

**Third Places as Alternative Spaces of Cultural Production and Consumption in the  
Neoliberal Creative City**

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## ABSTRACT

Amidst the rapid expansion and normalized absorption of neoliberal creative city and cultural planning policy scripts in many cities of the global North, alternative sites of grassroots cultural production and consumption are often overshadowed – in size, policy attention, municipal investment, and print media coverage – by spectacular cultural flagship buildings and their programming. Cultural flagships absorb significant public money in an effort to foster local pride and function as infrastructural lynchpins in economic development and urban revitalization plans, but high ticket and rental costs and a focus on professional performance limits access and usage. In response to social exclusions enacted by market-oriented pay-to-play restrictions, this thesis, interested in Mahtay Café and the mid-sized city of St. Catharines, Ontario, argues that in small- and mid-sized Canadian cities multi-purpose ‘third places’ are valuable alternative socio-cultural and spatial resources that are under-appreciated in municipal cultural governance.

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## **CHAPTER 1: “IT COMPLETES THE CIRCLE HERE, AND IT EVEN BEGINS THE CIRCLE FOR SOME PEOPLE”: INTRODUCTION**

*Growing up in St. Catharines, Ontario, I spent time hanging out downtown at the Public Library, the Farmers’ Market and a locally popular restaurant, The Lancer (Figure 1.1), owned and operated by my Pappou and Yiayia (grandparents). Each of these venues functioned as third places, or spaces of social gathering and spontaneous interaction at the heart of the community. As a child, I noticed the friendly and welcoming atmosphere in these places, and in recollection, I realize they were open to all people. In the library, I could stay as long as I desired and read as many Anthony The Ant books as I could get my hands on. At The Lancer I saw my Pappou continuously socializing with customers, give out free coffees to numerous people, and free soups to people who did not have the money for a meal. Local residents knew they could come to The Lancer for these three things without having to pay for them. What also made the Lancer popular in the community was that it was almost always open, with operating hours from 6am until 2am. This experience of accessibility, culture, and community in downtown St. Catharines that I remember as a child became even more meaningful to me as a young adult as I continued to seek out spaces of interaction and retreat outside of my home.*



Figure 1.1: Picture of my Pappou outside the Lancer Restaurant (Nicolaidis, 1990)

*I went on to complete a Bachelors Degree at Brock University. As an off-campus student it was challenging to feel part of a community, that my social self was being nourished, and that my daily life had more to it than completing my program requirements. Additionally, my academic work was generally only being read/heard by one other person, and that person was in charge of attaching a grade to it, not with developing a relationship of co-creation or support. Looking to enrich my social life and discover opportunities to share my creative practices as a singer-songwriter/musician within a community, I went to an Open Mic at the late Strega Café (Figure 1.2), which I will refer to in Chapter 5, where numerous local inhabitants came together every Thursday night looking for and sustaining the same desires I had. On these Open Mic nights, the people were the place. People would meet and often collaborate, some developing into regularly performing groups and others as support*

*for one another's creations. After regularly attending, a local artist and café employee asked me if I wanted to have a show there. I agreed and it became my band's first show. This café would let anyone play whether or not they had a following; it was a communal, non-hierarchical space. Like most musicians, musical creation and sharing had prior only took place in our homes as we grew our craft, and this accessibility provided the opportunity for it to flow into the social, public realm and be part of the wider local music scene.*



Figure 1.2: Performing a song of mine “Conversation” in collaboration with a local musician I met at Strega Café (September 2012, Fleury)

*Around the same time, I attended Mahtay Café for the same reasons. At this point, Mahtay Café was relatively new, but once people began to discover how easy it was to put their art up, perform, create and operate events, and simply hangout there, the number of users grew. Suddenly, the calendar began to fill up each month with events of all kinds, including open mics, poetry slams, exhibits, shows, discussions and workshops. Someone is*

*always producing and displaying something in this café and the staff know most people by name. There are always in-house events and information about other events posted, and I still meet new people every time I am there. Many people, like me, come to the café to nurture their social and creative self. In this café, I have collaborated with people, jammed, and participated in many events through my own initiative or that of others (Figure 1.3 and 1.4). Through this participation and involvement, people get to know your story, interests and creations, and see you in a different light than in places restricted to a singular or specific use. A community develops and is sustained by people's continuous actions. In this multi-purpose setting where the cultural and social merge, the creation becomes the person, and the art becomes interpersonal instead of distant – on a wall, a pedestal, or a stage. This occurs when the line between audience and performer is blurred, when the person who just performed sits down beside you to watch the next performer who stands at the microphone beside a painting of yours. This occurs within a participatory community, in a third place where anything goes.*



Figure 1.3: Soulstice, a musical project I am in, collaborating with an exhibit of 'walking photos' taken by local inhabitants, staged in Mahtay Café (March 2014, Spratt)



Figure 1.4: Performing with another musical project, Limestone Chorus, at Mahtay Café for a free CD release show in collaboration with two other local acts (September 2014, Fleury)

*More recently, I heard about and observed the construction of the new performing arts centre, and people's discourse about it being 'good for the downtown' and a 'local saviour'. Local media and public and private advertising praised its effects on the health of the downtown before the previous building in its location was even flattened, and continues to do so in its operative phase with statements like 'The Arts Live Here' and the 'community is coming back downtown'. Since its construction announcement, I have been curious about why civic leaders chose to make a significant financial investment in a performing arts centre that runs on high ticket costs, much external talent and consumers, and hopes to contribute to an all-encompassing goal of raising property values and attracting new residents, amidst unemployment and poverty rates that are known to be high relative to provincial and*

*national rates. Furthermore, I wondered, and still do, how this centre would benefit the current residents who may live or work or socialize downtown.*

*Having experienced the value of accessibility and collective practices associated with community centre-like places, I became interested in studying the practices of participation, conviviality, generosity, accessibility and community that occur in these third places. I wanted to know more about the important role that third places can play in cultural sustainability, specifically at the grassroots and community level, amongst the overshadowing economic development narrative and structure. From my experience in downtown St. Catharines, from youth to adulthood, even in the absence of a cultural plan and formal cultural infrastructure there has always been art, culture and community.*

## **1.2 Research Problem**

My personal narrative displays the inspiration and connection I have to my research while also setting the stage and outlining the relationships that this thesis will seek to further study, complicate and make visible. This introductory chapter summarizes my research topic and provides an outline of the thesis. Using the City of St. Catharines, and more specifically downtown St. Catharines as the geographic area of study, this thesis examines how the role and actions of urban planning for the cultural economy affect local residents. St. Catharines, a post-industrial city long known as a ‘GM (General Motors) Town’ or ‘Lunch Bucket Town’, is undergoing a process that civic leaders variously refer to as revitalization, urban renewal or a cultural renaissance. The city’s downtown has been the focus of cultural plans and re-branding strategies. Cultural economic development plans have been drawn up over the last decade and have only very recently become physically manifest as material

cultural infrastructure investments. While culture is being developed at a professional and institutional level, this research seeks to uncover what kind of culture is being developed at the informal grassroots level. Who is participating, in what kind of practices, for what purposes and where? Drawing on the work of Australian urban geographer Kurt Iveson (2013), I seek to locate “cities within the city” and to understand the creative ways in which this DIY urbanism operates. Furthermore, this research hopes to display how inhabitants also act as cultural planners through their own daily actions, and how places within the area can function as a support for this type of activity. Some of these actions take place within third places, so I will further highlight the role of third places in contributing to cultural activity through an analysis of a local third place called Mahtay Café. Through an analysis of local residents’ relationships with different forms of culture, this research expects to further problematize the shortcomings of the globalizing policies of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, cultural economic planning and the creative city script. St. Catharines is a unique, appropriate and important setting for this research problem as creative city scripts emphasize the potential for post-industrial cities to become creative cities. Furthermore, these scripts celebrate the characteristics of large urban centres, rather than mid-sized cities like St. Catharines, which may influence a mid-sized city’s desire to achieve the traits that larger cities exhibit. While large cities are widely celebrated as sites of cultural production and consumption, over the last decade, research has focused on the cultural political economy of smaller cities (e.g., Lorentzen and van Heur, 2012; Jayne et al., 2010; Lewis and Donald, 2010; Paquette, 2008). In the Canadian context, research has shown that 42% of Canadians reside in mid-sized cities as of 2006 (Bain and Mclean, 2012), suggesting that it is necessary to better understand the life of mid-sized cities.

### **1.3 Overview**

To contextualize my study of St. Catharines, Chapter 2 reviews the scholarly geographical literature on the cultural economy, cultural planning, and urban redevelopment. The goals of this chapter are threefold, to understand how: policies transfer at regional, national, and international scales to influence local urban development trajectories; neoliberal governments use culture for economic development and gentrification; and processes of gentrification operate and differently impact places and people. This research also reveals how local inhabitants engage in place-making strategies, spatial practices and collective organization to create space and opportunities for themselves, and where this occurs in cities. Following the literature review, in Chapter 3 I outline the objectives of my fieldwork and my experience of it. These two chapters set the stage for the analysis of my original research findings. Chapter 4 provides an overview and analysis of the formal cultural planning and redevelopment occurring at the municipal level in St. Catharines. Chapter 5 develops this cultural analysis but at a different spatial scale, displaying the actors, place and practices involved in cultural planning at the grassroots level in downtown St. Catharines. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes by bringing the planning scales, actors and practices together to critically reflect upon the differing effects and values of informal grassroots culture, institutionalized culture, third places and cultural flagships, and the possibility of generating accessible cultural community spaces.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PERFORMANCE AND RESISTANCE OF NEOLIBERAL CULTURE**

In order to comprehend the existence, origin, purpose and multiplicity of culture in cities, this chapter explores a range of interrelated literature within cultural economic geography, urban planning, and urban studies on neoliberal governance, the creative city, cultural planning, policy transfer, city size, gentrification, class politics, spatial production, and third places. The first section discusses the role of neoliberal governance in constructing culture through creative policy and cultural planning practices, followed by a review of the global transfer of policies and the effects of city size on implementation. This section leads into a critique of cultural planning based on its neoliberal composition and exclusive economic development objectives explained in the previous section. The next section builds on this critique by reflecting upon literature on gentrification, a result and objective of cultural planning projects. Building on a discussion of the relationships developed in gentrification processes, the subsequent section discusses the class politics highlighted and activated during revitalization efforts, and the ways urban space is produced, represented and practiced in response to this process. Lastly, I consider literature on third places to illuminate the history and variety of social and cultural uses of these spaces by urban inhabitants. As a whole, this chapter demonstrates how culture has attained a leading role in economic development strategies in cities worldwide, while displaying the effects of this rapidly absorbed policy implementation on people and place and the ways in which people respond to this socio-spatial change.

## **2.2 Roll-out: Neoliberal Governance, Creative Cities and Cultural Planning**

Neoliberal governance serves as an essential starting point for this literature review because the processes, knowledge and actors that develop cultural policy and plans all exist within a neoliberal framework. Peck and Tickell (2002) define neoliberal governance by its push/pull relationship termed “roll-back” and “roll-out” neoliberalism. The roll-back describes the diminishing social welfare policy and provision as well as deregulation, while the “roll-out” illustrates its active role in promoting the expansion and intensification of capitalism through economic development. Peck (2005) defines it as the promotion of policies of deregulation, restructuring, and shrinking social services, while actively favouring privatization and corporations. Neoliberal policies drive international exchange through promotion of a borderless, privatized globe in which transnational private corporations spread popular knowledge, strategies and best practices. Its praise and continuous pursuit of a market-oriented society ignores the need for the redistribution of wealth, resources, and services. As a result of neoliberal governance, “local governments increasingly behave like businesses in their attempt to attract economic development and balance the books” (Knox and Mayer, 2012, 144). While active in business practice, neoliberal governance strategically prefers to refrain from public responsibilities and social services so that people step up to provide for their needs themselves (Rosol, 2012). Neoliberal logic repeats its “pay to play” mantra, ignoring the reality that many people cannot pay, and thus remain unable to acquire their needs. Another social issue driven by neoliberalism is precarity, as social welfare and unionization are weakened and replaced by a wave of self-employment, entrepreneurialism and precarious forms of excessive labour with minimal, if any, security (Jones 1996, Gill and Pratt 2008, Bain and Mclean

2013). Precarious, individualized work and low pay result in economic and social struggles, which can lead to over-working and further decline of the social self (Mason 2004, Gill and Pratt 2008, Ross 2008, Bain and Mclean 2013, Worth 2015). Considering the negative impacts of neoliberalism, Harvey (2006, 146) asks, “[i]n whose particular interests is it that the state take a neoliberal stance...rather than, as is claimed, every-one, everywhere?” People who can afford it may be the only beneficiaries of neoliberalism, as Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that wealthy professionals and corporations influence the state toward enforcing neoliberal policies that elevate the value of their investments.

These transformations taking place in the urban setting under neoliberal governance constitute a process of neoliberal urbanism, defined by aggressive growth policies, increased financialization, and urban spectacle (Peck, 2005). Neoliberal urbanism demonstrates a focus on growth and investment as its primary goal in part achieved through increased speculative and debt-financed development accelerated through the use and construction of signature buildings and events to establish itself in a world of mobile investment and economic opportunity, providing the given city moments in the sun (Peck, 2005). These processes are operated through the entrepreneurial role generated by neoliberalism, resulting in a decision-making process drawn out by elite networks that is less-democratic and tends to cut out many residents of the city in the process (Peck, 2005). Additionally, many residents are not only left out but marginalized residents are actively regulated through a process of transformation which I outline in the following section on gentrification.

Richard Florida, a scholar, and arguably a salesman, in urban studies, infamous among critical scholars and activists for his branding and theorizations of what he calls the

“creative city” and “creative class”, uses the dominating context of neoliberalism to develop his theorizations about the economic growth potential of cities that adopt his strategies. Florida’s (2002) creative city theories argue that cities can increase their rank in the urban hierarchy by promoting creativity through arts and innovation-based economic infrastructure, quality of life and vibrant aesthetic promotion, leading to the attraction of the “creative class”. This creative class, too multiple and occupationally diverse to actually group together, is composed of people involved in ‘creative’ labour, ranging from artists to doctors. Many artists are precarious earning low and infrequent wages, while doctors earn high salaries, so the connection here is hard to justify from a socio-economic status perspective. However, according to Florida (2002), what is significant about the creative class is that their practices of innovation attract investment. According to Florida (2002), the competitiveness of a place is based on its ability to attract the highly-skilled and talented creative class. Apparently, the creative class looks for places that are creative, aesthetically vibrant, and visibly cultural, thus Florida encourages cities to leverage these aspects through promotion and transformation (Florida, 2002). Large global cities are celebrated atop the urban hierarchy that Florida (2002) constructs because of their ability to be tourist destinations, host intensified and large creative industries and headquarters for these industries, numerous post-secondary institutions, more diverse populations, and more money to invest in creative projects. Cultural planning is a professional practice that has been leveraged as a tool for formalizing plans to attract the creative class to cities.

Through cultural planning, a process defined by Mercer (2006, 6) as “the strategic and integrated planning and use of cultural resources in urban and community development”, cities are able to use imaginations of the creative city amenities of the future

and current infrastructure they already have to promote their city as a cultural and creative area. According to Evans and Foord (2008, 72), these cultural plans encompass a range of projects and attraction strategies including “heritage, local traditions, arts, media, crafts, topography, architecture, urban design, recreation, sports, entertainment, tourism and the cultural representations of places”. Additionally, according to Kovacs (2011, 323), cultural planning “involves the mapping of a community’s cultural assets such as cultural and heritage organizations, galleries and performance venues, and events and tourist accommodations for development and planning purposes”. Ultimately, cultural planning uses culture as a focus for economic planning and policy. “Processes of cultural zoning, community development, flagship facilities, the role of culture in development and regeneration, creative city planning and sustainable communities planning” all make up the field of cultural planning (Evans and Foord, 2008, 92). The development objectives in cities remain the same, as culture becomes another piece of the puzzle toward attaining the desired vision. The emergence and exponentially increasing practice of Richard Florida’s creativity city policies and governmental cultural planning initiatives go hand-in-hand as they reassert one another’s justifications and popularity. Both discourses feed into the globalized process of neoliberalism and use neoliberal normativity to be easily palatable to cities all over the world looking to further develop. Both creative city policies and cultural planning seek to promote and use entrepreneurialism, competition, public/private relationships, economic development, intensification, growth, expanding markets, and restructuring, all of which are neoliberal values.

### **2.3 The “Right Fit”: The Complications of Portable Policy and City Size**

Cultural planning and creative policy is also studied in relation to its flows and transfers from place to place and its privileging of place types, sizes and locations. While cultural and creative policy is understood as knowledge and ideas that are transferable between cities (McCann and Ward, 2011; Peck, 2011), it can also be analyzed as an action (Bell and Oakley, 2015). According to Bell and Oakley (2015) cultural policy is a “doing”, or an action that “produces effects”. Cultural policy can actively produce cultural infrastructure after the inherited cultural policy knowledge creates a plan. The inherited characteristic of cultural policy is detailed greatly in literature on policy mobilities. McCann and Ward (2011), as well as Peck (2011) describe policy mobility as the global process by which strategic knowledge in the form of policies is transferred from one place to another. Global competition over attracting investment, development and tourism has led to much policy transfer to obtain in one place what seems to be working in another, with the hope that global policies are also universally appropriate. Although Peck and Theodore (2010, 171) emphasize the “viral spread of creative policies”, the policies are arguably “polymorphic” in their particular development location (Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2010). The extent to which cultural and creative policies are particular is challenged by the universality of enticing “quick fix” cultural policy solutions applied by excited and desperate cities around the world (McCann, 2011). Acceptance of the universalism of quick fix policies may let down cities that do not mirror the concentration, intensification and development of large cities. Cultural and creative policies in general will play out differently in different locations based on “geographical position, size, and class legacies”, which lead Wiatt and Gibson (2009) to argue for the importance of analyzing “the creative economy in place”.

Unfortunately, according to Robinson (2002), globalization has created a hierarchy amongst the wide array of cities, placing wealthy global cities at the top, and all others below who should be working hard to develop in order to move closer to the top, rather than accepting the diversity of all cities. To argue for this diversity, geographers and urban experts on the cultural economy of mid-sized cities have displayed that the prescribed elements a city needs to be successfully creative are not suitable to cities outside of large urban centres, and they argue for policy transfer to be more sensitive to the realities of city size (Paquette, 2008; Hall and Donald, 2012; Lewis and Donald, 2010).

Instead of a one-size-fits-all cultural/creative policy, as outlined by Florida (2002), for large cities that are quantitative leaders in technology, talent and density, scholars studying mid-sized cities have theorized more appropriate and achievable characteristics for smaller cities to focus their cultural planning on. For example, Lewis and Donald (2010) argue that characteristics such as, livability and affordability, less characteristic of large urban centres, may encourage and support cultural development. Bain and McLean (2012) add that the “closer connection”, “local support lines” and “alliances” unique to smaller cities can also support cultural vitality, while Duxbury (2012) argues, “in smaller communities, the culture exists in and because of the socially rooted network, activities and active members”. Essentially, it is argued that culture does and can exist anywhere, regardless of city size, and certain characteristics of places encourage the growth and continuation of a cultural economy. What can also be inferred is that smaller cities need not change their characteristics to achieve culture and creativity because they already hold characteristics that are favourable for some forms of culture. Cultural/creative policies are indeed commonly accepted by municipalities interested in quick results achieved through

small-scale change, as McCann (2011) illustrates that these policies do not require drastic alternations or large investments in the local job market, appearance, infrastructure and layout.

#### **2.4 Institutionalizing and Commodifying Culture: A Critique of Cultural Planning**

Although creative policy and cultural plans may bring excitement, hope and mark a “turning point in perceptions of the city” from depressed to alive (Miles, 2007), there is much critique of this type of planning from geographers and urban scholars, some of whom speak specifically to mid-sized/smaller cities. Many of these scholars take issue with the common practice of cities masking economic development plans with the branding ‘culture plan’. In cultural plans, culture is waterlogged by economic development ideas and strategies, limiting its cultural and social potential. According to Duxbury (2012), the desire for tourism turns art from leisure into an economic development opportunity, and a resulting “institutionalization of culture” may occur. Through cultural planning, culture becomes less of a domestic occurrence while becoming more of an external label, as developments like cultural flagship buildings are used to “hard-brand” (Evans, 2003) the city with a cultural stamp. Culture, then, is regulated and shaped by the confines of economic prosperity; by the kind of culture tourists, investors and developers want to see. Zukin (1995) uses the term “symbolic economy” to describe the growth of cultural consumption and industries that produce symbols and space that boost the city’s image and attract new users. Contributing to the symbolic economy is an ever-growing process of adaptive reuse which Lynch (2011) describes as the repackaging, renaming and re-narrativization of a building to meet new demands of iconography in the contemporary

urban landscape, ultimately attracting new users through reconstructing the meaning of place. Chatterton and Unsworth (2004) argue that the leveraging of middle-class population interests along with inter-city competition, place-branding and attracting external investment – all associated with arts-led redevelopment – have overshadowed the goal of holistic and socially inclusive cultural planning. Miles (2007) refuses to reduce culture to the “promotion of economic growth”, arguing that culture is a “desirable end in itself, and gives “meaning to our existence”, as noted by UNESCO (2007). Urban planners and city officials are not providing culture, but opening the doors for private developers and organizations to create big-ticket facilities where culture can be purchased. This stance aligns with middle class population interests, as the ability to afford art and cultural experience allows one to obtain them. Challenging the neoliberal governance of culture, and its inherent inaccessibility, Evans and Foord (2006) believe the cultural renaissance must translate to quality cultural opportunities for all, and the ability for everyone to consume culture and participate in its everyday production. Cultural plans should be for all and by all, and according to Miles (2007), decentralizing power and voice in the planning and implementation of culture are valuable goals that could enable cultural diversity. Continuing with the critique of current cultural plans but also suggestions for a new type of planning, Evans and Foord (2006) warn of the precarity and incompatibility that can be associated with external economies and creativity in small cities, while advocating for cultural renaissance to emerge from within city communities in order to provide more year-round sustainable culture less reliant on and shaped by interests from atop and outside. Matthews (2010) certainly agrees with Evans and Foord, as she advocates for local meaning production and expression to be ensured top priority in urban art projects. A

weakness of cultural planning seems to be that it heavily relies on desires, professionals and ideas that are all external to the place and population in which the plan is for, as well as external to the “culture that already exists in everyday life” (Miles, 2007). Duxbury (2012) argues that cultural plans are partially blind to specific characteristics and tensions in the community, which have an effect on how the process of cultural development plays out in place. The inner-connections and knowledge held by current cultural groups in the city may be advantageous to the development of a place-appropriate and locally beneficial culture, and this belief forms the base of scholarly arguments for local production, grassroots creation and socially inclusive cultural planning, from the bottom-up.

The term sustainability is popular in cultural planning discourse, but does not include the latter processes of inclusive, grassroots, local production in its broad spectrum of uses, and according to Duxbury (2012, 167), “culture tends to be marginalized in sustainability discussions”. Rather, when culture and sustainability are grouped in cultural planning discourse, the combination is used to discuss the importance of environmental sustainability, heritage preservation, and urban design and landscape aesthetics. For example, Mapes (2012) explains how local residents leverage “sustainability” to preserve their town’s current ‘small-town’ aesthetic amongst a growth and development project. Similarly, Tavernor (2007) discusses “cultural sustainability” in the form of using tall buildings to develop a compact and dense urban core. Moving on from urban design to an environmental focus, Birkeland (2008) uses cultural sustainability to highlight healthy human relationships with natural places and the environment, while Wu, Fan and Chen (2016) uses cultural sustainability to advance prospects of “green building”. Lastly, cultural sustainability grouped with heritage preservation is displayed in Aydin’s (2010) writing to

illuminate the benefits of reuse as an alternative to new construction. Unfortunately, these uses of cultural sustainability all ignore the “human scale”, instead focusing on the physical landscape from above, a critique by Jan Gehl (2010) of modernized urban planning. The human-scale version of cultural sustainability that I imagine would describe a state of sustained population and cultural participation in an area through continued practices of cultural participation by local inhabitants, unaffected by formal cultural planning and economic development, revitalization projects. Ultimately, I infer a cultural sustainability of the population, rather than the sustainability of culture in contributing to economic progress.

## **2.5 Expensive Taste: Gentrification and the Arts**

Gentrification, a product and/or goal of cultural and creative developments, plays a large role in the development of urban infrastructure as well as the demographic make-up of neighbourhoods within cities (Matthews, 2010). Lees, Slater and Wyly (2008, 39) define gentrification as the ascending “class transformation of urban space”. Additionally, Paton (2014, 3) states that this class restructuring, “articulated at the local level”, “creates space for the progressively more affluent user”. Banners and signs celebrate the transformation and marketing of neighbourhoods, hiding the many exclusions and displacements that are a by-product of changes to the built and social fabric of neighbourhoods. Gentrification is led and often promoted by a combination of government representatives, city planners, culture resource firms, Business Improvement Areas, and chambers of commerce. While many cities are experiencing super-gentrification (the re-gentrification of neighbourhoods by wealthy professionals and elites (Butler and Lees, 2006)), in the classic stage model of

gentrification it is “artists” who are presented as the “first gentrifiers” (Ley, 1996). A significant body of literature in urban geography (Jackson, 1985; Cole, 1987; Ley, 1996, 2003; Smith, 1996; Podmore, 1998; Solnit and Schwartzberg, 2000; Bain, 2003; Slater, 2004) inspired by the work of Sharon Zukin (1982; 1995) reveals that concentrations of artists often make depressed areas look hip, attractive and unique, which is then desired and consumed by the “new middle class”, as well as other wealthier classes, who either become residents or tourists of the area. The “new middle class” is composed of a younger to middle-aged population with notable disposable income, a liberally consumptive lifestyle, and an interest in current fashions, trends, and culture (Ley, 1996). Zukin (1982) as well as Ley (1996) state a clear linkage between gentrification and aesthetic sensibility and popular urban lifestyle. This localized change in interest and users alters the human and property value of the area, where the wealthier middle and upper classes have the power to decide if they want to occupy the area, while the working class and lower-income households are presented with little choice if the property and living costs rise because of the new interest in and value attached to the area. This concept, which Paton (2014) terms “elective fixity”, illustrates the unequal “degree of control people have over their residential location” which is accentuated during processes of gentrification.

The state and perception of public space within the located area is also central to gentrification efforts, as redevelopment strategies rely on public space that investors, tourists and in-migrants feel secure in (Lees, 2006). Population control and public space (park, sidewalk, square) regulations may come into effect, displacing people before the associated rent gap closure does. Using gentrification to “govern the behaviours of ‘problem’ populations” is its most valuable effect and purposeful use, considering

gentrification does not develop “immediate profit” (Paton, 2014, 39). According to Uitermark et al. (2007, 127):

serving the middle classes, we suggest, is not their ultimate goal. Instead, gentrification is a means through which government organizations and their partners lure the middle classes into disadvantaged areas with the purpose of civilizing and controlling these neighbourhoods.

Gentrification creates, or at least some might hope, public spaces only occupied and used by those who Mitchell (1995) calls “legitimate users”: the employed and the housed. This means that fear of strangers and anti-social behaviour will influence local regulation efforts to decrease spontaneity, which is essential to – but rarely evident in – public space.

Whether contested or not, gentrification often results in the displacement of people from one area to another; current residents out, and new residents in (Ley, 1996). Lees (2006) describes the in-migrants associated with and desired by gentrification efforts as capitalists seeking out new areas with lower costs (such as smaller cities outside of large urban centres) and young professionals. Lloyd (2004) claims that these capitalists profit on the space created by artists, while many artists remain poor, precarious, potentially displaced and residual now that they have created a profitable landscape. According to Bourdieu (1993), artists’ vulnerability stems from their high cultural capital and low economic capital. While some artists may realize their potential or current vulnerability, dislike the sanitary or vapid space associated with certain gentrification efforts, or feel they do not receive benefits from gentrification, other artists may benefit from increased audience, increased income, or appreciate living/working in a recently developed area with many consumable products and experiences. Matthews (2010) states that some artists

actively oppose gentrification, while others support it and positively contribute to its evolution. As many supportive residents may be excited by the hopeful change, Lees (2003) explains how terms like renaissance, regeneration and revitalization direct attention away from the contested nature of gentrification. The celebration of development and public art can be used to hide the negative social consequences and regulation/displacement strategies. Aside from the costs and benefits associated with gentrification, there is also debate about whether or not arts-led redevelopment can be successfully implemented and operated in all urban centres. The success of gentrification and arts-led redevelopment is contingent upon many place-based factors, such as historical specificities, past labour markets and class legacies, so it is insufficient to assume gentrification will be successful in reaching its desired economic and social benefits, especially with more and more cities using similar strategies to engage in the same competition (Lees, 2006; Wiatt and Gordon, 2009). Although gentrification tends to result in the displacement and erasure of the past, there seems to be some local influences that may prove challenging to local government officials interested in promoting new ideas, policies and developments. Groups outside the realm of formal policy creation and practice may be able to take part in shaping the urban landscape to some extent through more concealed place-making efforts.

## **2.6 “We Can Work It Out”: Class Politics, Cultural Plurality and Place-Making**

Urban spaces are formally designed and planned by certain people and for certain people, while others who lie outside of these designations may plan in their own informal ways. According to Elwood, Lawson and Nowak’s (2015) article on class politics, identity and disidentification, there exist “sites of class identity formation” created through “place-

making efforts” which display “class difference”. This section will describe class identity and the associated places that have been made/favoured through cultural planning efforts, and later address the opposition to this class and the politics that exist between classes. Before beginning, it is worth defining place-making as “the set of social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live” (Pierce, Martin and Murphy, 2011, 54). A common place-making strategy amongst revitalizing cities, arts-led redevelopment, seeks to attract who Ley (1996) calls the “new middle-class” (as previously discussed in the section on gentrification), and who Florida (2002) calls the “creative class”, a category consisting of workers in the arts and culture sector, technology and innovation, and any other fields in which the worker has the freedom and responsibility to use his/her own ideas and creations. These two classes overlap in many characteristics, such as medium-high salaries and middle-upper class socioeconomic position. Government officials implementing creative and cultural plans want these people to invest, develop, participate, spend/consume, live and/or tour in their affiliated city. In order to attract, cultural planners develop infrastructure and public space that meets the desired class interests, and these classes further develop the infrastructure and space to their wishes. Hall and Barrett (2012, 176) explain that “the urban landscape is a reflection of cultural norms, values, and sometimes fears, of the groups who produce, occupy and use the city.” The power of these groups results in their lifestyle being displayed through a notably “material culture” that is more “artefactual” than the culture of relatively less powerful groups (Hall and Barrett, 2012). The type of infrastructure used to attract upper and middle class consumers and investors are cultural flagship buildings, which have more symbolic and economic value

than use value (Miles, 2007). Hall and Barrett (2012) use the term “cultural aura” to describe the well-highlighted places that cater to high culture activities of classical music, ballet, gallery art, fine dining, and contemporary fashion/design. The expensive architecture, large size, surveillance and exclusive entry to these buildings reflect the lifestyle of the associated users. Beaverstock et al. (2004) describe the inclination of the wealthy toward cultural exclusivity, highly sanitized spaces, gated entertainment, and places with boundaries to assist in the preferred avoidance of cultural others.

Cultural others who may identify with sub-cultures (e.g., rockers, punks and ethnic minorities) have, according to Hall and Barrett (2012), different identities, associations, and place-making practices than those within the category of high culture. This group may be composed of people disinterested in high culture and/or those who cannot afford its costs. Although this group has relatively less power, the exclusion of neoliberal governance and its place-making efforts has “spawned a swath of oppositional movements” (Harvey, 2006, 145) and “encounters with persons who trouble dominant materialities” (Elwood, Lawson and Nowak, 2015, 140). This opposition to the dominant material culture can be perceived through the lens of Lefebvre’s (1991) trialectics of space, where the representations of space set out by the dominant, formal cultural plans are challenged through the spaces imagined by cultural others who define and engage with different forms, expressions, and practices of culture in the city. The everyday spatial practices these people engage in have the ability to create and remodel places to their class and cultural desires which may include accessibility and affordability, in contrast to the exclusivity and expensiveness of the cultural aura.

Continuing with Lefebvre (1991), the first space in his trialectics, “representations of space”, describes the spaces created by a plan or a blueprint for that physical space. The space is perceived through or represented by this plan, and the type of users this space will or should attract as well as the behaviours of these users are also built into this plan, directly or indirectly. However, this is only one way the space is represented. The next type of space Lefebvre (1991) refers to is, “representational space”, which he describes as the “conceived space” or the imagined space. This imagination can be from the minds of people in power and those relatively powerless. Ideas about what this space could be may be different from the actual, neutral space. These ideas may not be tangible but desirable, and used as the utopian fuel for getting as close to the desire as possible. These imaginations can also be exaggerations of what is happening on the ground in a space, just as McCann (1999) displays, in the city of Lexington, KT, a local artist conceiving the racialized city in a subjective portrait of its geography. The last type of space in Lefebvre’s (1991) triad is the result of the negotiation between the first and the second space, the perceived and the conceived. It is no longer solely an idea or representation, but the actual grounded behaviours and actions at work in the space. It stems from the imaginations being enacted on the regulations of the planned space. The outcome is not necessarily the same as the idea, but it may be different than what was originally expected for the space. The third space, “spatial practices”, is the “lived space” of and by the users (Lefebvre, 1991). Everyday spatial practices, according to Lefebvre (1991) are able to produce space based on inhabitants’ needs and desires, as well as asserting their “right to the city”. This right to the city is attained and enacted through citizens continuously remaking the city, and excluding individuals and groups from this collective, creative act through favouring

processes of capital accumulation and industrial production denies them the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996). According to Butler (2012), this right entitles people to occupy or as Lefebvre (1996) says, 'inhabit', urban space and 'appropriate' it through their full and complete usage of space in their daily practices, routines and play. Lefebvre (1996) asserts that in this process, the use value of space is leveraged over the exchange value created by neoliberal urban governance. According to Iveson (2013), do-it-yourself (DIY), or Bain and Mclean's (2013) do-it-ourselves (DIO) that emphasizes the collective process of these practices, demonstrate the process of producing alternative space through inhabitants everyday spatial practices that result in the creation of "cities within the city". Self-managing their production of space and right to the city demonstrates citizens ability to engage in "real" participation (Butler, 2012), which is otherwise denied through exclusion from urban decision making processes. According to Martins (1982, 183), to have a right to the city, inhabitants must have the ability to "be present in all circuits of decision-making" in order to counter exercises of capitalism and dominant state planning. Robinson (2002) notes the importance of recognizing that alternative voices and perspectives do have the ability to destabilize the meta-narratives and totalizing accounts that dominate the city, while Duncan (1999, 54) encourages the realization that culture "is not external to us", but something we can "actively (re)produce". We, as people, are the culture. Cultural planning, existing in a document external to us and published and authorized by a small fraction of the population, and also people outside of the local population, can make culture institutionalized and out of reach of the people actually taking part in its lived everyday production. Culture is not the programs or development, but the people enacting these practices, amongst other actions. Looking at culture through a personal and interpersonal

perspective highlights the potential for reproduction. This means that culture certainly exists outside of the ways in which it is represented in a cultural plan. However, Hall and Barrett (2012) are sure to recognize that in relation to the material cultures discussed earlier, some cultures, by contrast, are relatively “immaterial”, and notably less associated with “tangible, material artefacts”, while more represented by “ways of life or social practices”. Although their imprint on the urban landscape is comparatively minor, these immaterial cultures do 'installate' in forms of visual art and physical media instead of through planning documents, urban architecture and large-scale, fixed structures (Hall and Barrett, 2012). This type of culture could be defined as less permanent and more elusive, nomadic, temporary, or “precarious”, which many subcultures of artists are rather familiar with, according to Bain & Mclean (2013). The cultural others and those associated with a more immaterial culture have less power in the formal processes of development, but still the ability to reproduce and affect the landscape through daily practices of their cultural desires.

The troubling of dominant representations of space is deeply important in understanding the relationship that exists between informal art and the prescribed formal culture plan. Vivant (2010) labels this relationship between informal and formal art space and practice as the “*in/off*” cultural scenes, where *in* culture is “organized”, “planned”, “commercial”, and consumption-driven, while the *off* is “spontaneous”, “opportunist” and less commercial (more “word of mouth”), and production-driven. Although they may exist in opposition in some regards, Vivant (2010) displays how the *in* culture relies on the *off* culture’s unique and alternative innovation for new ideas that will keep the *in* scene cutting-edge to keep up with competition over tourist interest and spending. Unfortunately

this relationship, although not opposing, creates an imbalance in which the off scene becomes valuable only for its borrowed ideas and economic profitability at the powerful discretion of the in scene. Hall and Barrett (2012) illustrate a similar relationship using the terms 'cultural diversity' and 'hybridity', which they deem as a desirable characteristic of contemporary cities, but often non-existent because of cultural groups being divided, inward-looking, and the societal mainstream and power-brokers disinterested in any engagement beyond tolerance with 'cultural others'. Nevertheless, while Sandercock (2006, 44 and 36) does recognize that "the city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement", she does imagine the cultural benefits of what she calls "mongrel cities" in which "difference, otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality prevail". For these multi-cultural terms to objectively exist, there must be, at minimum, a semblance of equality amongst cultural forms and persons. With the awareness that urban equality is not present, Knox and Pinch (2010) are optimistic that hybridity can still flourish in the birth of new cultural practices that may have the potential to unsettle dominant trends and expectations. This cultural diversity is a goal within documented urban plans, and although a great challenge due to the social and economic disparity in cities, the promotion, valuing and empowerment of accessible spaces of intercultural encounter – in keeping with Sandercock's potential around mongrel cities – may display some positive results in place and allow a wider cultural pool to be included in the recognized contributions to cultural development. Intercultural encounter may have potential to plant and develop, if nowhere else, in certain informal and spontaneous social gathering places, also known as third places.

## **2.7 Come Together: Third Places and Alternatives Spaces for Artists and Inhabitants**

To typify the setting in which much of my research takes place, I use the term, 'third place', popularized by Ray Oldenburg (1999) to describe the characteristics and significance of "hangouts at the heart of a community" like "cafés and coffeeshops", amongst other associated places. Oldenburg (1999) describes 'third places' as places of spontaneous informal social interaction that exist outside the home (first place) and work (second place). Furthermore, Bain and McLean (2012) characterize third places by the regular occurrence of conversation and discussion as well as the beginning formation of rudimentary policy. The social interaction and art found in third places often advocates for political activism and awareness as stories of local justices and injustices are shared (Noel, 2014). The two previously mentioned urban cultural geographers researching informal cultural strategies in mid-sized cities found that many of the 'third places' they observed, despite not being formally labeled so, "became cultural landmarks in their own right" through continuous advertisement, display, hosting, sponsoring and employment of local art and cultural workers (Bain and McLean, 2012, 134-135). Although the cultural characteristics of third places are much celebrated in the literature, there is debate about their social conditions. Dating back to the early nineteenth century, what are now defined as 'third places' have been somewhat contrastingly viewed as exclusive and inclusive, as well as community-fostering and consumerist (Freeman, 2008; Hickman, 2013; Mayer and Knox, 2006). To further discuss the social characteristics of this debate, the following paragraph provides a critical review of scholarly descriptions of the users of 'third places'.

Throughout history there have been public meeting places that are exclusively bourgeois, located near wealthier populations who may have more time to socialize outside

of or within work hours (Freeman, 2008). Essentially, this wealthier class can afford to be there. However, Hickman (2013, 229) argues, in his study of neighbourhoods in Great Britain, that “all socio-demographic groups made use of local third places, but some were more likely to do so”, such as residents who were unemployed or retired, since they spent more free time in the neighbourhood, rather than being occupied at work, away from their neighbourhood community, like the “economically active” population. This absence from community life leads to a lack of awareness of the potentially useful places available to these workers, continues Hickman (2013). A third perspective, making the ‘third place’ population even less tangible, comes from Haine (1996, 2) who brings the setting back to the nineteenth century Paris cafés of working-class sociability when blue and white-collar workers regularly attended cafés after shifts and on breaks, and eventually “formed the chorus from which the distinctive voices of café culture emerged”. In fact, the café became popularly viewed as a “secular” and even “sinful” place, available to and used by “those who did not believe in religion or understand the theater”, working-class social activists, “secret societies”, and uneducated locals interested in gathering to learn about otherwise inaccessible local news (Haine, 1996). Many characteristics of the café are desired traits in the socialist perception of how the city of Paris should be governed (Haine, 1996). Third places, like cafés, are not only attended by regulars, but also have a history back to the mid-nineteenth century in New York as being the first social destination for immigrants in their new neighbourhood (Lobel, 2014; Noel, 2014). Cafés, in this case, serve as effective meeting places because of the confidence that one will find people they know or meet someone with whom they have some cultural or geographical connection. In Noel’s (2014) study of the Nuyorican poetry scene, newcomers are encouraged to actively engage in the café’s art

performances and be a part of the dialogue through clapping, finger-snapping and cheering. Furthermore, the line between audience and performer is often blurred, and the 'stage' is open for anyone to speak, from the experienced to the first-timers, adding to the non-hierarchical, informal, and counter-institutional space of the café (Noel, 2014). Bromberg (2010) and Bain and Mclean (2013) highlight examples of other non-hierarchical, counter-institutional places that are produced by the collective actions of the people such as Mess Hall, a non-capitalist possibility space governed by conviviality and generosity, and Don Blanche, an artist-run centre that is free and open to people regardless of status. Although a wide range of people from "all socio-demographic groups" seem to use third places, Freeman (2008) argues that gender plays a role in the occupation of third places, as women have not always been welcome in all cafes, for example, nor have women always felt comfortable attending even if they were allowed entrance. Despite gender going unmentioned in many of the articles on third places, Bain and McLean (2012) describe users of the third places they observed as members of the cultural sector, arts audience, and post-secondary institutions, each of which have moderate to high representation of females.

These multi-disciplinary members of the arts community tend to have a "strong sense of community, fostered, in part, by social networks that have built and sustained through particular locally-owned third places" (Bain and McLean, 2012, 134). These third places are important to members of - and those interested in - the community of arts, as well as for local cultural development. Using literature on third places, cafés, art and culture, I demonstrate the significance of third places in their fostering and/or provision of social interaction, community development, collaboration, visibility, and space for creation

and display, all of which contribute to local cultural development. Lloyd (2006), in a study of the neo-bohemian art scene in Chicago, argues that third places act as hangout spaces for people to gather for interactions, which leads to a sense of community where people support and collaborate in cultural production, resulting in the increased “visibility of local creative efforts”. Dubinsky and Garrett-Petts (2002), in their study of the cultural future of small cities, believe that this type of social capital developed is of great importance to the creation and sustainment of cultural activity, while Buttner (1980) adds that spaces of social interaction effectively pair with the solitary workspace of the artist in the creative process. These “social gathering and networking opportunities are often quickly noted by cultural workers”, and the popularity and resulting activity creates visibility for the arts in smaller cities that do not have the advertisement and designations commonly associated with larger urban centres (Bain and McLean, 2012). The visibility of cultural third places allows artists to know where to find other artists and creative displays, and this attraction leads to a cycle of continued cultural production and increased visibility. As the community grows, they are able to shape the third place through collective interests and needs, as the third place simultaneously shapes them into an affiliated community (Hickman, 2013). Artists within the community begin to interact and collaborate within the third place, which is beneficial from a creative economy point of view (Stolarick and Florida, 2006), and an art career development perspective (Farrell, 2001). The individual artist benefits from the social integration, feeling of belonging and developed sense of place (Mayer and Knox, 2006), while the community as a whole is able to have the strength of speaking and performing as a chorus (Noel, 2014) and holding the power in numbers to facilitate regular informal cultural operations. Thus, third places, multi-purpose places in essence, lend

themselves rather conveniently to the multiple usages desired by an interdisciplinary cultural community, especially in mid-sized cities, considering that they generally have fewer cultural venues and less specialization in their cultural sector than larger urban centres (Bain and McLean, 2012).

This collaboration of cultural economy, planning and urban studies literature creates a scholarly base to inform the fieldwork, findings and discussions in the following chapters. This review allows for an understanding of the neoliberal framework at play in the cultural planning process, a framework that is also resisted. Examples of how cultural planning has played out in various spaces, how it has affected populations, and the ways in which people respond to its effects, allow this research to consider, observe and build on similar plots, while also contributing its own unique story – formal cultural planning, grassroots alternative practices and the multi-purpose third place in the mid-sized city of St. Catharines – to the ongoing development of research on alternative urban spaces and the cultural political economy of mid-sized cities within the field of geography.

## **CHAPTER 3: SETTING (AND TAKING) THE STAGE: RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter examines the process, goals, techniques and experiences of research fieldwork. First, the places that compose my case study – from the scale of the city, to the neighbourhood, to buildings – are highlighted. Next, I discuss the development of my research questions that guide the rest of my fieldwork. To investigate these questions, the following section explains my chosen research methods, their application in my fieldwork and how information was collected using these tools. Focusing in on the interview portion of my fieldwork, the subsequent section elaborates on the formal and informal processes I used to recruit interviewees. This chapter closes with a discussion of unique field experiences that stood out because they posed a challenge, brought surprise and/or coincidentally represented elements of my thesis arguments rather fittingly. Overall, this chapter paints a wide picture of the places, people, discourse and activities that compose my fieldwork while illustrating the ways in which my fieldwork practices happen to represent, and are not foreign to, the social nature and daily practices of the third place/café itself.

### **3.2 Case Study Cornerstones: Scaling from City to Neighbourhood to Building**

To set the geographical stage, there are three scales of place that focus my research and are the sites of my fieldwork to develop: (1) the mid-sized city of St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada; (2) the St. Catharines Downtown Area/BIA; and (3) Mahtay Café as well as the cluster of recent cultural flagship buildings (First Ontario Performing Arts Centre, Brock University's Marilyn Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, and Meridian Centre). These three places constitute a city, a neighbourhood/district, and a set of cultural venues.

This research seeks to gather, analyze and compare the directions, desires and needs of elected officials/municipal staff and residents, observe how these objectives are implemented and planned for in the downtown area, and discover the ways in which these objectives are lived and regulated in cultural places.

St. Catharines (Figure 3.1 and 3.2) as a case study is a unique place, but it also shares similarities with other mid-sized cities in Ontario and Canada. The case study approach is commonly used within the social sciences to allow the researcher to intensively examine the unique complexities and particularities of a specific setting. I use the case study approach in St. Catharines for this same reason. With an economic history moving from agriculture (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> C) to automotive manufacturing (20<sup>th</sup> C) to its inexcusable service-sector (21<sup>st</sup> C), St. Catharines has moved through industrial and post-industrial transformations similar to many Canadian cities, such as Windsor and Oshawa. The service sector emergence along with urban sprawl, disinvestment, high store vacancy, and loss of any celebrated economic identity left St. Catharines and its downtown area depressed and less vibrant than it once was. With high unemployment rates and low total family income ranking St. Catharines among the most socially and economically vulnerable cities in Ontario between 2008 and 2012 (Statistics Canada, 2014), outlining a visible need for improvement. This vulnerability paired with internal and external pressures for growth and development and an uncertain municipal identity have led St. Catharines to undergo planning for creative clusters, economic revitalization and tourism through cultural infrastructure projects. At times St. Catharines is referred to colloquially as *Lunch Box Town* or *GM Town*, but the official city moniker is now *Niagara's Urban Connection to Wine Country*. The Business Improvement Area (BIA) (Figure 3.3 and 3.4), which covers the

majority of the downtown area, is covered with new signs promoting a particular vision of the future with the words *Gentrification*, *Revitalization* and, its boldest and vaguest claim yet, *The Arts Live Here*.

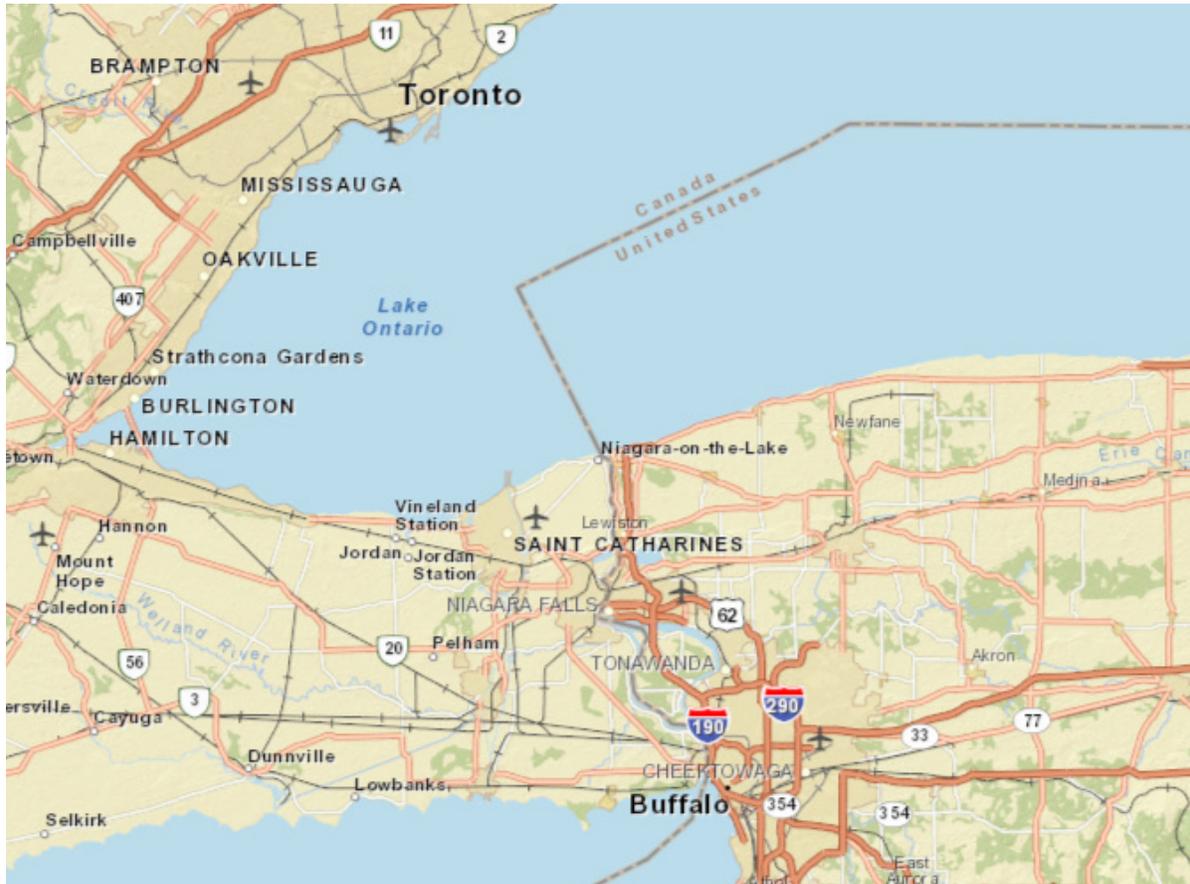


Figure 3.1: Map of Golden Horseshoe illustrating St. Catharines' position between Toronto and Buffalo (City of St. Catharines, 2014a)

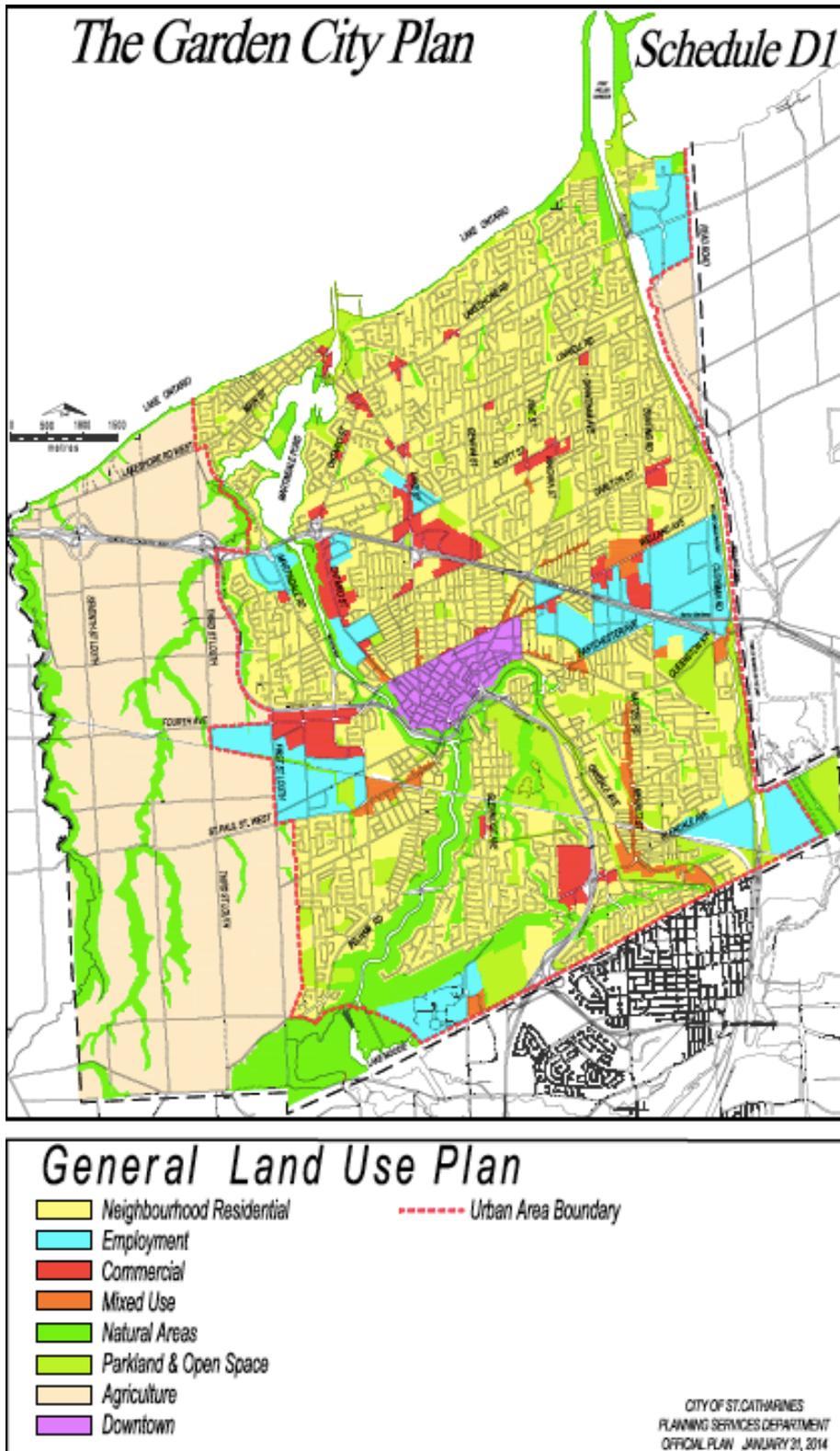


Figure 3.2: Map of St. Catharines (City of St. Catharines, 2014a)

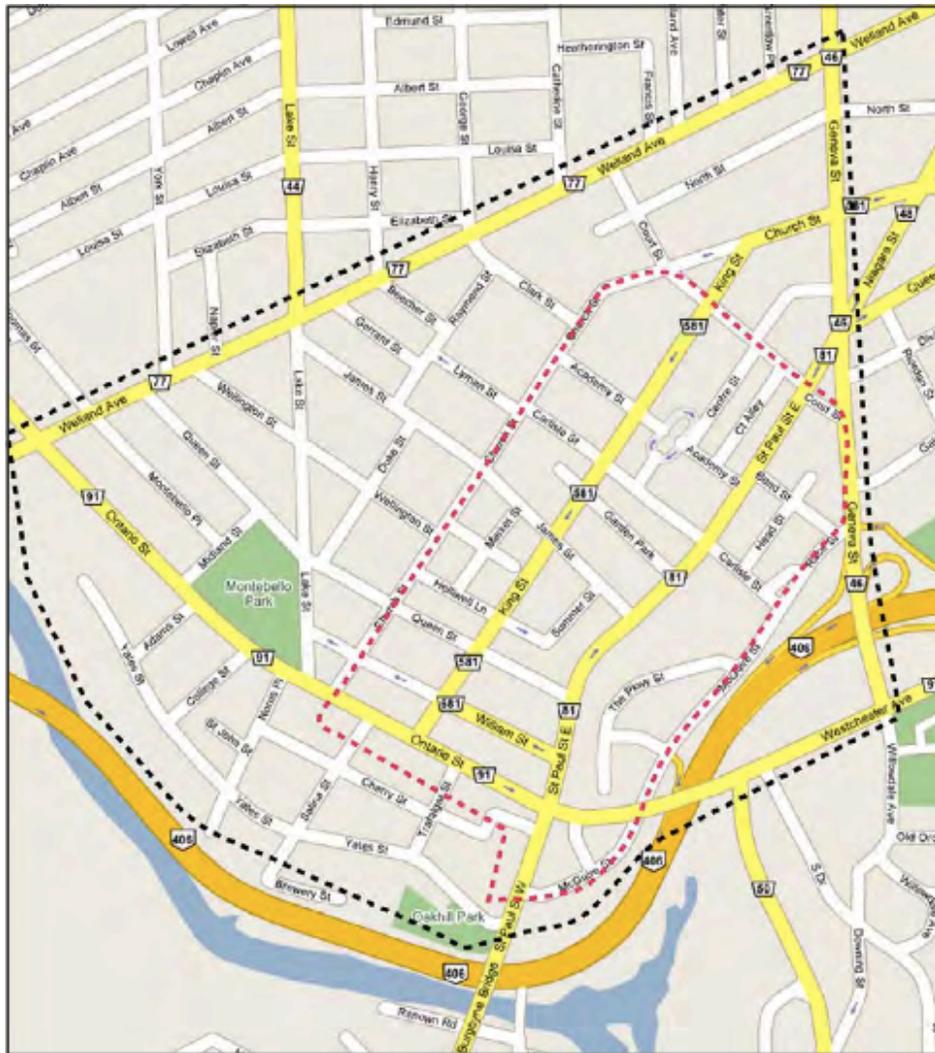
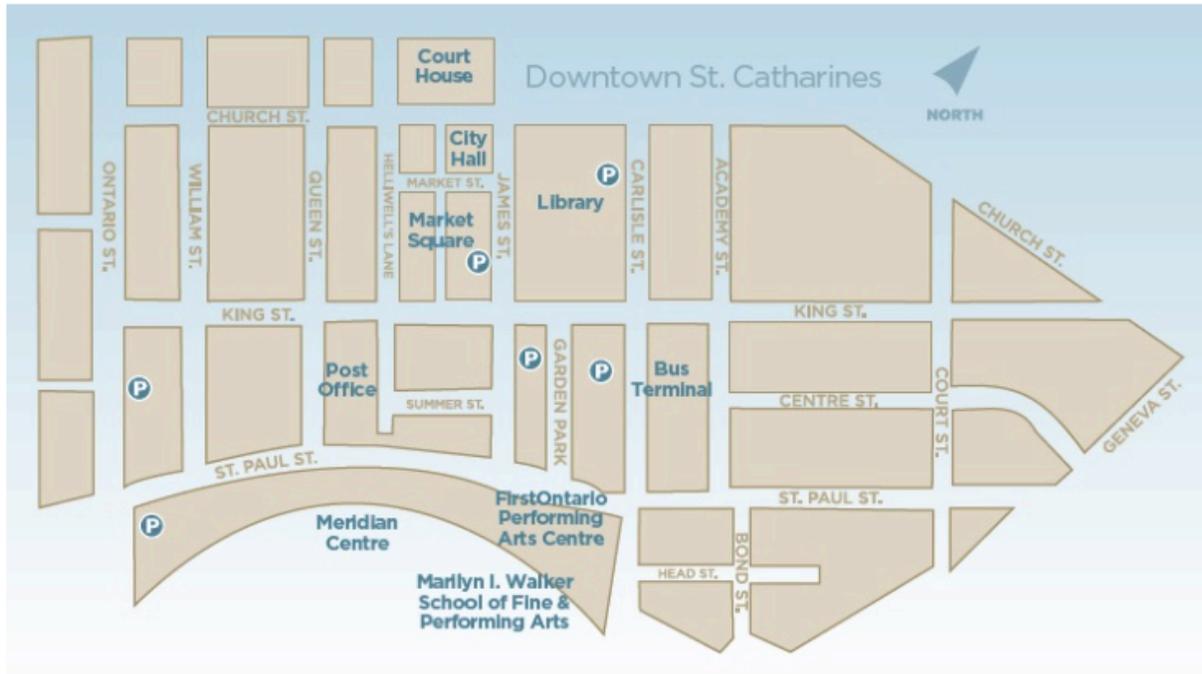


Figure 3.3: Map of Downtown St. Catharines (dotted black lines) and BIA (dotted red lines) (City of St. Catharines, 2014a)

## Map of the Downtown St. Catharines BIA



**FREE MUNICIPAL PARKING AFTER 6PM (MONDAY TO FRIDAY) AND ALL DAY SATURDAY AND SUNDAY — AT ALL P PLOTS/GARAGES AND ON-STREET METERS.** Parking charges may apply on evenings and weekends during some downtown events.

*Figure 3.4: Map of the Downtown St. Catharines BIA (mydowntown.ca, 2016)*

Like many cities in Ontario (e.g., Kingston, Peterborough, Kitchener, and Thunder Bay), St. Catharines, with a population of approximately 132,000 is classified it as a mid-sized city, also called “small” or “smaller” cities (Duxbury, 2012). With nearly half of Canadians living in mid-sized cities (Bain and McLean, 2012), studies taking place in mid-sized cities have the potential to be widely applicable, especially if other place-based characteristics align, such as blue-collar history, proximity to tourism areas and large cities, and presence of post-secondary institutions. Mid-sized cities provide a different landscape than larger urban centres due to lesser intensification, a smaller downtown area, smaller population, as well as less “specialization” and more “interdisciplinarity” often visible in

the physical landscape through more “multi-purpose” spaces and less purpose-built venues (Bain and McLean, 2012, 135, 139). Mid-sized cities also tend to be more accessible financially through cheaper rent and living costs (Lewis and Donald, 2010). With much scholarly focus on larger urban centres, as well as the imbalanced creative city competition over Richard Florida’s (2002) 3Ts of technology, talent and tolerance, it is important to illustrate how culture takes places in smaller cities.

Until 2015, downtown St. Catharines did not have any purpose-built cultural venues; many cultural events and creative practices took place in multi-purpose spaces open to a wide variety of uses, many of which are also known as “third places” (Oldenburg, 1999), places popular for social gathering and spontaneous interaction at the heart of the community. Among these cultural third places, Mahtay Café – located downtown since 2011 – is known by many locals, new and old, as the main and most active cultural hub and meeting spot for interaction, collaboration and performance. People of all ages and employment status (student, unemployed, labourer, service worker, professional, etc.) regularly enter and use this café. In this mid-sized city downtown area, there is not much competition or replication of shops and spaces, and most coffee shops are entirely commercial rather than acting as cultural providers, making this café unique and essential to cultural practices and makers, and thus an appropriate site for my research in St. Catharines.

Across the street from Mahtay Café are the cultural flagship buildings and megastructures recently developed as a result of cultural planning efforts in St. Catharines since the late 2000s. With the main street in downtown St. Catharines officially integrated into the Niagara Wine Route, the Meridian Centre opening in the Fall of 2014, and Brock

Arts Campus and First Ontario Performing Arts Centre the next Fall, St. Catharines downtown is undergoing a rapid physical and cultural transformation in its quest to attract investors, developers, businesses, tourists, new residents and artists. This transformation period marks an interesting time to observe the cultural landscape of this mid-sized post-industrial city and analyze how formal and informal culture are planned, where they take place, why there, and how and by whom it is participated in.

To develop further understanding of the population residing in downtown St. Catharines, I will refer to data from the 2001 Census, 2006 Census and the 2011 National Household Survey. Unfortunately, the 2011 National Household Survey data cannot be accurately compared with the Census data of previous years, so I use it here only to compare data within the 2011 statistics, rather than between 2011 and other years. The areas I will use to compare begin at the highest scale, the city of St. Catharines, which is also the Census Subdivision (3526053), then to the Census Tract (5390005.00) which covers the entire Downtown Area, and lastly, the Dissemination Area (35260384), which is the core downtown area, also known as the BIA. Statistics from the Census Tract (CT) and the Dissemination Area (DA) are very similar since they outline much of the same area, thus statements about the downtown can be drawn from both the CT and DA. First, according to the 2001 Census, 2006 Census and the 2011 National Household Survey, the majority of housing city-wide is “owned”, while the majority of housing downtown is “rented” (Table 3.1 and Figure 3.5). This demonstrates that the majority of the population living downtown has less investment wealth and stability than the majority of people residing in St. Catharines, as the majority of downtown residents are renters, not owners. The unemployment rates at each scale have increased in each succeeding data collection year,

and the unemployment rate is higher downtown than city- wide (Table 3.2 and Figure 3.6).

In addition to the downtown having the highest renter population in the city, the area also hosts a high unemployment rate.

Area	Data Year	Owned	Rented	% Rented
City of St. Catharines -	2001	36780	17025	31.6%
Census Subdivision	2006	37800	16925	30.9%
3526053	2011	38265	17155	31.0%
Downtown St. Catharines -	2001	350	1580	81.9%
Census Tract	2006	380	1445	79.4%
5390005.00	2011	395	1520	79.2%
Downtown St. Catharines BIA -	2001	60	335	85.0%
Dissemination Area	2006	55	295	84.3%
35260384	2011	75	340	81.9%

Table 3.1: Owned and Rented Housing in St. Catharines (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006, 2011)

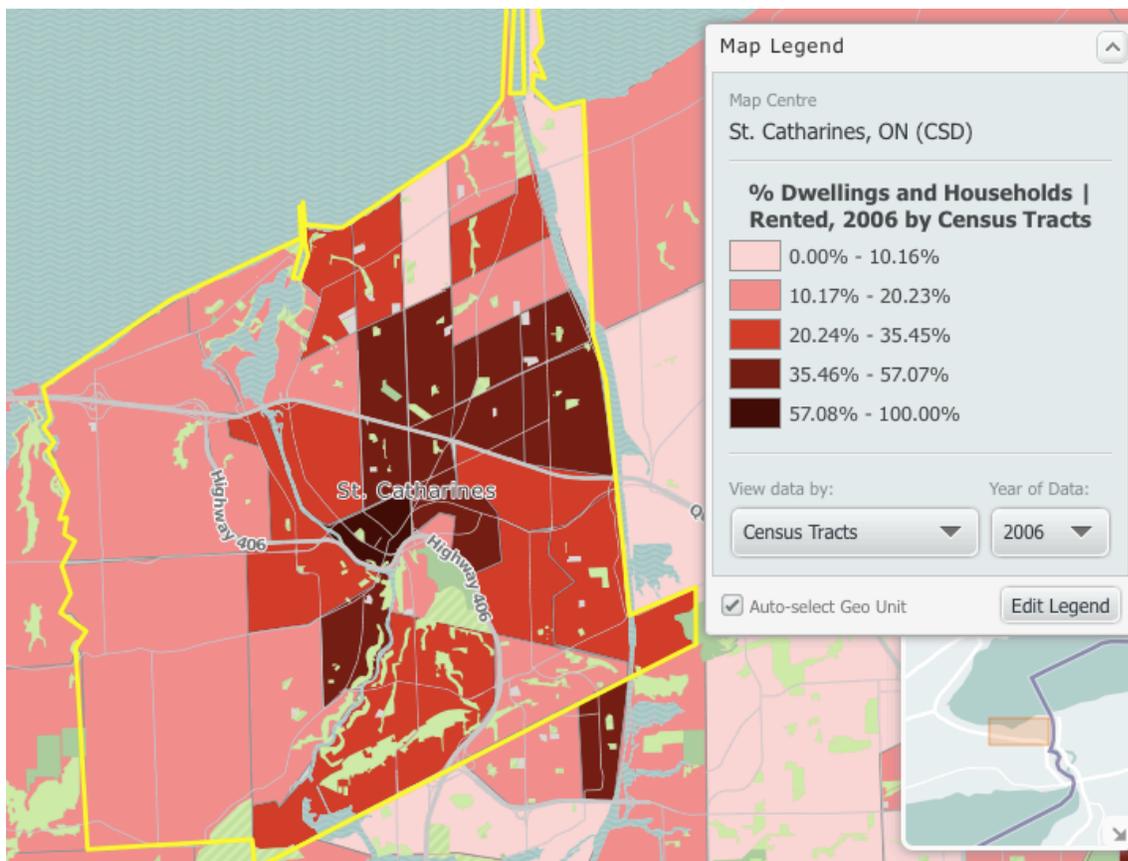


Figure 3.5: Map of St. Catharines % of Rented Dwellings by Census Tracts in 2006 – Downtown is darkest shade in centre (SimplyMap, 2016)

Unemployment Rate %	2001	2006	2011
City of St. Catharines - Census Subdivision 3526053	6.5	6.6	9.7
Downtown St. Catharines - Census Tract 5390005.00	6.4	7.5	11.7
Downtown St. Catharines BIA - Dissemination Area 35260384	5.6	9.4	10.8

Table 3.2: Unemployment Rate % in St. Catharines (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006, 2011)

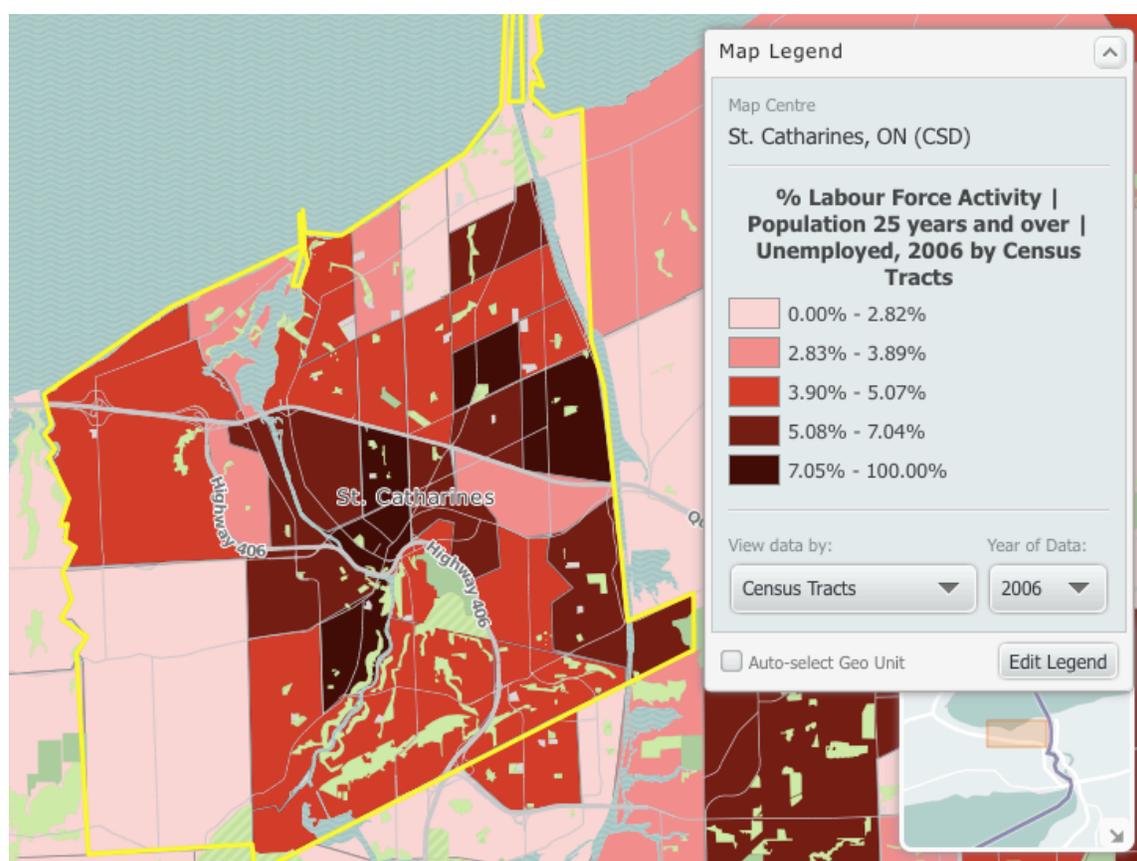


Figure 3.6: Unemployed % of Labour Force Activity in St. Catharines Census Tracts (SimplyMap, 2016)

### 3.3 Questioning Place: Developing the Research Questions

With much local hype around the cultural flagship developments in the media featuring ecstatic local residents, business owners and city officials, and the dialogue celebrating art

and culture in St. Catharines, this research seeks to uncover the less-publicized and documented accounts and experiences of local residents who participate in cultural practices prior to and regardless of recent flagship developments. Furthermore, this research questions where people engage in informal cultural practices, what their experiences are of these informal and formal cultural places, and what their opinions are of the local cultural landscape. In conjunction, the research seeks to review and critique the practices and goals of cultural planning and culture-led urban redevelopment and its associated undemocratic and exclusionary process and operation. By bringing these different perspectives together, this research will argue for the importance of third places and their associated informal cultural practices as valuable, yet under-appreciated, cultural infrastructure in mid-sized cities in the wake of formal cultural planning, branding, and megastructure development. My three research questions linking the latter ideas together are as follows: 1) Within the mid-sized city context, how do third places and artists engage in exchanges of support for one another? 2) What role do third places play in developing arts and culture in a mid-sized city? 3) How, if at all, do third places fit into the cultural planning and developmental direction of the municipality?

### **3.4 The Art of Research Design**

In order to answer these questions and to gain insight into the daily activities and interactions, personal narratives, and project plans in downtown St. Catharines, it was essential to apply an ethnographic approach to research that combined participant observation with semi-structured interviews, as well as discourse analysis of planning documents. Performing ethnographic research allows discovery of the richness, depth

complexity, and multi-faceted nature of social and cultural life through its holistic and open-ended framework (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002). Ethnography provides tools to gather data on actions, behaviours, stories, opinions, feelings, and experiences from the local residents, artists, employees and public officials, as well as provide an opportunity for me as the researcher to be involved in and experience the place-based interactions. Although it may be advantageous to be covert while observing as to not influence people's behaviours, Thrift (2000) calls for researchers to be "observant participants". The experience and associated learning provides the researcher with more data about the spatial and social happenings. With this in mind, I spent isolated time, blending in with the café life, quietly observing daily movements, while also on other occasions, I became involved in café conversations and events, adjusting my identity from performer to audience member to conversationalist. Through first-hand observation the ways in which the built environment produces and is produced by social practices becomes visible (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002). Upon watching the way the space is used, it becomes evident what a space encourages, allows for, or is open to, and the ways in which the users of the space continually shape it to meet their needs and desires. Guiding observation with question of what, when, where, who and how create the potential for retrieval of basic data about the social situations at hand (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002). To help defend against a common critique of qualitative measures – subjectivity – I triangulated and tested the reliability of my data. I have compared verbal data collected from the interview (what the interviewee says) with behavioural and visual data from observation (what do I see, and what do they do), as well as with the third form of data gathered through my experiences as an observant participant (what do I feel and what was I able to do).

Although observation and participation at the site of research depend mostly on the will and ability of the researcher, completing the interview portion comes with obvious external obstacles. According to McCracken (1988,10) respondents lead “hectic” and “privacy-centred lives”, and despite potential interest, few have the time to spare, and others may avoid the presumed “straightjacket of standardized questions” (Zuckerman, 1972, 167). In the case of my research project, this is true to an extent, as some were not interested in participating and others too busy for me to inquire. People are not choosing to come to the café for an interview, and employees often arrive on time for their shift and leave their workplace immediately following to either another third place or home, disinterested in being tied into more time in which they must serve external needs. However, contradictory to the expectation of limited time, all of the respondents in my fieldwork went over 15 minutes (well over 20 minutes for most) after signing an agreement that informed them of an expected 15-20 minute interview. Although Hoggart, Lees and Davies (2002, 206) argue that certain people have “little time to spare”, the range of respondents in my interviews from people living off welfare, art, public and private employment finances, with a variety of job, personal and household responsibilities, all found the time – more time than expected – to take part in the research. A likely reason for this could be that respondents found the research to be of interest and worthwhile.

The use of in-depth individual interviews in human geography are “too numerous to recount” and have become popular for their ability to “unravel complicated relationships” or “slowly evolving events” (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002, 206). Simply put, “if you want to know something about people’s activities, the best way of finding out is to ask them” (Brenner et al., 1985, 2), no different than how we learn through daily conversation. The

ordinariness and openness of interviews that act as conversations, allow for expansion outside of question-based confines leading to the potential for the researcher to learn something unrelated but applicable to any hypotheses or ideas they may have around the issue at focus. According to Hoggart, Lees and Davies (2002, 236), this flexibility can be achieved through a “loose guide approach” that allows more scope for learning about and addressing issues, and is based around the unexpected specifics of the respondent’s experiences and replies, therefore forming the conversation in a more “relevant” direction for the respondent and the research. My interview questions (Appendix A) are broad and general enough to allow for expansion and the ability for the respondent to go in their chosen direction with their response, and I ensured each respondent at the beginning of the interview that the interview is as open-ended as they choose to take it.

The scholarly research on interviews demonstrates that to help foster rapport with the interviewees, the place selected for the interview should preferably be relaxed and familiar (Holbrook and Jackson 1996), safe and quiet, and as formal or informal as the researcher desires the responses to be (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002). My interviews primarily took place in Mahtay Café where people regularly attend for its homeliness, comfort, familiarity, and quiet-enough work environment. There is a second, less busy room called the ‘Community Room’ connected to the main room of the café which is quieter and for some, more optimal for the privacy of interviews, which is where many of my interviews took place based on interviewee discretion. Third places, highlighted for their characteristic informal social interaction, allowed initial meeting and resulting conversation to unfold organically. Other interviews occurred outside of Mahtay Café in

other local third places, a café and a bar, with similar effects, as well as in the private offices of public employees, which are undoubtedly familiar to them, but arguably more formal.

A discourse analysis of planning documents adds written information to the wealth of direct contact information acquired through interview and observation. The discourse analysis is useful because it is “non-reactive” data collection, meaning that it is “not influenced by the fact that it will be used in research” (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002, 125). The cultural planning documents I analyzed did not change to hide or exaggerate information with the knowledge that I would be analyzing and critiquing it. Secondly, discourse analysis of planning documents allows this research to explore “elongated time periods” to examine “trends and the periodicity of events” (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002, 125). Discourse analysis enables the researcher to analyze plans over a period of time, and according to Hoggart, Lees and Davies (2002, 159), it is important to emphasize the “intertextuality” between texts to show how they exist as a whole and how they are influenced by one another, which is especially the case with “government documents”. I analyze the cultural planning documents separately to extract each documents specific focus and then together, to show the intertextuality of the documents collaboratively working towards a unified goal. Contributing to a hypothesis of the document’s goal is the need to “discover as much as possible about the condition under which the text was produced”, and once the “author’s situation and intentions” are discovered, an interpretation of the document can be further informed (Hoggart, Lees and Davies, 2002, 159). Beginning the discourse analysis of each planning document with an analysis of the authors provides an understanding of the identity and position at the root of the discourse.

### **3.5 Gathering and Documentation: Methods of Data Collection**

Throughout late 2015 and early 2016, I formally engaged in my fieldwork, beginning at Mahtay Café where I spent periods of 2-6 hours on 18 days engaging in observation, participation and interviews. After not being in my hometown of St. Catharines for a few months, it took some time before I was able to sit down in the café by myself without local friends and acquaintances engaging in conversation and catch-up. The familiarity I have with the people in this small downtown provided benefits and challenges to the efficiency of my fieldwork. After this very social opening period – providing much observation in itself of the social and community qualities present within this café – my quiet and covert observation began. I drew a sketch representing a blueprint of the café, with lines all throughout – which soon become visually noisy – to represent people’s movement throughout the café upon entrance (Figure 3.7). To add to this movement, I placed symbols (C for conversation, a mug for drinking coffee/tea, an apple for computer use, a pencil for writing/drawing, music notes for music, and a fork for eating) beside the end of the arrow to illustrate people’s activities once they settled in a position. I used this tool for 1-hour periods twice during the day (one weekday and one weekend day) and twice in the evening (one weekday and one weekend evening). Along with this, my journal was always open for me to write down common and notable interactions, and comments I overheard related to the café and local culture throughout the many days in the café. I also took my observation across the street to the Performing Arts Centre (PAC), once during the daytime and the second time for an evening performance.

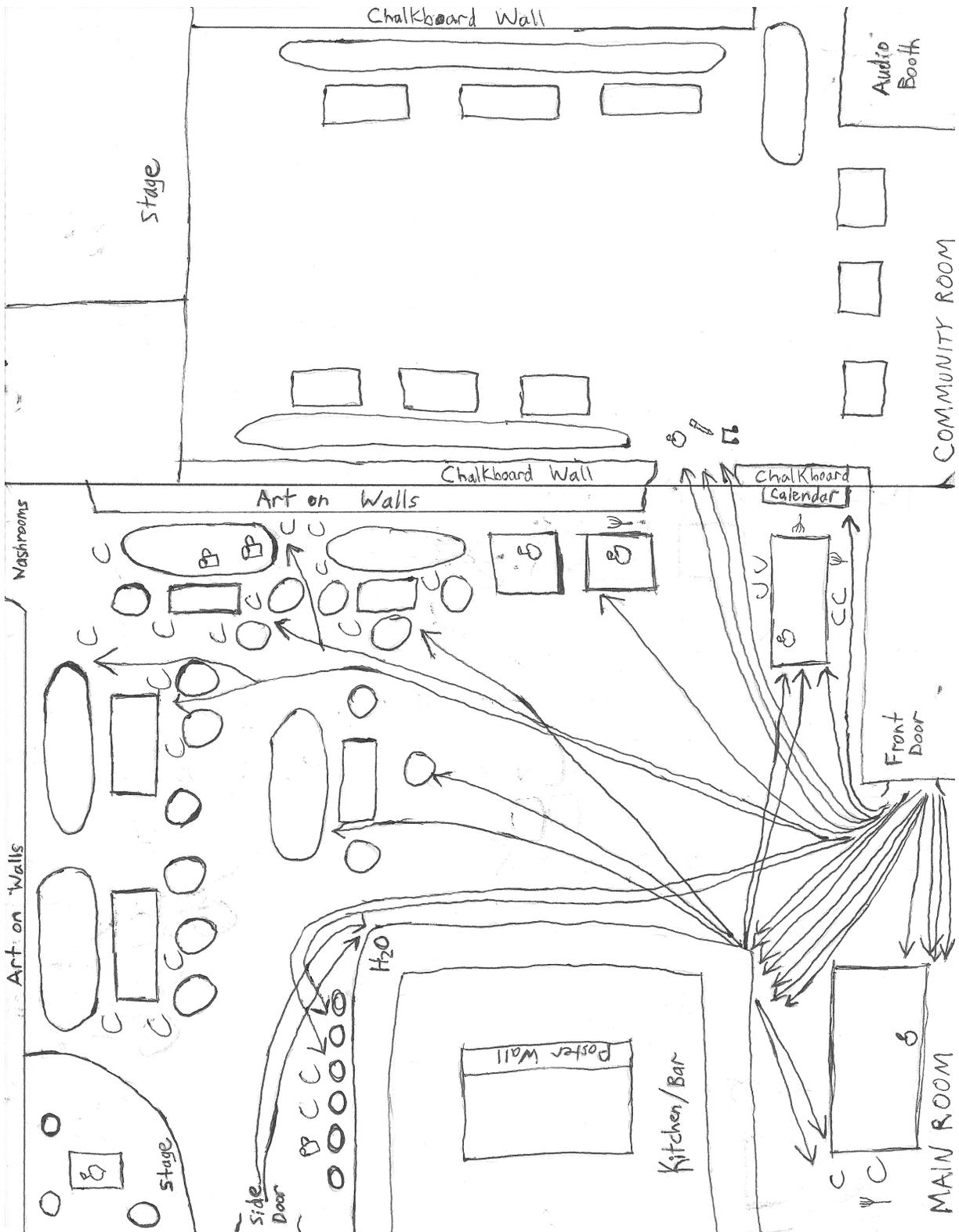


Figure 3.7: Blueprint Sketch of Mahtay Café with arrows of pathways and symbols of activity (Nicolaidis, 2015)

As mentioned, most of my interviews took place in Mahtay Café. Other than the interviews with five City of St. Catharines employees (Cultural Planning Supervisor, Manager of Programs and Cultural Services, City Councillor, Executive Director of St. Catharines Downtown Association/BIA, Executive Director of Performing Arts Centre) who were contacted by and selected location over email, all other interviewees (owner, employees, artists, café users) were ‘recruited’ in Mahtay Café. Four of the City of St. Catharines staff invited me to interview in their office rooms, while coincidentally, the fifth offered to meet at Mahtay Café. One of the two café employees elected to take the interview outside of Mahtay Café to a local pub, because as previously noted, many workers want to leave their work environment upon completion of their shift since they spend the bulk of their week in the building. Lastly, one of the artists I interviewed decided it was easiest if the interview took place in their home, while another café user elected a different local café to fit the interview in with prior arrangements. While in Mahtay Café, some interviews took place in the main room amongst the many surrounding activities and interactions, while other interviews took place in the ‘Community Room’, a room that is often emptier and quieter. All interviews began with the interviewee reading and signing the overview and ethics agreement forms. Upon agreement, I used two devices to record the audio of the interviews, while I followed along by completing written documentation of notable points in my journal. All interviewees agreed to this process.

Outside of the in-person information collection, I focused on finding the extent of cultural economic planning documents that lead to the new cultural development occurring in downtown St. Catharines. The first document *Downtown Creative Cluster Master Plan (DCCMP)* published in 2008 is the earliest document discussing current cultural

development and thus the first document I analyze, followed by the subsequent *Garden City Plan 2014* and *Inspire: Culture Plan 2020*, the most recent cultural planning document published in late 2014. To analyze these documents, I read through each of them individually, highlighting and extracting the main themes, aware of the chosen headings and sections. Next I analyzed these documents as a whole, as they are each a piece in the wider vision and implementation of the cultural economy in St. Catharines. The main themes present across documents created the main themes that create my subheadings in the subsequent chapter where I discuss my findings of cultural planning in St. Catharines. I then went back through the documents cutting and pasting highlighted information into each main theme. Additional analysis of these planning documents sought to discover and identify the authors of these documents to better understand objectives and influence. Much of the material in these planning documents was explicit about its objective, so I did not have to theorize deeper to infer information or fill in any holes.

### **3.6 Blending In: An Informal Process of Recruitment and Sampling**

In order to recruit potential interviewees in the café in a manner that would not disturb the natural life and activities in the café, I elected to be present in the café and engage in normal conversations with people nearby. One of two situations occurred that allowed me to bring up my research and ask if the person was interested in participating: 1) the person I was talking to would eventually ask what I was up to in that moment or in this period of my life, or 2) a person would say something in a conversation with me or nearby that related to my research, and I would chime in noting the connection to my research project. Continuously engaging in the places and activities that are the focus of this research project

allowed for interviews to be found quite efficiently. This process did not come without potential respondents turning down interviews, being too busy for me to engage with, or kind ways of saying no such as “maybe later” or “I have to leave soon”, but this was expected. This process happened quite naturally, and resulted in a sample population of café users/artists (Table 3.4) composed of 4 females and 8 males. Of these 12 people, 2 were non-white, which corresponds to the “10%” of St. Catharines’ total population identified as a “visible minority” in the census (Statistics Canada, 2007). This sample also spans age ranges from 20s to 60s. Exact income ranges of this sample are unclear, however it is reliable to estimate that most, if not all interviewees are part of a low income category considering no interviewees are homeowners, many collect government subsidies including welfare, disability and unemployment, and others make precarious wages off of their artwork. Additionally, 10 of the 12 interviewees stated they live in downtown St. Catharines, while 1 interviewee does not, and another was unclear about area of inhabitation within St. Catharines. Of the 10 interviewees living in downtown St. Catharines, 3 stated they do not have a permanent place of residence.

Age Range	Gender	Visible Minority
20s - 4	Female - 4	Visible Minority - 2
30s - 5	Male - 8	Non-Visible Minority - 10
40s - 0		
50s - 1		
60s - 2		

*Table 3.3: Sample Population of Café Users*

When proposing this research, my goal was to interview a small sample of 12 people, composed of 3 professional artists/cultural workers, 3 semi-professional artists/cultural workers, 3 non-professional artists/cultural workers, as categorized and defined by St. Catharines’ *Culture Plan 2020*, as well as include 3 non-artists. However,

these isolated categories were met with resistance from many of the interviewees, so I have withheld this categorization from acting as one of the ways to display the sample population. What is certain, is that within the sample there is a diverse range of art styles, art compensation, and time spent focused on art. I will further address the resistance and feedback to this categorization in the upcoming section, *A Critique of Cultural Planning*. Outside of the 12-person sample are the interviews with the café owner, 2 café employees, and 5 City of St. Catharines employees who are associated with municipal cultural planning, programs, services and development.

Upon receiving ethics approval, I messaged 10 City of St. Catharines employees who I became familiar with after noting their names when searching through various planning documents, city council meeting minutes and approved project documents related to culture in St. Catharines. I will note that searching for a list of current City of St. Catharines employees and their up-to-date email addresses was hardly navigable on the City's website or through various Google searches. In the end, I received 5 interview confirmations (the number I planned for), 1 decline, and 4 no responses. It is unknown whether or not the 'no responses' were out of disinterest, limited time, an email account that is no longer used, or an employee that has moved on. The City of St. Catharines employees that did invite an interview were very welcoming, accommodating and provided a wealth of information that I could not have discovered elsewhere, and even amongst their busy schedules, they conversed for 30 minutes to over an hour. There was only one difficulty in communicating with City of St. Catharines' employees, which came after my main fieldwork time as I was seeking information on the debt burden and payment plan of the performing arts centre. I first went to City Hall and told them what I was looking for. The staff at City Hall said they

did not have that public information, but told me to walk over to the St. Catharines Enterprise Centre, the location for the City's Economic Development and Tourism department, to gather this info. I arrived at this centre only to hear that they did not have this information. I asked if it was online, and they said 'no', but told me I should go over to the Performing Arts Centre (PAC) to speak with the Executive Director to find this information. I then walked over to the PAC, asked to speak with the Director, one of my previous interviewees, and was told that he is always busy and that I would only be able to see him if we had planned a meeting. I emailed him that day with my question and asked if he would prefer to respond by email or setup a meeting. I have yet to hear back from him. The following section will further discuss notable experience in the field.

### **3.7 The Challenges of Inclusion and Exclusion: Notable Experiences In The Field**

The interview period brought other surprises that quite accurately depicted the spontaneity, connectedness and collaboration characteristic of cultural third places. As I reached for the record button for my first interview in Mahtay Café, a local artist greeted and inquired about the interviewee's recent artwork. The three of us had a stimulating conversation, the interviewee displayed an artwork collection, and the local artist became fascinated with the work, leading to an unexpected purchase. The three of us learned about one another, became interested in each other's work, and this eventually led to further social gatherings, exchanges, and sharing of ideas between us in the café. In fact, this artist ended up interested in this research project and agreed to be interviewed. Once the first interview was finally underway, another artist walked into the room, picked up the café's guitar that sits out on stage, and began creating musical accompaniment. Another person

soon joined in, behaving as if they were not familiar, yet collaborating as if they were.

These surprises illustrated the possibilities of collaboration, creativity and play within the space, and while I moved to the Community Room portion of the café seeking the scholarly-recommended private and quiet space desirable for an interview, I was soon reminded of the social and cultural life of the café and the immersion of my fieldwork within a space of unplanned interactions.

With continuous unplanned and planned happenings occurring within the café, participation in events and conversations was very accessible. From performing and participating as an audience member in open mics and poetry slams, to creating art on the chalk wall and food drive bins, to joining conversation café and environmental activist talks and meetings, I experienced the creations and collaborations of many individuals and groups who regularly use and create this café. While experiencing and using the café in these many ways, I believe it is important and interesting to note that I was never once asked - nor felt the external expectation - to purchase any goods from the café.

While at the café I did find it challenging to be focused on my research, specifically my observations, as I know many people who spend time or work at the café, which led to many conversations and quick social interjections through the fieldwork period. Although these connections may have taken time away from my focus at times, they provided a wealth of insider experience into the everyday activities within the café as well as increased connection to the local arts landscape, community and dialogue, which I believe all benefit my knowledge of this research. In fact, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 1) encourage researchers using ethnography to collect “whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research”.

After spending many fieldwork hours at the café, I decided I would walk across the street to see inside – and if possible, covertly observe – the new performing arts centre for the first time, as it was just a month open. Within 30 seconds of walking into the main lobby and reading a poster on the wall, a security guard approached me saying “Can I help you?”, then proceeded to tell me the rest of the building is off limits. Feeling unwelcome, I decided to leave and return the next day. I walked through the main lobby toward the stairs to go see the rest of the building – and hopefully the theatres, if the doors were not locked – but as I approached the stairs, the security guard said, “no you can’t go beyond here, it is a liability for you to do that”. I asked the security guard if there are any upcoming tours I could join, which was also declined. Finally, I asked how I would be able to see the space since I’m an interested St. Catharines resident and artist, in which the security guard responded by informing me that I “cannot go beyond this point unless I have tickets”. The following day, I returned, but this time to the box office, but heard the same response, even though I told them I was interested in seeing the space to consider renting it. I was given an email of an employee who I could contact to inquire about renting, and that employee would potentially allow me access to parts of the building outside of the bare lobby. These fieldwork experiences, intriguing stories in themselves, also illuminate the social nature of the cultural spaces and the types of interactions that occur within them. In a process of gathering visual data about these spaces, these experiences also provided first-hand information about accessibility and social possibilities in these spaces.

Altogether this chapter illustrates the setting, places, actors and practices that will be discussed at a much deeper level and greater breadth in the following two body chapters. The findings discovered through these research methods and time in the field

help form the subsequent discussion of cultural planning at varying scales in downtown St. Catharines. This chapter hints to the differing composition of places of culture happenings and the formal and informal nature of the fieldwork findings that will be elaborated on through the remainder of this thesis. Through interviews, participant observation and discourse analysis, the following chapters are equipped with grounded multi-method research to form a complete discussion in partner with the theories and examples provided in the preceding literature review.

## CHAPTER 4: CULTURAL PLANNING IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF ST. CATHARINES

*The art centre opens in August, I think.  
Not that I'll ever be able to afford to go to it.*

*None of my friends will be able to rent it  
to even put on a ten minute play,  
or have any kind of show in it.*

*The Courthouse theatre will close after,  
and local productions will go with it –  
they'll have to book Michael Bubl   
or a Jimmy Buffet tribute  
(if not Jimmy fucking Buffet)  
and corporate workshops  
to keep the place open,*

*And it'll be even harder  
to find a parking spot  
Just to have a drink on a Friday afternoon.*

*Thirty: Poems about St. Catharines (more or less) by James Millhaven, 2015*

With change on the rise in St. Catharines in the form of new state-of-the-art cultural buildings, the increased advertisement of art and culture, renewed streetscapes, and growing foot traffic, an exploration and analysis of the driving force at the foundation of this change explains how this process began and the direction in which it continues. This chapter begins with an overview of cultural planning documents for the City of St. Catharines from its first initiation of plans to encourage growth and vitality published in 2008 up to the most recent cultural document published in 2014 in order to reveal the root imagination and blueprint that lead to the now-implemented cultural developments. From this policy and planning base, key analytic themes are drawn out and explored in critical dialogue with findings from interviews with municipal cultural representatives in St.

Catharines. The goal of this chapter is to develop a critique of the practice of cultural planning in general, but also to critique its use in St. Catharines. The chapter argues that governments undertake cultural planning primarily for economic development and gentrification purposes, rather than for purposes of public participation and local cultural expression, thus privileging middle class and creative class interests over the interests of current inhabitants.

Since the mid-2000s the City of St. Catharines has been increasingly engaged in cultural planning, with contributions from municipal departments of Economic Development and Tourism and Recreation and Community, as well as a wealth of external expertise from various global planning firms with bases in major cities such as Toronto. Upper-tier governments have also expedited St. Catharines' cultural ambitions through funding and mandating growth and intensification. Pressure from upper-tier government, local government, and select businesses and residents to address economic and built fabric expressions of urban decline in St. Catharines through downtown revitalization initiatives has fostered reliance upon cultural planning. To change the look, feel, life, identity and economy of St. Catharines, many civic leaders and residents maintain that it is necessary to depart from the city's past and instead engage its future as a cultural centre. As an extensive body of scholarly literature on the cultural economy and cultural policy, particularly of Floridian tradition, has shown, culture can beautify, re-brand, create vitality, and attract people, traffic, consumption, investment and development. Many civic leaders in St. Catharines see culture as the answer to the city's, and more specifically, the downtown's decline.

The *Downtown Creative Cluster Master Plan (DCCMP)*, a “response” to the 2006 *Provincial Places to Grow Act*, was the first official planning and policy expression of “renewed cultural interest” in downtown St. Catharines. Published in 2008, the DCCMP was a multi-consultant-authored document that incorporated input from the municipal departments of Economic Development and Tourism, Planning, Recreation and Community Services, and Transportation, as well as the St. Catharines Downtown Association, and Brock University. The DCCMP formed a “fundamental component” of the subsequent cultural planning document entitled *The Garden City Plan*, first published by the Corporation of the City of St. Catharines in 2010 and since revised in 2014, illustrating the city’s land use and physical development plans and its recognition of cultural vitality and identity as part of its sustainable future. The third and most recent document of cultural interest is *Inspire St. Catharines: Culture Plan 2020* facilitated by Lord Cultural Resources in partnership with staff and volunteers at the City of St. Catharines. Released in the fall of 2014, this document illustrates up-to-date “city priorities” themed as “Downtown Revitalization”, “St. Catharines Performing Arts Centre”, “The Meridian Centre”, and “Placemaking in St. Catharines”.

Together, these planning documents focus on cumulative goals of growth, intensification and revitalization, using culture as the economic engine to meet these goals. In order to grow, the plans outline the need to draw investors, developers, consumers, visitors, tourists, doctors, residents and “creatives” to the area. However, in order to attract people and investment, the urban planners and policymakers maintain that the downtown area must also appear safe, vibrant and attractive. Plans to construct two-way roads, identify entrance gates, increase sidewalk lighting, increase parking, façade improvements,

and a re-routing of the Niagara Wine Route have and continue to be implemented as a result of the all-encompassing cultural plan. These streetscape improvements create a seemingly physically ‘cleaner’ and more vibrant environment leading to the proposed, and recently constructed and operating, cultural cornerstones, the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre (PAC), the Meridian Centre, and the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts (SFPA). These three cultural flagship buildings are the most anticipated, planned, and popularly celebrated in terms of cultural infrastructure in St. Catharines, as well as being the largest, most expensive, and most state-of-the-art venues in downtown St. Catharines. The Meridian Centre began operation in Fall 2014, followed by the SFPA in September 2015, and the PAC in November 2015. The approximate cost of \$160 million dollars (City of St. Catharines, 2014b) for the construction of these three buildings has been funded largely by local government and upper-tier government, with corporate, institutional (e.g., Brock University) and community donors funding the relatively small remainder of the cost, resulting in the return benefits such as naming, advertising and membership rights.

#### **4.2 A Bird’s Eye View of Cultural Planning**

The influence from outside and above on cultural planning in St. Catharines is clearly visible in all three planning documents. Each document highlights the selection of the City of St. Catharines and its downtown core as an Urban Growth Centre (UGC) by the Province of Ontario; the only city chosen in the Niagara Region (City of St. Catharines, 2008: 2014a: 2014b). According to St. Catharines’ Cultural Planning Supervisor (November 24, 2015), “because of this provincial recognition, it’s our job to become more urban and that requires

a full engagement of our cultural assets because they are what are going to attract the knowledge-based economy”. This provincial designation requires the municipality to take action toward mandated growth through intensification and development of its infrastructure and population. More specifically, but still vague, the Province of Ontario designates a more pronounced relationship between economy, place and culture in St. Catharines (City of St. Catharines, 2014b). In addition the *Garden City Plan* (City of St. Catharines, 2014a) more strictly states the requirement that municipal land use plans shall “conform”, “not conflict”, “be consistent with”, and “in support of” provincial growth and intensification strategy policies. There is a need to “recognize and reinforce the role of downtown” and ensure that it “project a sense of vitality, beauty and dynamism” with the intention that it become a “catalyst area and focus for investment” (City of St. Catharines 2014a, 53). The influence from upper-tier government by way of designation and project funding, illustrates the transfer of policy (mostly economic) from one geographic scale, Ontario, to another, St. Catharines.

The provincial designation as a “Place to Grow” and its permeating policy created the need to develop municipal plans, which lead to the influence and addition of more extra-local policymaker groups: cultural planning experts and urban design consultants. For example, the DCCMP was completed by an inter-disciplinary team of the following consultants hired by the City of St. Catharines: Joseph Bogdan Associates Inc. (Architects/Urban Design Consultants), Sorenson Gravely Lowes Planning Associates Inc. (Planning, Policy Review and Implementation), Hemson Consulting Limited (Economic Development, Growth Potential and Real Estate), Dillon Consulting Limited (Transportation, Parking and Municipal Services Infrastructure), ENVision-The Hough

Group (Pedestrian and Open Space System), and George Friedman (Architect - Performing Arts and Academic Facilities Consultation). Each of these consultant firms are located in Toronto, and in addition to projects in Toronto and other large Canadian cities, many of these firms have completed projects globally, for example: Joseph Bogdan (USA, China, UAE and Europe), Sorenson Gravelly Lowes (USA, China, Russia, Iceland, Spain Mexico), Dillon (Asia, South America, Africa, Europe and Central America/Caribbean), and George Friedman (USA). Similarly, *Inspire: Culture Plan 2020* was facilitated by *Lord Cultural Resources*, another global cultural planning firm with headquarters in Toronto, as well as New York City, Paris, Mumbai and Beijing. The consultants, and creators of these plans, have global reach and absorb policies on this scale, while also existing in and specializing in large city planning.

Unfortunately, when urban planning occurs from outside and above the street or human level, it ignores the lives of the individuals using the space, in favour of the state-of-the-art design and geometric perfection on paper. Gehl (2010, 196) argues that modernist planning of cities from the upper scales – city and development – focus on “buildings rather than holism and city space”, diminishing the human landscape. Coincidentally, he also states that photographs of proud civic leaders standing with the development models (Figure 4.1) “illustrate the method and the problem” (Gehl, 2010, 196). This picture is focused on politician achievements, flagship building prominence, and the entrepreneurial, self-promoting city, not urban inhabitants or the human landscape. This type of planning is rooted in neoliberal governance defined by the restructuring and promotion of policies of deregulation and shrinking social services, all the while actively favouring privatization and corporations (Peck, 2005). Its praise of a market-oriented society ignores the need for the

redistribution of wealth, resources, and services. As a result of neoliberal governance, “local governments increasingly behave like businesses in their attempt to attract economic development and balance the books” (Knox and Mayer, 2012, 144). Furthermore, neoliberal policies encouraging development are arguably used for the purpose of increasing the value of corporate and wealthy individuals’ investments (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Since neoliberal governance is characterized by entrepreneurialism, its strategies are implemented primarily for the purpose of growth, development and investment. Considering the City of St. Catharines and its downtown were provincially selected as a ‘Places to Grow’, requiring them to intensify, develop and grow, neoliberal governance strategies are being executed by the province on the city, and later by the city as it takes on its designation and future objectives.



*Figure 4.1: St. Catharines’ Member of Provincial Parliament, Mayor and Member of Parliament standing with a model of the future Performing Arts Centre at a ceremony to celebrate the beginning of the cement pouring. Sign reads: “Hello Excitement, Hello Culture, Hello Renaissance. Where Niagara Takes Centre Stage – The New Performing Arts Centre. (Infrastructure Canada, 2013)*

Another neoliberal governance process accentuating the exclusion of current inhabitants is the dominance of expert teams at the policy table making decisions on cultural funding without the input of locals contributing to a democratic policy practice. Dollar-driven experts adopt quick-fix policy that is easy to implement and does not require much change of the current economic and social landscape and structure (McCann, 2011). According to Peck (2005, 740-741), these creative policies and strategies “work quietly with the grain of extant neoliberal development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place marketing”. Furthermore, these policies are drawn out by an elite network of municipal staff, elected officials and the business community, often omitting residents of the city in the process (Peck, 2005). Cultural planning for the people and by the people would look much different and be of greater use value, rather than exchange value, to the current inhabitants.

An additional source of influence external to the human landscape in St. Catharines is cultural planning expert Richard Florida who is mentioned and referenced in St. Catharines’ cultural plans. The DCCMP formally recognizes his theories and contributions to the mobile creative hype, while *Culture Plan 2020* uses discourse clearly influenced by Florida’s popular language, without mentioning the author. Civic leaders in St. Catharines appear drawn to Florida’s ideas about culture-led redevelopment because like the “snake oil he peddles” (Peck, 2005), this city has a declining manufacturing base and growing post-secondary institutions. The City of St. Catharines believes it can convert its economy from an industrial one into a post-industrial creative one, and understands the importance of attracting the creative class. Furthermore, the DCCMP (City of St. Catharines, 2008) cites Florida’s book, *Cities and The Creative Class*, which concludes that ‘regional

competitiveness' is based on a place's ability to attract 'high-skilled people' (human capital), and the 'attraction' of this talent is more important than 'retaining' it. *Culture Plan 2020* (City of St. Catharines, 2014b) continues this municipal celebration of the creative class by restating the need to attract workers in this type of economy, while emphasizing that in order to attract them, the city needs to replace its many "geographies of nowhere" – "bemoaned" by the "creative class" - with an environment that is "beautiful", "distinct", and "authentic".

In the transition from an industrial, manufacturing-based economy to a post-industrial economy, culture and creativity have been positioned centre stage both as a transformative agent but also as a new potentially profitable economic sector. In the opening paragraph of the *Culture Plan 2020* (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 5) it directly states that "St. Catharines is in economic transition and its cultural diversity, resources and opportunities are poised to contribute to the re-emergence of St. Catharines as a thriving, vital community." According to St. Catharines Cultural Planning Supervisor (November 24, 2015),

the creative economy is part of our realities, and part of everybody's day-to-day understanding of who we are, so that language needs to be in our cultural plan...If we don't see the connection between creating a talent base and entrepreneurialism for our commercial sector, we are going to lose ground in the global economy because other people get it. Other communities, other cities fundamentally understand the role that culture plays in building an authentic urban environment.

This quotation clearly conveys that cultural investment and creative attraction are perceived by planners and policymakers as fundamental to the economic renewal and

future of St. Catharines. “As we try to change from an industrial community to creative enterprise, the creative economy is all about having that base that attracts those businesses” (St. Catharines City Councillor, December 1, 2015). The dominant cultural planning and policy narrative in St. Catharines is to strategically invest in its creative symbolic economy to attract an external creative class with all of its perceived cultural entrepreneurial spin-offs.

The City of St. Catharines desires this new ‘community’, the creative class, because they are the apparent ‘saviours’ of the local economy. Cities around the globe are enticed and persuaded by Richard Florida’s formulaic and malleable creativity strategies, and will try to meet the requirements that Florida lays out. The City of St. Catharines, pressured to grow, looks to the most popular and widely mobile economic strategy, Florida’s creative city strategy, and they follow it step-by-step to reach its promised growth. Florida (2002) states the need to attract the creative class through cultural investment and quality of life promotion, and this class will bring increased economic development with them. The City of St. Catharines, like Florida, applies great value and focus on an imagined external population that can bring renewed investment to the city. Civic leaders seem more focused on what we can do for outsiders than on what we can do for insiders – local St. Catharines residents. Not only do his ideas overlook the local population, they also discount the majority of workers; workers who are not part of the creative class. These creative policies ignore the importance of a wide-variety of service workers and manual labourers, who in all cities make up the majority, and most certainly do in St. Catharines. Such privileging of certain types of classes, skills, employment sectors, and human beings over others in cultural planning and development increases the inequalities already present in the city

rather than seeking to combat them. Furthermore, given that these creative policies are widely mobile and implemented, St. Catharines is placing its finances and efforts on an increasingly elusive resource in a bidding war amongst a growing number of desperate, impressionable cities across the province, country, and globe (Lees 2006; Wiatt and Gordon, 2009).

The influence of other spatial scales can readily be seen in the citations within the City of St. Catharines cultural documents. For example, in the DCCMP, the City of St. Catharines references cultural plans in Vancouver and Calgary to display legitimacy and current trends, while the *Culture Plan 2020* draws on the following documents as borrowed examples and expert advice: City of Toronto Creative City Planning, Ryerson University Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity (study focuses on Toronto and Vancouver), Peterborough Municipal Cultural Plan, Municipal Cultural Investment in the City of Waterloo, Ontario Arts Study, Artists in Large Ontario Cities, Canadian Urban Institute for Municipal Cultural Planning (Guide for Municipalities), and Northumbria University (study commissioned by the European Commission). These referenced documents from municipalities, institutions and organizations serve as a pool of policy and project examples that can be borrowed and used as support for strategies of cultural development. As a St. Catharines City Councillor repeatedly emphasized: “We don’t have to invent this stuff” (December 1, 2015). Most cities worldwide are engaging in the same competition, using planned and institutionalized culture and creativity to attract the creative class. It is a relatively easy, but costly league to enter, as cities inherit quick-fix policies and leverage tourist-oriented ‘assets’ in the categories of art, heritage and culture, just as all other cities practice. This wide policy circulation increases inter-city and intra-city cultural

homogeneity, as culture is planned from the top-down by the same people using the same literature, which seeks to attract the same population and create economic growth through the same means.

### **4.3 Cultural Planning: An Economic Strategy**

The intertwining of economy and culture makes up the bulk of St. Catharines' municipal plans. In fact, much of the cultural development is justified by its economic benefits. The DCCMP (City of St. Catharines, 2008) clearly states economic development through revitalization and intensification as its main goal. Furthermore, the City of St. Catharines (2008, i) states that the Master Plan's primary objectives are as follows: to create a safe and attractive Downtown that both will attract investment and tourists, redefine the Downtown as a desirable place to live, shop and do business; and encourage people to walk through the Downtown, day and night." The creative cluster is a means to an economic end. In response to the realization of the area's creative potential, the civic leaders partnered with planning consultant firms to create the DCCMP to reflect the "renewed interest in what the downtown can offer" (City of St. Catharines, 2008, 3). Civic leaders in St. Catharines believe that strengthening the role of culture in its economy is required to attract "residents", "large employers", "entrepreneurs" and "creative talent", of which the latter two are "essential elements for economic growth" (City of St. Catharines, 2008). It is understood that there is city competition over this desired population, and St. Catharines must leverage its cultural economic resources in order to sway the population in its direction. As noted in the *Garden City Plan* (2014a, 25), St. Catharines' art and culture "enhances tourism, economic development and the overall vitality of the city". "Ultimately", according to a St.

Catharines City Councillor (December 1, 2015), “art raises up an area, it becomes the desirable place to be, people want to live and open up businesses around it, so space becomes a premium, and the city and landlords capitalize.” The connection is clear in St. Catharines: “cultural development and economic development go hand-in-hand” (Executive Director of St. Catharines Downtown Association (SDA), February 1, 2016).

This type of cultural planning focused on economic development turns culture and creativity into neoliberalized commodities planned and promoted for their economic potential. The intrinsic value of culture and its social significance are ignored or placed secondary to its economic benefits (Chatterton and Unsworth, 2004). Really, the City of St. Catharines, like all other cities, is creating economic plans that use culture as the means to the desired end, more than they are creating culture-oriented plans that support art for arts sake (Duxbury, 2012).

#### **4.4 Safe and Vibrant Streets**

In order to create urban space that seems attractive and conducive to investment in the cultural economy, civic leaders have chosen to prioritize making downtown St. Catharines appear ‘vibrant’ and ‘clean’ such that newcomers feel safe and secure. Streetscape design and aesthetics has become a top investment priority. Conversion of main streets from one-way to two-way traffic, introduction of *Walk STC* signage (Figure 4.2) directing foot traffic to select destinations, increased patio seating extending onto the sidewalk, and lamppost renewal and increase, decorated with the BIA’s recently installed *Famous Faces* banners displaying a number of prominent ‘homegrown heroes’ (Figure 4.3), are all symbolic strategies to create visual and aesthetic coherence (Zukin, 1995). “Throughout all

stakeholder consultations, safety and security for pedestrians were noted as major priorities to success for any St. Paul Street revitalization” (City of St. Catharines, 2008, 61). Urban design changes are practical and straightforward and make a quick visible difference to the front stage of the city. To enact this change the city proposes to capitalize upon its ‘professional artists’, who are “a source of talent, innovation and entrepreneurship, and positively influence the social and environmental fabric around them; their reputation as gentrifiers is well-documented” (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 65). High profile members of the local arts community were contacted as soon as the Downtown Association thought of the *Famous Faces* project (Walter, October 9, 2008). As civic leaders prioritize investment in the downtown streetscape and seek to capitalize upon the city’s human capital – a potentially limitless cultural and creative resource – the assumption is that an aura of vibrancy and vitality will ensue. In pursuit of a ‘lively’ downtown environment the city has followed recommendations made by Ryerson Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity: “[a] diverse nightlife equates with more pedestrian activity, lower crime rates, a sense of safety and higher property values. Artists will gentrify neighbourhoods that are perceived as sketchy by others. Thus, culture directly influences the environmental pillar of sustainability” (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 31). Although this quotation is slightly fragmented, it ultimately argues that with more populated sidewalks, safety will increase, crime will decrease, and more people will want to live, work and own property in the area, resulting in property value increase. Artists and their associated cultural practices are positioned as change agents – their presence is assumed to enact by attracting people to cultural activities, creating a downtown crowd of cultural workers and businesses and helping to enhance the social and built fabric of the city.



Figure 4.2: Walk STC Sign in downtown St. Catharines (Nicolaidis, 2015)



Figure 4.3: Three of the 'Famous Faces' Banners by My Downtown BIA (Nicolaidis, 2016)

Since these plans and projects have been operationalized, cultural representatives in St. Catharines have noticed the following downtown population and environment changes. According to St. Catharines' Cultural Planning Supervisor (November 21, 2015):

there are different kinds of people coming downtown, so there's much more diversity on the street and by virtue of that and the increase in numbers of people, people are naturally going to feel safer and will be more inclined to come downtown.

The Executive Director of the SDA (February 1, 2016) also agrees that "a more positive pedestrian flow helps with the safety of our area". This seemingly well-supported opinion amongst cultural representatives about the safer downtown environment is expanded upon by the Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016):

Because of all the people down here doing and looking for the same thing, it creates a different kind of who is occupying the streets at night are now your friends and neighbours and people who you know and are talking to and now the community has come back into the downtown. And that community is what shapes how people feel in this space. It's a lot different feel when you're sharing this space with your friends and neighbours and not those, those, umm, I'm trying to pick my words very carefully here. But ya know, it's just a safer feeling when you're in the space with all of those people.

The increasing safety of downtown coincides with a changing population using the area. The performing arts and state-of-the-art cultural facilities in combination with their packaged dining and retail experiences has become a newly-featured excursion offered in downtown St. Catharines at the demand of middle-class and tourist interests. This class-based consumer traffic attracted by the cultural, entertainment and leisure amenities, is planned for the perceived safety created by highly-populated streets of people with a clear

consumption purpose (e.g., live, shop, and play), in contrast to an environment of less foot traffic and more 'loitering'.

The cultural planning documents and its representatives claim that the main purpose for the new cultural developments is to "give people a reason to come downtown", and to "bring the community back downtown". These goals and statements fail to realize that there are already plenty of reasons to be in downtown St. Catharines and plenty of people - a 'community' - that use and live in the downtown. There is a population being ignored, a population not viewed as community-like. There is also a culture that exists downtown in everyday life (Miles 2007), without being formally planned. What kind of community and culture is the city talking about? Based on interview responses and cultural documents, this new community is composed of higher-end tenants, sophisticated people, wine-enthusiasts, performance-goers, theatre community, and residents of St. Catharines who have 'not been downtown in years'. There have long been plenty of reasons to live in or come downtown, so it is possible that the qualities the city is trying to develop are qualities that an external population look for or demand.

Cultural plans tend to be partially blind to longstanding community characteristics (Duxbury, 2012), in the drive for renewal. Simultaneously though, the city is aware of certain characteristics that they would like to change through urban renewal. These are the characteristics most visible to the public eye, as these elements will either attract or repel the 'new community'. The cultural developments, as noted by cultural representatives, it is hoped will bring a new community, diversity, and your friends and neighbours, to downtown, contributing to a safer feeling than being around another population, which the Executive Director of the PAC failed to describe any further. Likely, the population who he

was referring to are those who will be displaced because they apparently create an unsafe feeling for the new community coming downtown. This group, then, is probably not composed of white, upper-middle class, high-income earners. Redevelopment strategies rely on this new community feeling secure in public (Lees, 2006), and in order to create this perception, cities attempt to make public spaces aesthetically-pleasing and largely occupied by 'legitimate users' (Mitchell, 1995). This manipulated landscape is a reflection of the norms, values and fears of the "groups who produce the city" (Hall and Barrett, 2012, 176). This creates an unfair representation of the city and of who is able to produce the environment to cater to their needs and express their identity. Cultural planning is thus an official 'place-making effort' (Elwood, Lawson and Nowak (2015) used by the city and its wealthy associates to create a new environment (Pierce, Martin and Murphy, 2011) that personifies the desires and characteristics of the new consumptive class it hopes to attract.

#### **4.5 We're in Wine Country Too: Tourism, Wine Route Expansion and Rebranding**

One of the main reasons for the cultural and creative planning of safety and attractiveness in downtown St. Catharines is the role it plays in the potential for the area to become part of 'Wine Country'. The viability of the Wine Route being redirected through downtown St. Catharines, as well as the construction of a Wine Embassy and Wine Council headquarters, can be increased through St. Catharines investment in its safe and accessible streetscape. According to the City of St. Catharines (2008, 61), "The Wine Country Embassy...is an element that crosses all interests – retail, business, cultural, tourism, recreational and transit". Civic leaders in St. Catharines are pressured to demonstrate their commitment to a beautiful and thriving downtown to the Ontario Wine Council in order to be considered as

an added focal point in Ontario's Wine Country. More specifically, "the Downtown needs to 'set the stage' to attract the sophisticated and educated wine enthusiast market, such as attractive routes into and entry points to the Downtown and quality Downtown streetscapes along with other unique retail and cultural offerings" (City of St. Catharines, 2008, iv). Supporting the quest for downtown St. Catharines to market itself to the Ontario Wine Council is another global 'urban design, landscape architecture and economic development firm', Peter J. Smith and Company Inc, through their report *Energizing Niagara's Wine Country Communities*. In this report, Peter J. Smith and Company Inc, (2008) celebrate the potential of Niagara region to become a "world-class" tourism destination through establishing Wine Route links between wineries and downtowns, which enhance tourism opportunities and attractions related to wine, culture and culinary tourism. Clearly, the potential wine route benefits increase the appetite for planning of increased cultural infrastructure and improved streetscapes.

The focus on tourists, visitors, and the creation of a 'sophisticated' population using and spending in downtown St. Catharines is stated throughout the cultural documents. The wealthy middle and upper-middle class are the target audience of the redevelopment strategy for downtown St. Catharines. Such a population is presumed to desire an attractive environment rich in art, entertainment and culinary culture, and civic leaders have sought to provide this by capitalizing on the wine route brand – already well-established in this part of the province. In addition to streetscape planning, the DCCMP also imagines a new parking garage, hotel, and two-way traffic, all working toward the "fundamental objective: move people through downtown" (City of St. Catharines, 2008, 5). An issue limiting this objective is discussed in *Culture Plan 2020*: the diversity of cultural experiences lack public

visibility, and many of the groups creating these experiences cannot afford to market to tourists (City of St. Catharines, 2014b). In response, civic leaders believe that the City of St. Catharines needs to partner with other tourist areas and activities in the surrounding region and further market its cultural resources through cultural flagship development and city re-branding. According to the City of St. Catharines (2014b, 56), there is “‘tourism-ready’ cultural ‘product’ in St. Catharines”, but these organizations tend to focus on the local market. The City of St. Catharines plans to use its current cultural resources, in combination with future cultural developments to attract a visitor population to come through its core.

Through this process of resource leverage, new development, and a goal to change its economic base, the City of St. Catharines makes it clear that they are engaging in a process of urban rebranding. The city is in the midst of undertaking redevelopment with a creative focus, and it seeks to market itself as an innovative and attractive place where people can “live, shop and do business” (City of St. Catharines, 2008, 2014). Although many St. Catharines residents still think of St. Catharines as a ‘lunch-bucket’ community or automotive town, its new signs garnered from the recent cultural planning exercise rebrand the city as: ‘Niagara’s Urban Connection to Wine Country’ (Figure 4.4 and 4.5). This new moniker rebrands the city with a more touristic label, while also reimagining and repositioning the city’s relation to the surrounding region; as previously noted, a region known for its tourism. The proposed cultural development is believed to hold the potential to forever change the city and its downtown (City of St. Catharines, 2008).



*Figure 4.4: St. Catharines' New Slogan (Herod, 2014)*



*Figure 4.5: New Wine Route Banners in Downtown St. Catharines (Nicolaidis, 2016)*

#### **4.6 Bold Statements: Constructing Cultural Flagships**

The infrastructural developments expected to be a big part of the short- and long-term change are the new cultural facilities along the main street, St. Paul. These are, as the cultural documents mention: the new spectator facility/Meridian Centre, the SFPA/Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, and the NCFA/FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre. The former names for each were displayed in 2008 plans before being given their latter operative names in more recent documentation post-2014, including an updated map (Figure 3.4) created by the Downtown BIA late 2015. The DCCMP (City of St. Catharines, 2008, ix, 95) requires that the city provide the opportunity for development of these “major attraction venues” that may exist as a “flagship symbol of the City’s commitment to Downtown revitalization”, and will function as “anchors” to draw public to downtown during all hours. Downtown revitalization is “strongly linked” to the effect of these major “creative cluster elements”, and as a result, the stakeholders in the DCCMP “emphasized that the art centres must have major visibility on St. Paul street to best impact revitalization of the street” (City of St. Catharines, 2008, 60, 74). “Putting the centre smack dab in the middle of downtown which has been determined as a places to grow, the city wants to attract residential and big business development specifically in the downtown” (Executive Director of PAC, February 1, 2016). According to the Cultural Planning Supervisor – and supported by a similar statement from the Executive Director of the SDA – the new entertainment centres “will be bringing people downtown who have not been coming into the core of St. Catharines for years” (November 21, 2015). “These centres will repurpose and give people a reason to come downtown” (Executive Director of PAC, February 1, 2016). Identified as ‘cornerstones’ in the city’s revitalization strategy, these

centres contribute to the hope civic leaders have in returning downtown to its “glory days as a bustling, vibrant community heart” (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 19). Throughout the 1800s and up until the 1930s when the most recent Welland Canal was rerouted to the city’s eastern edge, the Welland Canal, coming through downtown St. Catharines fuelled the area into a “hub for commerce and industry in the Niagara Region” (St. Catharines Downtown Association, 2016). The canal helped to stimulate the birth of St. Catharines’ industry centered around shipyards, mills (grain and textile), metal, automotive machinery, and paper. The automotive industry became the city’s largest, leading to General Motors becoming the city’s main economic anchor and socio-cultural identity (e.g., nickname “GM Town”), with its central factory now vacant at the edge of downtown since 2008. Some notable gathering spots that attracted people to the downtown that are no longer in operation, or do not function as they used to, are the YMCA which moved to the North End ‘big-box’ commercial area, and the many ‘hotel’ bars known for a variety of characteristics such as live bands, alcohol, drugs, biker hangouts, strippers, and the low-cost rooms above. Additionally, the Farmer’s Market and Public Library, as well as the Old Courthouse that is not as active or populated as it once was and remains vulnerable to redevelopment into a boutique hotel, are popular sites of culture and gathering in existence prior to the introduction of culture-led revitalization.

There are plenty of purposes to be in downtown St. Catharines, and there is a wealth of arts and culture in downtown St. Catharines, with or without cultural flagship buildings. Art and culture is happening everywhere, all the time, inside and outside of buildings all over the area. If people have “not been downtown in years”, it is not because art and culture were absent, but because the type of art and cultural experiences they value or

associate with were not available to their desired degree. The following subsection on the performing arts centre will provide a deeper discussion of the institutional/professional type of arts and culture inferred here, along with a discussion of its lucrative, yet controversial role.

#### **4.7 ‘The Arts Live Here’: Roles of the Performing Arts Centre**

Calling it a “key capital project” and a “major” “unprecedented” investment, *Cultural Plan 2020* further discusses the importance and valuable role the PAC – and the other two cultural facilities – will play in downtown revitalization. However, the plan does focus more on the PAC, as it is the “largest cultural project” in St. Catharines, its construction has made culture a “high-profile priority” in the city, and its role in downtown renewal is well-recognized (City of St. Catharines, 2014b). According to the City of St. Catharines (2014b), the PAC will perform many important functions in the city such as being a key player in the cultural and economic landscape and the primary provider of arts experiences (Figure 4.6). Policy documents frame the PAC as embracing the professional arts sector through its programming, and position it as the largest per annum investment in culture in the city. Clearly, the perceived and planned role of the PAC is substantial; it is to be the main hub of arts investment and arts provision by the City.



*Figure 4.6: “The Arts Live Here” posters in PAC main foyer and on downtown lampposts (Nicolaidis, 2016)*

While the PAC is thoroughly celebrated in Culture Plan 2020, there is some mention of concerns about its functionality and sustainability. Amidst the cultural renaissance in downtown St. Catharines, “there is a recent perception of vitality and success within the arts sector, yet organizations are...worrying about the rental rates of the future arts centre” (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 20). Affordability and accessibility of the PAC are issues at play within St. Catharines’ arts sector. In addition to rental costs, the arts community is also concerned about the City potentially reducing or eliminating its funding toward “currently-supported organizations” (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 75). The City realizes that the “PAC is an enormous investment that can make or break the local cultural sector”, so it must foster a healthy arts community to meet the PAC’s “economic – and cultural – goals” (City of St. Catharines, 2014b, 75). The success of the City and the PAC appear to be precariously

reliant upon a healthy arts sector, yet it remains unclear how the city plans to support the arts sector and how it plans to facilitate access to municipal space and funds.

With the PAC now in operation, interview responses from cultural representatives will further expand understanding of its planned and practiced purpose. All cultural representatives agreed that the PAC is a main (if not the singular) infrastructural driver of culture in St. Catharines and is one of the reasons that a culture plan was established. The PAC is publicized and celebrated for its role as the new centre of culture in St. Catharines, something that previously did not exist. According to the Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016), the arts centre is presently functioning in many roles for the area, such as:

Cultural hub for Niagara, the centre of creativity in this region, and where good work comes to be shared with an audience. Giving a place for this community to gather. Being able to explore things together. I think the PAC plays a huge role in sort of the social knitting of our society and bringing all of those different elements of what makes up this diverse country that we live in, and trying to build that sense of society and community. I think the centre is at the centre of all of that as well. And having this building here is something we want to show off now, we want to bring people to. It's something we want to talk about as a community, because it is now that hub of visible tangible entertainment and culture that's happening here. It's visible and it's easy to find.

The local buzz described above is supported by multiple mentions of local residents having found 'pride' in their hometown as a result of the new development. The Manager of Programs and Cultural Services in St. Catharines states that "the PAC has been a source of

pride for people who live, work and visit here” (November 21, 2015). A City Councillor also articulates how PAC has generated “pride in our community” (City Councillor, December 1, 2015) and, in the words of the Executive Director of SDA (February 1, 2016) become “a home for the arts” and brought “culture to the forefront” in St. Catharines. The PAC’s role as the main centre for arts, culture and pride has been celebrated from its blueprint to its operative state.

The ability of the PAC as a tool to attract people, business and dollars is reinforced throughout the interviews with cultural representatives. Since the PAC “operates in high numbers, there are suddenly all kinds of people downtown at once” (Cultural Planning Supervisor, November 21, 2015). The large numbers of performance-goers is said to create spin-off benefits for the businesses in the area. This spin-off crowd is primarily present during dinner hours as the majority of the events, from music (both popular and classical) to theatre to comedy, are scheduled in the evenings, and many performance-goers dine before the show. The Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016) references the ‘Mirvish model’ to promote this synergistic connection:

The best way to fill a restaurant is put a PAC next door. Fill the PAC with people who want to eat. In our downtown, we’re the investment so that all of the other citizenry and business owners can profit from what we pull into the downtown.

The Executive Director of the SDA (February 1, 2016) notes that this business support structure is currently functioning in downtown thanks to the planned layout that requires performance goers “to park elsewhere, making them walk past our members on way to the facilities. Our restaurants have already noticed a huge benefit.” This increase in downtown business transaction may increase future business development in the area. According to

the Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016), “we will and already have seen the vacancy rate downtown diminish cause more businesses want to hook into this new energy coming downtown... they want to get a piece of it. This is yet another tool of the PAC”. The general perception of politicians, arts administrators, and urban planners is that the more people using and spending in the downtown and the increase in infrastructural development makes the downtown a more ‘desirable’ place to be, increasing its value and profitability for property owners, as well as the city through tax revenue. In the following statement, the Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016) suggests that the increase in value is attributable to the arts centre development: “You build the PAC to elevate property values, which then helps your tax-based funding. Property values are increasing and that brings in investment cause people want to buy low and sell high.” The City of St. Catharines’ obsession with property and associated taxes is commonplace throughout Canada as municipalities rely heavily on property taxes and real estate development to improve their financial situations (Loison and Fischler, 2016). This cultural economic renaissance provides many opportunities for a continued process of attraction of new residents and investors. According to a City Councillor (December 1, 2015), one demographic, less characteristic of St. Catharines’ anglo-Christian past, that will be attracted by the PAC and its associated development are “ethnocultural communities. Most immigrants come with big bucks, so there’s lots of opportunities for us that way”. On a larger scale,

an arts centre kind of brings a credibility to a city that it is a sophisticated city, a place that you can be creative, a place there is something to do, that it demonstrates that the community wants to be on that big city map, because without an arts centre

you aren't really a complete city. It kind of completes the city for those looking at us, not those living within us. So building that is to kind of give the developer, investor, or person who is looking for a place to move their family, something else to look at in that list of things a community has to offer.

The PAC clearly fills many roles for the City of St. Catharines' planned cultural economic development, as it attracts a population of potential investors and visitors who may otherwise have overlooked the area.

In addition to the economic benefits the PAC contributes to the downtown area, the centre also provides what civic leaders believe to be a new level of cultural advancements for performers and ticketholders. Throughout the interviews with cultural representatives, the term 'purpose-built' was frequently used to discuss the importance and character of the PAC. The Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016) states:

Having a professional purpose-built centre allows a setting that maximizes the public's experience of the performance. Now you're not being compromised in all the things that make the performance good. You can now just enjoy the experience more than: Is my seat good? Can I see the stage? What are the washrooms like? God, I have to come up this long staircase to get here? All of those things go away when you have a purpose-built PAC because the seating is maximized to give you the best view, the acoustics in a brand new venue are so amazing, and the sound system and lighting is state of the art.

While the design (Figure 4.7) is new and fresh, a local inhabitant (February 2, 2016) notes that "it's not so inspiring. They could have done something really cool. It's sterile". The building is not dressed in people's artwork, and has an uninhabited air about it.

Nevertheless, civic leaders believe that this purpose-built venue will provide ticketholders with an experience more accommodating than non-purpose built venues such as churches, as “audiences are no longer sitting on pews, and now have bar services, enough washroom stalls, and a building where health, safety and accessibility are addressed. You do not get this in a church” (Cultural Planning Supervisor, November 21, 2015). Apparently, purpose-built centres provide a ‘pristine’ experience that audience members will pay higher prices for knowing they will not have to worry about undesirable building aspects like hard seats, small or unkempt washrooms, view obstructions, to name a few, that may subtract from the overall experience.



*Figure 4.7: Exterior and Interior of PAC (Nicolaidis, 2016)*

The elevated audience experience is also attributable to the ‘heightened ceiling’ the new building allows performers. For example, the PAC provides the “performing arts community with a purpose-built facility enabling them to maximize their talents, something the symphony has never had in churches, schools, and Brock Centre for the Arts which is a spoken word hall, a terrible sounding room” (City Councillor, December 1, 2015). This will be the “first time some of the local artists will perform in a facility that is purpose-

designed” (Cultural Planning Supervisor, November 21, 2015). These users are a specific group, the Cultural Planning Supervisor (November 21, 2015) notes, as just a “small core will use the PAC as home, and some other artists will use it occasionally”. Art groups that now ‘call the PAC home’ are Niagara Symphony Orchestra, Chorus Niagara, Carousel Players (theatre) and Suitcase In Point Theatre, while occasional local artists have also had single-performances in the centre as part of a short series put on by the PAC which selected a handful of local songwriters to open for international songwriters accompanied by a house band. Also in the local artist demographic is an

emerging arts community that is hard-pressed to be able to afford the arts centre, so they will continue to use other venues and found spaces that are not designed for the performing arts, but they will make due with those and their audiences will have to make due as well” (Cultural Planning Supervisor, November 21, 2015).

Aware that there is an affordability issue present, the Manager of Programs and Cultural Services (November 21, 2015) notes the need “to help our local artists afford the PAC so they can cover their costs”. While overall cost for an artist to use a PAC venue is subject to the amount of technical labour, front of house labour, food and beverage/catering service, box office fees, rental equipment, and marketing and promotion required for the performance, the non-inclusive minimum rental costs for the four main venues are outlined in *Table 4.1*. As for the cost of tickets, the price greatly varies based on the type of performance as well as the age of the audience member. Select shows have a reserved number of \$5-\$20 tickets for the “high school” or “child” category, where as other shows have tickets from \$25-\$45 for categories such as “University/College Student”, Under-25 and Under-30. Additionally, a few shows have small “senior” discounts of \$5-\$10. Regular-

priced tickets for people ages 30-65, and in some cases all people attending a show with a single firm ticket price, range from \$43-\$100+. The PAC clearly has the ability to bring the production of a performance into a different realm; however, the group of people who will experience this realm is limited by the venue’s prohibitive rental costs to perform and tickets costs to attend an event.

Venue Name	Partridge Hall	Cairns Recital Hall	Robertson Theatre	Film House
Minimum Rental Cost (Based on required 5-hour minimum)	\$2250	\$1125	\$625	\$625

*Table 4.1: Non-Inclusive Minimum Rental Costs of PAC (FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, 2015a, 2015b)*

While cultural flagship buildings do create quick transactions and buzz (Miles, 2007), even cultural representatives in St. Catharines admit that a small, select group of local citizens and performers will actually be able to afford to use the PAC. This inaccessibility is against inclusive everyday cultural production, which Evans and Foord (2006) believe a cultural renaissance should provide. A wealth of municipal planning, funding and now debt is associated with the PAC, while many locals will not benefit from its operation. Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 3, I was unable to obtain access to the information on debt burden and payment plan, however, in addition to the \$60 million dollar cost to construct the centre, the City of St. Catharines will cover the estimated \$1,263,432 deficit developed from the PAC’s operation in 2016 (City of St. Catharines, 2016).

The culture formally planned and promoted by the neoliberal city is that of high exchange value and symbolic value, a type of culture that attracts the city’s goals, rather

than a culture of high use value to the current inhabitants of the area undergoing cultural development. Cultural flagship buildings are renowned for their exchange and symbolic value as they attract desired populations and their monetary transactions (Evans, 2003). The PAC, assuming many economic development roles, functions as this valuable cultural flagship for the city. The city is chasing external populations and finances through provision of attractive, upper-middle class culture characterized by Beaverstock et al (2004) as exclusive, highly-sanitized, gated entertainment, while failing to generate cultural opportunities for the downtown area's current inhabitants. Cultural representatives celebrate a flagship building that produces a state of the art culture, where audience members do not worry about their seat, view, sound and amenities because all components are maximized to provide the best experience possible. However, this flawless experience comes at a cost that is inaccessible to many residents and local artists. According to Lefebvre (1996, 144) segregation by "state policies pursuing agendas for urban regeneration" is demonstrated when priority is given to the "exchange value of space", "increased land speculation" and "higher housing costs", all of which are mentioned as cultural plan goals that the PAC contributes to.

In addition, many downtown inhabitants may be displaced as a result of the increasing property values the city hopes – and already notices – the PAC contributing to. When deciding on the site to construct the future performing arts centre, the civic leaders and consulting team chose to select the former Knight's Inn Motel, across from the Leonard Hotel. The owner, who owned both buildings, was only willing to sell if he could sell both (Herod, October 14, 2009). The City decided to purchase the Knight's Inn property, and with this knowledge, a developer agreed to purchase the Leonard Hotel property, as part of

the beginning of the downtown revitalization project, exactly as planned in the DCCMP (Herod, October 14, 2009). The developer is quoted in *St. Catharines Standard* after purchase of the Leonard Hotel: “When I can picture a 30-foot glass wall along St. Paul and a two-storey lobby, that’s the kind of thing that’s going to get developers like us pumped up” (Herod, May 30, 2011). The deals both closed in November 2009, and redevelopment of the six-storey Leonard into a “showpiece” with “larger and nicer” rooms, as well as the Knight’s Inn into a performing arts centre, were both set to begin construction (Herod, October 14, 2009). What happened to the people who used these buildings? According to a participant at the Downtown Talking Circle:

the Leonard hotel was home to a lot of people who were living on the edge. They had an apartment or they lived across the street where the performing arts is (Knight’s Inn), in smaller units. When all that property was bought and cleared out, they were moved on (January 21, 2016).

Another participant at the Downtown Talking Circle and employee of Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN) – a charitable organization on the Eastern edge of downtown St. Catharines that works with individuals dealing with homelessness, unemployment, poverty, addiction, and mental illness – mentioned that when civic leaders announced that the “arts centre downtown was coming, buildings started changing hands. A lot of people living in these apartments are turning up at Start Me Up, and they still haven’t found apartments. 3 or 4 years and they’re still homeless” (January 21, 2016). A second employee of SMUN stated that since he began working at SMUN 3 years ago, “there’s been a massive influx of people coming through the doors from downtown. Our housing department went from 1 to 4 people. We can’t keep up. Everyday I’m turning people away” (January 21, 2016). As a

result of redevelopment and revitalization, lower-income individuals have been displaced from the centre of the city (Figure 4.8).



*Figure 4.8: Wooden sign outside PAC during its first month open reads “What about the rest of us” (Nicolaidis, 2015)*

Common to Canadian cities pursuing economic development is the forced movement of poorer and more marginal populations from areas that authorities, developers and users are finding attractive as new places of entertainment and residence (Catungal, Leslie and Hii, 2009). According to the Executive Director of the PAC (February 1, 2016) in reference to the old Leonard Hotel:

they’re redeveloping what was a pretty ugly building...cause they see the opportunity for a higher-end tenant where they’re not getting the lowest end rental tenant. They’ve actually got the ability to attract a higher-end tenant which now elevates the sophistication and offerings within the area of what’s happening”.

The City's goal of gentrification and revitalization stated in their cultural plans and by their cultural representatives display the desire for a change in population and landscape, which go hand-in-hand. Like Uitermark et al. (2007) argue, gentrification is used to civilize and control neighbourhoods through attracting the middle classes. Although the terms 'gentrify' and 'gentrification' each arise once in the cultural document text, they are used to celebrate how artists contribute to gentrification, rather than used for critical discussion of displacement and social exclusion. Furthermore, terms like revitalization, renewal, and renaissance are more commonly used both in text and interviews, as they carry the image of positive progress and change. Lees (2003) believes that these terms direct attention away from the contested nature of gentrification. Regardless of how the city labels this process, the current or previous inhabitants may be forced to relocate as a result of multiple potential situations caused by rising property values for three reasons. First, tenants may not be able to afford increased rent and living costs. Second, building may change ownership and be redeveloped for a higher-end tenant. And, three, residential buildings may have their function change and be used for retail or business uses instead. For example, 259 St. Paul Street (the former Leonard Hotel, currently Carlisle Square) had a total phased-in property assessment of \$920,000 in 2008 prior to its purchase and development, and is now assessed at \$6,264,000 in 2016 after its redevelopment (Municipal Property Assessment Corporation, 2016). Property values are increasing and buildings are changing hands and looks as a result of culture-led revitalization. Current lower-income inhabitants are not only underserved by the cultural renaissance, but displaced by it as well, as they do not have as much "elective fixity" or degree of control over where they reside as the incoming middle class residents (Paton, 2014). These groups

without “political privileges” are rejected, displaced, and/or prevented from participating in the making of the city (Lefebvre, 1996). This exclusion runs contrary to Matthews’ (2010) belief that local meaning production and expression be ensured top priority in cultural projects. Ultimately, as cities pursue economic development and competitiveness through cultural projects, they “tend to place growth over equity in their list of political priorities and will try to justify local costs by means of city-wide benefits” (Loison and Fischler, 2016, 359).

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

Two overarching elements tie together the overall points of critique of cultural planning. First, that cultural planning exists primarily for economic development purposes, not for cultural provision and cooperation. Second, that cultural planning imagines a specific type of culture appealing to, and in favour of, an external creative class over its current inhabitants, thereby gentrifying a targeted area. Additionally, cultural planning is imagined and directed by a small, wealthy group of professionals and experts from above, omitting the participation and contributions of residents who are affected by or excluded from its developments.

Less acknowledged and celebrated in formal cultural planning, and a type of culture and place that remain relatively hidden in the shadows of large cultural flagship buildings and their associated upper-class culture and professional entertainment, is the informal culture that is developed on the backs of local artists collaborating and sharing in social gathering places called ‘third places’. The following chapter will discuss the significance

and use value of third places, and the associated grassroots culture, to current inhabitants and local artists in search of accessible cultural participation.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE HUMAN-SCALE: INFORMAL CULTURAL PLANNING IN A THIRD PLACE**

Even though cultural planning is more popularly discussed as a city staff/council initiative to promote economic development through institutionalized culture at a municipal scale, cultural planning can also be informally practiced at the grassroots level by citizens. Third places are informal and multi-purpose gathering places of social interaction that are particularly conducive to supporting grassroots cultural initiatives. Rather than a culture focused around economic development, third places support a culture based more on social development, and the production of the cultural practice itself. In this chapter, I use material from my interviews with artists, café-users, café employees and owner, observations from my time in the café, and scholarly literature to display current, and past, functions and roles of third places/cafés, as well as the use and effect of place-making through everyday spatial practices in creating a space and moments alternative to the more dominant neoliberalized culture. Although not all findings extend beyond the third place I focus on, Mahtay Café, they do show the potential of third places to contribute to cultural participatory opportunities. In so doing, this chapter argues that the grassroots cultural practices that occur in third places are a demonstration of an important mechanism through which culture is planned and operationalized successfully at the human scale through the collective action of urban inhabitants.

### ***5.2 Third Place Accessibility***

Although culture does not exist in absence from the people enacting it, there are places that can contribute to and influence its creation (via collaboration and inspiration), its visibility,

its accessibility, and its resulting reach and collectivity. Third places, as defined by Ray Oldenburg (1999) are places of informal social gathering and spontaneous interaction at the “heart of the community”. In downtown St. Catharines, Mahtay Café fulfills the role of a valuable third place.

With its central downtown location, Mahtay Café is accessible by foot, bike or public transport. The visibility of the café, influenced by the relatively high foot traffic in the area, makes it a popular social and cultural gathering place. In addition to its location, the café’s long hours, 7:30am to 12am – and some nights until 2am – add to this third place’s accessibility. People are able to be in the café for extended periods of time without being displaced which supports socializing and cultural production. According to local artist and café staff member (December 17, 2015), “It’s not just a place where you meet beforehand or afterwards. It’s a place where people are all day and night, which is pretty cool, because generally speaking, that doesn’t happen [elsewhere]”. The café contains a variety of couches, chairs, benches, stools, high tables, low tables and open floor space which allows people to “actually lounge” (local artist/café user, November 24, 2015). In addition to the spontaneous interaction and social gathering so common to this third place, it also has an open calendar of scheduled events (Figure 5.1). On any given day in a given month there is likely to be at least one event chalked in on the publicly visible calendar. Anyone who has a show or event they would like to conduct can ask the owner to use the space of the café for a single-evening event or a month-long exhibit, for example. The owner or an employee then responds with available dates, and the people managing the event are able to confirm an available date and use the space at no cost. According to a local artist (January 28, 2016), “I first came to the café because I heard you could easily put your art up”. According to the

café owner (November 24, 2015), “we have a policy of not saying no to things. This has allowed people to do things in the space that they would not be allowed to do in a corporate space”. The café space is free to artists interested in using its floor, stage and walls, and it is also free for people to enter and use the space as most events are free, and ones that are not free have a cost decided by the artists from pay-what-you-can to \$5-10 (this is not a door cost, but an event cost, so people can still use the alternative room of the café). How is the owner able to provide the space for free to all of these events? The café is able to generate enough money through food and drink sales as a result of its central location, popularity, large patronage, and quality products. “They have the best coffee in town”, says one café user. To further attest to the café’s popularity among patrons, one café user (November 10, 2015) emphasizes that Mahtay Café is “The Café”, while another café user states that the “staff seem to know everyone by name” (November 10, 2015), which was confirmed during my observation periods. The café’s popularity and large patronage, and resulting customer purchases, are generated in part by the large number of people using the café to conduct or participate in its events. Local inhabitants are attracted to the café by its cultural and social provisions and happenings, and then purchase food and beverage items while in the café. Other people may simply enter the café to purchase food or drink and leave. While some people desire to purchase and consume a hot drink or snack/meal (\$1.60<), upon observation and interview responses, people are able to enter and use the café without purchasing anything. The café’s financial accessibility is noted by many cafe users (November 2015 - January 2016) through the following statements: “I can come here even without a dollar”, “It’s an open space anyone can come into whether or not they’re contributing to the finance”, “I proposed to have a show here, and it happened very

easily, for free“, “I can sit here for 9 hours doing my things and drinking coffee for a few bucks“, “I wrote a poem all night in the café. I don’t think they throw anyone out“, “It’s nice that based on Mahtay’s philosophy, and the fact that it’s a business, a person can come in here and just hangout and drink water and not have to purchase anything to enjoy the benefits of this space“, “This is a place that a person can just come to and be part of without having to pay. You can definitely come in and drink water for free and enjoy. I don’t know of any other places like that“. This café is able to be nurture local inhabitants through the following mandate, described by the café owner (November 24, 2015):

the space is open. It was always our intent not to just plop down and be all about commerce, but actually create a community. And I think we’ve done that. In many ways we’re a hub for a lot of artists and students. We’re like a community centre that serves beer... It’s a creative space with very few limits put on it, so I think that in the end that is what makes it a very habitable space.

The affordability of art and culture in this café exists in contrast to the high-cost of art and culture in the performing arts centre (PAC) across the street.



Figure 5.1: Mahtay Café's Wall Calendar (Nicolaidis, 2015)

To enter the PAC and to use any of its spaces, you are required to pay. Ticket and rent prices, as listed in Chapter 4, are costly and inaccessible to many residents of St. Catharines. The PAC is only available on per-hour rental basis, or through ticket purchase for a specific amount of time, from the point the doors open shortly before the performance time, until a few hours later, shortly after the performance is over. Furthermore, the space does not encourage people to linger outside of seated performance time, as the foyer is a bare space without seating or gathering areas, or any art on the walls. All that is mounted on the walls is a large sign that celebrates the donors who have financially contributed to the construction of this facility (Figure 5.2). To local residents who can afford it, the PAC represents a state-of-the-art venue to be proud of. Others, such as an artist (November 10,

2015) in Mahtay Café, state that “the city is hopeful, but to me it’s just building”. For a Mahtay Café staff member (December 19, 2015), “The PAC is outside of monetary availability for most artists. An artist (December 7, 2015) interviewed in Mahtay Café stated how “at the new centre [PAC], you have to have money. It just gives people with money more shit to do. As an artist I can’t go to these events, but I can come here”. Another artist (December 7, 2015) mentioned: “I won’t contribute to the PAC because it’s all about money. Once you join that, you’re in it”. These statements all reinforce the financial exclusiveness of the PAC and how it excludes local cultural workers who simultaneously reject the commodified culture it sells. Not only can some artists not afford the PAC, they may also not want to be associated with its “cultural aura” (Hall and Barrett, 2012) and cultural capitalism. The affordability of Mahtay café is repeatedly framed in interviews as more welcoming and accessible to these artists and other inhabitants who cannot afford to be part of the consumptive class. For many local cultural workers, Mahtay Café exists as a valuable, inspiring, and socially inclusive alternative to the PAC.

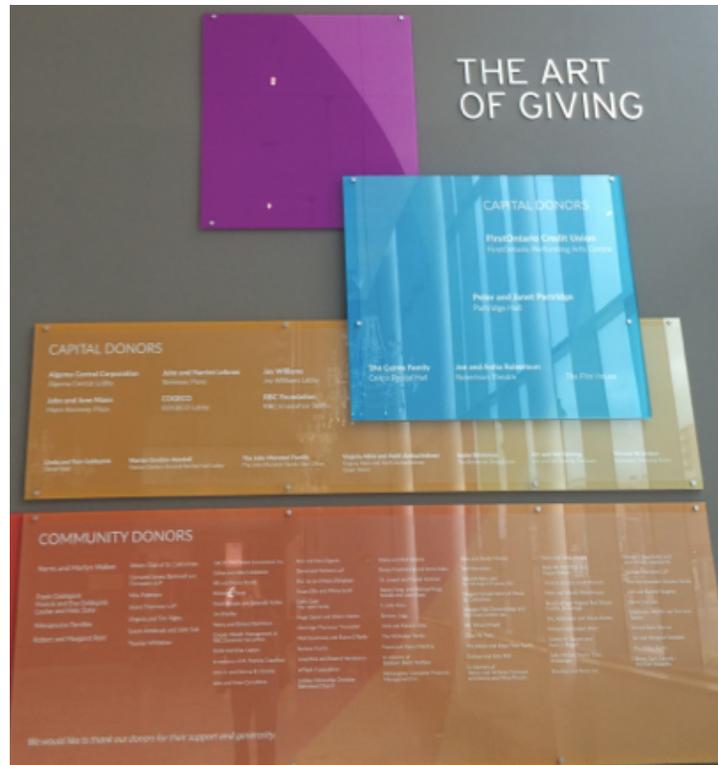
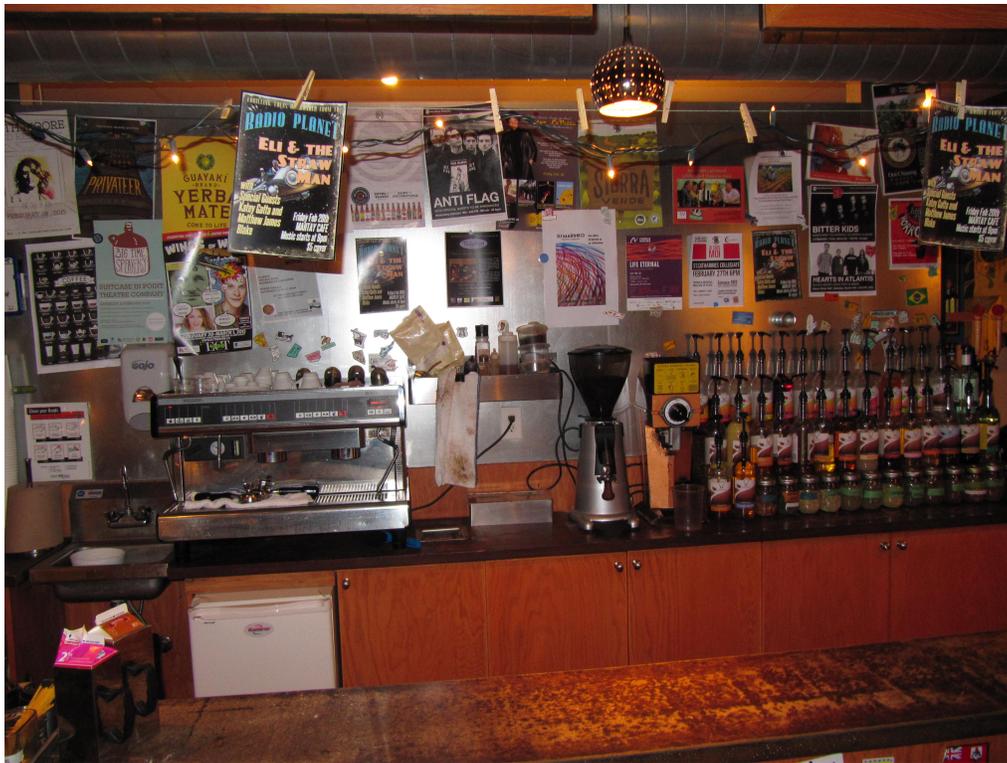


Figure 5.2: PAC Donors' List (Nicolaides, 2016)

### 5.3 “Anything Goes”: A Multi-Purpose Cultural Hub

In conjunction with Mahtay Café’s financial accessibility is also the important role it performs as a social and cultural hub. From within this space community awareness is generated of local happenings and relationships. Similar to observations by Bain and Mclean (2012, 134-135) in other mid-sized cities in Ontario, third places can become “cultural landmarks in their own right”. Mahtay Café’s calendar (Figure 5.1) and walls/poles (Figure 5.3) that display local people, practices and performances occurring in and outside of the café, encourages the connection of people and the potential for collaboration and involvement. Cafés have long been places where people come to retrieve and learn about local news (Haine, 1996). The calendar displays the multiple upcoming events in the café, such as open mics, discussion/sharing circles, poetry slams, exhibits and

concerts, while the walls and poles open to the pinning of event posters allow people to spread and receive 'word' about happenings in the wider area. According to a café staff member and local artist (December 17, 2015), "Mahtay is where you go to find out what's going on in town. Whatever it might be, someone there is going to know something". Other local artists and cafe users agreed that they too come to the café to find out 'what's up'. The multi-purpose function of this building as a news post, social hub, and cultural venue of a wide variety of arts practices, both production and performance, demonstrate the ability of the third place to function as a multi-purpose space, not built for a narrowly-defined purpose, but a purpose flexible to the user's desires. Considering that mid-sized cities generally have fewer cultural venues and less specialization in their cultural sector than larger urban centres, the diverse usages possible in a multi-purpose space are favourable to an interdisciplinary cultural community (Bain and McLean, 2012). This multi-purpose nature allows art and culture to exist within the everyday, mundane social pathways of urban inhabitants, in contrast to formal purpose-built performing arts centres that function solely as professional entertainment spaces; people buy their ticket, enter the venue, find their uni-directional seat, watch the performance, then leave the building. Formal cultural institutions support a limited understanding of the social dimensions of art and culture. People do not go to a performing arts centre to find out local news, meet new people, build community, collaborate, create or debate ideas, but rather to be entertained.



*Figure 5.3: Mahtay Café Poster Wall of Local Happenings (Nicolaidis, 2015)*

As a result of the café's affordability and open eclecticism, it becomes a space open to the actions and desires of its users. It becomes a space of possibility, for the development of one's cultural practice. A local artist and café user (November 24, 2015) said, "It completes the circle here, and it even begins the circle for some people. It's not just for one class, but cross-class". This artist infers two ideas here. One, that the café exists as the other piece of the puzzle for people, assuming its role as a third place for social gathering and interaction outside of the solitude and work-oriented space of the home/workplace. Also as a space for a person to share, express, and inspire what they have created on their own. Another local artist and café user (December 8, 2015) states, "that it's the café life that brings artists together and people talking. I don't need it for my work per se, but the community I take part in". A third artist/café user (November 22, 2015) says she likes the

café “to read, to get out of home, work, and rub elbows. Sometimes I bring stuff to work on, or I just talk. It’s a great place to meet and bump into people”. According to the café owner (November 24, 2015), Mahtay Café “offers the out-of-studio social nourishment”. The café can be the social portion of the path of one’s day, but also the social portion of one’s artistic creation. According to one artist (December 8, 2015), “my growth comes out of the people. The events and the people I meet here flow into my work”. Conclusively, spaces of social interaction effectively pair with the solitary workspace of the artist in the creative process (Buttimer, 1990). The second idea touched on in the artist’s quotation about ‘beginning the circle’ and ‘cross-class’, infers that some people get their first opportunity to participate in cultural activities at the café, influenced by the café’s open access to all people regardless of their income, creative ability, experience or status. For some people, it may be the place where they first recognize that they too have the ability to produce culture. It may also be the first sharing opportunity for someone who already creates their own work but has never shown it publicly, as they know that at the café people will be present to experience their work, and likely supportive of it as well. A local artist and café staff member (December 19, 2015) provided the following example:

if you’re 16 and you’ve never performed in public before, where do you start? You can do an open mic or play your first show at this café. People come to some of these events and say ‘hey, I can do that’, and you go up and play. You see guys get up for the first time in front of people, or the first time in 30 years for some people who are older.

The existence of this café and its openness to all forms, lead by its ‘yes’ policy, creates a visibility of and resulting continuation of cultural participatory opportunities. While

attending various events, such as open mics (Figure 5.4) and poetry slams (Figure 5.5), I observed people from 12 to 70 years old performing their craft, from people who have years of experience to first-time performers. At an open mic I attended one night, a man approximately 50 years old, turned around and said to me with shaking hands, “It’s my first time trying to be a comedian. First time I’ve ever done it. I just want to get it out of my system”. Our spontaneous conversation continued until it was his turn to take the stage. He completed his performance, nervously, with much applause and laughing response from the crowd. Soon after, a musician around forty years of age sat down on stage and said, “I’m not very good, but I’ll try. This is my first time playing”, which led into a song about struggles with addiction. The following night at the poetry slam, a young woman introduced her poem about her personal experience as a victim of sexual assault, and thanked the crowd of people for being there and listening to her first time expressing this in public. At the same poetry slam, a girl in Grade 8 came with her father to perform the first poem she ever wrote. Open mics, and other events where the mic is open, serve as a “junction between professional and amateur practice” and allow contact between performers at “different points on the scale” (Behr, 2012, 1). The open mic setting satisfies performers’ needs for an “environment in which they can feel free to stumble and make mistakes”, while the “mixture of old hands and beginners, avowed amateurs and aspiring professionals, is central to the tacit convention of support” (Behr, 2012, 13). With no cost to the performer or audience, and the provision of multiple stages, walls and floor space open for all people to use, the café becomes a place of personal, cultural, artistic and social development for people of all experiences and incomes.



*Figure 5.4: Open Mic at Mahtay Café (Nicolaidis, 2015)*



*Figure 5.5: Poetry Slam at Mahtay Café (Nicolaidis 2015)*

#### **5.4 “Not just a café...It’s The Café”: A Review of Café Life in Downtown St. Catharines**

Interestingly, there was a café in downtown St. Catharines earlier than Mahtay Café that displayed some similarities. This café, Strega, had an open mic, first-time and experienced performances, art exhibits, and chalk art walls, as well as good quality and relatively affordable food and drink, but it had also a few characteristics that decreased its accessibility. Firstly, Strega Café was only open from 10am-4pm, with the exception of Thursday nights for open mic, and closed on Sundays. These hours are minimal and do not allow for people who work day jobs to experience them, or for the café to function as a hub where people will always be because they know it is almost always open. One artist (November 16, 2015) added, “I went there sometimes and liked it, but they had weird hours, so I think that led to its disappearance”. In addition to its confined hours, a tension around accessibility and acceptance developed between café users/artists and the owner. According to two local artists (November 16, 2016: December 7, 2016), after an open mic night that featured a notable amount of poetry, the owner said in person and on social media that at the upcoming open mic “there will be no poetry”. In fact, this latter quote can be found on a ‘timeline post’ on Strega Café’s Facebook page, displaying the validity and public reach of this statement. The owner had only recently began to work on open mic nights, and wanted to change and limit the accessible nature of the ‘open’ mic that was attractive to, and celebrated and nurtured by local artists, café users and previous staff. Many patrons were upset by this and decided they did not want to be associated with the new exclusivity of this café, and immediately stopped coming to this café. The following week, only four people were at the open mic, and then the open mic was cancelled. The café ended up closing down a few months later, due to an apparent decrease in patronage and

resulting inability to afford operation. This case demonstrates the importance of the accessibility – in hours and acceptance/openness – of a place to meet the desires and demands of people. Additionally, it displays the collective power people can hold through their decisions to support or not support a place based on their beliefs of what a place should provide.

Unlike the former Strega Café, other cafés/coffeeshops in the downtown area have managed to stay in operation. These cafés (Figure 5.6) are: Cafesito, Cool Moose Café, Tim Hortons, Fine Grind Cafe, Coffee Culture, and Caffe Gatti. Tim Hortons and Coffee Culture, both multinational coffeeshop franchises are focused on fast service, high volume, and the multiplication of their brand. While people still frequent these coffeeshops in downtown St. Catharines, they do not function as local cultural hubs. They are strategically placed down one-by-one across geographical areas based on market potential. According to a café user at Mahtay Café (June 22, 2016), “At Tim Hortons, you sit there for 10 minutes and you get a glare from staff telling you to move on. It’s either A buy something or B get the hell out”. Caffe Gatti, the most recent addition to the downtown group of cafés, emerged out of a previous pastry bakery and retail shop called Pino’s Pasticceria, which then purchased and renovated a street-front store to open under its new name in 2015. Caffe Gatti is still a business primarily known for its decadent pastries, and advertises itself as such. Additionally, it is not open in the evenings. Like the previous two cafés mentioned, it also does not function as a cultural hub. Cafesito, also limited in its operating hours (closed evenings and weekends), is known for its delicious breakfast and lunch items as well as its beverages, but like the others, is not a cultural hub. Cool Moose Café, closed in the evenings and weekends other than 8am-1pm on Saturdays, is primarily a breakfast and lunch shop,

not functioning as a cultural hub. Lastly, Fine Grind Café, open 11am-11pm daily has accessible hours and is an open space for its users to engage in cultural/artistic practices and spend many hours working, conversing and collaborating. Although they do feature local visual art work and seldom host poetry readings, their cultural events are infrequent, their space for cultural production and performance is relatively limited, and its number of users tends to be low. Despite these characteristics, Fine Grind is important to local cultural production and collaboration, and is a notably accessible place. In fact, two local artists interviewed mentioned Fine Grind Café as the only other place outside of their home and Mahtay Café that they use to work on their projects, meet up with people, and stay for extended amounts of time. While these other cafés do offer people products, environments and/or experiences they enjoy, the cultural provision, accessibility and participation operating at Mahtay Café is unique to downtown St. Catharines.



*Figure 5.6: Map of Cafés in Downtown St. Catharines (Source: Google Maps, 2016)*

## **5.5 Culture By The People**

When space is accessible to people, they are able to use it for their personal and collective creative desires, and those resulting uses of the space in turn further influence future

possibilities. The actions, behaviours and creations of people in Mahtay Café demonstrate the ability of people to collectively pursue and express their desires for inclusivity, anti-capitalism, anti-classism, and a culture that is created, operated by, and accessible to, local inhabitants, rather than a small group of select professionals pressured by an economic development narrative inaccessible to many local inhabitants, both artists and non-artists. According to Haine (1996), many characteristics of the café are desired traits in the socialist perception of how a city should be governed. Through place-making efforts and everyday spatial practices, local inhabitants are able to create a culture, less through built form in the spectacular urban landscape, but through a relatively “immaterial” (Hall and Barrett, 2012) yet still visible and impactful culture occurring at the human scale.

Using Mahtay Café as their stage, local artists and inhabitants of a wide variety of experience, class and age come together to collaborate, watch, listen and learn from one another. Through creative actions, they gather to form a collective based on participation, support, community and collaboration. This community, open to anyone, encourages people to join in on the cultural activities available. Local people putting their art on the walls, and their words, thoughts and actions into the rooms, through an unscreened process that does not filter out dissonant, explicit, controversial, political, or ‘beginner’ or ‘hobbyist’ art, demonstrates the process by which these inhabitants demonstrate their desire for non-commodified and non-market expression accessible to all people regardless of professionalism. Throughout the café interviews, many interviewees vocalized their rejection of the categorized professionalism of artists, and that ‘making a living’ has anything to do with being an artist or not; some rejected the artist label altogether. One interviewee (November 22, 2015) said, “Screw that definition. That’s a dickhead definition

that an economist would come up with who doesn't actually care about art. By that definition, I'm not making them any money so they don't care about me". A second interviewee (December 7, 2015) stated, "What does it mean to live? The cost of living is to be able to breathe. I have no interest in using my body, mind and soul to make money. You don't have to make money to be an artist." Other interviewees were unsure if they were professional artists, but rather citizens who provided professional "creative services", "use" art, or are "professionally poor". The political culture of this café is similar to what Noel (2014) observed in the Nuyorican Poetry Scene, where he notes that the social interaction and art found in third places often advocates for political activism and awareness as stories of local justices and injustices are shared. One of the many observed events that enacts these exact qualities is a 2-day long "Wetland Celebration!" (Figure 5.7) where local artists and residents came together to celebrate and continue their successful protestation of the potential corporate destruction and redevelopment of a nearby wetland through storytelling, discussion, writing, drawing, performance, installation, relaxation and play. In addition to planned events, the continuous mundane behaviours – or everyday practices – demonstrate how residents are literally 'making' the 'place' through material display (framed art, chalk art, posters, and the continuous presence of a wide variety of people), and the immaterial transfer of knowledge through sound, song, story, performance, production, collaboration, conversation and spoken word. In Pierce, Martin and Murphy's (2011, 54) terms, the people are creating and recreating "the experienced geographies in which they live". The creation of this place-based culture cannot happen without people actively producing it. Furthermore, art did not live here before, during and after construction of the building without the people housing it there, contrary to the elected

official and municipal staff belief that art 'lived' in the PAC before it opened for operation. Moreover, even once a cultural venue is in operation, the arts cannot live there. Culture and art is everywhere, and it is the people who are it and produce it, not the building. According to Duncan (1999), culture "is not external to us", but something we can "actively (re)produce". Therefore, art and culture live within the people, and wherever the people go and live their everyday practices is where art lives. Surely these places cannot have thick financial gates if artists are to be able to live out their everyday practices. According to a local artist (January 21, 2016), in reference to the PAC's boastful claim,

I've lived downtown my whole life, and I can tell you the arts have always been here. And the poetry slam, you can go out to Mahtay and see an amazing arts community there, or see any of our really beautiful local bands play. Its always been here, we didn't need an arts centre to bring the arts to downtown. We need the centre to connect the community to the arts that are here. And if we don't do that, if we don't engage the marginalized individuals in our communities, then were going to fail to be a good place to live.

Cultural venues must be available to and be informed by the need of local inhabitants. Otherwise, their 'right to the city' is denied. According to Lefebvre (1996, 158), the achievement of this right must "gather the interests... of the whole society and firstly of all those who inhabit". Furthermore, inhabitants must have a "right to be present in all circuits of decision-making leading to the control and the development of the organization of social space" in order to counter exercises of capitalism and dominant state planning (Martins, 1982, 183). The right to the city has potential through the practice of self-management.



*Figure 5.7: Local residents gathered for storytelling at 'Wetland Celebration!' event (Nicolaidis, 2016)*

The trend of DIY demonstrates the ability of collectives to develop their own “cities within the city” (Iveson, 2013) based on shared desires of urban inhabitants who assert that they too have a “right to the city”, the right to “inhabit” and “appropriate space” (Lefebvre, 1991). Groups of local inhabitants at Mahtay Café are dedicated to making art happen through active creation and collaboration that allows themselves to be engaged in their craft and desired lifestyle while extending this opportunity to any newcomers who share these desires. “We put up everything we want”, an artist says about the active pursuits of artists in the café (Figure 5.8). Many different artists imagine and operate the various events that occur in the café, and through this, assert their belief in inclusivity and accessibility. According to Purcell (2002, 103) this right to spatial appropriation “confronts capital’s ability to valorize urban space, establishing a clear priority for the use value of urban residents over the exchange value interests of capitalist firms”. Artists are the people

making the events happen, rather than a corporate team, and thus have control over event accessibility and purpose. Another example of this is a periodic event imagined by a local artist and enacted by an open collective of artists called “Together Tonight” (Figure 5.9) based around, as its name infers, people coming together for the evening in one room to produce and receive art. This self-management, according to Butler (2012), makes participation in urban life “real”.



*Figure 5.8: Local artist putting up their art in Mahtay Café (Nicolaidis, 2015)*



*Figure 5.9: Local artists producing and performing art at 'Together Tonight' (Nicolaidis, 2015)*

Another trait of this arts community that makes participation real is the diminished divide between audience and performer allowing everyone to simultaneously participate as witness and actor in a non-hierarchical community. The stability of this self-created and sustained community ensures that people will have others to share with. According to a local artist (January 28, 2016), “I enjoy producing in a public environment where people around me become interested and invested in my creations”. Another local artist (November 10, 2015), who makes a living off of graphic design freelance work but creates and performs rap at the café, states that in this social setting “I can be seen in a different context”. The precarity of cultural work can make it challenging for people to define themselves as creative workers, internally (personally) and externally (socially), and have the opportunity to display their creations in a social setting. It is a struggle to find work as

an artist, and thus a struggle to find a place to display, which can affect how a person understands their identity. A social setting where people are supportive, listen and share similar vulnerabilities, allow, according to a local artist (November 10, 2015), “a place to define yourself”, in a “different context”.

This precarity amongst artists, and more widely, millennials, is a result of neoliberal promotion of self-employment and forms of labour with low to no security (Jones 1996, Gill and Pratt 2008, Bain and Mclean 2013). As a result, individualism becomes the norm as labourers strive for solo success through excessive labour hours (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Ross, 2008; Bain and Mclean, 2013; Worth, 2015). Due to low pay, low security and a lack of unionization and communal work in self-employment, there is a resulting decline of the social self (Mason, 2004; Worth, 2015). As millennials are encouraged to work on their own to build up the visibility of their craft through excessive work hours, the importance of the social self may become ignored. This neoliberal trend focused on accumulation and growth, on the entrepreneurial and laborious self, is resisted through the success of a continuous nature of social gathering based on the celebration of conversation, knowledge sharing, social connection and relationships, community support, political contestation, activism, and leisure. Similar activities and philosophies are noted by Bain and Mclean (2013) in their analysis of two artist-run spaces that resist the exploitative neoliberal and creative class definitions of art and culture. These behaviours are of the collective kind, not the individualized kind promoted through neoliberalism, and although these actions inspire and energize production, it is neither a cultural production driven by capital nor one easily commodified considering its free and critical nature. Instead, cultural production is celebrated and made visible, rather than hidden behind its consumptive form. People

involved in the creation and sustenance of this community are uniting for social and cultural purposes rather than economic or entertainment purposes. According to Richardson (2014, 99), this type of collaborative “unpaid labour” with a “tendency towards ‘commons’ rather than ‘competition’” demonstrates the “problem and potential at the heart of precarious labour”.

While this DIY/DIO practice of social and cultural production and provision does challenge neoliberalism through its facilitation of the social self in response to individualization, it also plays into the hands of neoliberal governance by making up for the roll-back in social service provision through community volunteering that provides these opportunities that otherwise would not exist. Neoliberal government prefers that people provide for their needs themselves so that the government does not have to provide for them, as argued by Rosol (2012) in the analysis of local volunteers stepping in to provide community gardens for the public. The resulting existence of cultural and social provision via volunteerism creates the illusion that the government does not need to take further action because people will simply ‘do it themselves’. Although volunteering does not challenge neoliberal strategies, the group of active people do have the advantage of creating a space that is not interfered with by governmental regulations, which enables a politically-critical space, inline with Lefebvre’s (1991,194) advice that “there is a deep contradiction when combining state-controlled institutions with radical contestation”.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The “lived space” (Lefebvre, 1991) of accessibility, participation, production and collectivity created and practiced by local inhabitants in Mahtay Café challenges the

“representations of space” (Lefebvre, 1991) authored by planners and wealthy professionals who execute the neoliberal script of capitalism, consumption, exclusivity, and individualism. Since culture lives within the people and as a result of their behaviours, inhabitants are able to create and sustain culture wherever they choose regardless of what buildings are advertised and built as cultural venues. Inhabitants have the ability to come together to share in their experiences of precarity and individualism and their desire to participate in cultural practices and express their creations and beliefs within an inclusive and open-minded community. The use of the third place, in this case Mahtay Café, as a location or hub for these cultural practices by local inhabitants expands the visibility, accessibility and reach of these practices as Oldenburg (1999, 112) suggests that these are the places “where one is more likely than anywhere else to encounter any given resident of the community”. Every practice exists in a place, but the place needs to be accessible and open to the practice. Mahtay Café demonstrates the potential of third places, multi-purpose places and cafés, to be places of great use value that are accessible to local inhabitants seeking to participate in cultural practices, through its traits of openness, malleability, affordability, and altogether support. The combinatory effects of collective activism and accessible space makes evident the possibility of culture for culture’s sake, culture that challenges and is not bounded by popular opinion, and culture that contributes to and is created by the social lives of all local inhabitants regardless of status.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: GRASSROOTS PRACTICES IN A CULTURAL ECONOMY**

This thesis has demonstrated the varying roles and objectives of culture and creativity in formal and informal cultural planning in downtown St. Catharines. The actors, place and purpose of culture play a significant part in the differences between types of culture and in the value of that culture to local inhabitants. This concluding chapter discusses the contributions this research has made to scholarship in geography and urban studies and offers recommendation to municipal leaders for how cultural planning projects can have a wider use value to local inhabitants.

### **6.2 Scholarly Contributions**

Within the discipline of geography this thesis most directly engages with scholarship in the areas of cultural economy and urban geography. Through an ethnographic approach to research, I discovered some of the challenges of deploying culture through urban planning as a tool for economic development. The knowledge co-generated in this thesis through participant observation and interviews is grounded in the stories of local inhabitants' struggles with inclusion in the cultural economy as well as their successes in combating their exclusion through grassroots practices. I have sought to build on previous research of alternative practices and cultural places such as Bain and Mclean (2013), Iveson (2013), Bromberg (2010), and Flusty (2000). While these scholars focus on creative and cultural practices in non-profit artist-run spaces, outdoor public spaces and liminal spaces, this thesis adds to the plethora of usable and flexible cultural spaces by incorporating a small business – a café and/or third place – into the spaces of possibility for cultural practices not

encouraged or celebrated by dominant neoliberal planning scripts and creative city best practices.

This thesis not only contributes to cultural economy and urban planning research in general, but specifically to the growing body of literature on culture and planning in mid-sized cities. Using the starting point of upper-tier government pressure on local government to facilitate growth, this research shows how mid-sized cities are forced to act like larger urban centres, and displays the government's bias and desire toward larger size; 'bigger is better'. Through normative planning models, these cities are encouraged to reject their current composition and size-associated traits in the drive to renew, develop and intensify. While Bain and McLean (2012) point out that it is common for mid-sized cities to not have purpose-built venues, resulting in a greater importance attributed to multi-purpose venues, the big city script forced upon mid-sized cities alters this characteristic through promotion of state-of-the-art cultural flagship buildings, thus changing the perception of the city's size and potentially its actual size. These actions further the popular notion that a city is not complete until it is a large city, or at least has the amenities of one. As the little brother of a large city like Toronto, St. Catharines like many other mid-sized and smaller cities agrees to enter the global competition to achieve its stamp on the big city map, while ignoring parts of its current population and their social needs.

### **6.3 Cultural Variables: Influence of Actors, Place and Practice**

While creativity is openly celebrated by urban planners and elected officials, it is celebrated for its ability to convert a place and its population rather than for the practice itself. As a result, creativity comes to be seen as a tool for the purpose of economic development,

rather than as a daily practice by people living out their desires and needs. No matter how much creativity is present, urban planners and elected officials will look outside of the current population to generate and attract more creativity. In the process of looking outward, the creativity already present amongst local inhabitants is often ignored or downplayed. Such dismissal of local creative talent suggests that it is not creativity that local governments are seeking, but rather wealth through an increase in number and an elevation in class that will inflate the tax base and property values through growth in consumption and investment. Considering that creativity and culture both exist prior to and as a result of formal cultural plans, I use this final chapter to bring together the multiple forms, scales, actors, geographies and objectives of cultural planning discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. While formal cultural planning is usually pursued by a small group of elected officials, urban planners and wealthy professionals for the purpose of economic development that benefits few, with a focus on an external population and a consumptive, exclusive culture, informal cultural planning, on the other hand, is enacted, lived and managed by local inhabitants for its own sake and inhabitants' social and cultural desires, and thus creates an inclusive culture accessible to the participation of inhabitants. This latter type of planning seeks out spaces in which its accessibility can thrive, and in this case study, as well as others such as Bromberg (2010) and Bain and Mclean (2013), third places show potential to be of significant use value to inhabitants who want to freely participate in culture and creativity. The grassroots cultural practices occurring in third places demonstrate a tangible alternative city within the city.

#### **6.4 Cultural Planner Identities**

The occupational composition of a cultural planning team tells much about who a plan is for and the type of culture that will be constructed. In St. Catharines, as in many cities around the world, the cultural planning team is composed of professional elite who are celebrated for their 'expert' knowledge – architects, urban planners, business leaders, elected officials, and economic development officers; a type of cultural planning that will profit this narrow population through financial transactions, increased investment, and local government popularity achieved through quick-fix policy that sprouts spectacular cultural flagships that symbolically represent economic progress and success. Urban planners who are focused on economic development and fostering urban entrepreneurship often only cursorily consult local inhabitants who are neither property or business owners. The economically precarious are often just as interested in accessing local culture but may be the least consulted of all residents and may also be the most negatively affected by formal cultural planning initiatives. This is clearly the case in St. Catharines, as none of the interviewees at Mahtay Café were aware of the cultural planning documents and were not consulted for their experiential knowledge, opinions, needs and desires. Being excluded from the formal planning ring, local inhabitants challenge the notion of professionalism as they create and assume their own cultural planning roles at the grassroots level. This agency and self-management demonstrates a culture for the people, by the people; more specifically, by people desiring to find access to participatory opportunities.

### **6.5 Staging Culture: The Influence of Place**

The places selected and constructed by these different groups of cultural planners also speak to the different objectives and operations of culture they imagine. Purpose-built

cultural flagships, specifically the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines, are composed of state-of-the-art infrastructure allowing for high quality sound, image and seating comfort, all afforded by multi-million dollar investments from multi-tier government (public tax dollars), business leaders and wealthy donors. The building price is high and so too is the cost to enter and to use the facility. Again, this type of culture is planned by globally influenced architects and urban planners, leading to a cookie-cutter, textbook, culturally-sterile design void of local inhabitants' manifestations. Additionally, the building is essentially never open to the non-consumptive public, and only open to the consumptive public at specific times, mostly during evening performance hours. In contrast, multi-purpose third places, specifically Mahtay Café in St. Catharines, lend themselves to be used at almost all hours of the day by the entire public, consumptive or not, for multiple purposes. The multi-purpose third place is eclectic as a result of its walls and floor being open to inhabitants' creative expressions and stories. Inhabitants are able to fill the space with meaning, creating a place of and by the people. To a degree, inhabitants author the place based on their needs and desires instead of the place authoring their actions.

## **6.6 The Value of Culture**

The actors and the place of action deeply influence the type of culture practiced as well as the purpose of that culture. The type of culture implemented through formal cultural planning is for the purposes of improving the city's global image, rebranding, attracting dollars through investment, population intensification and tourism, gentrifying its landscape and population, all leading to proposed economic development. This culture is

focused on an external population, external finances and external desires. Drawing in an external creative class as tourists, new residents, and labourers, who will all help to increase property values and taxes, and displace the more precarious culture in the process, is central to this type of city-planned culture. This culture does not benefit current inhabitants nor does it actively provide them with agency or participation, but rather ignores them because they do not directly appear to contribute to the renaissance vision. Based on gated entertainment, exclusive access, symbols of vibrancy and safety, and neoliberal ideals of pay-to-play, this city-planned culture appears to be largely shaped by middle- and upper-class norms and practices of cultural consumption. This type of culture is of high exchange value to the corporate city and real estate/business owners while holding little use value for the majority of local inhabitants. Alternatively, an accessible culture produced by and for the inhabitants obtains much use value for local inhabitants. This type of culture exists not because of economic objectives but as a direct result of people's desires to actively participate in a community and to express and share their beliefs, opinions and creations. People's need for social connection through interaction and collaboration amongst the neoliberal virus of individualism, entrepreneurialism and precarity drives this informal collective grassroots culture where people can gather, unite, develop relationships and be involved in cultural practices. This culture is accessible to all people through its affordability, open and progressive nature, and non-contingent participation.

## **6.7 Resulting Implications: Imagining a Future of Social Cultural Policy**

Considering the inherent and social benefits of culture and creativity accessible to all inhabitants, it is important that civic leaders and elected officials be reminded of the value of informal, grassroots culture and creativity to the livelihoods of inhabitants and be encouraged to direct cultural investment toward creating opportunities for inhabitants to manage and participate in culture. Instead of using public tax dollars to increase property values and taxes, which only benefits real estate owners, public tax dollars need to be invested in a way that can benefit all people regardless of their ownerships and existing wealth. In place of cultural economic policy that benefits few, a cultural policy focused around social benefits could benefit a greater breadth of people by providing accessible opportunities to be involved in cultural practices and the resulting cultural community. I strongly maintain that inhabitants' tax dollars should not be used to fund projects that are not accessible to them. Cultural projects, I argue, ought to be influenced by the needs of people who are marginalized, not by upper-class dreams and competitive place-branding ambitions. Civic leaders and elected officials ought to closely examine the demographics of their current population, particularly their underprivileged population, and create cultural policy focused on the desires expressed by these people, rather than using cultural policy for their more privileged population and populations that are not yet even residents of the city.

The third place Mahtay Café is an example of the type of cultural project the city could invest in to contribute toward social cultural opportunities for inhabitants. Mahtay Café displays the potential that multi-purpose third places have as places where local inhabitants can develop supportive social relationships with the potential to foster creative collaboration and engagement in cultural production. This third place is a successful

example of participatory culture in practice; it is a centrally located and socially accessible venue that inhabitants are attracted to and helps to meet their creative needs. Most importantly, a wide variety of people continuously make use of this space, not simply as a night out on the town or to enjoy a 'hot ticket' event, but in their daily routines and creative practice. The high construction costs and continuous operating costs of the PAC afforded by the city of St. Catharines could productively be reorganized toward affording a publically-funded multi-purpose third place imagined and managed by local inhabitants. Although it is admirable that a small business like Mahtay Café provides cultural accessibility, inhabitants should not have to rely on socially conscious and convivial business owners in order to participate in free culture, nor should inhabitants be forced to pull up their socks and 'do it themselves'. I maintain, that in the twenty-first century, despite municipal funding cut-backs and competing investment priorities, it should be the responsibility of civic leaders to direct a portion of its cultural investment focus towards fixed spaces of cultural participation for all.

Considering St. Catharines is a post-industrial city with a wealth of disused space, there should be a number of potential sites to operate a public centre for accessible cultural participation. The City could use vacant factory land and/or structures or vacant storefronts they have been desperately trying to fill downtown. In fact, the City of St. Catharines has immediate experience in adapting its "terrain vague" (De Sola-Morales, 1995) or abandoned urban buildings for new uses, with their recent transformation of the vacant heritage Canadian Hair Cloth Building into an arts school. This imagined cultural place could take on characteristics and functions of a community centre that fosters social interaction and provides space for cultural production and display, and most importantly,

is free and open to everyone. Bain and McLean (2013) display the success and usefulness of a free space, Don Blanche, which fosters cultural production and social collaboration through its provision of large open spaces and encouragement of diverse creative practices. Additionally, Bromberg (2010) provides example of the effectiveness of using a vacant storefront to house a non-capitalist space of generosity and conviviality, Mess Hall, which is imagined and operated collectively by its users for the purpose of their desired creative practices. These types of non-economic social centres bring unique views and lives together that develop new potential ways of being in urban space (Wendler, 2014). Wendler (2014) also provides a third example of free community space, Prinzessinnengarten, an urban garden with a café on previously unused city land where people are able to come together, interact, share and learn from one another, and be creative and innovate new practices and methods, all based around the multidisciplinary culture of gardening. Each of these free communal centres is accessible to all people and have the ability to contribute to people's social well-being and provide accessible opportunities for cultural participation. I am hopeful that these examples and my overall thesis provide St. Catharines, and others cities implementing revitalization efforts, an illustration of the types of places and opportunities that inclusive cultural planning approaches can contribute to.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

### Café Users (Artists/Non-artists)

- 1) Please begin with a brief description of yourself as a resident in St. Catharines. If you are an artist, you can expand on that as well.
- 2) Why do you come to Mahtay café? What is the importance of this café to you?
- 3) What does Mahtay Café offer you? Is this unique to this setting, or do you receive this elsewhere?
- 4) How, if at all, has this café contributed to you emerging or growing as an artist?
- 5) How, if at all, has the arts community evolved in relation to this café?
- 6) How do you feel about the recent cultural developments in downtown St. Catharines?

### Café Owner/Employees

- 1) How is this café able to support artists?
- 2) Why are artists important to the cafe?
- 3) What unique characteristics/abilities does this café offer artists?
- 4) How, if at all, has the arts community changed in relation to this café?
- 5) What relationship exists with, or impacts have been felt from, the cultural developments across the street?

### Municipal Representatives

- 1) Could you begin with an introduction of yourself, your role in the city, and your role within municipal cultural projects?
- 2) What are the main infrastructural drivers of the city's cultural plan and cultural

development?

3) Why is the cultural plan and cultural development important?

4) Who and what is the cultural plan/development seeking to attract?

5) What do the new cultural investments (Meridian Centre and Performing Arts Centre) offer to the general public? To local artists?

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

#### Study name

The Importance of Third Places as Cultural Infrastructure in Mid-sized Cities: A St. Catharines Case Study

#### Researchers

Researcher name Jordan Nicolaides

Masters Candidate

Graduate Program in Geography

Email address jnic@yorku.ca

Office phone (416) 736-5106 (York U Geog Grad Dept)

#### Purpose of the research

To enhance knowledge about the relationship between formal and informal cultural planning, and further understand the importance of public places that foster grassroots art opportunities to the development of culture in mid-sized cities in Canada.

This research will be conducted through participant observation, participant interviews, literature reviews and media analysis, and will be presented as a written thesis, as well as through oral/visual presentations.

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

The interviewer will ask you to respond to 4-6 open-ended questions regarding your feelings, experiences and opinions in relation to local arts/culture. You will answer as many of these questions as you are willing.

Expected time: 5-20min.

An audio recorder will be used during the interview.

#### Risks and discomforts

There may be potential social discomfort if someone is listening into the interview and disagrees with a participant's response.

To mitigate any discomfort, the participant can request to move the interview to an area further away from nearby others, within the public space.

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

The potential benefit of your participation in this research is the increased awareness of the importance of accessible places and opportunities for grassroots art participation and expression, and more attention given to the ability of these places and actions in fostering local cultural and social development.

**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**

The data will be kept confidential unless you have given your permission otherwise. The recorded data will be transcribed, coded (using numbers - and in certain cases possible by law, position titles - but not names), stored in a computer password digital file, and will be destroyed once thesis is complete in Spring/Summer 2016. The consent forms will be destroyed 2 years after research completion.

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

**Questions about the research?**

If you have further or future questions about the research in general or your role in the study, please contact the researcher, supervisor or graduate program:

Researcher - Jordan Nicolaides, jnic@yorku.ca, (416) 736-5106

Supervisor - Dr. Alison Bain, abain@yorku.ca, (416)736-2100 x 66192

Graduate Program - York University Geography, gradgeog@yorku.ca, (416) 736-5106

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. 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, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)

**Legal rights and signatures:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in

The Importance of Third Places as Cultural Infrastructure in Mid-sized Cities:A St.Catharines Case Study

conducted by Jordan Nicolaides. 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** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_