park space cannot be generalized to the wider communities to which they belong. This is due to small sample size and probable participant selection bias. Both service providers and community members have commented on Rouge Park’s aesthetics in terms of foliage change, seasonal variations and birding. Photography is very popular among visitors, according to both anecdotal and visitor survey data. Parks Canada can enhance park design and programming to accommodate visitors’ (especially new or transient) appetite for aesthetic components in the park. As Rouge Park is being made more of a “destination,” several informants foresee more considerations being made to amenities in the park, which would be especially encouraging for visitors in large groups. Most community members believe that family members would be interested in coming to Rouge Park because “it is a different experience.” However, the success of their
engagement effort is speculative.

Wilderness is a term often used to describe Rouge Park, by almost all interview participants. It is thus one of the key themes that emerged. In Western thought traditions at least, wilderness and the city have been conceived as contradictory (Tuan 1990). As polar opposites, their places in people’s imaginary have switched over time. Contradictions abound in biblical readings evoking the concept of wilderness: wilderness is “a place of desolation, the unsown land frequented by demons” (Jeremiah 25:38, cited in Tuan 1990 p. 109), but it is also a place of refuge and contemplation for those in purgatory (p. 110). The 18th and 19th century saw not only saw philosophical shifts guided by the Enlightenment movement, but also population increases and the pressure for land development. Wilderness began to be seen as an obstacle to development (p. 111) and at the same time, the preservation movements spearheaded by Henry David Thoreau started to emerge. The establishment of the National Parks systems in the U.S. came in the early 1900’s (ibid); and the conservationists and preservationist philosophy guiding the management of Canadian National Parks soon followed. The sublimity of wilderness has thus been gradually incorporated into nationalistic ideals (p. 111-112).

With newcomers, socio-economic barriers may affect their participation disproportionately. However, the lack of familiarity and attachment to the landscape mentioned by some community service providers merit further research. There is some recognition that the Chinese community is not particularly aware of the Rouge Park, but interviewees struggled to identify specific reasons for this. The social make-up of visitors to Rouge Park could be substantially different from those traditionally seen at Parks Canada sites. This is because (1) people typically travel to as opposed to live near a National Park, and the attendant visitor mentality would be something new to the agency (Steinberg 2013, pers. comm.; Lavoie 2014);
and (2) while staff members are generally aware that demographics of community members surrounding the park are increasingly culturally diverse and immigrant-driven, they seem to be very cautious in interpreting the consequences of diversity for planning decisions. Lastly, it appears that stewardship activities attract a fair amount of participation from faith-based organizations from my interviews (e.g. Across U-Hub, the Tamil Congress) and a quick news article search of the Scarborough Mirror (e.g. Islamic Foundation of Toronto and Congregation Darchei Noam, a Jewish group). This is not surprising since religious membership seems to encourage community volunteerism among Asian Americans, though this relationship may not be equal among all faith groups (Ecklund and Park 2007).

Awareness of Rouge Park

In the initial phase of this research, the process of finding community groups that may have connections to Rouge Park proved very difficult. Given the size, longevity and purported popularity of the park, I assumed a high chance of success when first setting out to connect with community organizations within 15 minute drive of the park. As it turned out, awareness of the park is relatively scant among community organizations and service providers, as evidenced by emails and cold calls.

The Rouge Park Alliance website does not list the organizations with whom they had collaborated in stewardship activities. Upon further investigation of previous Parks Canada consultation reports, some useful leads began to emerge. In addition, the David Suzuki Foundation was active in the campaign for a Rouge National Park in 2012, and had recruited community organizations to build awareness (Sheppard 2014, pers. comm.). A list of these organizations is provided on the DSF website. Thus to date, awareness and stewardship of the
park is found to be concentrated among organizations that have partnered with either the RPA or the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF), often at their own initiative. Interestingly, common to all the organizations that responded and accepted my requests for interview is the fact that they have had a sustained relationship with RPA or the DSF. There are several other organizations that did not respond to my research inquiry. In some of these cases, it was quite possible that the person in charge of leading membership activities related to Rouge Park is no longer with the organization and that collaboration with RPA or DSF had not been sustained.

Excursions and observations

I made three trips to the Rouge Park on September 3rd, 17th and 21st, 2014. Trips started mid-afternoon under calm, warm and sunny conditions, which were assumed to be encouraging for park visitors. The beginning of the fall season and foliage change may be an additional appeal to some.

The general intent of the trips was to obtain a snapshot of user types: visible minorities, group size and activities. I focused on the Scarborough stretch of the Rouge Park because (1) there is a lack of direct access via public transit to Bob Hunter Memorial Park, or the park space within York Region in general; and (2) I learned that most users of the park are generally found in the Scarborough stretch between Steeles Avenue and Lawrence Avenue (Steinberg 2013, pers. comm.), where trails are more established and currently advertised to the general community (see Rouge Park 2013). Information I gathered from the trips are in the table below. More visible minorities were observed on the weekend outing (September 21st) and at the beach area (September 17th). Quick notes, made discreetly, were based on visible characteristics of visitors. For the most part, no deliberate attempts were made to interact with
the park users to find out how they identify themselves culturally. Consequently, it was not possible to ascertain who were recent versus settled immigrants, or one’s level of acculturation to the mainstream society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day/time</th>
<th>Trails/landmarks</th>
<th>Demographics observed</th>
<th>Group composition</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Other notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 3rd 2:45-4:10pm (start: Rouge Valley Conservation Centre near Zoo Road)</td>
<td>Vista trail - Little Rouge Creek - Celebration Forest - Mast Trail - Glen Rouge Campground</td>
<td>(11 observations) 1-2 of visible/ethnic minorities; mostly adults;</td>
<td>if not with dog, then group of 2</td>
<td>Walking, several hikers with dog (often unleashed)</td>
<td>Wednesday, beginning of school year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 17th 2:30-3:45pm (start: Rouge Hills on Lawrence Ave E)</td>
<td>Lawrence Ave E. – March boardwalk – mouth of Rouge River – Lake Ontario – Rouge Beach trails</td>
<td>(49 observations) 16 of visible minorities;</td>
<td>Mostly single visitors, with males somewhat more likely; 15 couples and 5 groups of more than two (visible minorities)</td>
<td>Mostly walking, biking; some rollerblading and relaxing; 1 picnicking, angling</td>
<td>Wednesday; trails only at marsh and waterfront – no connectivity north of Lawrence Ave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 21st 3:05-6:15pm (start: Rouge Valley Conservation Centre near Zoo Road)</td>
<td>Beare Hill Trail Head – Cedar Trail – Little Rouge Creek – along train track – hydro corridor – Twyn Rivers area, Celebration Forest – Orchard Trail – Mast Trail – Glen Rouge Campground</td>
<td>(38 observations) 14 of visible minorities; varied age groups</td>
<td>females seldom alone, except with dog; visible minorities more likely with family/children/large group outings</td>
<td>Walking, several hikers with dog (often unleashed); relaxing by riverbank, in forest; white males more likely alone</td>
<td>Sunday; many visitors parked at Twyn Rivers area; unclear signage caused doubling back of some visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Socio-economic variables**

When asked about possible barriers that immigrants face in visiting the Rouge Park, most interviewees from community organizations believe that the lack of time and/or money explains their lack of participation. There is also some agreement that the visitors one sees in Rouge Park tend to be White/European and ethnic minorities are somewhat less represented. A couple of interviewees point out there is a lack of awareness or promotion about Rouge Park in the Chinese community. This observation makes sense considering that (a) the park has not been widely advertised in the broader community, (b) that most visitors are local residents and (c) the Chinese do not figure predominantly close to the park south of Steeles Avenue.
In the literature reviewed, there are mixed conclusions based on the role of socio-economic variables on immigrants’ and ethnic minorities’ under-participation in nature settings. On the one hand, some researchers draw upon the framework of environmental injustice whereby one’s socio-economic status (income level, level of education, access to modes of transportation, etc.) are closely related to one’s immigrant status. In this case, variables such as socio-economic status and class are seen are seen as underlying (or systemically marginalizing) factors preventing equitable access to nature recreational resources (see Floyd 2001 for the “marginality hypothesis”). On the other hand, some researchers call for a more complex consideration of environmental justice inclusive of human geography hitherto ignored. For instance, beyond one’s current socio-economic achievements, life experiences, cultural preferences, inter-generational differences and attitudes towards the environment all serve to inform one’s activities in nature settings (Byrne and Wolch 2009). The main justifications for this more critical outlook are two-fold. One, some quantitative studies testing individual and interactive effects by socio-economic variables, ethnicity, acculturation, among other factors could not conclude the former to be mainly driving participation rates and differences (Winter et al 2004; Deng et al 2006; Lovelock et al 2012; Bustamente 2008). Second, qualitative studies by social anthropologists and historians using interviews and focus groups bring to the light the specific and nuanced ways in which cultural identity and affiliations, when carefully contextualized, do play a significant role in people’s narratives of relationships with nature (Thomas 2001; Thomas 2002; Lanfer and Taylor 2005; Roberts and Chitewere 2011).

Unfortunately as aforementioned, visitor demographics have never been tracked in the Rouge Park, so evidence-based conclusions could not be made. The assertion that immigrants’ and
ethnic minorities’ under-participation is socioeconomically driven is anecdotal for the most part. It is not known, for instance, whether traditionally under-represented groups simply invest time and money into recreational activities in other nature settings. Further, the fact that all of community members I interviewed are settled immigrants may be indicative of their socio-cultural (though possibly also economic) integration in the host society. Even though the relationship between socio-economic integration into the mainstream society and cultural identification has not been thoroughly explored here, it could be a mutually reinforcing one.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Motivations for stewardship}

By and large, tree planting is the most popular stewardship activity, one which has attracted participation by individuals from diverse cultural and socio-economic demographics. In every interview conducted, tree planting was mentioned by the participant. The apparent popularity of the activity is largely a product of long-established partnership between the Rouge Park Alliance and community organizations looking to engage its members in outdoor activities. The community members whom I interviewed spoke of tree planting with fondness. While the ecologically restorative quality of the activity was not lost with these interviewees, it was not specifically evoked. Interviewees were more likely to mention the activity as enhancing one’s sense of contribution to the landscape and to a heightened sense of belonging. Returning to the spot where a tree was planted, for instance, was mentioned by a few participants. It may be that for these individuals, tree planting is a symbolic act of putting one’s roots down, and having them firmly established in a new locale and being allowed to flourish, much like the process of immigrant settlement in the host country. Witnessing the growth of something one was responsible for can be especially rewarding and equally beneficial across cultural lines.

\textsuperscript{11} That said, Parks Canada’s “Learn to Camp” program, which offers guided camping over the course of one weekend at discounted rates seems to be very well received by some of the newcomer attendees (Lavoie 2014; Chan 2014). It is worth noting that two of the targeted audiences for this program are youth and new immigrants (Lavoie 2014).
There are a number of other ecologically oriented activities in Rouge Park led by the RPA staff over the years, which participants either mentioned in passing or did not mention at all. Annual activities such as the Hoot and Howl, the bird count and the Frog Watch are among the best attended according to RPA staff (Santos 2013, pers. comm.). Since RPA did not maintain volunteer demographics, it is not possible to know the cultural diversity of the attendance. Asked if the senior members of the Malvern Family Resource Centre (MFRC) have attended any of those activities, Amy was doubtful. However, she indicated that the time of these events (e.g. nightfall for the FrogWatch) is often not ideal for the members, who may have other obligations or may be fearful about going into these spaces at night. Aside from time constraints, it is possible that these activities requiring some knowledge of the biodiversity and/or landscape have not interested a wider audience. While attending a FrogWatch meet in April 2014, I observed a handful of volunteers who differ in age, are mostly local to the area, but most of all tend to be enthusiasts of the activity to begin with; for instance, there was one participant who recently emigrated from the U.K and has worked as an environmental professional. Birding is a possible exception. A few interviewees (e.g. MFRC seniors and Chan) expressed delight in learning to identify birds while on a guided tour by Rouge Park Alliance staff. One explanation for this is that birding is relatively relaxing activity, requiring little physical exertion. Additionally, birding might be a popular activity in many cultures and therefore familiar to many newcomers as an occasional, if not a serious, hobby.

*Observations from YMCA youth meetings*

With Andrew’s permission, I was able to attend two YMCA volunteer trainings on April 3rd and September 4th. The purpose of my attendance was to observe the meeting, learn a little
more about demographics represented in this leadership group, as well as any interest they may have related to nature settings. During the meeting in April, 21 youths were in attendance. Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines were the top three countries represented. When asked what they wanted to do in the summer, youth leaders mostly looked forward to pursuing practical endeavours such as school and paid work. Only four youths (including two from Australia and Ontario) mentioned some sort of outdoor recreation such as Tough Mudder race, camping or playing soccer. During the September meeting, a different group of youth convened to brainstorm volunteer ideas. With the exception of traditional athletics-themed fundraising activities, instances of outdoor recreation included one mention of scavenger hunt. The skills that these youths wished to develop as leaders are wide ranging, but only one mention of nature activity (planting/gardening) can be counted. The perspective to be gleaned from these observations is that, with a plethora of skills to learn, environmentally themed activities are simply not top of mind for these immigrant youths. This is especially understandable since, as Andrew mentioned, most of these youths are fairly recent immigrants and they might be mostly concerned with gaining employable skills. That being said, despite frequent stewardship activities organized between the YMCA and the Rouge Park Alliance, and youth leaders being generally aware of the park’s existence, very few of them actually looked forward to environmental activities. As a final note, Andrew helped introduce my research topic to the group and invited eligible youths (over 18 years of age) to contact me for a chat about Rouge Park. Two youths eventually came forward with some interest but were not able to schedule interviews.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & DISCUSSION PART B – NATURE & BELONGING

Critical political ecology lens

Many scholars have put forth their own definitions of political ecology (Robbins 2004, pg 6). Central to all political ecological approach is the recognition that ecology in theory and/or in practice is not apolitical (Robbins 2004, pg 5). One definition of political ecology as a theoretical framework that fits most aptly with my research is that it serves to “synthesize the central questions asked by the social sciences about the relations between human society, viewed in its bio-cultural-political complexity, and a significantly humanized nature” (Greenberg and Park 1994 cited in Robbins 2004, pg 6). In other words, the knowledge system that we recognize currently as ecology reflects a type of “environmental orthodoxy” (Jennifer Foster 2013, pers. comm.) which prioritizes the power of scientific inquiry ahead of most other ways of understanding the “environment.”

Swyngedouw (2010)’s “Trouble with Nature: ‘Ecology as the New Opium for the Masses” is a treatise which departs from the political ecological lens and uses discourse analysis and semiotics to probe historical and contemporary notions of “nature”. One key argument Swyngedouw makes here is that “nature” is a slippery concept in post-modern times; further, the ignorance of potentially multiple meanings that can be referred to as “nature” or the acceptance of narrow definitions of “nature” reflects how deeply politically entrenched the term is. That is, “nature” is subject to political struggles that privilege certain definitions and actively diminishes others, which threaten the hegemonic order seeking to promote a neat definition of “nature.”
To deconstruct the meanings (or non-meanings) of “nature” in the English language in the postmodern sense threatens to arrive at an epistemological void, since uses of the word have diversified and intertwined with other signifiers to such a degree that public discourses evoking “nature” can be viewed as hopelessly confounding. Somewhat different from Swyngedouw’s analysis of “nature” at the semiotic level are more empirically grounded political ecological approaches. These include the study of distributive injustices with regards to environmental access, formation of discourse coalitions (Schlosberg 1999), as well as the struggle for power and legitimacy by different discursive communities employing certain environmental narratives (Jennifer Foster 2013, pers. comm.). Even though these are powerful theoretical approaches to take in the study of politics surrounding the Rouge Park, the current project aligns best with the idea that the space and politics are mutually reinforcing and that the “received wisdom about environmental knowledge” (Jennifer Foster 2013, pers. comm.; Lefebvre 1991, translated by Nicholson-Thomas 1991) is open to interpretation. Limiting ourselves to viewing environmental knowledge about Rouge Park strictly in ecological terms may unintentionally restrict nature-based activities in this space to certain communities. As Richardson (2002) succinctly puts it, “the essence of this approach is that it does not follow a linguistic focus on discourses as texts and communication, but is instead more interested in how social structures create conditions for thought, communication and action” (p. 355).

Henri Lefebvre’s theory of production of space (translated by Nicholson-Smith 1991) has been deployed as one theoretical basis for studying the relationship between ethnicity and recreation. In Appendix 8, I reflect more on the book insofar as it discusses humans’ relationship with nature. The essential conceptual framework that Lefebvre put forth is that our interpretation of space and what goes on in it is profoundly informed by our social
relations and various forms of institutionalization. Space is both a product and site of production of social relations. Philosophically, the relative view of space thus contrasts with the determinist view of the universe and of Euclidean spatial analysis serving as the dominant frameworks guiding the functioning of contemporary society. As Lefebvre argues, these frameworks are taken as given, privilege certain segments of the population as well as foreclose other ways of knowing. By seeing social relations and spatial organizations as mutually reinforcing, the underprivileged can then understand the processes by which they are exploited by hegemonic forces or entities.

_Whose park is it really?_

The following results about Parks Canada’s 2013 Autumn survey (please see Appendix 6 for a scanned sample) are of interest to this study. (a) Vast majority (86%) of the visitors at the time of the survey were adults and seniors. Youth made up the remaining 14%. (b) There was overwhelming consensus on statements (i) “It is important that natural areas such as this park be protected in urban settings”, (ii) “I’m proud that this park is protected” and (iii) “This park is important to my community.” Two of the caveats, as per the survey report, should be acknowledged here. One is that the survey was only offered in English, and it was possible that some newcomers may have declined participation due to the language barrier (Holmes 2013, pers. comm.). Another is that the survey was conducted over the Autumn season, which is not peak tourist/visitor season (Steinberg 2013, pers comm). Inclement weather was also a factor. Nevertheless, with anecdotes and my own observations hiking in the park it is possible to conclude that the majority of visitors are repeat users, of which many are local residents. These users in turn are more likely to have a sense of ownership of the park, to be familiar with park use etiquette and to be inclined to provide feedback to park management staff.
Parks Canada’s 2013 Autumn survey shows that 55% of the visitors live within 15-minute drive of the park and a further 40% within an hour’s drive. While socio-economic barriers such as time and monetary cost may have deterred some people from visiting Rouge Park, insufficient information is available to ascertain whether these barriers affected a given user’s frequency of visits or decision to visit at all. Given that not many visitor infrastructures currently exist and that many areas do not explicit encourage multiple uses (Santos 2013, pers. comm.; Jennifer O’Connell 2014), it is more likely that some users have avoided the space and consequently have gained little familiarity with it. These users, if ever encountered during my research process, may have felt that they had little to contribute to the topic at hand and ruled themselves out from the recruitment process.

In the absence of concrete data on Rouge Park user ethnicity, cultural identity or immigration status, the sense of ownership on the part of minority users of Rouge Park is inferred from other fieldwork activities. With the exception of one community member, several interviewees recruited from community organizations as well as participants in Parks Canada’s management plan consultation meetings indicated little to no awareness of the park’s transition to federal management. As previously noted, attendants most easily identified in consultation meetings were associated with either the environmental conservation or agricultural preservation causes; other civic organizations such as the Malvern Family Resource Centre were in the minority. As well few if any organizations serving ethnic minorities, immigrants, or faith-based clienteles seem to be present.

In addressing part of the core management mandate for the New South Wales NPWS aimed at enhancing cultural diversity and social responsibility, Thomas (2001) remarks: “[w]hether the
government and its agencies are adequately meeting these challenges is a matter for conjecture. The apparent diversity of park users suggests that NPWS is, at least to some degree, fulfilling the needs of migrant people. But what happens when people unfamiliar with the Australian environment enter our reserves?” (p. 10). Even though the passage here refers to the sense of danger and unfamiliarity that immigrants may face when entering a new landscape, it neatly captures the key inquiry explored in this paper. The same challenge of assessing and meeting socio-cultural responsibility extends to park services, programming and environmental stewardship inside Rouge Park.

“Localized topophilia”

To avoid the pejorative connotation associated with terms such as NIMBYism (not-in-my-backyard) or YIMBYism (yes-in-my-backyard), I choose to conceive of another term to denote one’s sense of the environment that is often localized and strengthened through repeated exposure (or time), “localized topophilia.” One’s attachment to the environment surrounding one’s place of residence, if it can be wholly defined to include potential biophysical, socio-economic and cultural environments, may be manifested in one’s desire for constancy. While resistance to change was not previously considered as an explanatory framework for Rouge Park users, it has most likely manifested in political struggles by local residents and environmentalists alike in the efforts to maintain the status quo (O’Connell 2014). On the face of it, the desire to “keep things natural”, as enunciated by many community members at Parks Canada’s consultation sessions, may be seen as motivated by an ecocentric view of the environment. However, critical analysis of people’s reactions to development projects (O’Connell 2014) cast doubt on this assertion\[1\]. Parks Canada’s 2012 Autumn survey suggests that the even though the vast majority of respondents (94%) are satisfied with their
visitor experience, only one in five would commit to being volunteers (as volunteering in the park has mostly been in the form of citizen science and restoration activities). This is not to say that ecocentrism and the desire for environmental constancy did not evolve side-by-side, or that for some Rouge Park visitors ecological conservation is paramount regardless of locale, but that these aspects of one’s sense of place are difficult to disentangle in some cases. Nor would it be fair to disregard the fact that restoration activities to date in the park have been accomplished largely via volunteerism, be it on one-off or repeated basis.

*Multicultural outreach and intercultural understanding*

The staff at the Multicultural Connections program at the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority has led many outreach efforts in the GTA. This effort is thorough with respect to the types of organizations and the constituencies that they represent. Many different types of environmental programming have been provided to date, though mostly in the forms of presentation and TRCA site tours. Evaluation forms provided through the Freedom of Information (FOI) request indicate that the presentations and tours were well-received by the participants. It is also difficult to assess from these forms, given the setting in which they were filled out, whether participants withheld any negative feedback. Alternately, it is possible that the forms themselves were not designed to critique the program outcomes per se, but rather to generally gauge the effectiveness of program delivery. With respect to research into the attitudes and perspectives of new immigrants or ethnic minorities regarding their nature-based activities in the GTA, Multicultural Connections staff members have indeed been active on this front, as depicted through TRCA committee minutes, collaborative research reports and other surveying efforts. There are, in fact, many insights to glean from these research outputs. The results from these studies are not made available in the public domain, i.e. online research.
or simple research request. I surmise that the reason for this reluctance to share may be in part to protect participant confidentiality.

From a review of the documents provided, it can be seen that staff have contacted a wide variety of community groups, faith groups, cultural organizations, settlement agencies and adult language learning centres for purposes of outreach and implementation of MC programs/activities. In addition, there was substantial effort in information/knowledge sharing between TRCA and other ENGO’s, LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) having similar programs to better engage ethno-cultural minorities and/or newcomers. However, the only organization close to the Rouge River Watershed with whom the TRCA has successfully connected appears to be the Welcome Centre for Immigrant Services in Markham and Scarborough. Presentations on a variety of topics were integrated into their LINC classes.

Also included in the document review were staff reports relevant to MC program evaluation, including information about MC's relevance to TRCA mandate and operations, program evaluation criteria, methods employed for community outreach and future directions for MC. A committee report (TRCA Executive Committee meeting minutes – September 11, 2009) on the collaboration with the Hindu community regarding religious offerings at river sites is noteworthy. In the Strategic Plan 2013-2022, there are mentions of adapting TRCA services to be more sensitive to cultural demands, although it is uncertain how this policy has been translated into programs and actions. Further, there were sample program evaluations and thank-you letters, which indicate that staff members have provided high quality programs and services. This being said, evaluation forms such as the ones provided tend not to elicit negative

---

12 These include subsidized trips to conservation areas, classroom presentation on water and energy conservation, climate change, native and invasive species, Aboriginal history, career training in the environmental sector and community outreach
responses in general. Whether intentional or not, the forms do not seem to be designed with the goal of eliciting a whole range of responses. Given the setting (school trips, teacher led, supervised, student name on form), it is unlikely that the student participants would answer anything in the negative.

I was also curious about any research output (including reports) related to two of the MC program mandates listed on the official webpage (a) identifying and reducing barriers that prevent new Canadians from exploring green spaces and/or to (b) acquiring knowledge and insight into new Canadian perspectives of nature and their attitude towards green spaces. Examples include a staff report on different cultural perceptions of nature and nature-based activities through research conducted with major cultural groups. Among staff’s many attendances at diversity conferences, FutureWatch stands out as a collaborator working most consistently with the TRCA on the subject of newcomer integration. Curiously, in 2010, staff discussed how to improve environmental experiences for newcomers in parks. It is unclear how this initiative was implemented and evaluated.

In short, through subsidized participation in nature-based activities and thematic workshops, it can be tentatively concluded that MC programs and initiatives have helped to reduce knowledge and socio-economic barriers for newcomers, in particular. Through primary research efforts and information sharing with other ENGO’s, the effort to understand the perception of newcomers and cultural minorities towards the environment has been made. This effort remains piecemeal, as I speculate, mainly due to feasibility concerns. Other lesser acknowledged concerns (more pertinent to my research questions) including the difficulty of tracking long-term success in conservation and stewardship education vis-à-vis newcomers and cultural minorities. Nevertheless, some successes are worth noting. For instance, staff
members appear to be a very proactive in seeking and maintaining community networks; the Authority played a key role in encouraging environmentally sound religious offering by some members of the Hindu community; a staff member’s planning foresight in promoting cultural and political sensitivity to the Tamil community’s gathering for tree planting event seemed to be well received; and the many LINC and ENGO thank-you letters indicate that community partnerships with the TRCA MC staff were pleasant and beneficial.

*Unidirectionality of environmental education*

Earth Day Canada published a Diversity Research Report in July 2012, marking an ambitious effort to examine the experiences and insights of community members, practitioners and communication specialists on the subject of cultural diversity and inclusion in environmental initiatives in Canada. The community members were recruited from the Chinese, Hispanic and South Asian communities in the Greater Toronto Area. Among the report’s many interesting findings, the authors point out that environmental education, as it is practiced conventionally, tends to be unidirectional. That is, there is a lack of mutual learning with newcomer environmental knowledge. Further, that different environmental practices or mentalities as “something that needed to be fixed” did not sit well with some informants. For one informant, the targeting of youth in environmental education is at the source of this mentality, since adult immigrants presumably might not be readily integrated into the mainstream environmentalism.

*Culturally differentiated perceptions of nature*

An internal report by the TRCA reflects a rare but important research effort undertaken to understand perceptions of nature held by different cultural groups in the Peel Region. In 2008,
the TRCA conducted nature walks followed by large focus group discussions (20-50 participants each)\textsuperscript{iv}, in collaboration with the Credit Valley Conservation authority, Centre for Land and Water Stewardship at the University of Guelph and the Multicultural Inter Agency of Peel (MIAG). In total, 220 participants were recruited through community contacts familiar to MIAG and represented diverse cultural and faith groups in the Peel Region. The vast majority of participants were first-generation immigrants, representing 33 countries. Of those, there were four (4) South Asian countries, seven (7) Latin American countries, seven (7) Arab countries, nine (9) African countries, three (3) European countries and three (3) Asian countries.

With the exception of those from Arab countries, most groups had a mixture of new and more settled immigrants (being more than 5 years). The European group was the smallest. The participants in the South Asian group were linguistically and religiously diverse. They value family time and spend most of the time with “[work], daily chores, and church activities” leaving little time for relaxation” (p. 3). Faith appears to be extremely important in the shaping of participants’ view of the environment, with the belief that “one person can have an impact” on the environment. Recycling, proper waste disposal and pollution are some of the topics of concern. Most are fond of walking or biking in nature settings, although they had not participated in stewardship activities. To this group ostensibly time and monetary costs are most likely to prevent them from accessing environmental activities. To Latin Americans, being able to socialize in outdoor settings, especially during the spring or summer, is very important. Many strongly encourage further promotion of nature parks to the younger generation and the wider community. Photography and bird watching are popular activities when they are out in nature. While socio-economic costs can be a real barrier in environmental
participation, there appeared to be little interest in environmental issues to begin with. This said, most were conscious about energy and food waste. Overall, there is a strong desire to be close to nature settings, and for community members from all cultures and ages can go and co-participate in activities. Despite having good English fluency and having 12-30 years of residency in Canada, most Arab participants felt self-conscious about their communicative abilities and relied on the younger generations to translate. Their communities here tend to be small and isolated “because of lack of trust” (p. 8). However, “they found this meeting ground very helpful to start bridging that gap” (p. 8). Inter-generational activities are also important for this group. Relative to the other groups, the Arab participants tended to be keener to learn about native plants, have participated in stewardship activities and communicated with the younger generation about environmental issues. Members of the African group were linguistically diverse and needed no translation for the focus group discussion. Their primary community affiliations tended to be in “church groups or recreation centers” (p. 10). It is important for them to be able to relax with friends (as can be deduced, from a more urbanized setting). In terms of the environmental issues explicitly or implicitly raised by the researchers, this group unanimously expressed no interest or knowledge. Within the Chinese group, the majority were women aged 25-35, enrolled in a LINC class and using the research activities as a language practice. Perhaps due to limited language proficiency, participants articulated general enthusiasm for the nature walk. It was understood that many came from urban areas “and have not seen the country side.” Environmental pollution seemed to pique their interest. If outdoor activities are to be planned, group trips to rivers and opportunities to fish would appeal to them the most.

On the whole, common themes for many participants across the groups included (a) the

---

13 The investigators did not define what they considered to be “interest in environmental issues,” which I suspect to be somewhat problematic in their study in general and perhaps more so with particular researcher-participant dynamics.
importance of having group time, especially with family and/or friends; (b) enthusiasm about
gardening; (c) inter-generational differences in that the Canadian-born’s identify less with
their parents’ or grandparents’ culture from their places of origin. Consequently, nature-based
activities and environmental knowledge as summarized above cannot be generalized to them.
Researchers recognized that outdoor activity preferences are different for different groups, and
hope to develop programs and activities that target these preferences in the future. They also
gauged that environmental knowledge tends to be low among new immigrants. They attributed
this mainly to socio-economic barriers (i.e. people working hard to become settled in the host
country) and language barriers. The participants from African countries, I would argue, serve
as a counter-example. A more insightful discussion might have been possible if researchers
had asked about their life history, environmental memories, perceived/actual discrimination
and experiences in immigrant settlement. There is insufficient information from the Chinese
participants. If the aim of ENGO’s is to promote environmental stewardship activities for
settled immigrants, it would be interesting to conduct a similar discussion with the same
individuals a few years later.

What else can we learn from this exercise? For one, focus groups discussions with immigrants
about culture and the environment are few and far in between. TRCA et al have set up an
excellent framework for conducting such discussions as well as noted some caveats from this
endeavour. Second, even though ENGO’s in general are moving into a more culturally
inclusive environmental justice framework (Schlosberg 1999, p. 110-113), it is possible that
not all are actively confronting their own assumptions as to what makes desirable
environmentalism. While socio-economic and language barriers can be removed for some (but
only some) immigrants in order to achieve predictable results (e.g. increased attendance in
nature settings, educational seminars, sponsored community group fieldtrips, etc), it is
uncertain whether these initiatives and programs have any long-term significance for participants. A cynical critic might condemn the accessibility-oriented approach to environmental outreach towards immigrant communities as picking the low-hanging fruit. If new immigrant communities continue to be under-engaged despite well-intentioned efforts to reduce barriers and advertise through ethnic media or community leaders, other factors which require more cultural immersion and introspection may need to be uncovered.

Inter-cultural communication, as my research reveals, tends to be heavy in policy but disparate or weak in implementation. For instance, “inclusivity” has become a buzzword or a necessary policy terminology employed by park planners and environmental service practitioners. Moreover, approaches taken by different environmental organizations to better engage culturally diverse audiences seems to differ greatly. The differences in approach seem to be mainly rooted in the ways environmental justice, though not always explicitly stated as such, is defined within the organization. Some see environmental injustices vis-à-vis cultural minorities and/or immigrant as a function of systemic factors such as socio-economic status. Thus, removing cost or time constraints may be seen by some as key to improving access to environmental resources. Some also see the lack of environmental education or knowledge barrier as underpinning the lack of engagement. With knowledge provision, as it is assumed, inspired action will soon follow. Still others look to challenge the cultural norm with respect to environmental knowledge, and make efforts to uncover environmental experiences, knowledges and practices within those populations traditionally under-engaged.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

At the practical level, the present study is an examination of visitor experience in Rouge Park through a cultural lens. As the preceding chapters demonstrate, ethno-cultural identities comprise one of many factors influencing visitor experience. There are good reasons to speculate that ethno-cultural identity intersects in various ways with other variables such as socio-economic status, immigration status and age to produce complex experiences for any given user or visitor. It is beyond the scope of this project to ascertain how these factors behave in a deterministic way to produce attitudes and behaviour at the individual level.

As evidenced by interviews with community organizations, most environmental practitioners adopt an environmental justice framework that is primarily focused on improving access and education. With respect to Rouge Park, this approach has been successful in sustaining partnerships – in the form of stewardship and fitness programs – with a handful of organizations that serve minority populations. However, the long term impact of the stewardship programs on individual participants has not been measured. Also, few organizations have ventured into the territory of expanding their knowledge frameworks and inquiring into culturally diverse perceptions of nature. Interviews with participants are also inconclusive in this regard, as I suspect is partially due to adopting a snowball sampling methodology somewhat conducive to selection bias. Specifically, complicating the search for perspectives of newcomers and ethno-cultural minorities vis-à-vis Rouge Park in particular is the fact that the park is simply not well known within many of these communities. Future studies may benefit from widening the geographic scope of inquiry to include nature parks, wilderness areas and conservation areas in general.
Majority of users to Rouge Park seem to be more motivated by aesthetic aspects of Rouge Park’s landscape than by its ecology. As indicated by some discussants, the sense of variability and novelty experienced in their visits provides them with a great deal of satisfaction. Interviewees offered different perspectives with respective to the balance they see as appropriate between human uses and environmental protection. The sole points of consensus lie in improving transportation access and navigation tools in the park. Some community members also view the Rouge Park as a wilderness space, as antithetical to the city and an escape from urban ills. Local ecological knowledge is slowly catching on with immigrants who were previously unfamiliar with the associated concepts and terminologies. Engagement efforts by the former RPA staff are mainly responsible for promoting this ecological awareness. However, awareness among immigrants from ethno-cultural minorities does not easily translate to engagement in traditionally organized conservation activities.

To be steward of a land, one must feel a connection to it. Parks Canada is in an unprecedented position to help guide the future of a park, which in recent history, has been shaped mostly by local activism. In this sense, much of the park’s current landscape, programming and planning process had not been directly influenced by the agency’s policy directives. To some extent, this very civically engaged mode of planning has probably encouraged the participation of local community groups and the heightened sense of ownership of some users. As my research process and results suggest, however, the sense of ownership is likely not felt equally across all community members. As more ethno-cultural communities become aware of the park and build their futures in the GTA, user demands on the park space might not only increase but differ in their very nature from those encountered prior to drastic demographic change. While these demands are not yet apparent (perhaps with the exception of a cricket field in the Bob Hunter Memorial Park), it is in Parks Canada’s interest to be mindful of emerging stakeholders.
from ethno-cultural organizations in the GTA. Setting up opportunities for inter-cultural exchange is not only useful for potentially improving outreach to communities but also for reducing conflict among stakeholders.

**Recommendations**

- **Future research directions**

To be inclusive in the dissemination and attainment of environmental knowledge, as I have argued, it is crucial for organizations to develop the capacity to define and conduct research projects that are relevant to culturally diverse audiences. Equally important would be the researcher’s reflections on the research process. Information collected to this end, and shared among service providers and research institutions, appears to be rather limited in the GTA. Where a wealth of information regarding immigrant and ethnic minority perspectives may have been generated (as is the case with the TRCA), it has not been collected on a regular basis and is generally unavailable in the public domain. Alternatively, there may well be informal knowledge sharing networks among certain community organizations, albeit unknown to most researchers. In the context of broadening environment services to a wider variety of clientele, I recommend that these findings (where confidentiality issues can be avoided) be made open to the public. It would aid in information-sharing with other organizations with similar goals, i.e. understanding the perspectives of new Canadians, then adapting their services and program accordingly to be more effective.

There is limited understanding of the culturally diverse views of the environment and landscape in Rouge Park. Parks Canada could do well to encourage the voicing of these views in the future, especially given the immigrant-driven dynamic of population change in the GTA.
as well as the agency’s own mandate of serving all Canadians of all demographic diversities. Several recommendations can be made in this regard. First, annually/biannually conducted visitor surveys in the park can track variables such as immigrant status, visible minority status, language proficiency and/or place of origin. Despite the criticism that these categories are imperfect indicators of cultural identity, having these data will allow Parks Canada to track important general trends. Second, if organization capacity allows, in-depth anthropological research eliciting the views, life experiences, environmental practices and migration history can be conducted with a given cultural or ethnic group, in the fashion of Thomas (2001) or Thomas (2002). Soloman (referenced in Forester, 2009)’s technique of using picture slides of places to evoke different views or feelings regarding landscape or the environment may be a cost-effective study. To accomplish any of this would require a gradual cultural shift within Parks Canada organizationally to recognize national parks as socially constructed spaces having the potential to embody different environmental knowledges. Alternatively, Parks Canada could support the works of scholars to do similar work in Rouge Park. This should be particularly feasible in light of the Parks Canada’s management plan explicitly placing the Rouge Park as a research site (Parks Canada 2014). While environmental and other civic organizations have done admirably in reducing (or at least fully recognizing) socio-economic and temporal barriers to participation in nature-based activities in the park, the issues may not be entirely driven by lack of accessibility. When individuals do not see themselves as stakeholders in the park, or as equal participant in the space, more can be done to understand why. Traditional survey and models of public involvement may be insufficient to uncover these hidden views. Focus group discussions, whether they are held in the context of Rouge Park or other nature settings around the GTA, can be enlightening.
Intercultural understandings of landscape

The idea of successful participation by diverse visitors should go beyond improving access or addressing knowledge gaps about the biophysical environment. I strongly suggest that environmental programming and education explicitly recognize specific cultural and environmental movement histories which have been most influential in the park’s current landscape and planning discourses. If our environmental experiences have been mediated by cultural conditions and that our environmental preferences are intimately linked with our cultural identity, it is important that we (a) acknowledge where culture and environment have intersected and (b) innovate programs and activities, wherever possible, to be more culturally relevant to our changing society.

Finding and sustaining contacts within community organizations is arguably the most effective avenue to understanding the fast-changing cultural fabric of the GTA. Current ethnic community relations which Parks Canada maintains are primarily inherited from the Rouge Park Alliance years. Given that many of my interviewees have made laudatory statements about the Alliance staff members responsible for stewardship and visitor education, the decision by Parks Canada to recruit the same individuals into its new community engagement team (and hopefully to continue their works in similar capacities) is an encouraging first step. Other valuable contacts, no doubt some are already known to the federal agency, could be obtained from well-connected non-profits such as the David Suzuki Foundation or the TRCA. Interestingly, the DSF is one of the few environmental organizations relevant to the Rouge Park that actively advertised its community partners. The TRCA has kept its own databases of community contacts throughout the years, but they are not made public. Other grassroots organizations may well have invaluable knowledge and insights of ethno-cultural outreach strategies, but these may have only been among few trusted partners. Ostensibly due to these
networking dynamics, ethno-cultural minority outreach on the whole tends to be sporadic and kept internal to most organizations. These organizations in turn may not identify, or be easily identified, as key stakeholders by official Rouge Park planning entities looking to widen community partnerships. Further, they can be a crucial facilitator for community members who are otherwise unreceptive to traditional means of advertisement for public consultations, and would be more likely engaged if consultation opportunities are communicated by word-of-mouth (Taylor and Lanfer 2005, p. 16). Where language barrier may be an issue, or where complex cultural, ideological and political ideas struggle to find verbal expression, a “visual language” such as community mapping (referenced in Lanfer and Taylor 2005, p. 18) may be a surprisingly effective tool.

- Park design, programming and staffing

Many of earlier recommendations pertaining to intercultural understanding of views of nature are consistent with those made by Mandy Thomas (2002, p. 133-137) in her study of Vietnamese Australians in the federally managed parks of New South Wales NPWS. Two specific suggestions Thomas makes for park programming are equally compelling for our case here: (1) Conservation ethics are culturally informed and educators ought to reflect on aspects of teaching that risk presuming a cultural rationale. A poignant example raised by Andrew Kowalchuk is the cultural-historical gap revealed in the commemoration of Bob Hunter; (2) Interestingly, immigrants in Australia have expressed a strong desire to learn more about Aboriginal history, heritage and culture. Strikingly similar suggestion was raised by immigrant youth participants in Parks Canada’s youth visioning workshop in 2012 (Lavoie 2014). One obvious implication is that employing Aboriginal interpreters to become leaders of park programming would greatly enhance Aboriginal people’s presence as stakeholders as well as educators in the park, not to mention the potential benefits to visitor experience.
Further, the “concept of loop” which was incidentally mentioned by interviewees, “proximity to water” and preservation of large, aged trees seems to hold universal appeal (Lanfer and Taylor 2005, p.10). These are considered to be universal principles of design. Instead of catering to a particular cultural taste, Parks Canada could be open to community participation in the creation of public spaces that encourage adaptability (p. 12). One example is the idea of community garden, which has been a successful model for environmental participation by people of diverse backgrounds in many urban areas. Community gardens could be an extremely effective way for immigrants in particular to grow and learn about native plants (especially with respect to their medicinal, culinary and other consumptive values), as well as become active stakeholders in the park space. As the Rouge Park becomes more widely known in the wider community, growth in user demands for barbeque pits, picnic facilities, gathering places and sport facilities is conceivable. This could and should prompt periodic rethinking of park management culture and rules (p. 15).

Currently, the agency of Parks Canada as a whole appears to be experiencing challenges diversifying its workforce with visible minorities (Parliament of Canada 2013). There is a definite opportunity to improve employment equity and multicultural outreach via the hiring of multi-ethnic park staff – a common recommendation by scholars in the subfield of ethnicity and recreation. Immigrants who are “1.5 generation” can be especially adept at navigating between the host country culture and the immigrating culture, and could be trained as “cultural mediators” (Thomas 2002, p. 137). This recommendation is in addition to the current plan of the agency to provide multi-lingual signage and promotional material related to Rouge Park. Publicity material ought to be designed with particular attention to depiction of people so as to “avoid both exclusion and stereotyping” (p. 136). As a few discussants mentioned, more
promotion of the park’s programming and events can be accomplished via ethnic media. From the limited success of such promotional efforts of Rouge Park in the past, it would appear that heavy investment into ethnic advertising might not generate a high return.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Parliament of Canada. “The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights Evidence.” Ottawa,


Rouge Park. 2013. [www.rougepark.com](http://www.rougepark.com)


Sherman, D.R. 2005. “Participatory parks planning: exploring democratic design as a tool to mediate cultural conflict over neighborhood green space.” Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in City Planning at MIT. 128pp.


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sample letter inviting research participation

Informed Consent Form

Study name
Differential participation of ethno-cultural groups in nature-based activities in Rouge National Urban Park

Researchers
Researcher name: Yinuo (Yvette) Guo
Masters Candidate
Graduate Program in: Environmental Studies
Email address: yvetteg@yorku.ca Office phone: 416-736-5252

Purpose of the research
Rouge Park is the largest wilderness park in the GTA, spanning 5600 hectares and crossing separate municipal boundaries. The park is currently undergoing a process of federal ownership, operation and intensive planning by Parks Canada. As the population in the Greater Toronto Area will become increasingly multicultural, park planners and managers might choose to re-assess the ongoing demands from the population, and in some cases, invest in new infrastructure to adapt to changing demands.

Some research indicates that in North America, nature-based activities and cultural programming tend to reflect the needs of mainstream population, while marginalizing the participation by minorities. Since there are few studies of nature park participation by ethno-cultural minorities (including recent immigrants) in the GTA, the proposed research is considered preliminary in that it will help to set the stage for more detailed work in the future. Some guiding research questions are: relative to mainstream park visitors – (a) whether ethno-cultural minority groups visit and use the park equally frequently? (b) what activities (if any) do they participate more frequently in? less frequently in? (c) what motivates individuals to come to the park? (d) in what ways might individuals like to see the park improved?

By posing the questions of whether and how various ethno-cultural groups in a society can exhibit different attitudes and behaviours toward the environment, I hope to contribute to broader discussions about (a) the relationship between environmentalism and a sense of belonging in a society and (b) how environmental activities can be designed to be more sensitive to cultural diversity and to foster greater participation by ethno-cultural minorities. In this light, this research may have recommendations for how to better engage ethno-cultural minorities in areas such as park planning, design and programming.
The information relevant to this research project will be collected from literature review and primary research using qualitative methods. These include in-person interviews with individuals in their professional capacities and in-depth discussions (either one-on-one interview or focus-group format). The final product of this research will be a Major Paper completed in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Environmental Studies (Planning stream) within the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University.

**What you will be asked to do in the research**

I would like to invite your participation in an interview of approximately one (1) hour in length. You will be asked to provide your experience, knowledge and insights regarding aspects such as the Park's management, planning, programming and servicing.

**Risks and discomforts**

There are minimal to no anticipated risks and discomforts resulting from your participation. You have the right to not answer any questions. Should you have any additional concerns, please do not hesitate to let me know.

**Benefits of the research and benefits to you**

There are no direct benefits from your participation in this study. However, your contribution to this study has the potential to benefit the community at large by helping park managers, planners and programming staff better understand the perspectives and experiences of visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Voluntary participation**

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the study**

You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.
Confidentiality
You will be named and identified in the Major Paper report unless you indicate otherwise. Please note that this report will not be made available in the public domain. However, if you express concern about the release of a given piece of information, said information will not be reported.

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Optional: Additional consent:
This consent form, once completed, will be kept at a secure location for two (2) years following the completion of this study.

Questions about the research?
Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or by email, should you have any questions or concerns about my research project.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Environmental Studies Human participants Research Committee on behalf of York University. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca

Legal rights and signatures:

I, , consent to participate in conducted by . I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________
Participant

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________
Principal Investigator
Appendix 2: Sample interview questions

- 2A. Staff involved in park planning management and operations
1. How would you describe the types of historic and existing programs, plans and uses in Rouge Park?
2. How would you describe the individuals who participate in the program, planning and activities you mentioned previously (Q1)?
3. Are there gaps in what park staff offer and user needs that have been identified? Which needs are, or should be, prioritized? And why?
4. What types of outreach (if any) has your team conducted towards immigrants and ethno-cultural minorities?
5. How do you prioritize which groups to approach and what programs/activities/topics to engage them with?
6. What do you understand to be the interests and needs of immigrants and ethno-cultural minorities when it comes to participating in nature-based activities?
7. What are the possible future directions for Rouge Park in the next 5, 10 and 15 years?

- 2B. Community service providers and representatives
1. How would you describe your organization’s membership in terms of socio-cultural demographics?
2. In terms of outdoor recreation, where do you think members of this community like to frequent? What activities do they prefer doing?
3. Do members of this community like to go to nature parks? Do they know about Rouge Park?
4. Has your organization been approached by someone from Rouge Park, the TRCA or any other environmental organizations in the GTA about participating in environmental activities (e.g. hikes, camping, ecological restoration, community gardening, park planning, etc.)?
5. Do you think some people might be reluctant to go to nature parks? And why?

- 2C. Community members
1. How would you describe yourself culturally?
2. What language do you speak at home? And with your friends?
3. If (and when) you go to parks, do you go along or with others (e.g. family, friends, clubs)
4. How often do you come to Rouge Park?
5. What would discourage you from coming to the park?
6. What motivates you to pursue activity \{X,Y,Z\} in the park?
7. What activities would you think about doing in the park, but do not end up doing?
8. What is your favourite place in Rouge Park? And why?
9. What is your least favourite place in Rouge Park? And why?
10. Do you or a member of your household participate in any nature-based stewardship activities in or around Rouge Park?
11. Do you ever collect (or forage) anything from the park? Why or why not?
12. Are there parts of the park that you think should be off limits to visitors?
13. How do you think the park would look like in 10, 15 years?
14. What suggestions would you offer to the people who operate and manage the park?
15. What other parks in the Greater Toronto Area do you frequent?
16. What attracts you to these parks?
17. What do you consider to be an ideal nature park?
Appendix 3: Interviews and personal communications

• Interviews

• Personal communications
Aryne Sheppard. Senior Public Engagement Specialist, David Suzuki Foundation. Spring 2014
Chain Steinberg. Former staff, Rouge Park Alliance and TRCA. Winter 2013.
Diana Chan. Former staff, TRCA. Winter 2013.
Louis Lavoie. Senior Advisor, Community Engagement and Industry Relations, Parks Canada.
Michelle Holmes. Former staff, Rouge Park Alliance and TRCA. Winter 2013.
Mike Bender. Former staff, Rouge Park Alliance and TRCA. Spring 2013.
Sheryl Santos. Former staff, Rouge Park Alliance and TRCA. Spring 2013.
Appendix 4: Map of Rouge Park study area

Source: StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting (2010)
Appendix 5: Parks Canada consultations and planning approach

Parks Canada has generally taken an open and consultative approach to planning Rouge Park with the interested stakeholders. The first phase of consultations occurred in summer 2012, with the aim of gathering viewpoints regarding a concept plan for a federally managed Rouge Park (Parks Canada 2012a). The extensive efforts to both bring awareness to the wider community and to elicit all relevant opinions included open houses, staff tabling at community events in downtown Toronto, Markham, Pickering, visioning workshops (including one youth-specific) and town hall meetings. While ethnic minorities were not a targeted audience in any of these events, Lavoie (2014) described interest groups that attended to be “diverse” and submits that Parks Canada fully intends to better engage newcomers to Canada.

Having completed its first visitor survey in Fall 2013 and consolidated various interests related to the Rouge National Urban Park, Parks Canada has recently released a draft of its fairly ambitious management plan (Parks Canada 2014) in June 2014. The federal agency conducted its second phase of public consultations in September 2014 at four locations. These locations were presumably selected on the basis of their proximity to Rouge Park and to interested stakeholders. I attended two of the four (at the Markham Museum near Unionville in Markham and at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Downtown Toronto). A rough head count indicated 80 attendees at the Markham meeting and 120 attendees at the Downtown meeting. Both meetings took place on a weekday from 7-9pm, but in terms of transit-accessibility, the Markham one was poorer. From research activities, personal observations and conversations, several points about attendance can be noted. First, the majority of attendees represent environmental groups who have led lengthy battles for ecological conservation within the Rouge River valley, and oftentimes several members from the same organizations were in attendance. Also significant are individual farmers who have agricultural interests in lands.
within or abutting the current park boundaries. The demographics of these groups tends to be mainly European and middle-aged or older. Speaking delegates, when the consultations allowed for it, were almost entirely from these groups. Second, other civic organizations including the Malvern Family Resource Centre, previously engaged in Parks Canada’s conceptual planning, continued to participate in the management planning phase. Some diversity in terms of visible minorities as well as emerging interests in the park are most noticeable within these organizations. Third, I did not attempt to use the consultations to organize discussions around cultural diversity, but mainly listened to how other attendees framed their interests. Interest and thinking regarding this topic, when it was briefly brought up, appeared to be limited. However, one participant, having hiked throughout the park and encountered many visitors and hiking groups, was of the view that the park does not lack racial diversity. Another participant, in another discussion, pointed out the perceived problem observed with visitors of Asian descent overharvesting fiddleheads.

Discussions at tables were self-organized around one of four themes from the management plan. Participants were free to write down their comments and suggestions on sticky notes, which were organized based on those themes and then posted on bulletin boards. Comments remained fairly general, since the management plan offered few concrete details to which stakeholders could respond. As with most other informants in my study, it is believed that non-compliance in general should be met with enforcement and environmental education. With some exceptions, the most prominent voices during these meetings are of the view that Rouge Park be kept as is, or be held to a higher conservation standard.

A few participants called for greater attention to archaeological studies and appreciation of Aboriginal heritage in the park space. Lack of youth engagement and environmental learning
were also a concern with some. On the record, there were very few comments about how
to encourage the participation of ethno-cultural minorities and newcomers aside from
“advertise in ethnic press.” In brief conversations, I found little awareness among the audience
that ethno-cultural minorities and immigrants are somewhat under-represented as users or
stakeholders of Rouge Park. Other than seeing visible minorities in Rouge Park, even frequent
users were unable to offer definitive comments about their perceptions of user diversity. When
asked whether cultural uses of the park have been observed, two participants did mention their
concerns of overharvesting, mostly by the Asian community.

Notwithstanding that some informants serving in official capacity view the park as a space that
should be more conserved with minimal human access, not all stakeholders agree. The balance
between human access and ecological integrity has been an ongoing point of contention for
Rouge Park. In fact, even during the Rouge Park Alliance years, there were ongoing debates
which tended to seesaw depending on the leadership of the standing committee during a
particular period (StrategyCorp and Hemson Consulting 2010; Santos 2013, pers. comm.;
O’Connell 2014). As can be seen from Parks Canada’s management plan, the wording is not
definitive as to what specific kind of ecological integrity is to be achieved and what maximum
level of visitor access is to be allowed. It is a fine balancing act, which has aggravated many
environmentalists present during the consultation exercises. The environmentalists want to see
concrete targets for ecological restoration, which is a goal that they fear is being diluted by
Parks Canada’s concurrent focuses (e.g. visitor infrastructure and agriculture). The agency has
been noticeably silent on the matter of prioritizing environmental preservation and
conservation over other visions for the park.
“Day User” version (shown here) was administered to users of Rouge Park in all places except the Rouge Beach. A separate Rouge Beach version was administered to respondents intercepted at the beach. The two versions differed mainly in terms of questions pertaining to specific visitor elements unique to each area.
Appendix 7: Yi-Fu Tuan’s “Topophilia”

“Topophilia” talks about all the affective relationships that humans have with nature. As the title indicates, the book is “a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values.” It is organized as a general survey of specialized topics that have relevance to environmental concern. The book is “a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values.” It is organized as a general survey of specialized topics that have relevance to environmental concern.
attitudes and values (p. 2), in which the later chapters are enriched by relevance themes already introduced previously. The book starts off with a survey of the human experience that Tuan believes to be universal, e.g. common traits in perception: the senses; common psychological structures and responses, as well as concepts such as egoism and ethnocentrism.

A chapter titled “from cosmos to landscape” sets out to describe in broad strokes major cosmologies in ancient civilizations and the interplay between cosmologies and landscape ideas. Subsequently in the concluding chapters, the discussion takes on an urbanist turn and focuses on Western notions of ideal cities in both physical and social manifestations from antiquity to the present, American cities and finally the suburbs and new towns. Admittedly, all of these topics can greatly enrich my discussion of Rouge Park. In the following sections, I summarize a few chapters and other relevant themes that deal specifically with the relationship between culture and nature.

Chapter Six: Culture, experience, and environmental attitudes
Tuan calls for the importance of understanding, at least at the group level, “cultural history and experience in the context of its physical setting” (p. 59). Culture influences a social group’s reading of the environment, and the environment influences the development of the group’s cultural history and interpretation of it. To this point, Tuan demonstrates the relevance of the following in environmental perceptions and attitudes: cultural traits (p. 60-61) and sex roles and perception (p. 61-63). Another area often overlooked is the difference between visitors and natives vis-à-vis the physical environment (p. 63-67). Here, Tuan describes visitors as mostly transient in the setting, employing aesthetic appreciation as their mode of evaluating the environment, attracted by a sense of novelty and perhaps the superficial. For the natives or the locals, by contrast, a set of “behaviour, local tradition, lore and myth” over time shapes
their reading of the environment; their relationship to it tends to be less explainable. As the Rouge Valley and hills are a defining feature for the park’s landscape, Tuan’s comments on mountains is quite pertinent. There have been conflicting views of the mountains throughout human history (p. 70-74). In many Eastern and Western traditions, mountain used to viewed with awe (p. 70) and aversion (p. 71) which evolved in these traditions, albeit divergently, to be characteristic of sublimity. Finally, in present times and with the advent of scientific thinking (p. 73) the evolution has converged to mountains having recreational value.

Chapter Seven: Environment, perception, and worldviews
Here, Tuan illustrates these themes with examples from different cultures where particular worldviews can be said to be related to “salient elements of a people’s social and physical setting” (p. 79). In many ways, the worldviews reflect the rhythms and constraints of the natural environment (ibid). In particular, Tuan examines the ways that the forest and riverine environments are related to cosmologies.

Chapter Eight: Topophilia and environment
Without attributing absolute causality, the author is interested in the ways that culture-environment as a two-pronged approach can explain the “specific manifestations of the human love of place or topophilia.” Several points are noted: (a) visual pleasure or aesthetic enjoyment of the same thing tends to be intense but fleeting. “The appreciation of landscape is more personal and longer lasting when it is mixed with the memory of human incidents […] and combined with scientific curiosity” (p. 95); (b) Physical contact with nature has become less frequent in modern times, often incurring as recreational rather than vocational activity such as farming (p. 96). Tuan asserts that topophilia is not homogeneous among farmers, whose socioeconomic status (e.g. farm laborer, smaller farmer-proprietor, a more successful
proprietor) (p. 97) defines the specific type of relationships they may have with the land and specific feelings that are conjured. The author briefly comments on the physically and psychologically regenerative effects of certain settings for individuals – a concept linked to theories of Attention Restoration alluded to elsewhere in this paper.

Chapter Nine: Environment and Topophilia

Tuan believes that some landscapes are persistent in their appeal to humans everywhere, for instance, the seashore, the valley and the island. Elsewhere in this paper, the imagery of valleys and mountains has been prominent in interviewees’ commentaries of Rouge Park. Mountains also seem to figure prominently in the discussions with participants of Chinese descent. Tuan, himself of Chinese heritage, introduces elements of the Chinese thought and aesthetic traditions in “Topophilia” where they form interesting contrasts with those from other civilizations. Landscapes in China tend to differ from those in Europe in being sharper in contrast by way of plains and steeper mountains, as opposed to the rolling topography of Europe (p. 126). When it came to depictions of nature, traditional Chinese “poetry showed a far greater range of nature sentiment than did landscape paintings” (ibid). Moreover, when landscape paintings were made, “palaces and human activities tended to dominate the foreground” (p. 127); natural features such as the mountain and water were almost always depicted in juxtaposition (p.127-128). This is in part because the vertical and horizontal dimensions thus rendered highlight the aspect of visual contrast. Spiritually, mountains are seen as embodying individuality whereas water possessing of a more diffuse and religious power. Tuan points out that mountains in Chinese paintings have tended to enjoy a more faithful rendering than any other feature.

Appendix 8: Humans’ relationship with nature in Production of Space
A few passages are of interest. For instance, he partially addresses the issue by stating that the trajectory of Western civilization’s mode of production, namely capitalism, is that of mastery of natural processes so that nature can be brought under control (p. 108-110). Curiously, nowhere in this work does Lefebvre define nature, but the implications of his monologue with an imaginary Devil’s Advocate implies that nature and all things described as natural, have sovereignty but which humans have subsumed under a technologically driven paradigm. Interpretations of nature that rely on reductionism, as he further argues, also reduce the “living being” (p. 178). By contrast, Lefebvre advocates throughout the book for holistic studies of space. That is, the goal of understanding social production of space becomes not so much finding a “unitary” or universal causal theory, but to encourage gainful sharing between these partial systems of knowledge (p. 398). Thus, in a general sense, Lefebvre denounces piecemeal studies of space and urges spatial analysis to be conducted in a less localized, and more systemic fashion – thus, the breaking of silos which had tended to constrain the breadth of intellectual pursuits.

On the whole, however, the Production of Space appears merely on the cusp of contemplating the interactions between culture and nature. The mode of production with which Lefebvre is concerned is chiefly a political economic one. Conspicuously missing is an analysis of cultural knowledge and multicultural uses of space. It is nevertheless possible to adapt Lefebvre’s theoretical framework to analyze the extent to which culturally specific modes of production have dominated spatial practice. More recently, Lefebvre’s production of space has been applied to the analysis of multiculturalism in pluralist societies. In a similar fashion, the present study and others (Lovelock et al 2012; Thomas 2001; Thomas 2002) pose a challenge to cultural hegemony implicit in predominant perceptions of, and accepted behaviours in, nature settings.
A number of authors have explored the relationship between acculturation of minority groups and participation in mainstream environmental activities, e.g., Sasidharan et al. (2005), Rahbar (2010), Hung (2003), Deng et al. (2006) and Johnson et al. (2004). On the notion of “acculturation,” Hung expands as follows, referencing work by Floyd (1999): “Cultural assimilation, or acculturation, refers to minority groups adopting the cultural behaviours (e.g. language and diet) of the dominant group. Structural assimilation refers to the degree or nature of intergroup relations. This social interaction can take place with primary (e.g. family or close friends) or secondary social groups (e.g. people at school, the workplace, or in the neighbourhood). Drawing upon these ideas, assimilation theory postulates that increased levels of cultural and structural assimilation among ethnic minority groups will likely result in their recreation patterns emulating those of the mainstream population.”

Do more settled residents adopt a stronger environmental sense when it comes to conservation in Rouge Park? Not necessarily. The answer largely depends on what is meant by conservation. The “protectionist mentality” could be more of an overriding factor for residents’ opposition to development. O’Connell explains using three counter-examples: 1. if people do not like a new tree in a new area, they may cut it down regardless of environmental benefits; 2. relatively small scale issues such as a sports field nearby may garner more public involvement than more money-conscious projects like a larger development far away; and 3. In the York Region, the sewage pipe installed under the Rouge River did not actually garner too much outcry because it is underground. Therefore, saliency and immediacy of planning issues can create considerable political momentum, and arguments “in the name of the environment” cannot be accepted uncritically. Ecology as a spatial practice is politicized, despite claims to the contrary. The ambiguity of this term, remarks Lefebvre (1974, 1991), is that “it is a mixture of science and ideology, [and] facilitates the formation of most unlikely alliances” (p. 381).

As he writes: “Typically the first group — the ‘reactors’ — oppose a particular project in order to protect their own privileged space, their gardens and parks, their nature, their greenery, sometimes their comfortable old homes — or sometimes, just as likely, their familiar shacks. The second group — the ‘liberals’ or ‘radicals’ — will meanwhile oppose the same project on the grounds that it represents a seizure of the space concerned by capitalism in a general sense, or by specific financial interests, or by a particular developer” (ibid).

In 2004, the Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) authority became concerned about disposals of certain items in the rivers in Brampton, a practice that appeared to be linked to a certain cultural group. The CVC subsequently approached the TRCA for its expertise in multicultural outreach. In a joint effort that also included provincial ministries, Ontario conservation authorities examined the rationale and scope surrounding Hindu religious offering and burial ceremonies, and studied the potential environmental effects of such practice as well as legal precedents for religious accommodations in other places. Potential environmental effects were deemed minimal – apart from certain disposals of food and synthetic material – and ash scattering in rivers, one of the essential component of the practice, was allowed based on religious accommodation. Since 2004, conservation authorities have continuously partnered with Hindu community leaders to raise awareness about environmentally friendly practices of river offerings. With some exceptions, the partnership has been mostly successful. While the committee report makes no mention of the Rouge River, RPA staff have mentioned similar river offerings there.

Discussions started with (a) introduction/ice breaker activities, followed by eliciting (b) perception of nature focused on the nature walk taking place previously, and (c) in-depth understanding of community activities and interactions participants are involved with. (d) Discussants were asked about what “environmental issues” mean for them, how they choose to be informed about issues and with whom they are communicated. Lastly hosts asked about (e) community contacts and advertising avenues best suited to disseminating information about environmental issues.