

# UNDERSTANDING NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

*A Study of  
the Street  
in Vancouver  
Downtown Eastside*  
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# **Understanding Neighbourhood Change - A Study of the Street in Vancouver Downtown Eastside**

**Att förstå stadsdelsomvandling  
– en fallstudie av gaturummet i Vancouver Downtown Eastside**

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*The research for this thesis was carried out on Coast Salish Territories*



Strathcona back alley  
September 2012

# PREFACE

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## MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

*When I first moved to Vancouver in 2010, I went to explore the city; a city with reputation to be one of the most "livable cities" (City of Vancouver 2010), where green initiatives and efforts to create an attractive urban environment are well known approaches (see for example Vancouver 2020 - A Bright Green Future (ibid.)). When exploring the city through walking around without a certain goal, I ended up in Chinatown one evening. Chinatown is located in the eastern part of the Downtown area, also called the Downtown Eastside. In my mind, I had imagined the area to be cozy and magical, a friendly space with businesses open during the evening hours, serving the tourists. But when arriving to the area, it frightened me a little; instead of the atmosphere I had created in my mind, I was met by closed storefronts and poorly lit back alleys. The people passing me on the streets seemed to be vulnerable, poor, homeless. The situation took me by surprise, and I left the area quite quickly and figured I should go back sometime during daytime instead.*

*When I, a few months later, decided to move east, I suddenly came to live next to this area; it became my neighborhood. I got to know the streets, the people, the atmosphere. The streets ceased to be intimidating; rather, they became inviting and exciting. Instead of walking on the main streets, I preferred to use the shortcuts, walking through the alley ways, away from the familiar commerce and traffic. For some reason, these were the spaces in which I began to get to know this city. I began to get a wider understanding for the complexity of this city - of the city. These spaces revealed to me the complexity of the city, in terms of power and poverty and the role of public space in relation between the two. These spaces created a curiosity for me to understand what role they could possibly play in the creation and maintenance of a community; these streets are peoples homes, but also, these are streets which constantly change.*



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When starting the process of this thesis I wasn't sure where it would lead me. I want to thank my supervisor Eva Kristensson and assistant supervisor Emma Paulsson for supporting me with their knowledge and for encouraging me along this journey, and for reminding that "en forskningsresa är en resa ut i det okända".

I also want to thank all of my inspiring friends in Vancouver for their curiosity, support and friendship. Special thanks to Maria Wallstam for encouraging me to carry out this study and for invaluable input and interesting discussions, and to Daniela Aiello for the unlimited access to your personal library.

Thank you Mum, for sharing your knowledge and for always being there for me.

Finally, I want to give thanks to the lands and people of the Unceded Coast Salish Territories and the Downtown Eastside for letting me carry out this study in this city that I love.

Malmö/Vancouver, August 2013

Lisa Markström





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## *ABSTRACT*

This thesis explores what effects gentrification can have on the urban environment, and how neighbourhood change is connected to and affected by global trends and local planning strategies. The analysis draws upon an empirical study carried out in a gentrifying area in Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside, which has Canada's largest community of concentrated urban poor. The empirical material consists of data collected by the author, with an emphasis on site observations, attendance on public planning and community meetings and interviews. The study focuses on the street and the sidewalk as public space and discusses these spaces through the lens of theory on gentrification and urban justice.

The study shows that gentrification has an impact on the street life and the physical space of the study area. The Vancouver Downtown Eastside is interpreted as a socially and economical problematic area, and the City of Vancouver attempts to carry through changes according to the concept of "revitalization without displacement", something which this study confirms can be hard to implement successfully. Further, this thesis argues the importance for landscape architects and planners to take on an active role in creating more just and diverse cities, where segregation between socio-economic groups attempts to be avoided. Through being advocates of the urban commons and public space, where equality, diversity and processes of learning from our fellow citizens are in focus, rather than creating landscapes of consumption, this thesis argues that the profession of landscape architecture and planning can contribute to making our cities more just.

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# INTRO

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## AIM, PROBLEM BACKGROUND & METHOD

Gentrification is a subject which during the last decade has been widely discussed within the field of urban planning and is a concept which was initially formulated by Ruth Glass in 1964 (Lees, Slater & Wylie 2007). Many researchers draw parallels between gentrification and global neoliberal strategies, as well as the effects which these strategies have on how cities are planned (Smith 2002, Harvey 2005). In the present global economy, cities all over the world are competing for resources such as business investments, the “international managerial class” (Atkinson & Bridge 2005, p. 1) and cheap labour (Atkinson & Bridge 2005). In order for cities to increase the possibilities to attract human and economical investments, different planning strategies have, and are constantly being, developed. During the 21st century, different economical, political, cultural and environmental strategies have been used in order to promote and market cities as attractive and livable.

### *AIM*

The overall aim with this thesis is to study what effects processes of gentrification can have on the urban environment in a larger city. In addition, the study aims to study how these changes can be connected to global and local planning strategies and trends in order to get an understanding of how global and local planning strategies affect the urban fabric and the way it is used.

More specific, I hope to bring a wider understanding to the complexity and the role of urban streetscapes in the context of gentrification, by examining how the ongoing urban transformation affects this type of urban space, the users and the use of urban space. With the direction of these purposes, the following main research questions were formulated:

- what effects can gentrification have on the streetscape in a larger city?
- what spatial resources and conditions can be identified in the streetscape in an area which is going through a process of gentrification?
- can spatial and usage differences be identified and if so, how are they connected to gentrification as neighbourhood change?

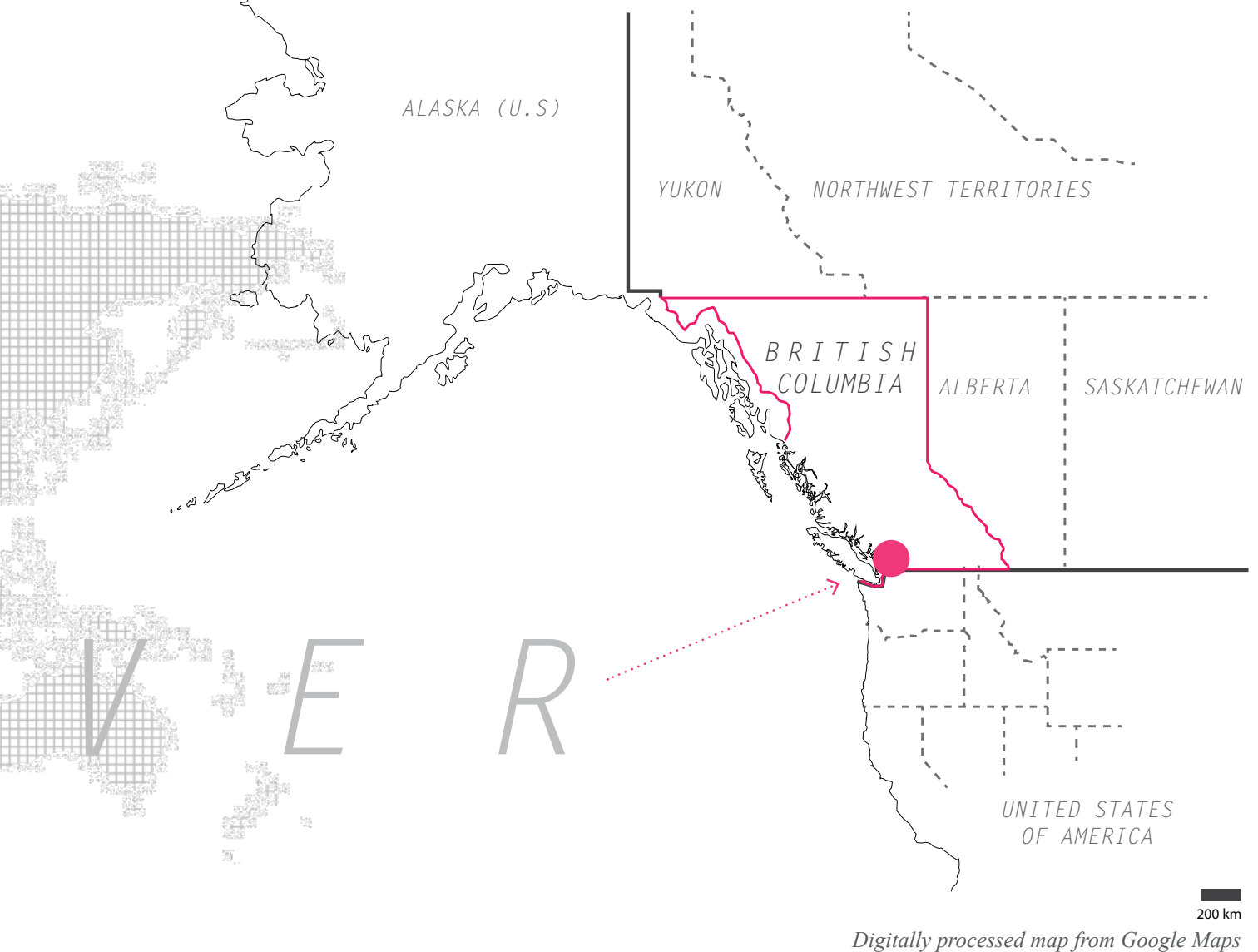


*Digitally processed map from <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/worldout.htm>*

## *PROBLEM BACKGROUND*

In order to achieve a relevant analysis, I chose to carry out my research in Vancouver, located in the province of British Columbia on the Canadian West Coast. The choice of study site was based on Vancouver having a well known reputation within the practice of urban planning and design to be innovative (the most prominent may be the concept of “Vancouverism”, see page 64). It is also a city which has taken on an active role in the global competition between cities, and has been selected to be “the world’s most livable city” (City of Vancouver 2010, p.11) by The Economist several times during the last decade (The Economist 2011). Along with this, mainly positive, image, Vancouver also has Canada’s largest community of concentrated urban poor. In Canadian media, this area is often mentioned as “the poorest postal code in Canada” (New York Times 2010; The Globe and Mail 2013) and the area has, not rarely, been described as a ghetto. The area also forms one of Canada’s most concentrated open-air drug markets and a comparative large part of the citizens are suffering from addiction and/or mental illness. Through studying this area which for Vancouver, and for Canada in whole, has quite a distinguished socio-economic situation, I aim to compare the outdoor space, and the changes which are taking place in it, to the city’s strategies to maintain its position as a competitive city on the global arena.

My personal relationship to the study site, the Vancouver Downtown Eastside (DTES), is another main motif and background to why I chose to write my thesis about this particular space in this particular city. Vancouver has been my home during two years, and in close



proximity I have experienced how art collectives, non-profit cultural organizations, which has functioned as meeting-points for me and my community, have been pushed out of this downtown area. I have seen these spaces getting replaced by high-end restaurants, expensive offices and apartments (yes, I have even seen a dog spa move in at a former gallery space!). But mainly, I have witnessed the struggle which vulnerable groups and the present low-income community in the Downtown Eastside are fighting in order to maintain their right to live in the area and not being pushed out through the gentrification process which is taking place. With an increased part of the stock of affordable spaces for housing, culture and businesses disappearing through different renewal schemes, the displacement of people, activities and low-income communities is a reality in the Downtown Eastside. Personal experiences and observations has therefore played a key role in choice of this study, as well as the study area.

Through performing a case study, I hope to deepen my own understanding of how planning visions and strategies on a global and local (Vancouver) level affects the spatial, social and economic conditions in an inner-city neighbourhood. I also hope to examine how this can be substantiated on a street level. According to Carmona et al (2010), it is important for urban designers to have a “deeper understanding of the context in which they operate and how their design policies, proposals and projects are either transformed, or can resist transformation, through implementation” (Carmona, Heath, Taner & Oc 2010, p. 269).



## METHODOLOGY

When this thesis was initiated, the route was not all set. For me, this study has been an exploration of the urban context in which the profession of landscape architecture and urban designers work, as well as an exploration of a specific space. But it has also been an exploration and search for the most useful methods, which would best meet the objective in relation to the time available to perform the study.

The thesis was carried out through two main components; a *background* presenting theory and previous research and an *empirical study*.

The *background* aims to give an overview of theory and previous research in the fields of globalization's relation to gentrification, as well as public space. It also aims to help the reader to get an understanding of the theoretical lens through which the case study was performed and analyzed. The initial parts of the thesis present previous research and theory within the fields of globalization, gentrification, cities and justice and public space. The theory constitutes the basis for my research and provides an overview of central theoretical concepts of the study. It aims to introduce the reader to the problem background in which my empirical study was carried out. In doing this, the aim has been to use recognized research within each subject area in order to provide a substantial and factual background.

The *empirical study* was carried out through data collection with a triangular approach. Data was collected through site observations, open-ended, semi-structured interviews, research of city planning documents, attendance on public planning and community meetings, and was documented through field notes, quick sketches and photographs. Studies of planning documents, research and theory aimed to provide a relevant background to the study area (Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside) in which the studied streetscape is located. When collecting data on site, methods such as observations through site visits, participation in public planning- and community organization meetings as well as interviews was used. Although I did set up rules for the use of method, I also made the decision to keep an open approach to it, in order to also provide space for the unexpected. Since the case study site is home to vulnerable and marginalized groups, I felt the responsibility to take on a sensitive and acknowledging approach when collecting data and information about the site. Therefore, the method was partly shaped along with getting to know the area and the social environment better. A more detailed description of the case study methodology can be found on page 53.

## LITERATURE

The main theory on the subject of global tendencies of neoliberalism and gentrification studies used for this thesis are written by theorists such as David Harvey (2005) and Neil Smith (2002). Harvey is leading theorist in Geography and Social Theory at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and Smith was a prominent geographer at the same university (CUNY). Smith has contributed to the research and discussion on gentrification with a special focus on the "revanchist city". Loretta Lees (King's College London), Tom Slater (University of Edinburgh) & Elvyn Wyly (University of British Columbia) (2007; 2010) are geographers who have contributed to the field with both individual research as well as significant collaborating publications on gentrification (*Gentrification* 2007 and *The Gentrifica-*

tion Reader 2010). Sharon Zukin (1989; 2009; 2010) is a professor in Sociology at Brooklyn College and CUNY. She has contributed to the research field of urban life and gentrification with her research on authenticity and the artist's role in neighbourhood change. When covering previous studies and research on cities and justice, publications by urban theorists such as Susan Fainstein (2010; 2011; 2012) and geographers Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell (2003; 2008) were used as sources to cover this subject.

Public space is a widely studied research area, and in order to keep a focus on the subject of the study, I have mainly used texts which focus on the street as public space; I have tried to cover public space in general and the street as public space in particular. To get an understanding of public space historically and in present time, Anthony Orum and Zachary P. Neal (2010) was a main source. In order to cover some well established ideas on how design and architecture relate to city life and the use of space, danish architect Jan Gehl's classic publication *Life Between Buildings* (2010) was studied, as well as the ideas and research carried out by Jane Jacobs. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht's publication *Sidewalks – Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space* (2012) was a main source on the subject of sidewalks as public space. Publications by Nicholas Blomley (2004; 2011) has contributed with a disputing and critical view on the established design approaches to sidewalks as public space. Blomley is a Vancouver based professor in Urban Geography at the Simon Fraser University and has carried out several research projects on gentrification and geographies of power, often with the Vancouver Downtown Eastside in focus.



*“The question about what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights”*

**David Harvey,  
New Left Review (2008, p. 23)**





# THE CITY

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## URBANITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

### GLOBALIZATION AND THE CITY

The world in which we live today is a well connected global arena. Many of us can easily travel across continents and borders, and if not physically, we can connect to each other virtually. The economy is not reliant or limited by national borders; the economy is global and neoliberalism is the hegemonic economical philosophy which the world market relies on (Smith 2002, Harvey 2005). Today, almost all states has adopted neoliberal theory in one way or another, either voluntary or through being responsive to the neoliberal system. Advocates for neoliberalism are found all over the spectra of societal and economical functions, both on a global and local scale; it has become “hegemonic within global capitalism” (Harvey 2005 p. 9).

Freedom is one of the cornerstones in the theory of neoliberalism; the freedom of the individual and the free market. But David Harvey (2005) questions *what kind* of freedom which is discussed, as well as *who's* freedom. ‘Freedom’ is a concept which in itself is appealing to most of us; but in the case of neoliberalism, according to Harvey, freedom equals the freedom of private actors on the financial market: “The freedom it embodies reflects the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations and financial capital” (Harvey 2005 p. 7). Smith (2002) draws connections between neoliberalism and the history of liberalism, and argues that today’s global neoliberalism derives from 18th century liberalism, which was pivoted on two crucial assumptions: that “free and democratic exercise of individual self-interests led to the optimal collective social good” (Smith 2002, p. 429-30) and that the market knows best. When looking at how these ideas have developed into the 21st century, neoliberalism represents a significant return to the original axioms of liberalism with a focus on individual self-interests and the reliance of the free market. Today, this market is acting and relying on a fluid global arena (Smith 2002).

Neoliberalism as a political and economical system developed during the late 1970’s and 1980’s, and around the world, changes occurred through powerful political leaders such as Thatcher in Great Britain, Reagan in the United States and Deng Xiaoping in China. These political changes would come to affect the new global economical order, often termed as ‘globalization’. The idea of neoliberalism is the idea of a limited role for the state, which according to the neoliberal ideas should function as supportive to the free market. The role of the state within this system is that of a creator and preserver of an institutional framework which support the neoliberal values. The state is expected to put up legal frameworks to defend and protect the rights of property and to guarantee the “proper functioning of markets” (Harvey 2005 p. 2), through law and protective institutions (such as the police). According to neoliberal politics, it is also up to the state to set up a market for fields which lack a “natural” market, such as education and healthcare (Harvey 2005).

### NEOLIBERALISM AND THE URBAN IMPACT

How, then, does this economic system relate to the city? What does the global economy have to do with urban life and the shaping and development of, and within, the city? And what is really new with how this global arena works? An international market has existed for

thousands of years, where trade of goods and culture between different continents has taken place. According to Jamie Peck (2013), a professor in Urban Geography and a researcher in urban and regional political economy at the University of British Columbia, “cities have been absolutely central to the neoliberal project as proving grounds for some of the leading edge experiments in welfare cutbacks and privatization” (*Austerity Urbanism* 2013). Susan Fainstein (2010) explains this further, and argues that the changes in economy and production mobility has resulted in a decrease of social programs; programs intended to benefit a putative population. These changes in many Western societies can be seen as an effect of post-World War II (so called “Post-Fordism”, see Fainstein 2010, p. 169). The growing development towards non-western manufacturing resulted in reduced needs of labour in many Western societies, something which partly also broke up the working-class unity which during the industrialization era “had developed within the mass-production industry” (Fainstein 2010, p. 169). This, in combination with the global mobility of potential workforces, which in its turn also brought up the competition for jobs, resulted in unions losing membership and the political discussion of those issues lost ground. This was also followed by a growing culture of consumerism and “Within this set of forces urban planning and policy became increasingly oriented toward a single-minded focus on encouraging growth through the vehicle of public-private partnerships” (Fainstein p. 169). The new global economy has resulted in production being much more mobile, moving where the costs are low and production is most profitable; and in that sense place has become less important. Described by Neil Smith (2002), the addition to the present context of the global market is how and where production is taking place and how the scale of economic production has expanded. In short terms, production has gone global. One North American example on the stepping away from site-based national production is Detroit, which had a prosperous car industry reaching its peak in the 1950’s, but when production started to move to other parts of the world (Smith 2002), Detroit was being left with an economical struggle which remains to this day. With a more fluid and variable economy, “definitive sites of production for specific commodities became increasingly difficult to identify, and the old language of economic geography no longer made sense” (Smith 2002 p. 433). This is the economical context in which cities of today exist and develop, and will be referred to as the “neoliberal city” in this thesis.

### THE COMPETITIVE CITY

Because of the global mobility of capital and production, cities and urban regions are competing over investment capital. In the wakes of the changes of the economical system, many Western cities have moved from industrial production to focusing on entrepreneurial, cultural innovative and knowledge production. Today, it has become important for cities to be attractive and competitive (Olsson 2008), and strategies to attract new investments and residents are crucial on the competitive arena. In that sense, the neoliberal city contains both the conditions and the result of neoliberal ideas (Olsson 2008), with economical, social and spatial relationships which can be connected to globalization. For many cities, branding has become an important part of the acting on this competitive arena. Image-making have become an important strategy. Today cities promote themselves as being “cultural diverse” by promoting existing Chinatowns, Little Italy’s (or by actually actively try to create these kinds

of areas), create “cultural flagships” (Olsson 2008, pp. 235-236; translated from Swedish to English) or signature architecture or by hosting big sports events (Olsson 2008); there are various ways through which cities are competing for economical investments and human capital and strive to be acclaimed.

Competitive strategies also have impacts on the kinds of environments that are created in our cities. Consumerist focused, clean and pleasant urban landscapes are designed, not rarely through processes of revitalization and gentrification. But as Lina Olsson (2008) points out, there is also another side to the representative city districts and neighbourhoods created in the wakes of the branded city; the segregated city. Social polarization can be found both within the city and its physical spaces, as well as on a societal level such as schools and other institutions (Fainstein 2010; Olsson 2008). According to Olsson (2008), city landscapes with segregation between rich and poor are characterized by both social and spatial barriers, something which can lead to a disappearance of socially mixed neighbourhoods in many of our city areas (Olsson 2008). According to Zukin (2009), revitalization as a result of competitiveness in central urban areas can be seen as a threat. Further, Zukin argues that gentrification and social fragmentation will lead to a loss of authenticity within the city (Zukin 2009).

108

**COMING  
SOON**

110

101

4200 - 5000 N. HASTINGS  
5700 - 6100 N. HASTINGS

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# GENTRIFICATION

## GENTRIFICATION – AN INTRODUCTION

Seen through the history of urbanity, gentrification is not a new phenomena. Although, during the past decade, gentrification has won a broader acknowledgement both within the field of research as well as in the general urban discussions and city planning contexts, the term was coined half a century ago, in 1964, by the British sociologist Ruth Glass (Lees, Slater & Wyly 2008). Gentrification is a definition which aims to describe the process of the “replacement of an existing population by a gentry” (Lees *et al.* 2008, p. 5). This process has taken place in many urban environments, but inner-city neighbourhoods in New York (Brooklyn) and London (Barnsbury) are often used as examples. After Glass’s attempt to describe this process, the definition has been developed further by researchers such as Neil Smith, who argued that the process of gentrification itself, as well as the definition, evolve: “The term, coined by Ruth Glass in 1964, has mostly been used to describe the residential aspects of this process but this is changing, as gentrification itself evolves” (Smith in Lees *et al.* 2008, p. 9). According to Lees *et al.* (2008) “the term gentrification is one of the most political terms in urban studies” (Lees *et al.* 2008, p. xxii), since the definition itself implies class-based displacement. Renowned scholars within the field of gentrification research states that gentrification is a strategy which often takes place intentionally, and that key actors of gentrification must be held responsible for the process; “cities and neighbourhoods do not move from a state of decline to renaissance naturally but that a plethora of key actors are involved in the process of gentrification – from individual gentrifiers to landlords, realtors, developers, the state, corporations, institutions, and so on – and they must be held accountable for their actions.” (Lees *et. al* 2008, p. xxiii).

According to David Havey, urbanization has always been a class phenomenon (Harvey 2008). Gentrification, thus, is a term and a process which implicates issues around economy and class, and how these issues can unfold in human settlements. When the process of gentrification was coined, it mainly described the process in small-scale neighbourhoods. Today, gentrification is no longer seen only as an urban process in first world countries, rather, it is a global phenomenon which no longer is confined to urban centers in Western countries. According to Atkinson & Bridge (2005), gentrification has gone global and can be found in many parts of the world, in both urban as well as regional centers and rural environments. With these assumptions, the research agenda of gentrification widens from a neighbourhood and city scale. Atkinson & Bridge (2005) also argue that there is an “international professional managerial class” (*ibid.*, p. 9); a global cosmopolitan class which have skills and possibilities to transfer anywhere in the world. This argument can therefor be associated to the discussion of globalization and a mobile population. The amplification of the processes of gentrification develops simultaneously as a “market reform, greater permeability and population migration have promoted internal changes in the economies of countries not previously associated with gentrification” (*ibid.* p. 2). The authors also raises the question whether these changes are related to globalization’s “manifestation as a form of new urban colonialism” (*ibid.* p 2).

When it comes to gentrification on the urban scale, researchers such as Neil Smith has argued that gentrification as an urban strategy can be interpreted as “revanchist” (see *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Smith 1996). This theory claims that

an elite (the middle-class) re-takes the urban core (Atkinson & Bridge 2005) after having abandoned the city during the “white-flight” in the middle of the 20th century. “White-flight” is a critiquing term which aims to describe the suburbanization which followed after WWII, where middle-class populations moved out from city cores to suburbs, away from e.g a black population (U.S) or the working class (U.K), and where low-income people were left in disinvested inner city areas (Lees *et al.* 2008, p. 10). Although, this has also been subject for discussion within the field, where Smith has argued that gentrification primarily is a matter of movement of capital, not people (the so called “rent gap theory” formulated by Neil Smith in 1979) (Atkinson & Bridge 2005).

## ASPECTS ON GENTRIFICATION

Although gentrification is a dynamic process, where many aspects are into play, research on gentrification often takes on different aspects on the phenomenon as such; studies and theories on how different economical initiatives, demographics and actors are involved in the processes of gentrification, and what impacts they can have on urban environments. The following section therefor aims to introduce some of the main aspects.

### ***Gentrification and the Artist***

Sharon Zukin is one of the researchers that has studied the connection between gentrification and art communities. Zukin wrote her first publication on the subject in the early 1980's (see *Loft Living – Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, Zukin 1989). Her thesis focused on changes taking place in inner-city neighbourhoods of New York City. In her study, she describes how she experienced how former manufacturing and warehouse spaces, housed by artist taking advantage of cheap rents and expedient spatial conditions, gradually became more and more attractive to a young, urban middle-class with capital. She studied if and how artists communities functioned as catalysts for gentrification, when moving to and/or being active in an area. She argued that this was the case, and that there is only a matter of time before economically stronger groups would follow, and as an effect displace the artists. In the 1970's, it became fashionable among people in New York to live in areas that had previously been manufacturing areas. Zukin (1989) refers to the phenomenon as “loft living” which would describe housing in industrial buildings and warehouses.

### ***The Creative City Concept***

This relationship between creative, artist-based communities and gentrification processes has resulted in artist being blamed for causing, or at least actively (but not necessarily intentionally) taking part in processes of gentrification. According to Blomey (2004), “Pioneers”, such as artists, attracted to life on the cultural margins” (p. 78) has also been criticized for not recognizing their role as agents of gentrification. As an irony of fate, one main reason for artists to live in certain areas is because of low rents and affordable living conditions. But, as a result of the competitive city, creativity and culture has become a commodity; it has turned into a planning strategy which has been adapted by cities all over the world (e.g Toronto, Berlin, Malmö). One of the most renowned scholars on the subject is Richard Florida and his theory on the creative class; that creativity has an economical value which can attract an economically and culturally strong population to cities. Florida means that

creativity, creatives and culture can be linked to a city's economic development (Hahn & Kagan 2011). Charles Landry is, alongside with Florida, one of the main thinkers on the creative city-concept. When discussing the creative city, Landry explains that it grasps both a creative "mind" (both individually and in a societal whole), where diversity, tolerance, measured risk taking, thinking across disciplines and to be able to "imagine the implications of the present for the long term" (Landry 2007) is what creates the conditions for a creative process to start. The strategy of the creative city has been criticized for resulting in gentrification, segregation, exclusion and displacement. The reason to this critique is that the strategy aims to put focus on the cultural capital of a city, such as artist communities, or certain areas, as a way to attract professionals with high levels of cultural and economical capital (Hahn & Kagan 2011, p. 13). Therefore, culture is used as a 'growth machine' (ibid., p. 13) in order to upgrade a district and its atmosphere, where artists could be seen as pioneers for gentrification, self-chosen or not. As Vanessa Mathews (2010) writes; "Within the new economy, art is one of the leading place-making devices, and renewal processes are a leading force in restructuring the urban. The arts sector is incorporated into policy strategies to enhance place image, build social cohesion (quality of life and livability), and to diversify the economy" (Mathews 2010 p. 667). One of the risks with this strategy is that it, in order to attract certain economical groups, actually causes more homogeneity and a loss of identity within neighbourhoods and in residents' relation to the city in itself. What could also be seen as problematic is that artists are used as part of the real estate system, raising the value of an area or a building, as well as in how city developers' view of artist's work and efforts could be comprehended as only being based on economical terms (Hahn & Kagan 2011 p. 20).

### ***Entrepreneurial Pioneers***

Sharon Zukin (2009) also discusses gentrification through business-driven development, where she describes the situation in the neighbourhoods of Harlem and Williamsburg, New York, where a decrease of traditional local stores and services since the early 1990's has taken place. At the same time, there has been a dramatic increase of boutiques, mainly those of smaller local chains, and a share of large chain stores. These "new" businesses are, according to the Zukin, by "the media, state, and quasi-public organizations" seen as "symbols and agents of revitalization and therefor valuable for the development of the neighbourhoods" (Zukin 2009, p. 47). Zukin argues that those new retail investors also contribute to the changing of "the social class and ethnic character of the neighbourhoods" (ibid. p. 47). Further, one of the impacts the new businesses have in these areas are those of "displacement of local retail stores and services on which long-term, lower class residents rely and to the state's failure to take responsibility for their retention, especially in a time of economic crisis" (ibid. 47). Since the 1970's one can see how restaurants, cafés, and stores has contributed to neighbourhood change in form of gentrification, and therefor also work as "highly visible signs of gentrification in cities around the world" (Zukin 2009, p. 47). Through this kind of changes, the retail landscape focuses on catering and "responding to a different consumer base" (ibid p. 48), as well as creating a new sense of place.

A changing neighbourhood which develops towards a more economically stable population may attract new retail entrepreneurs to that area, seizing an "economic" opportunity. Also, these areas may be more affordable for entrepreneurs to set up a new business, on a location

where it is less expensive than for example other Downtown locations. Zukin (2009) argues that the state also has a role in business-driven neighbourhood change. State agencies do have the power to “shape a new retail landscape with economic development policies, zoning changes, and policing strategies” (p. 49), and therefor state and media in general support this kind of retail landscape which in its turn works in favor for residential gentrification, “against the interests of long-term, low-income residents” (p. 49). Further, this can be interpreted as a wanted effect on neoliberal strategies. The effects a changed retail landscape could have on space is interesting, since it creates a new sense of place.

### *SOCIAL MIX*

Loretta Lees (2008) describes the academic discourse on gentrification as critical, concerning the social changes that the process brings, and that the academic conclusion is that gentrification leads to displacement, segregation and social polarization. The process is often connected to the concept of “social mix”, a renewal process which in planning circumstances aims to create more livable and sustainable communities (Lees 2008). The concept of social mix is popular among both national and local governments as well as among urban policy-makers and urban scholars, and Lees stresses the fact that the ideas of social and functional mixed communities remains mostly unquestioned within the planning field (Lees 2008). Lees questions if social mixing at all can be seen as positive (which when brought up in planning circumstances often is taken for granted), and stresses that the rhetoric of social mixing as a planning tool hides a gentrification strategy. Words such as ‘urban sustainability’, ‘revitalization’, ‘regeneration’ and ‘renaissance’ are terms which, according to Lees, are used instead of the word ‘gentrification’. She argues that gentrification is a loaded word with negative connotations, “but who would oppose ‘social mixing’?” (Lees 2008, p. 2452). Lees asks where this passion for social mixing comes from, and brings up the fact that through “moving” higher-income citizens into an area with lower-income residents, it may likely result in improvements of tax-income, support for local business and a decreased burden on the social services. In other words, the economy of the area will increase. An interesting aspect brought up in the article is that social mix never sets off in the opposite way, where spatial changes and programs aim to encourage lower-income citizens into a middle- or high income neighbourhood. Lees concludes this as that “social mix policies /.../ push the idea that we all should somehow be/become middle-class and that we all want to be middle-class” (Lees 2008 p. 2463-64). This is also brought up by Blomley, who argues that it is common to consider “urban pioneers” (e.g entrepreneurs opening up a new business in a gentrifying area) to be able to improve the physical environment because of their interests of keeping their surroundings representative. Also, this kind of change is often considered to potentially “bring a moral example” into a neighbourhood (Blomley 2004, p. 87).

Lees argues that social mix as a planning strategy could be interpreted as a way to promote gentrification and to normalize the “other” through, with spatial means as a tool, bringing middle-class norms into neighbourhoods with other social structures and dynamics. But as Lees stresses, if social improvements and change is the aim, (one-way) social mixing is not the right direction; “Social mix policies are cosmetic policies rather than ones prepared to deal with the whole host of complex social, economic and cultural reasons as to why there are concentrations of poor, economically inactive people in our central cities” (Lees 2008 p.



2463). This means that we must acknowledge the reasons to why there are segregation and social imbalances and take into consideration the larger structural dynamics in our society which create those. Blomley (2004) stresses that the concept of social mix is “commonplace in neoliberal planning discourse” to create a “positive interaction between the classes” (Blomley 2004, p. 88), and that the concept in itself is problematic since it “promises equality in the face of hierarchy” (ibid., p. 99). Fainstein argues that “paradoxically what is rationalized as planning for diversity is in fact destroying genuine diversity” (Fainstein 2011, p. 162).

### THE RIGHT TO THE CITY?

Blomley refers to the attitude behind gentrification as a consideration of envisioning “a better use for a certain building” or neighbourhoods (Blomley 2004, p. 78). The “concept of highest and best use” (ibid., p. 84) reoccurs in discussions on urban renewal, and Blomley argues that the attitude of the highest and best use of property is hegemonic; to extract the highest potential is to be forward thinking. Therefore “any argument that low-income residents have a right to occupancy is a spit in the wind of ‘natural’ inevitability” (Blomley 2004, p. 86). In other words, if an area hasn’t fulfilled its “full potential”, it may also be comprehended as non-progressive. But who decides what the “best use” may be and what are the values that “full potential” is based on? By raising questions towards the concept of highest and best use, it is also interesting to analyze the rhetorics and the words which are commonly used when discussing urban change; words such as renewal, renaissance, revitalization. These words suggests that the present situation is outdated, non-progressive or without life. According to the economic model which we operate within, Blomley argues, the highest and best use is commonly comprehended as to make an area more profitable. In *Loft Living* (1989), Zukin discusses how she comprehended the gentrification process in her neighbourhood in New York in the 1970’s. She mentions the argumentation of the constantly evolving city; that cities has and always will continue to change, reshape and develop, and that “realists dismissed these complaints [to not perform the proposed changes] as blatant nostalgia” (Zukin 2010, p. x preface). Another argument is that revitalization projects in areas with social issues is a way to get rid of problems related to these. Zukin argues that it is not the getting rid of problems which she considers as problematic; rather, she consider the disinterest of dealing with social issues in non-profit terms as an issue;

*“I don’t call my dismay nostalgia. I don’t miss the street crime or heroin trade or graffiti-covered subway cars. I don’t think that poor tenants should be condemned to live forever in old-fashioned apartments with bathtubs in the kitchen because the landlord won’t build a bathroom. I do miss the look and feel of neighbourhoods whose diversity was tangible in the smell and sounds of ethnic cooking, experimental art galleries and performance spaces, and faces and voices of men and women who came from everywhere to create the distinctive character of streets.”*

(Page x, Preface, Zukin 2010)

The option of urban growth which offers a production of authentic places is needed in order for our cities to evolve without displacement and polarization; “Yet the right to produce au-

thentic places in both senses, historically old and creatively new, offers an alternative to the kind of growth that pushes many people out. Claiming authenticity can be a means of gaining ownership for any group” (Zukin 2010, p. xiii). Erasing authenticity in the process of urban renewal, according to Zukin, is to take away the cultural inheritance from urban working class (Fainstein 2011). Fainstein discusses Zukin’s thoughts on the loss of authenticity, and raises the question whether “the white-collar proletariat now resident in American metropolises would share her negative feelings toward cappuccino” (Fainstein 2011, p. 162); after all, upgrading and urban renewal schemes are among many urbanites perceived as something positive.

### PLANNING FOR URBAN JUSTICE

Urban theorist Susan Fainstein (2010) has tried to formulate guidelines on how to achieve social just cities through planning policy. In *The Just City* (2010), she presents *equity*, *democracy* and *diversity* as the main qualities in constituting urban justice; that justice reflects these criteria. She argues that we need to recognize the neoliberal forces as a main contributor in a market-oriented system, where profit is the main driving force of development in our cities today (Fainstein 2010). Fainstein’s argumentation is based on the claim that an equal distribution of means within the current economical system tend to fail. She argues that market forces need to be harnessed, at the same time as citizen participation need to increase in order to reach a more just outcome when we are planning our cities (King 2011). Fainstein critiques how urban programs, aiming to enhance “metropolitan competitiveness” (Fainstein 2011, p. 149), has perpetrated injustice, although their supporters have argued the intention of benefitting marginalized people (e.g poor people and marginalized racial groups); “In the instance of redevelopment programs, the unjust treatment of disadvantaged populations was consistently rationalized as being their own long-term interest” (Fainstein 2011, p. 149). She continues arguing that distributions of benefits tend to favor developers, and that many urban redevelopment projects tend to break up communities and force people to move involuntary.

Further, Fainstein argues that the competitive city, with its many ways to attract people and investments, also aim to de-concentrate the poor. She acknowledges that these strategies has “come along to stimulate central city economic development” (Fainstein 2011, p. 161), and because of the market oriented approach to city development, residential improvement tend to be secondary to economical goals. Therefore, Fainstein argues, urban beautification is incorporated with these “unabashed goals” (ibid p. 161) of economic development rather than serving the common with liveable environments. She puts emphasis on the planner’s role in furtherance of urban equity, democracy and diversity. Since the “need to attract private investments skews projects to favor developer interests” (Fainstein 2011, p. 165) she suggests that “planners need to learn /.../ how to be effective in pressing a deal on the better-paid, private sector negotiator sitting across the table” (ibid. p. 166), and that planners must take on an active role to avoid solutions which “disproportionally benefit the already well-off” (Fainstein 2011, p. 170). Thus, she also acknowledge that planners often are limited by the boundaries of market factors, federal and local legislation as well as political agendas. But in the end, Fainstein promotes that “justice, not growth, should be the operative rhetoric surrounding development activities” (ibid. p. 170).





the drive



Over the course of time, I have been thinking about the future of the city and the role of the artist. I have been thinking about the future of the city and the role of the artist. I have been thinking about the future of the city and the role of the artist.

Sun. Aug. 25, 12-2 @ Britannia  
Sun. Sept. 1, 12-2 @ Propthouse Cafe  
Fri. Sept. 13, 8:00 @ Propthouse Cafe

Live From Clara  
Sidewalk Cellist

# THE STREET

## THE URBAN COMMONS

### PUBLIC SPACE - AN OVERVIEW

Public space is spatially and terminologically spaces of great complexity. Public space can be explained as space where people openly can meet and interact with each other outside the realm of the private home or other spaces instituted for a more inclusive kind of interaction and/or activity. It can act as a venue for individual expression; expressions such as art, music or ways to dress and act. But public space can also be the space in which power relations are played out, and where the powerful exert control over those with less power – as well as being sites of protests and resistance against the practice of power (Neal in Orum & Neal 2010). Despite the complexity of defining public space, scholars commonly divide it as space of *civil order* (regulated and controlled), *power and resistance* (confrontational/political) and space for “*display, opportunity, and celebration*” (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 35. Also, see Neal & Orum 2010).

The richness of public space has an impact on our social lives. This is where we go to see and to be seen, to express our opinions and unique identities (Neal & Orum 2010). These are the spaces in which we see and meet each other, spaces for display, both on a level of personal expression as well as in a collective sense; *spaces for celebration and meetings*. Parks, squares, commercial streets and sidewalks and open air markets are some examples of commonly recognized public spaces. There are also social aspects on how public space organize our public lives. In a broad sense, public space can be seen as a “facilitator of civil order” (Neal 2010, p. 5) where we observe personal differences and to which we react, learn from and adapt (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012). The interaction which is taking place in public space is “the foundation of our social networks” (Neal 2010 p. 5), the setting in which relationships between neighbours can develop certain bonds, such as providing “a sense of belonging and security” (ibid. p. 5).

Competing interest of how public space is to be used therefor motivates municipals to regulate public space in order to keep *civil order*, something which result in a constant discussion on whose interests that are prioritized when regulating these spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012). Serving as sites where power and resistance are played out, public space can never be considered to be completely open, inclusionary or egalitarian; public space “will always present opportunities for conflict by those who feel that they have been unjustly excluded” (Neal in Neal & Orum 2010, p. 5). As a critique on public space as a ground for civil order, geographer Don Mitchell (2003) argues that the perfectly ordered city is “a city of authority, a totalitarian fantasy in which the city is alienated from its residents” (Mitchell 2003 p. 230)

Public space plays an important role as political space where citizens in democratic societies can perform the right to free speech, labeled by Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012) as a *space of power and resistance*. Historically, The Agora (Greek for “gathering space”), located in Acropolis in Ancient Greece, functioned as a spatial platform for political, religious and commercial activities. The Agora was a rectangular open space, supported by building structures such as temples, government buildings and covered walkways. This was, though, a very restricted space where the notion of who belonged to the “public” was quite narrow -



only male citizens were considered to belong to the public (Neal & Orum 2010). According to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeuch (2012), “public protests and picketing are political acts and necessary dimensions of a just society” (ibid. p. 83), and even if protest and political actions may interrupt the ordinary life of public space, free speech must be protected. The actual act of interruption can also be seen as part of the message, and is therefor also an integral part of public space (ibid.).

A well known example of a plaza on which political conflicts has taken place is the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China, where the student demonstration in 1989 ended in an unknown number of deaths after the state decided to strike down the protests with violence (Neal & Orum 2010). Current examples are the Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey, and Tahir Square in Kairo, Egypt, where major political protests has taken place during the first decade of the 21st century.

### *PUBLIC SPACE AND THE SENSE OF BELONGING*

When it comes to the interaction with public space in our everyday life, Jan Gehl (2010) emphasize the importance of the sense of belonging to areas located outside of the private residence. He argues that the experience of belonging among users or residents of an area has an effect on “surveillance and collective responsibility” and that “public spaces become part of the residential habitat and are protected against vandalism and crime in the same way that residences themselves are safeguarded” (Gehl 2010, pp. 59-60). When discussing crime and vandalism, Gehl suggests that residents who feel comfortable with using outdoor spaces, and that this creates a “natural interest and feeling of responsibility” (Gehl 2010, p. 172) to the space. The sense of belonging to public space is something which Mattias Kärrholm explores in his dissertation *Arkitekturens territorialitet: till en diskussion om territoriell makt och gestaltning i stadens offentliga rum* (in english *The Territoriality of Architecture – Contributions to a Discussion on Territoriality and Architectural Design within the Public Spaces of the City*) (2004). Kärrholm seeks to develop the discussion of the relation between everyday use of built environment and territorial power relations, as well as what role architectural design and material aspects play within these power relations. Kärrholm brings up the concept of territorial appropriation, where an object, such as a bench, is used by the same person or group of people on a regular (or irregular) basis results in how the bench can be associated with that user/s, by themselves as well as by others. There is a complexity of the personal relationships which people can have to public spaces; people can develop a strong relationship of responsibility and familiarity to a space, which also could bring a sense of “ownership” to that same space. Kärrholm describes a territory as “a spatially delimited and controlled area” (Kärrholm 2004, p. 291) which both constitute and is constituted by spatiality of the built environment, as well as the everyday life. He argues that territoriality is “a concept of political, cultural and social implications; something which can be defined as power, where space is used as its medium” (ibid.).

## PUBLIC SPACE, OWNERSHIP AND REGULATIONS

In *Common Ground – Reading and Reflections on Public Space* (2010) Zachary P. Neal defines public space as including all areas “that are open and accessible /.../ to all members of the public in a society /.../ in principle though not necessarily in practice” (Orum & Neal 2010, p. 2). The fact that a space could be defined as “open and accessible” does not necessarily mean that it is unrestricted. For example, authorities may have the right to prevent activities from taking place in public space if those are of the character to put others at risk or which would prevent other people from enjoying the space. The typical definition of, what many of us interpret as, a typical open public space would be that in which certain groups cannot be excluded from using the space, and where individuals are allowed to express their opinions through freedom of speech; what Neal calls the *quintessential public forum* (e.g. the square). But there are also public spaces which are less open, the so called *non-public forum* and *limited public forum* (Neal in Neal & Orum, p. 3), spaces which are restricted concerning the activities which are allowed to take place, as well as by whom and when the space is allowed to be used (e.g. a post office lobby or a school gymnasium). These examples of public space are thus classified to apply on public property, whereas “privately owned and operated spaces are not public in the legal sense, and therefore are not subject to the same protections that ensure their openness and accessibility” (ibid., p. 3). However, Sharon Zukin (2010) discuss the problematic aspects which may occur when privately owned property is used as public space. She argues that semi-publicness allows for private owners to enforce restrictions to how the space is to be used and by whom. Central Park, Bryant Park and Hudson River Park in New York are examples on this kind of privatized public spaces; governed and financed by private organizations. Zukin labels the governance of these kind of spaces a “quasi-public authority” (Zukin 2010, p. 111). Zukin finds this kind of privately owned space, intended for public use, problematic since it gives private actors the power to “remake public culture” (ibid., p. 114). She argues that it establishes an owe to “individual philanthropes and big corporations” (ibid., p. 113). This kind of ownership may create imbalance between what we expect public space to be (democratic and open for everyone) and the intentions, or values, of the owner (Zukin 2010). The impacts of these kind of space relations, seen through the perspective of urban justice (described on the page 38), is discussed by Staehli & Mitchell (2008), who are arguing that privatized space can operate as oppressive. If the city is the owner of public space and therefor also being the provider of the space regulations, it is not as easy to restrict it: you can’t as easily kick people out (Staehli & Mitchell 2008). They also argue that the main part of the field of research on public space has focused on its nature as space, while little focus has been directed to public space as property. They suggest that the understanding of public space as a set of property is foundational when discussing the subject, since this has an impact on “the role, function, and nature of public space as space” (Staehli & Mitchell 2008, pp. xx). Property as the means of ownership of a space is argued to have an impact on the premisses for what that space is and what it is not, what it *can* and *cannot be*. Who owns publicly-accessible property does, according to Staehli & Mitchell, “matter critically to who is and who is *not* included in the public” (Staehli & Mitchell 2008, p. xxii. Emphasis in original). What this essentially means is that property ownership also brings with it property rights – and with it the right to include or exclude.

When discussing urban spaces, it is argued to be crucial with an understanding of the power relationships, created through ownership, operating in public space. Through the control of space, groups or individuals also have the power “to shape other relationships, including relations between people who aspire to be included in the public” (ibid., p. xxiii). Staeheli & Mitchell also claims that these power relationships also result in creating “a powerful tool in the regulation of space, and thereby, of the public” (ibid., p. xxiv).

### *PUBLIC SPACE AND JUSTICE*

Public space is a type of space where many different uses may interfere with each other, as well as the different visions of what we might think that these spaces can and should be. Also, we all carry different identities, norms and values, and how we use and associate to public space therefore naturally varies (Staeheli & Mitchell 2008, p. xxiii). The way our societies handle and manage diversity in relation to public space and property is a subject which Staeheli & Mitchell are debating in their publication *The People's Property? Power, Politics, and the Public* (2008). They argue that private interests tend to predominate how central urban areas are structured, as well as “who can and do populate them” (ibid., p. 47). The interests of Business Associations (which should be viewed as private interest) can, for example, have a critical saying in issues of public space design, such as if public furniture should be provided or not. Since public space is intended to be the citizens' shared and common space, this is an interesting point of view. As Carmona *et al* (2010) puts it: “development and redevelopment of the built environment is a means of making profits and accumulating capital” (Carmona *et al.* 2010, p. 55). By looking at property in relation to public space, or rather public space as property, this can also help us understand “the ways which politics, power, and publicity are constituted and enacted in the formation of political communities; these configurations of community hold different possibilities for citizenship, democracy, and justice” (ibid., p. xi). Further, as Fainstein puts it, space in itself has and is “used by the privileged to protect their positions” (Fainstein 2011, p. 163).

The use of public space may also bring light to the demographics of a space. To be “present in the public space” and to be visible in the public sphere is a necessary part of making claim on the public as well as making claim to be part of the public. When it comes to vulnerable and marginalized groups in the society, claiming to be part of the public can be controversial. The main example which Don Mitchell discusses in *The Right to the City – Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (2003) are those who are forced to count public space as their only home. Mitchell addresses the fact (and urgent problem) that “people still live in public spaces, and they are still dying there too” (Mitchell 2003, p. 229). He also discusses how many North American cities deal with these issues through criminalizing the acts of “private” life (such as sleeping) in public space. As Mitchell mentions, previous research has proven that policing methods, developed out of concepts such as the “broken window theory”<sup>1</sup>, “likely does not reduce crime” (ibid., p. 227). Rather, he argues, these methods

1 The criminological “broken-window theory” is a theory which aims to reduce crime and restore order in areas or spaces considered to be troubled with criminal activities.



might only create an illusion of order “while at the same time implementing an urbanism that is as alienating as it is controlling” (ibid.). By criminalizing vulnerable groups, one could argue that focus is drawn from the “need to address poverty” (ibid., pp. 227-228) as well as resulting in an increased distrust between police and community.

## NO CAMPING

NO STRUCTURES  
(TENTS OR OTHER SHELTERS)  
PERMITTED IN THIS AREA OR ON ANY OTHER  
CITY STREET, SIDEWALK OR BOULEVARD.

STREET & TRAFFIC BY-LAW 2849  
SEC. 71.1

NO MERCHANDISE OR WARES  
PERMITTED IN THIS AREA OR ON ANY OTHER  
STREET, SIDEWALK OR BOULEVARD  
FOR SALE OR DISPLAY.

STREET & TRAFFIC BY-LAW 2849

SEC. 66.12



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## THE SIDEWALK AS PUBLIC SPACE

### THE SIDEWALK IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When discussing public space, it is easy to primarily think about parks, plazas or squares; but one of the most commonly used public spaces is the street and the sidewalk. Referring to Jane Jacobs, the sidewalk is one of our “main public spaces of the city” (Jacobs in Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 3). Historically, sidewalks as space can be traced back to both ancient Greek and Roman cities. In medieval European cities there were no separate spaces for pedestrians, pedestrians mingled on roadways with horses, wagons and carts. In the 17th century, large European cities such as London and Paris introduced spaces akin to today’s sidewalks (trottoirs, promenades, boulevards), spaces which separated pedestrians from vehicles. By the 19th century, sidewalks were commonly constructed in most big European cities. North American cities urbanized rapidly during the late 19th century, with, according to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, an ambivalence to urban life. Early North American cities were characterized by streetscapes where people, goods and vehicles crowded the same spaces. With growth, these conditions resulted in “increasingly professionalized municipal government, municipal improvements and public-space controls” (ibid., p. 17).

Early on in the North American context, sidewalks often served multiple uses apart from walking, such as shop display, deliveries and street peddling; which resulted in the sidewalk being a busy space. Increasingly, regulations were created along with municipal professionals and business leaders developing visions for the sidewalk as space intended for pedestrian *circulation* and *order*. Car traffic has also had a major impact on both the development of and increased regulations around sidewalks. The car has historically been favoured before pedestrians and other forms of use of the urban streetscape. A growing sense of sidewalks as part of the public sphere has also brought regulations on what kind of activities that are aloud within these spaces. Loitering, panhandling, prostitution and unregulated street vending are common activities prohibited in public space in general, and are therefor also commonly applied for sidewalks. Municipal ordinances often favor efficient movement simultaneously as social, economic and political uses are more restricted. On the other hand, the sidewalk (like public space in general) are constantly being negotiated and redefined (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012).

### CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES ON SIDEWALK USE AND DESIGN

As architects, we are provided with tools and knowledge with which we can influence and affect the street life, as well as what kind of street life that potentially will take place. For example, many architects are aware of the well known theories of Jan Gehl. Danish architect Gehl’s theories on the relationship between social life and public space, found in the publication *Life Between Buildings* (2010, originally published in 1971), has inspired architects around the world to move towards a more pedestrian friendly approach on urban planning and design. Gehl Architects has carried out many redevelopment strategy projects and surveys all over the world. In North America, the office has performed projects in New York (an urban realm and bicycle strategy analysis for *The World Class Streets Report*, carried out in 2009 for the City of New York, Department of Transportation), San Francisco (a survey

on public space and public life in the Fisherman's Wharf area, 2008) and Seattle (a vision on future development for a vibrant downtown in Seattle, 2007-09) (Gehl Architects 2013).

Another person who has had an influence on how the profession of urban planning and design are approaching public space and the sidewalk is Jane Jacobs. In the 1960's, Jacobs was a community activist who criticized major downtown developments in order to protect local neighbourhoods in her publication *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Jacobs demanded the appreciation of community- and place-based approaches in urban planning in face of modernist planning. Jacobs was an advocate of the sidewalk as public space, and through her research she put emphasis on the sidewalk as an active site of socialization. She promoted the sidewalk as active public space, not only for the social interaction in itself, but also since it, according to Jacobs, can help keeping neighbourhoods safe and controlled by the presence of people in the streets.

These two sources of inspiration are two of many public space advocates who has contributed to our view of life in the city, and their approach to public life has had a large impact on, and has inspired, contemporary urban planning and design. The main ideas of public life and space which has derived from these popular approaches on public space are how we through design can create, encourage and/or favor a vibrant urban fabric. When it comes to the life of streets and sidewalks, Gehl emphasizes the importance to understand how physical structure either encourage or dis-encourage different kinds of uses of the sidewalk, for example through providing different kinds of seating or through the design of facades and other physical elements connected to buildings. When it comes to the example of facades, Gehl means that this has an impact on the concentration of activities as well as the intensity of experiences for those who passes by. The concentration of entrances or other "exchange zones" (Gehl 2010, p. 93) has an impact on activation of the public environment; "Big buildings with long facades, few entrances, and few visitors mean an effective *dispersal* of events. The principle, in contrast, should be narrow units and many doors" (Gehl 2010, p. 93. Emphasis by me). In other words, according to Gehl, the street life is reduced when larger units replace smaller, more active, units; "In many places it is possible to see how life in the street has dwindled drastically [...] when passive units such as offices and banks move in" (Gehl 2010, p. 93). Also physical details have an impact on the opportunities given to provide for people to stay and reside in public spaces. If a facade lacks "interesting details – niches, holes, gateways, stairs, and so on" (Gehl 2010, p. 153) it also makes it harder or less inviting for people to stop or to find places to reside and dwell. As Gehl puts it: "Good cities for staying out in have irregular facades and a variety of supports in their outdoor spaces" (Gehl 2010, p. 153).

## CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES ON SIDEWALK REGULATIONS

In *Rights of Passage – Sidewalks And The Public Flow* (2011), Blomley argues that the engineering way of looking at and interpreting sidewalks to a large extent is what controls how sidewalks are regulated and designed. Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012) mention the regulation of sidewalks as "taming the sidewalk" (ibid., p. 258). The sidewalk as a

“functional” space, intended for movement of pedestrians, is the primary approach before other uses (walking, informal/leisure strolling or promenading). The commission, or duty, of the state (through municipalities and city planning departments) is through this logic mainly to ensure that nothing disturbs or interfere with the act of walking. The legal and engineering logic of the (orderly) movement is that of pedestrian movement from point A to point B. Blomley (2011) presents research carried out in a Canadian (and North American) context, where he examines the effects of the “traffic logic” which he claims has the main influence on how we interpret and design sidewalks. The detailed geometric specifications on sidewalk design and the sidewalk as legal space, used and adapted by local professionals, are provided by the Transportation Association of Canada (the United States have a similar equivalent). According to Blomley, “such documents re-inscribe a view of the sidewalk as a space of flow” (Blomley 2011, pp. 38-39). Theories expressed by urban scholars such as Jane Jacobs and Gehl are in different ways promoting the intricate, overlapping sidewalk with vital frictions for the street life. Blomley argues that through an engineering point of view, the successful sidewalk is that which separates, buffers and arrange people and objects. The legal regulations surrounding public space, including sidewalks, are “governed by regulations, and subject to oversight by legal actors such as judges and municipal officers” and “is governed, produced and interpreted according to multiple codes, rationalities and practices, many of which are law-like” (Blomley 2011, p.). He claims that the ways in which state agents think and act upon city spaces are crucial in that sense that they function as manifestations of power.

When discussing the sidewalk and the complexities surrounding the sidewalk as “public space”, Blomley (2011) emphasizes the importance of moving from the abstract way of discussing sidewalks (such as rights of public space, brought up by Mitchell and others in the previous chapter) to a focus on the material space and the actual sidewalk. Blomley claims that the ways in “which state agents think about and acts upon” city spaces is crucial in the sense that they are manifestations of power (Blomley 2011). He argues that the hegemonic way of thinking about sidewalks as public space is that of an engineering point of view. Further, he argues that the way planners think about these spaces often end up in terms of use and function, “the merging of bodies and objects” (Blomley 2011, p. 109). This becomes problematic since it turns human bodies into neutral objects, similar to objects such as street furniture. This approach can therefore be problematic for those who interacts with the streetscape in a non-conformist way, which is often the case with e.g homeless people or other marginalized groups (the conformist way would be the neutral and technical way of interpreting and looking at the sidewalk as space, labeled by Blomley (2011) as “pedestrianism”). With this functional way of regulating sidewalks, people and object will therefore also have “right” or “wrong” positions within the space. If people or objects interact or is integrated on the sidewalk in ways which won’t correspond to the regulatory of the space, they would therefore be positioned in the “wrong” way. With a civic humanist approach, sidewalks equals the space of the people and “if objects [the human body as subject] appear” they function as “extensions of the human subject”. In other words, through this point of view, a persons belongings are “humanized”, and are therefore also given a deeper meaning than only as

objects detached from a persons being and emotions. Blomley (2011) describes pedestrianism as concerning both people and things with no objection to lawful protest or speech. The act of blockage, on the other hand, by objects (which by the civic humanist is an extension of the actual person they belong to) are something which pedestrianism as a rationality would consider as “obstructions in their own right” (Blomley 2011, p. 9).

The technical approach of sidewalks as spaces of transition, the act of movement from point A to point B, also divides the act of planning and designing sidewalks and public spaces into planning *for* or *against* different people and interests. There is no coherent framework for cities when it comes to governing urban sidewalk activities, but according to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012), “cities employ techniques that regulate land uses and use design to make some activities more acceptable and to filter out others” (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 263).

The assumption among those who govern sidewalks as space, is that the space is supposed to mainly serve pedestrians moving along it. But if that is the main approach most cities have, which then also would reflect the way urban planners and designers design those spaces, it appears relevant to ask how this affects people who wish to and/or use the sidewalk in different ways.

## CONFLICTING INTERESTS ON THE SIDEWALK

### ***Homelessness and the Street As Shelter***

According to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012), homelessness is a public space dilemma. In the way it is perceived homelessness is seen as problematic in two ways; a homeless person is often perceived as causing discomfort (rather than for example the more aggressive notion of danger) for “regular” sidewalk uses such as strolling or shopping, and that regulation targeting homelessness address ordinary uses. Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht discuss homelessness and the presence and visibility of homeless people as a disturbing element for many users, because of the act of witnessing suffering and conditions which “they do not want to take responsibility for” (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 175). The authors also raise the question of whom is causing harm and who is being harmed.

Sidewalk ordinances regulate many activities, and activities which causes harm (e.g assault, property damage, battery) can be prohibited by cities and states. But being homeless is not a crime, although both ordinances and physical interventions can have multiple effects for people who are homeless, which in its turn often make their daily life more difficult. Businesses often addresses visible homelessness in relation to their business as a problem, since it may cause discomfort among potential customers and discourage them from entering the business. Homelessness and poverty can therefor be comprehended as causing disencouragement among customers in an area and in that way have an effect on the businesses.

Some people consider policing actions as harassing, such as for example issuing jaywalking tickets or actively addressing people without a clear cause; something which is more likely to target homeless people or people residing the street in less “conventional” ways.

By making it harder for people to reside in certain spaces through physical interventions, restrictions and policing activities, these factors could be considered as tactics to push people from one place to another, and in a larger context from one neighbourhood to the next. But, as Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012) discuss, more restricting public-space regulations won't resolve the underlying problem of homelessness and poverty. Further they stress the necessity of "retaining an element of independent choice /.../ for sidewalk regulations" (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 182).

### ***Sidewalks as Spaces of Informal Economies***

Informal economic activities are an issue which can be subject of conflicts. Informal economies are as such driven by economical needs and can be interpreted as means for people to get by. Informal economy activities are most often illegal, such as street vending without permit, day laboring, drug and sex trade, and are activities which can create conflicts over the uses and meaning of public space.

In many cases, street vending which takes place in public spaces, not rarely on sidewalks, challenge the regulations created for the needs of established merchants. According to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, conflicts on these issues often reflects "larger struggles over social change and attempts to manage it" and that "Established merchants and middle- and upper-class citizens have tried to deny mobile vendors the opportunity to use sidewalks for economic activity" (ibid., p. 127). As a respond to these regulations, people relying on informal economies and who are in need for this kind of economical and social venue in order to perform different activities, have negotiated their presence through evading and challenging these regulations. What the conflicts on street vending (one can for example find examples on "vending wars" in New York and Los Angeles, a subject further developed and discussed by Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, pp. 138-155) reflects is big differences in the notions of appropriate public-space use. It creates a conflict between those who claim their right to the city and to public space for economical activities and those who consider street vending as causing unfair competition to more established businesses. Established businesses often also oppose what is perceived as messiness, congestion and disorder in relation to it. Informal economies can also be interpreted as an anti-social behavior, an attitude which is demonstrated in Mitchell Duneier's sociological study of New York in the 1990's (see *Sidewalk*, Duneier 1999). According to an attorney representing local business owners, street vending without permit could be considered as an anti-social act: "occupying public space to sell things is antisocial" (Duneier 1999, p. 232). For unregulated street vending, there are several offenses which can be cited, such as "calling out their wares, standing too long on the sidewalk, peddling in prohibited zones, and violating standards for food quality, preparation and storage" (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 138).

### ***Regulating Sidewalk Use Through Design***

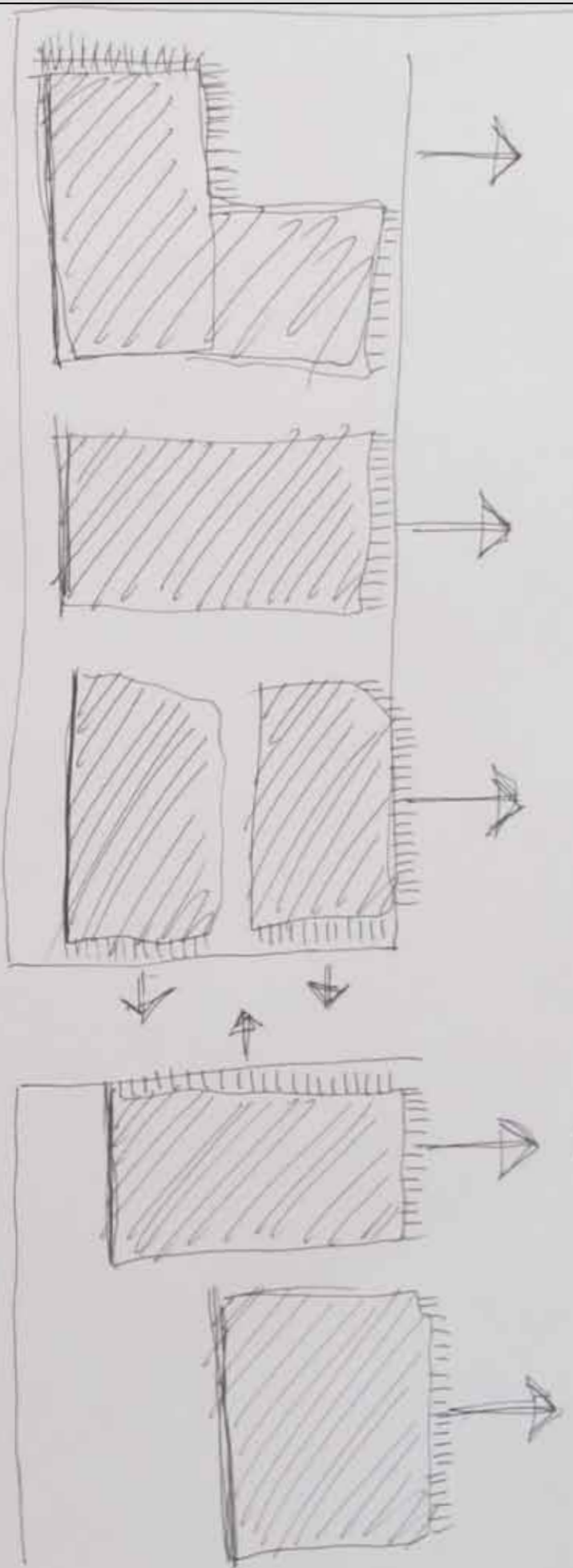
How the sidewalk is furnished is, as mentioned, also an important feature which influence how people move or reside in the space. The way public furniture is designed, as well as placed or located, have an impact on the way it will and can be used. Gehl argues that well-functioning city areas provide access to the opportunity of sitting. Primary seating (such as

benches and chairs), secondary seating (stairways, steps, low walls, etc.) are part of the important role which the design of details plays (Gehl 2010). As mentioned, there are different ways to regulate public space. Hard-control (such as regulations and laws) and soft-control (using design and landscaping to determine uses and users) are the main regulatory tools. Through soft-control design, one can prevent people from for example sleeping on a bench through adding barriers between the seats (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012), or discourage usage for a longer period of time by a slight tilt to the seat. Through simply not providing any street furniture at all can also be a way to control the use of a space. Through a criminological point of view, soft-control design can be seen as crime-preventive (sleeping as a criminal act), whereas anti-homeless activist may see this approach as revanchist and exclusionary (through a rights point of view). Furthermore, there are also the aesthetic design concerns (Blomley 2011), which is also an important concern for businesses that wants to keep their environment around their business attractive for customers. Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht writes that for BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) “there are only two appropriate sidewalk uses: it is a corridor for unobstructed pedestrian circulation and a container for hardscape improvements that enhance the street’s image” (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht 2012, p. 146). The being (or not being) of street furniture is quite a complex urban question, and can reflect the kind of use aimed for in a space.



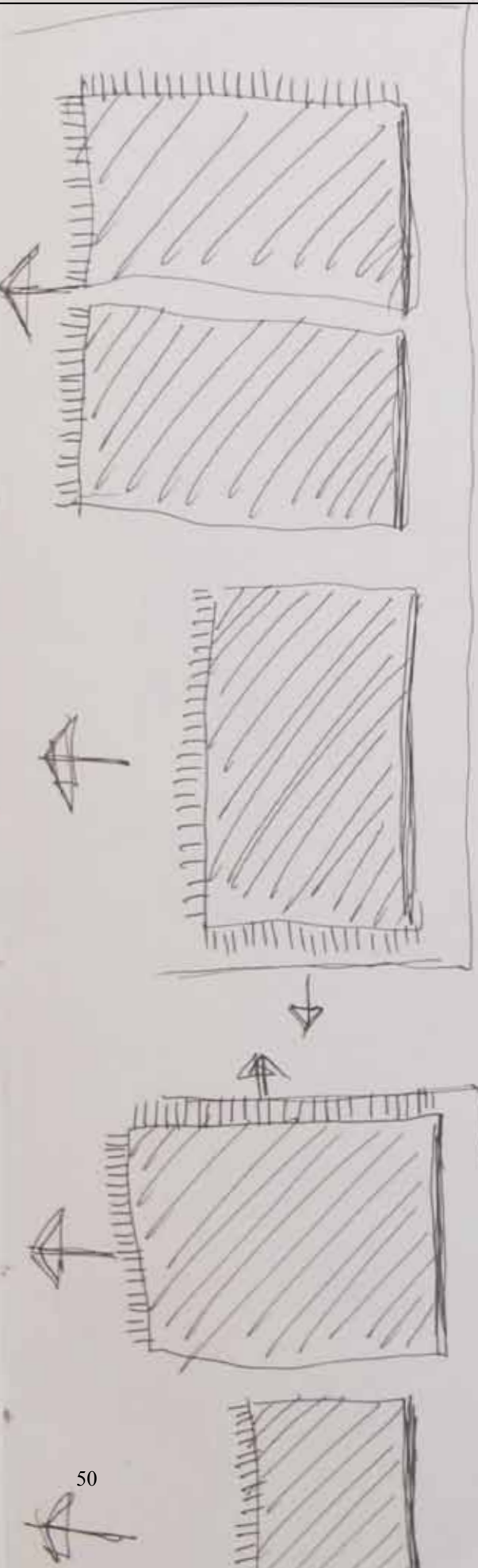


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# CASE STUDY

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## PROLOGUE

During an afternoon in early February, I walk West through the North alleyway between Columbia St. and Carrall St., towards Pigeon Park. I make notes in the notebook which I am always carrying with me;

*“A man stands behind a container with his pants rolled up to his knee, placing a needle into the flesh of his leg. By the corner of where the alley ends, by Carrall St., a group of men are working on what looks like a storefront on the corner building”*

Notes 2013-02-01

A few days later, when arriving to the site again, I note:

*“When coming through the alleyway from Columbia, I see a parked police car on my right side. I see a well-dressed man photographing the picketers from across the street. It becomes clear to me that he is the owner, or one of the owners.”*

Notes 2013-02-07

The protests which I witnessed by my second visit to Pigeon Park started with the opening of a “high-end restaurant” named the Pidgin Restaurant, located in one of the buildings facing Pigeon Park. The opening of the restaurant provoked some residents and community activists through its mere presence in proximity to the square, which is a well-used public space and a symbolic node for the community’s marginalized groups. The picket, which started in February 2013, has been ongoing for many months. Six days a week a group of people gather outside the new restaurant by Pigeon Park, which is a 400 square metre square, squeezed in at the intersection of Hastings and Carrall Street. According to one of the protesters, this particular site has a symbolic value for the community. She draws back from her memory a protest which took place a couple of years ago when a new bike path was introduced at the site:

*“[...] people saw it as a fault line, like, people saw Carrall Street as the fault line already. And that’s one of the values, those boundaries are always being drawn. Actually when they opened up the bike lane, some activists made an action where they poured sand on it and drew a line in the sand, like literary drew a line in the sand. /.../ But there was no accident that they [the City] chose Carrall Street either, because that was part of their plans, to make this shopping area. Carrall Street has changed so much those last like, three years?; with the Nelson The Seagull, the Community Store, now Rainier and Pidgin Restaurant and Meat and Bread<sup>1</sup>, like all these places. And the thing is that, a lot of people don’t really ride through on Carrall, if they live in the neighborhood. That’s another thing that is interesting with the use of the space along the Hastings Corridor, a lot of people don’t leave those street blocks very much at all. Partly because transit is so expensive, or they have mobility issues or all those things combined. So the Carrall Street bikeway*

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<sup>1</sup> These are new restaurants and businesses which during the recent years have opened up in close proximity to the square, except for Meat and Bread which is located by Hastings & Cambie Street.

*was not for the people living here.”*

Interview with Community Activist

Thus, the symbolic value of the site for the low-income community does not meet the legal boundaries for the City’s zoning strategy:

*“It is interesting that the low income community and the activists see Pigeon Park as the defense line against change, and you know, it’s funny because the other day they were so angry about that restaurant and saying that; ‘we will not have this restaurant in the DEOD [the zoning area Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District]!’. Legally it’s actually Gastown, it’s not DEOD. To them, it’s their district. So you know, there’s this complete disjunction between the legal boundaries of what is named and what is legally permissible, and what the community perceive as their patch. It’s a disconnect. So they are protesting and defending what they believe to be their patch.”*

Interview with City Planner

What is taking place at the Pigeon Park square can also be seen as symbolic for what is happening in the Downtown Eastside in general. A constant battle is taking place, a battle between community activists and the entrepreneurial pioneers, or the City, or the hipsters, or the... ones with power?

What is taking place within a few blocks in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside is what many researchers and theorists would describe as gentrification. An existing low-income community is being replaced by socially and economically stronger groups. But what does the effects of gentrification look like in the actual streetscape of the Downtown Eastside? How are the streets used, by whom, in what ways? Does gentrification change eventual patterns of spatial conditions and resources? And what values does these streets inherent today?

Through this study I aim to try to track the answers to those questions.





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## CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

According to Johansson (2003), the case study is of special importance in practice-oriented fields, such as architecture and planning. Johansson argues that the case study “contribute to the building of a professional repertoire” (Johansson 2003, p. 4), where “the ability to act within professional practice is based on knowledge of a repertoire of cases” (ibid., p. 4). The aim of this case study is based on this proposition. Through studies and part-taking of the spatial and social environments of a particular space, I hope to be able to widen and add experience and knowledge on space to my personal and professional repertoire. The study has an ethnographic approach, hence it was carried out with a perspective on human culture and society (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). The reason to this approach is my interest in developing my knowledge on how social patterns and human behavior are connected to the interaction with physical space, an understanding which I find important within the field of urban planning and design. If I am, through the profession of landscape architecture, to shape and impact people’s living environments, I consider this understanding crucial in order for me to carry out my profession in a responsible way.

### CHOICE OF CASE STUDY AREA

The geographical boundaries which I’ve chosen to perform my case study within is located in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) area of Vancouver, British Columbia (Canada) and consists of four connected blocks. The study area is going through what by many is perceived as gentrification, not least by many of the residents living in the area. There are community groups and activist organizations which are actively trying to put light on this process and fight against it. But there are also many advocates for change, since the area is heavily burdened by issues such as poverty, drug trade/use and mental illness.

The reason why I chose to study these specific blocks within the same area, instead of looking at, for example, two geographically and demographically separated areas, which could result in a wider perspective on spatial differences in general, is simply that I seek to deepen my own understanding for the actual process of gentrification in relation to the users of a space. I wanted to study the relationship between the users of a space, a community, and its physical and spatial environment, rather than studying the differences of gentrification processes between geographically separated areas. The aim with this case study is to study a specific space through the lens of a global urban phenomenon and anchoring the study to previous research and literature in this field. Through the study of this specific area I wanted to get a deeper understanding of gentrification and its processes in relation to physical space and its users. The method was also inspired by the single-case study rationale, formulated by Yin (2009):

*“The theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as the circumstances within which the propositions are believed to be true. A single case, meeting all of the conditions for testing the theory, can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory”*

(Yin 2009, p. 47)



In line with Yin, I wanted to seek knowledge about this phenomenon and relate it to theoretical concepts and previous research, where testing and/or confirming the new knowledge which I have gained through my literature studies.

## *DATA COLLECTION METHODS*

### ***Site observations***

Site observations were carried out in the area by me moving through the area by foot or bike, during the months of February, March and April of 2013 during different times of the day (morning, noon, afternoon, evenings). As a way to organize the site observations, I decided to break up the area into sections, as a way to make the site visits structured. I moved through the area, block by block, on the main street (Hastings Street) as well as the North and South back alleys in relation to it. The site observations were documented with field notes which I wrote down on site, usually after having walked one or two blocks, and pausing at a corner or by walking in to the community center on Main Street. I tried to take notes somewhat discretely to not draw too much attention to my presence in the space. Since many people who live in the area and move through these streets are struggling with very few means or drug use and/or mental illnesses, I also tried to be discrete and not throw my camera up in people's faces. I mainly used my cellphone to take photos, which unfortunately resulted in images with quite low resolution. Instead, I tried to document as much of the atmosphere and what I saw through my notes. When I got back from the site visits I wrote down my notes onto my computer to have them organized and to be able to handle the data more easily.

In order to get an understanding for how the space was used on different hours of the day, the visits were documented according to some basic, but specific, rules, often through visits during different hours of the same day. When visiting the area during the dark hours I did not move through the back alleys, though I tried to get an appreciation of what took place in these spaces from the cross-streets. When studying each section, the following aspects were documented:

- Time of day
- Weather
- What formal/informal functions are to be found within the section?
- What does the surrounding physical structure look like? (Buildings, materials, textures)
- Who uses the space?
- How do people interact with the physical structure?
- What main activities are taking place?

By always keeping track of these main objectives, eventual patterns could be determined more easily. It also facilitated a structure to which I could read the area easier in order to get a clearer image of core aspects in collecting information about the space and how it is being used. Ten observations following the structured scheme took place during the months

of February, March and April and usually lasted between one to two hours each. Apart from these visits, five observations took place by Pigeon Park and the picket.

In addition to the organized site observations, I also moved through the area “off the record” regularly, when visiting the area for different reasons (going to the library, meeting friends, shopping, etc.). These visits were not documented, but it helped me to get a better understanding for the area and how the streets were used.

### ***Interviews***

Open-ended, semi-structured and recoded interviews were carried out with actors from different interest-groups in the study area. The interviewees represent the planning sector, the political activist community as well as the art scene.

Through two separate interviews and meetings with City representatives, a City Planner (referred to as C.P) and a Social Planner, who both have had important positions in the Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan, I was able to get an understanding for the study site through the perspective of Vancouver’s City Planning sector.

An interview was also carried out with a community activist (referred to as C.A), who is also working for one of the non-profit organizations providing accommodation for vulnerable groups in the Downtown Eastside at one of the SRO’s<sup>1</sup> in the study area. She has also been a driving force on the picket line in Pigeon Park (see pages 121-127).

Since a lot of the theory and research on gentrification draws connections between artist communities and gentrification (see for example Zukin 2010), this was an aspect which I wanted to learn more about as well. This was possible through discussions with artists who has been active in (and evicted from) the area, as well as through an interview with one of the main organizers of an art collective (referred to as C.O) who has been active in the area’s art scene since the 1980’s.

The aim of these interviews was to get a wider perspective of the area, and in order to use my time most wisely I focused on getting a diverse basis of interviewees (a qualitative approach), rather than trying to focus on a quantitative approach (e.g through interviews with representatives from the same group). The interviews helped me to get different viewpoints and a wider context of the site; opinions, memories and facts about the space in which I pursued my research (as an explanation to this approach is my personal interpretation of what space is and how it is shaped; I believe that space is shaped and comprehended differently by different people/groups). The interviews focused on the qualities and values which the interviewees considered to exist in the study area, as well as their opinions on the changes which are taking place in the area today, although the semi-structured configuration of the interviews also permitted a more general discussion on the issues in the Downtown Eastside.

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<sup>1</sup> SRO stands for Single Room Occupancy and is a multi-tenant housing system with rooms for one or two people, where the residents also typically share kitchen and bathroom.

### ***City Planning Documents and Public Meetings***

In order to get a general view of Vancouver's planning strategies, I used John Punter's *The Vancouver Achievement* (2003) as my main source, complemented by up-to-date information on the City of Vancouver's official website (under the label "Home, Property and Development"). The long-term visionary report *Vancouver 2020 A Bright New Future – An Action Plan of Becoming the World's Greenest City by 2020* (City of Vancouver 2010) was also studied to get a deeper understanding of the visions and values which the City is envisioning for Vancouver's future. The Greenest City-vision was developed under Mayor Gregor Robertson (the present mayor since 2008, representing the political party Vision Vancouver), who according to the City's homepage is a mayor who embraces issues such as "Working to end street homelessness", "Addressing housing affordability", "Improving public transit" and "Making Vancouver the greenest city in the world" (City of Vancouver 2013a).

Planning documents related to the Local Area Planning Process, LAPP, (City Of Vancouver 2012) were studied in order to get an understanding of the planning approach which the City has for the area. I also attended two official LAPP meetings (the initial meeting in September 2012 and one meeting held for the Strathcona community in February 2013). In addition to these meetings, I also attended several community meetings organized by community groups (the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council, Carnegie Community Action Project and The Social Housing Coalition). Apart from these meetings, I also attended different manifestations and protests with an anti-gentrification agenda as well as two Public Hearing's for development plans in Chinatown (part of the DTES) in Vancouver City Hall, in order to get an understanding of the present discussions and issues which are taking place and how these are dealt with on a city level.

### ***Media and Social Media***

As a way to keep myself posted on the different viewpoints of the area in general and on the changes which are taking place in particular, I also observed media (local news-, political and cultural media) as well as social media (Facebook and Twitter). One interesting source with these observations has been to read comment forums related to articles or Facebook pages. Discussions on different subjects concerning the Downtown Eastside (e.g. different development plans, anti-gentrification protests and other reports) has helped me get an idea on the rhetorics which are used when discussing these issues, as well as getting an idea of what the debate climate can be like.

### ***Documentation***

During the site visits and public meetings, notes, photographs and quick sketches were used to document what I heard, saw and experienced. Some of these photographs have been used in this document, as a way to visually present my research. All diagrams and plans presented in this document were produced in Photoshop or Illustrator, and any eventual information source is presented with each plan or diagram.

### *REFLECTIVE CONSIDERATIONS ON ETHICS AND METHOD*

Although informal discussions and conversations with users of the spaces which I studied took place during the research stage, I made a decision not to use these dialogues as quoted references or describe data which could be linked to a specific person. Since many people in the research area suffer from addiction and/or mental illness, I felt a responsibility not to use these conversations other than on a very general level (e.g. when describing the users of a space rather than information received through the actual conversation) in order to not risking to exploit those that I talked to. Although, this is thus a balance act which I hope I managed to handle.

Another regulation which I decided to make was to perform observations which could be described as “hidden observations”. Even though hidden observations can be perceived as ethically doubtful, since it, which the name implies, takes place without the knowledge of the one/s being observed, it would have been difficult to have used a different method. The research for this study was carried out in a large area, four blocks in Downtown Vancouver, and it would have been difficult to inform all the users passing and using these spaces to my study, something which may have been easier if studying, for example, a smaller park. By not informing the users, it also made it easier for me to blend in and carry out the observations without changing peoples behavior. Although, my presence in some of these environments, being a white middle-class female, sometimes got alerted, questioned or met by suspicion. This might have had an effect on the result of the study, since my presence might have effected the behavior around me.

One could also argue that the study partly was carried out through participatory observations, since I am also a member of the larger community in the Downtown Eastside. This area is a space which I use in my everyday life and these streets are streets which I interact with myself. I engage with people, organizations and businesses in the area which I also study. Thus, my role as a member of the community is the one of a white middle-class academic. My own role as a (involuntary) gentrifier through my mere presence in this neighbourhood has to be acknowledged in this context, and this is something which has been a moral and ethical conflict for me throughout the whole study. Me being a white european masters student, doing a study on this space and its users, did put me in a delicate ethical and moral conflict. What right do I have, as a visitor from the colonial continent, to do a study on the struggles and the vulnerability in this neighbourhood? Robertson & Culhane (2005) wrote that the “global public has come to know the Downtown Eastside and the people who live here through journalistic sensationalism and the distancing language of academics, medical researchers, and law enforcement agencies” (Robertson & Culhane 2005, p. 18). I am aware that I through this study might contribute to spreading a rather black and white image of the area and that the academic format of this study might result in a distancing from the space and its users. Despite my growing awareness of this, I chose to carry out the study in hope to diverse the discussion on Vancouver and its reputation within urban planning and design.

## *DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY*

This study is delimited in the way that it only studies four blocks along Hastings Street. The area of Downtown Eastside is larger than this stretch, and includes a variety of different areas which all have different characteristics, and as many central urban areas these are also experiencing neighbourhood changes and new development plans (see the Local Area Planning Process, City of Vancouver 2012). The city also have several other areas which are under the venture of gentrification processes. But for the purpose of this study, I decided to limit my study area in order to be able to do a thorough study. As another argument to limit the study area is that this particular stretch is an area of big conflict in Vancouver; the future path for this particular site can be seen as an example which reflects the overall values of the city. How this stretch is functioning today compared to tomorrow is therefore a relevant and important issue to be studied. Will the future of the site be carried out through the hegemonic urban revitalization and concept of social mix strategies, or could it be a “social justice zone” (Swanson & Drury 2013, p. 16), as some community activists demands?

As a strength, the chosen boundaries for the study area gave me the opportunity to study it more closely. It gave me a detailed context and understanding of the space; spatially, socially, politically and emotionally. It gave me the opportunity to get a deeper understanding for what I was actually studying and made it possible to collect different kinds of data (triangulation). One could argue that in qualitative studies, such as in this case, the aim is not to make generalizations but to study a phenomenon more closely and to point at what effects the processes of gentrification can have in an urban downtown area. Although, when carrying through the study, I constantly struggled with how to collect data. Drawn from my experience of analysis work, speaking with the actual users of a space, interacting and asking questions and doing surveys are good ways to get to know what the users of a space feel and think about the actual space. Although I would have wanted to carry out these kind of studies, I made a decision not to. These methods would have required a much wider understanding on aspects such as colonialism, mental health issues, drug use, sex work and poverty in order for me to carry them out in a respectful and ethical way. I felt that the complexity of the conflicts which are taking place in this area would have demanded an even longer interaction with the space, and especially with its organizations and local residents.

The fact that I in a way have been an “outsider” while doing my research for this thesis, with the fact that I am coming from Sweden, could have been both a weakness and a strength for the study. It has taken a lot of energy for me to get an understanding of political systems, history, cultural differences and norms and other societal elements both of Canada in general and Vancouver in particular. But on the other hand, being an outsider can also be a strength since it might help you see and view things in different ways, which one may be “blind for” when being very familiar with the context one acts within.





# VANCOUVER

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## A BRIEF STORY OF A COLONIAL CITY

### INTRODUCING VANCOUVER

The City of Vancouver, located on unceded land of the native Coast Salish Territories, was founded in 1886. The development of Vancouver, or the “replacement of wilderness by civilization” (Wynn & Oke, 1992, p. 72) took place through intensive logging and deforestation in an unusually high speed. The “wilderness” described by Wynn & Oke (1992) was a well developed culture and settlement of Coast Salish people; landscapes which were named, used and claimed. As all major Canadian cities, Vancouver started as an outpost for colonial expansion. The lands which Vancouver was built on was, before the European settlers arrived, a landscape used and occupied by First Nations for villages, fishing settlements and summer camps and Vancouver, as many of the early Canadian cities, was located on a site of special significance for the native population (Blomley 2004). In *Unsettling the City* (2004), geographer Nicholas Blomley comments on this, arguing that the colonial city “was not so much settled, as ‘resettled’” (ibid., p. 110). He also claims that colonialism is an ongoing process, as opposed to a single event taking place at a specific time. In Canada, Blomley continues, this process includes the sphere of place making. The general consciousness and understanding of creation and maintenance of space in the Canadian society generates a forgetting of the past, as well as a conceptual removal of native culture and people from the urban space. Through maintaining the image of native people as located “in the past or in nature” (ibid p. 114), native people and culture are kept marginalized from the present and contemporary consciousness of space and the idea of the city. Still, half of the Aboriginal population in Canada are urban (and to mention, also constitutes a large part of the urban poor). Almost a hundred thousand people were living at the Pacific Northwest in a food-gathering economy when Spanish mariners and English traders arrived to the area in the late 18th century. The inhabitants of the area spoke many different languages, such as Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, Nootka and Salish. As in all human settlements, there were also political and cultural differences between different societies and villages (Woodcock 1977). According to Robertson & Culhane (2005), approximately 90 to 95 per cent of the indigenous population was “wiped out by epidemics of infectious diseases over the course of the first 100 years of European contact” (Robertson & Culhane 2005, p. 16). Even though a lot of work is being done to erase old stereotypes, First Nations still face discrimination and racism in Canadian cities to this day (Robertson & Culhane 2005), something which can be argued to strengthen Blomley’s thesis on colonialism as an ongoing process in the Canadian society. Today, Vancouver is a city with many nationalities and cultures. The two official languages in Canada are English and French. Respectively, English is spoken by over half of the Vancouver population whereas French is spoken by approximately 15 percent of the Vancouverites. The country’s largest minority, the Chinese, make up 3.5 percent of Canada’s population. In Vancouver, the Chinese languages (Chinese, Cantonese, Mandarin) are the most commonly spoken after English.

Vancouver is known for its scenic environment and proximity to nature – something which has contributed to its popularity, and which attracts people from all over the world to visit or move here. On the north shores the Coast Range Mountains rise sharply to 1,200 meters, bringing the ocean to the edge of downtown Vancouver. The city is located where, before the deforestation, old temperate rain-forests once grew, which results in a very humid and mild climate; the city has an average of 40 % rainy days per year (annually 94 centimeters of rain)



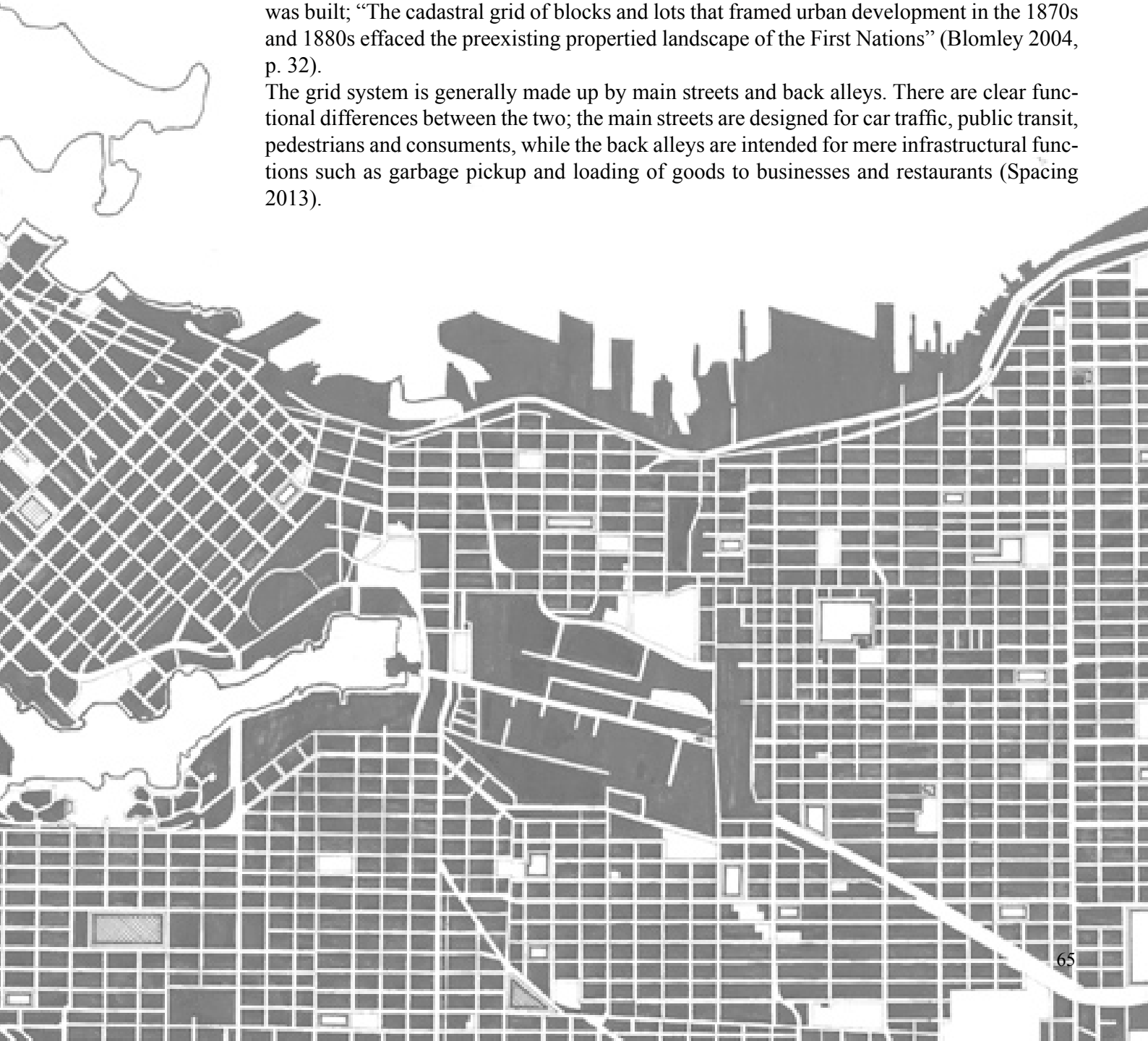
(Punter 2003). The scenic setting of Vancouver is an essential part of the city's popularity, and has fostered a culture of active lifestyles and outdoor recreation. The relationship Vancouverites have to the surrounding nature and the way that the scenic landscape affect the general mood of the city is comply described by Punter (2003): "on cloudy days when the mountains are invisible and Vancouver must rest solely on its human-made qualities, there is a massive sense of loss and the city seems much more humdrum" (Punter 2003, p. 4). He continues to argue that the proximity of the scenic natural environments in which the city exists, develops and grows also has contributed to an awareness on urbanity and environmental qualities among the citizens.

In the west part of Vancouver, a 400 hectar large park is located. Stanley Park is the only "natural" setting within the city. The park area has never been developed for other purposes than park use and forestry during since the 19th century. Before the area was turned into parkland in 1888, to be "enjoyed by all" (Blomley 2004, p. 118), it was the land of the Squamish settlement Xwayxway. After the decision to designate the area into a park, a few native people remained living in the area, but were eventually dispossessed in 1923 (Blomley 2004). On the homepage of Vancouver City the park is described as "kilometers of trails, beautiful beaches, local wildlife, great eats, natural, cultural and historical landmarks, along with many other adventures" (City of Vancouver 2013b).

### *THE GRID*

At the turn of the 20th century, the size of Vancouver's colonial population was 2700 people. Typically for North American cities at this time, Vancouver grew fast and the population had increased tenfold by the 1930's, and by the early 1990's it had reached the half-million mark (Punter 2003). Today the City of Vancouver has around 600 000 residents and together with surrounding suburbs, Greater Vancouver have a population of over 2 million people (Government of Canada 2013). The initial development grew according to a strictly organized grid system, developed around an electric street-railway which created "an inter-urban system of links". When the city grew, the street-railway system provided for the suburban growth. Again, it is important to acknowledge how and on what grounds this infrastructure was built; "The cadastral grid of blocks and lots that framed urban development in the 1870s and 1880s effaced the preexisting propertied landscape of the First Nations" (Blomley 2004, p. 32).

The grid system is generally made up by main streets and back alleys. There are clear functional differences between the two; the main streets are designed for car traffic, public transit, pedestrians and consuments, while the back alleys are intended for mere infrastructural functions such as garbage pickup and loading of goods to businesses and restaurants (Spacing 2013).



## VANCOUVER PLANNING POLICIES

According to the City of Vancouver, the city's planning policies focuses on livability (City of Vancouver 2013c). Information which can be found on the City's homepage explain to the reader that their way to plan for a livable and sustainable city is through keeping a focus on a city where neighbourhoods provide the opportunity for the residents to "work, play and shop". The aim is to create environments "where people feel supported and engaged", and can "enjoy a vibrant street life and their fellow residents" in "an attractive, functional, memorable and safe city" (City of Vancouver 2013c). The comprehensive attitude when it comes to density and growth is acknowledging the importance of densification, while at the same time claiming an approach of protecting the beauty of the city and its surroundings. This approach to urban planning has made Vancouver renowned and the city has a well-established reputation to be one of North America's most well-planned cities. Since the 1970's, the city's planning strategy has been to create and facilitate for a "livable downtown", where a mix of housing, offices and commerce has created a rather unique setup for a downtown area in the North American context. This hasn't always been a given course, though; in the 1960's, a proposal was presented to build a freeway through parts of the eastern downtown area (Gastown) and office development by the waterfront. These plans never got realized, mainly because of protests carried out through grassroots campaigns. Instead, the city took on a different route than many other North-American cities (Blomley 2004, p. 81). During this period, the city also established an "environmentally conscious planning regime" (Punter 2003 p. 3). The dense, high-rise dominated downtown responds well to the contemporary hegemonic strategies of densification which are widely discussed in city planning today, argued to create more efficient and environmental-friendly cities. In the post-war era, Vancouver has had a constant demand for housing, something which has resulted in affordability issues. Rises in welfare and poverty levels, both in the city as well as the region, has been used as strategies to deal with those problems (Punter 2003).

The social geography in Vancouver has an East-West split. The West End and other Western neighbourhoods are considered the most expensive and sought after areas, whereas the Eastside historically always has been poorer, with blue-collar neighbourhoods such as the areas of the Downtown Eastside. These parts of the city has historically also been more diverse, with an especially large Asian population (Punter 2003, p. 12). In this East-West split in the Downtown core, is where one of Canada's poorest neighbourhoods is located. The Downtown Eastside is known for being troubled with poverty, mental health and drug issues. As a way to try to come to terms with issues of polarization, the city works with the concept of social mix, a commonly used strategy intended to bring about change in low-income areas (the concept of social mix can be reviewed on pages 30-31).

## VANCOUVERISM

With a reputation as one of the best-planned cities in North America, Vancouver has also established an internationally known term for their planning strategy: *Vancouverism*. When visiting the City of Vancouver's official homepage, the term is proudly explained as describing "a new kind of city living" (City of Vancouver 2013d). Vancouverism is high-rise density separated by low-rise development, where "light, air, and views" are allowed to break up the

density. Basically what it is all about is how to achieve a combination of urban density and activity with a respectful approach to nature. Vancouverism encourages dense urban environments with many parks and public spaces, walkable streets and sustainable forms of transit. Through “development policies, guidelines and bylaws” as well as “extensive consultation with residents, businesses and experts”, Vancouverism achieves “liveable, high-quality urban design”, an approach which has created an international interest for the city among urban planners and designers (City of Vancouver 2013d). In an article in a local magazine a few years back, Jane Jacobs was mentioned as “the mother of Vancouverism” (Wood 2012). Though Jacobs criticized the city for “greenwashing” (Wood 2012), this statement reflects Jacobs influence on Vancouver’s urban planning and design philosophy.

### *THE GREENEST CITY VISION – BRANDING A CITY*

The strategy of environmentally conscious planning strategies, introduced in the 1970’s, is seemingly still well maintained in Vancouver. In 2010, the City of Vancouver released a visionary report on the planning strategy for the city, *Vancouver 2020 A Bright New Future – An Action Plan of Becoming the World’s Greenest City by 2020* (City of Vancouver 2010) – a document intending to set out a long-term vision to become the world’s greenest city by year 2020. The vision was developed by Mayor Gregor Robertson’s “Greenest City Action Team” and the report is called “a pathway to victory” in which “we all will share a sustainable world” (City of Vancouver 2010, p. 6). The document also contains ten specific goals, which, in order to reach the vision, needs to be achieved during the coming years; Vancouver is aiming to become “the global leader in progress toward an environmentally sustainable future” (City of Vancouver 2010, Intro). A large part of the arguing for the importance of the strategy is an argumentation focused on a green economy, where health equals wealth. According to the vision, a green economy is described to create “green jobs”. A compact, efficient city with a good transportation system will leave a lighter environmental footprint – and would therefor also be cheaper to run and easier to maintain.

Green businesses and buildings, efficient transit lines, community gardens and greenways could all be interpreted as ways to reach “victory” (ibid, p. 6 ) for the city which during recent years been named the most livable city in the world by The Economist (ibid). According to the The Greenest City vision, one of the keys to create a desirable and livable city in the global and competitive economy is to attract creative people. This is a well known planning strategy for urban renewal, formulated and analyzed by, among others, Richard Florida’s *The Rise of The Creative Class* (2002), *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005) and *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2005) (a strategy and theory which has also been met with heavy criticism, see for example *The Creative Fix*, Peck 2007). Vancouver’s position as a Green Capital will, according to the Greenest City report, be cemented and the city will also be “a hotbed for green commerce and innovation” through reaching these goals (City of Vancouver 2010, p. 6). With the goal of becoming the Worlds Greenest City, where the green economy is in focus, the City of Vancouver hopes to communicate to the global economy that “when it comes to economic – and ecological – competitiveness, Vancouver means business, but not business as usual” (City of Vancouver 2010 p. 6). The vision and the goals are communicated in very clear words and there is no doubt that the goals are set to aim high; “The greenest city in the world will be a vibrant place where residents live prosperous, healthy, happy lives with

a one planet footprint” (ibid., p. 11). The economical goals make up a big part of the vision and the plan to become a successful city, capable of attracting businesses, talented workers and investment dollars, something which is clearly expressed in the document: “Becoming the greenest city is more than an environmental objective; it’s also a savvy economical strategy” (ibid., p. 11). In the *Vancouver Economic Action Strategy* from 2011 (City of Vancouver 2011), the City acknowledge that “Economic success is increasingly dependent on skilled and talented human capital, while talented individuals are increasingly mobile” (City of Vancouver 2011, p. 6) and that “in order to attract and retain talent”, businesses need to be located in “great neighbourhoods” (ibid., p. 6). According to the Economy Strategy (2011), a successful downtown is one which “combine a dense mixture of activities and people, a vibrant walkable and bikable public realm, and high levels of investment in digital connectivity and high tech services. They are also environments where companies have appropriate spaces to grow into, and where start-up companies are supported through all stages of growth from ideation to globalization.” (ibid., p. 7). According to Blomley (2004), Vancouver as a place has long defined itself “in terms of the logic and metric of real estate and real property and their dynamic interplay” (Blomley 2004, p. 146).

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Vancouver is a beautiful city with many assets, and has managed to develop a successful branding strategy. One of the reasons to why I first wanted to visit the city was because of its reputation within the field of landscape architecture; what a study site when interested in urban design and nature experiences! When I returned to Sweden after having lived in Vancouver for one year, I attended a lecture where Vancouver and its successful interaction with nature was mentioned; Vancouver architecture and urban planning was brought up as an inspirational and good example. I remember how it struck me how successfully Vancouver has managed to create and maintain a branding concept. Vancouver is, indeed, a well-organized city with a lot of great design and architecture; but, as with any place where you spend a lot of time, I also got to see and experience a wider and more complex image.

As Olsson (2008) states, image-making as a strategy can be connected to globalization and the global economic system. The Greenest City Vision (City of Vancouver 2010) is a representative example of how the City of Vancouver takes on an active role in trying to attract businesses and people to the city and to stay there. The “competition”, which Olsson (2008) discusses, becomes very distinct in this vision, with formulations such as “victory” and the commonly used word “competitive”. That this is an intentional strategy by the City is clear, and the formulated visions are to be comprehended as a “savvy economical strategy” (City of Vancouver 2010 p. 11). What become obvious in those planning documents is that in order for the city to remain competitive and attractive, it needs to supply for the kind of living environments which speaks to the citizens which constitutes the “internationally mobile talent” (City of Vancouver 2011, p. 7). These goals and visions has and will continue to have a great impact on the urban fabric; how and for whom the city is developed and designed. One critic has argued that the document is “ambitious” and that the strategy holds some “important de-

liverables”, but that it yet “remains a policy document to be strategically mobilized to justify (re)developments” (Longhurst 2012). On a general level, Fainstein (2012) has criticized how the concept of “sustainability” is used within the urban planning field. She argues that the sustainability debate tend to focus on environment and climate, without dealing with issues concerning social aspects on cities and development; and that the political debate is aloud to focus on economy and profit (Fainstein 2012).

On the competitive arena, Vancouver seems to have it all; signature architecture (the Convention Centre with its complex green roof built for the Winter Olympics in 2010, and the less up-to-date landmark just beside it built for Expo-86, as well as a new arena located in the middle of the city), “Chinatowns and Little Italy’s” (Olsson 2008, p. 235) (respectively in the Downtown Eastside and on Commercial Drive) and the city recently hosted a big sports event (the Winter Olympics in 2010). And it has paid off; “In the past decade, the city of Vancouver has become a poster city for urban redevelopment in North America. Its planners are celebrated, its neighbourhoods studied, and its name attached to a movement in urban planning - ‘Vancouverism’” (Harris 2011, p. 1). And many Vancouverites are proud of this, with reason, but there are also critical voices which stresses the fact that the city also holds big inequalities; “Vancouver is able to mystify social suffering through recourse to the natural sublime: the pure air of the forests, the natural beauty of the ocean and mountains, the grandeur of the North Shore mountains” (Witt 2013). Referring to how different market actors plays on this selling image of Vancouver, Witt (2013) ironise over how the branding of Vancouver and its living situation often tell a story which he has a hard time to identify with: “It is difficult to overstate the way in which this utopic idyll displaces the real experience of living in Vancouver. Compare the sublime beauty of the North Shore mountains to the empty ruins that litter Eastside tower blocks. Counterpose the flavour of the salty sea air that wafts into a Yaletown balcony to the pestilential stench of a mould-infested Eastside basement suite” (Witt 2013). Critics has also argued that the ecological sustainability approach is “produced as post-political”, but without “bringing social justice back into the domain of urban environmentalism” (Longhurst 2012).

In an article written for the Mainlander, an on-line publication for critical research on municipal politics in Vancouver, Andy Longhurst (2010) calls for an environmental approach which “ensure that social justice is part of environmental justice”. He raises the question whether the environmental and green lifestyle which is communicated through the Greenest City Vision (City of Vancouver 2010) is available to everyone; “For those unable to consume appropriately and fulfill their duty as citizen-consumer in the competitive city, is their right to the city invalid?”. One could argue that what Vancouver tries to achieve is a balance between environmental issues and neoliberal global politics; a process in which nature becomes a commodity. The discourse of nature as idea is a large subject of discussion which I won’t be able to immerse myself in through this study. However, what I intend to explore, discuss and study in the following chapter are the urban landscapes that exists and develops on the basis of the ideas and strategies previously presented and discussed.



*Downtown in the Eastside, exists a world where many hide*

*Binnars are searching, while panners are lurking  
Smokers are selling, while tweakers are dwelling*

*Downtown, in the Eastside, I see a cyclist pedal by*

*Vendors are flogging, despite rain that's sogging  
Buyers are talking, while others keep walking*

*Downtown in the Eastside, is where I live and show my pride.*

**Jewel Chapman <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Poem from "Voices of the Street" - Special Literary Issue 2013 *Megaphone Magazine* - *Vancouver's Street Paper*.





ACME  
Cafe

You won't believe  
what's in store.

SAVE-ON  
MEATS

# DTES

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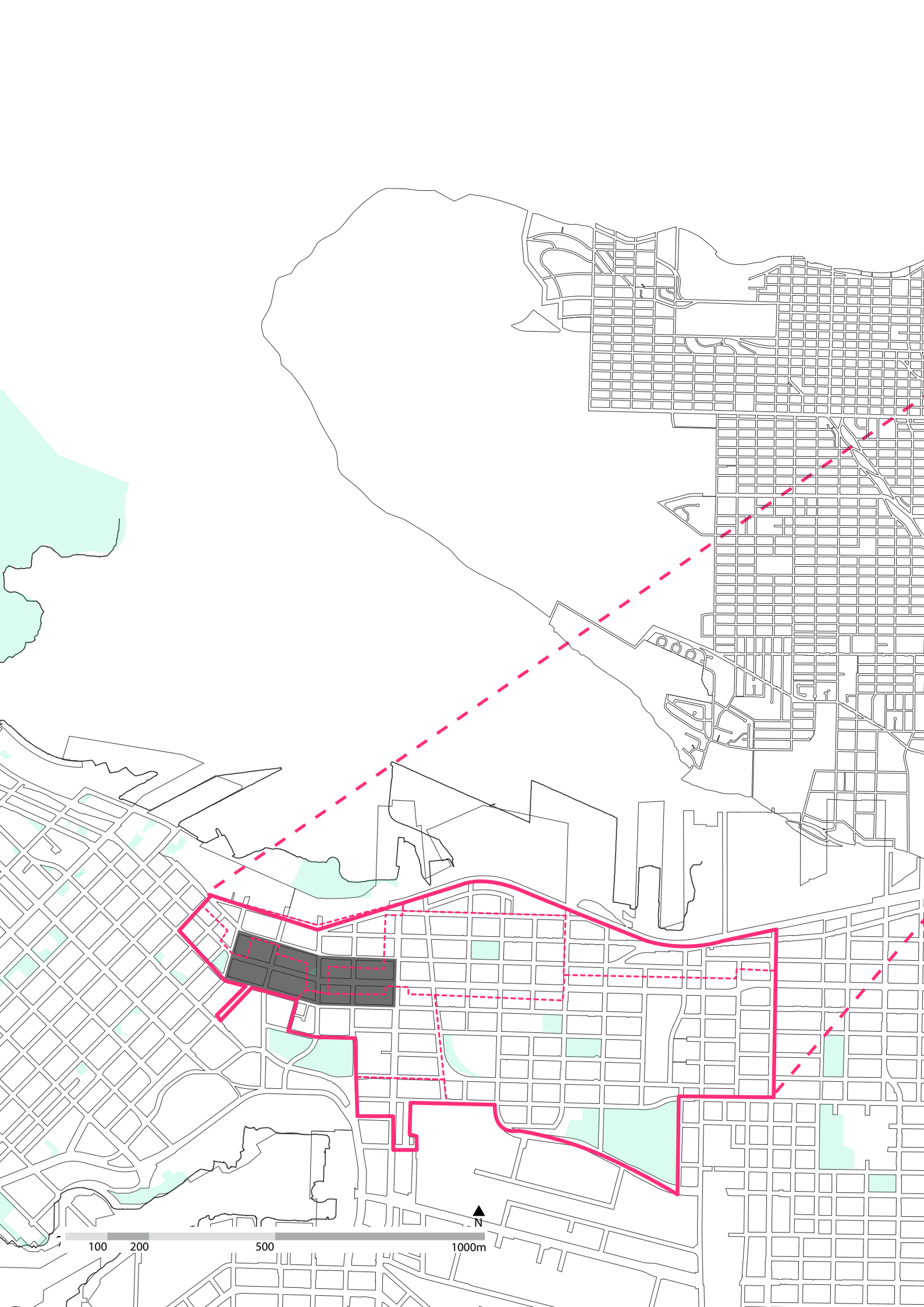
## INTRODUCING THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

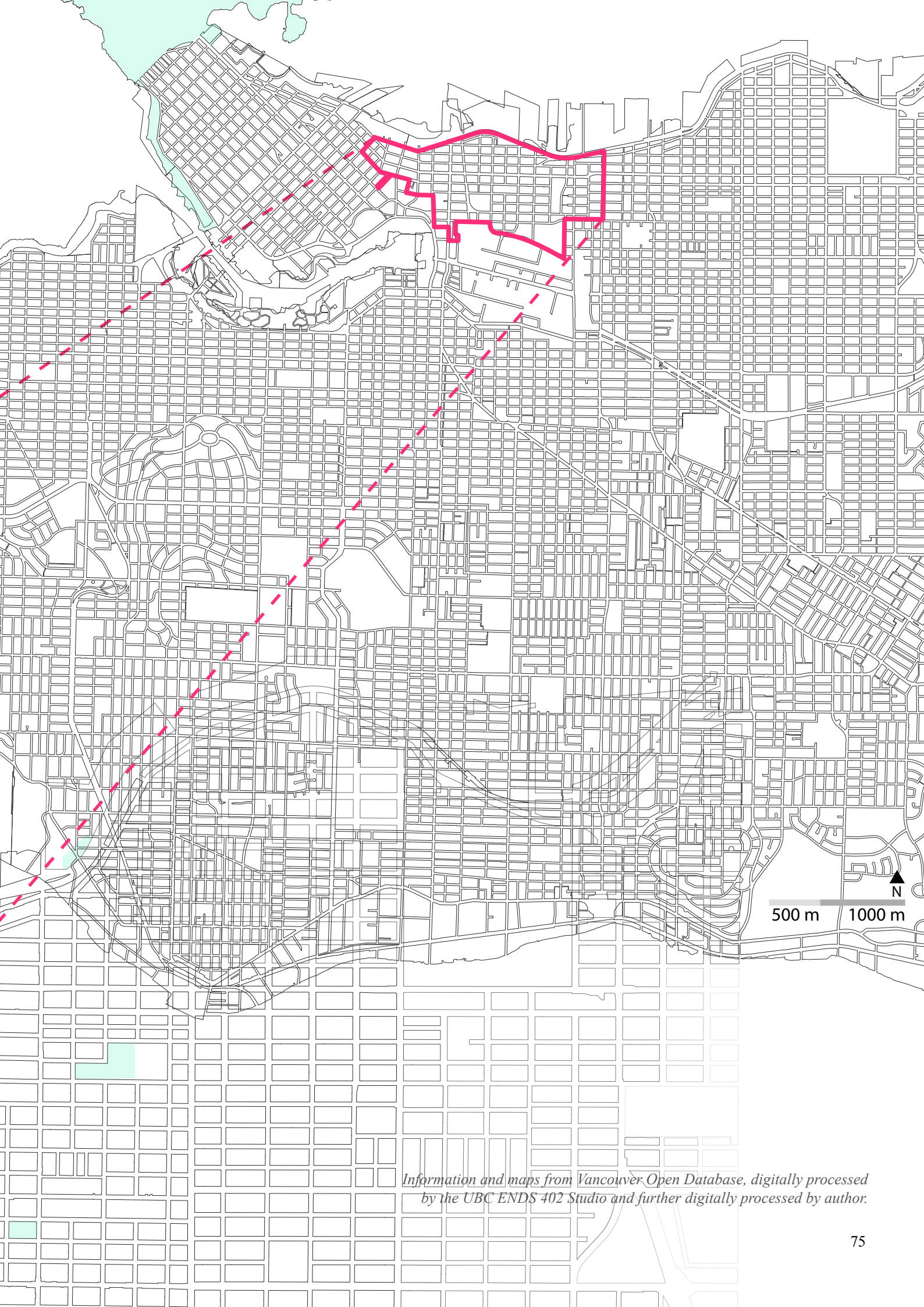
### *BACKGROUND*

The Vancouver Downtown Eastside (also referred to as the DTES) is one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods and is considered to be the heart of the city (City of Vancouver 2012). The Downtown Eastside is historically a working class area and a place for racialized populations (Blomley 2004). The area has also been an active down-market commercial area, and until the 1960's the area was characterized by its population of "hard-living, single men" (Robertson & Culhane 2005, p. 17). In the late 19th century, thousands of single men moved into the area during the gold rush era, heading up and back from the Yukon and Northern B.C (Robertson & Culhane 2005). What is now the central area of the Downtown Eastside, has since these years gone under the nickname "Skid Row" or "Skid Road", a term which derives from the "corduroy roads dug to slide logs into the water", and which is a West Coast connotation for "slum" or "ghetto". Logger, miners and fishermen would spend their time off in this area for amusement in "nightclubs, opium dens, bars, brothels, and beer parlors for which the neighbourhood was famous" (ibid., p. 17), off of the camps or the sea where they would spent most of the year working.

The Downtown Eastside has many assets; its history, architecture and diverse communities. But it is also an area with a bad reputation, both locally within the city, as well as on a national level. In a documentary series in one of Canada's largest national news papers, the neighbourhood was discussed and analyzed under the headline "Canada's Slum" (The Globe And Mail 2009). This is an area which struggles with unemployment and housing issues, homelessness, mental health issues, crime and drug use. According to Robertson & Culhane (2005), "Canada's Slum" is more complex than what the general and mostly negative image provides. The area is collectively named the Downtown Eastside, and is geographically made up by different areas – with different neighbourhoods, social and economic conditions and zoning regulations. The area includes the neighbourhoods of Gastown, Victory Square, Strathcona, Chinatown, the Oppenheimer and Japantown (DEOD) and Thornton Park areas, as well as industrial lands and the Hastings Corridor. The legal boundaries which Vancouver's zoning policies relies on, can, though, be somewhat blurred when it comes to how the area is perceived by the residents and how the area is perceived in peoples minds. According to a Vancouver City Planner, one of the dichotomies of the Downtown Eastside is the "complete divergence between people, people livelihoods, and their relations to each other in the neighbourhood and in their space". When positioning the area in a regional and global context, the area is traversed by many major connection routes; inheriting an important railway hub and port area, as well as a well used thoroughfare for car traffic.







*Information and maps from Vancouver Open Database, digitally processed by the UBC ENDS 402 Studio and further digitally processed by author.*

## A “POLITICALLY CONTESTED SPACE”

The Downtown Eastside has a history of political struggles. The area has been called a “politically contested space” (Proudfoot 2011, p. 89); a ground for struggles such as the labour strife in the 1930’s, demonstrations against urban renewal and demolitions in the 1960’s, and the recent resistance against gentrification (Proudfoot 2011).

The central area of the Downtown Eastside has a history of community activism and protests, which also today is strongly manifested. Blomley (2004) explains the intense struggles in the present day as focusing around land use, property rights and landscape, “which pivot in turn on contending stories and representations of the spaces of property” (Blomley 2004 p. 148). A recent example on how these issues are contested was the protests around the renewal project of the Woodward’s building on Hastings St. In the early 2000’s, parts of the community fought to appropriate and claim their neighbourhood through squatting the, at the time, empty building with demands on turning it into social housing (further explained on page 107). But, as Blomley (2004) notes, the Woodward’s building did never belong to the neighbourhood, when speaking in terms of legal ownership. Yet, it was perceived as having a symbolic relationship and value to the community. During the years of struggles over the building’s future, protests were expressed in both peaceful ways, such as painting the building with pictures and slogans, as well as disobedience protests such as the “tent city”, where the sidewalk was occupied by protesters and homeless people turning the sidewalk into their bedroom (ibid.); their home.

In the Woodward’s case, the protesters won a small victory; parts of the new development turned into social housing, thus most of the units are condominiums or market rentals. According to a Social Planner at the City, the city strives to create “social mix” in the area. This was the City’s attempt when negotiating the Woodward’s project, but the project failed in creating that kind of space and the feeling of exclusion among low-income people and other vulnerable groups in the neighbourhood has not been inevitable. The “experiment” with Woodward’s as a project based on the concept of social mix has therefor been loudly criticized by low-income community as a failure (Carnegie Community Action Project 2012).

## INTRODUCING THE NEIGHBORHOODS

This chapter aims to introduce the areas which constitute the Downtown Eastside, since the case study site is incorporated into four different legal zones (Victory Square, Chinatown, Gastown and the Oppenheimer District). Further I will proceed to introducing the actual study site.

My opinion is that the history of the area is important to understand in order to also understand the context of what is taking place in the area (and the city) today. I believe that the layers of history can help us understand contemporary issues. I also believe that the layers of history, the stories told and to be told, as well as understandings of place are important in order for new layers to evolve; on stable ground.







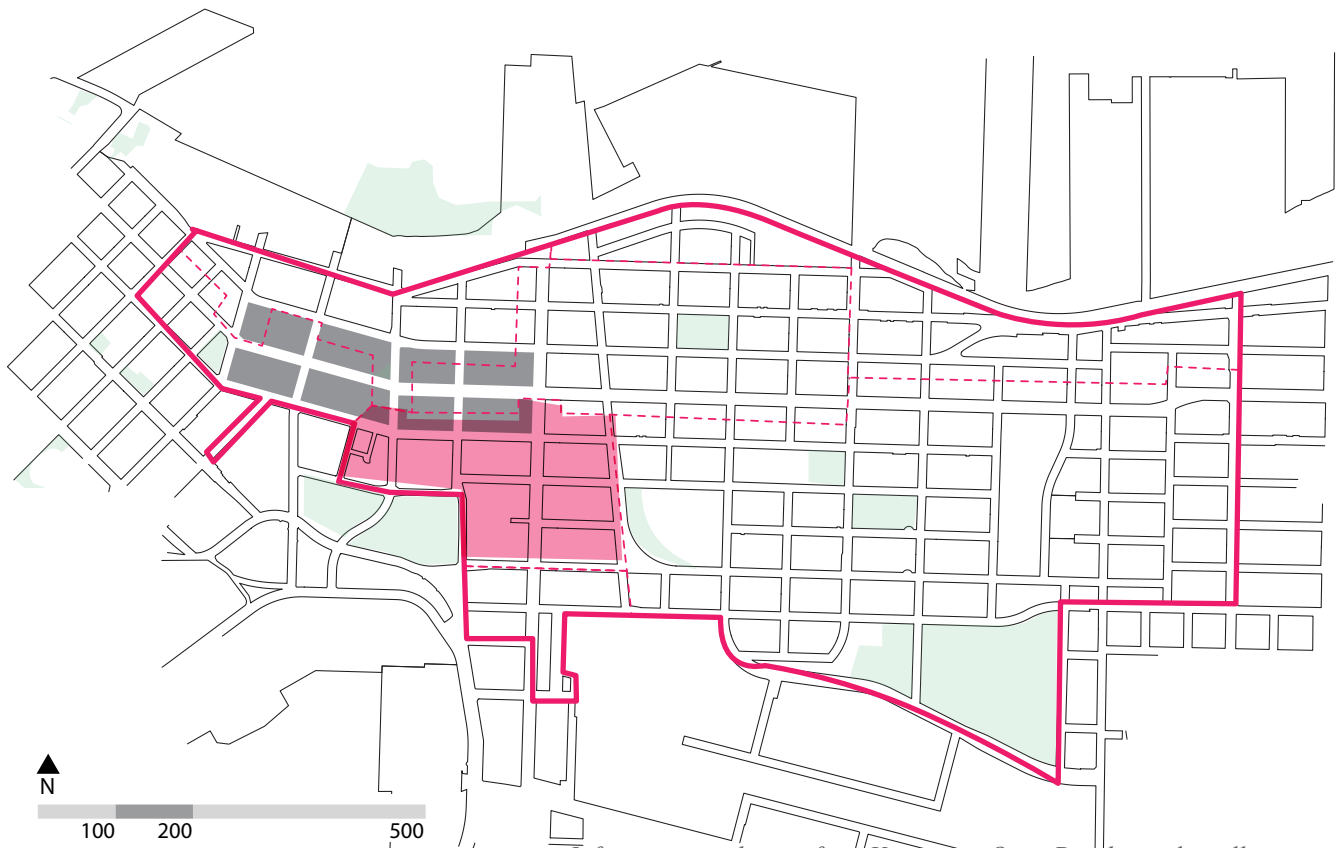
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## CHINATOWN

In the middle of the 19th century, a large Chinese population journeyed from China in order to work in British Columbia. The majority of the immigrants were male, and the labour were often carried out in gold or coal mines, or in services within the city. When the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was built in the late 19th century, 75 % of the workers were Chinese; 17 000 Chinese arrived to the area between the years of 1881 and 1885.

In North America, most Chinatowns were established on unwanted land, which was also the case in Vancouver, where it was developed in the area of False Creek. When first taking shape, it stretched along Carrall Street, running into Gastown. In the late 1800's, Vancouver officially housed around 114 Chinese people, but the actual number of the Chinese population in British Columbia at this time was around 15,000. Before 1923, Chinese migrants were not able to obtain citizenship, due to racist attitudes, and several raids against the Chinese community were carried out by European-Canadians (Yee 2005).

Today, the area is characterized by its retail, which is mainly targetting the Chinese population as well as tourists. The interest for Chinatown among developers has during the recent years incresed, and the area is facing revitalization in the near future.



*Information and maps from Vancouver Open Database, digitally processed by the UBC ENDS 402 Studio and further digitally processed by author.*





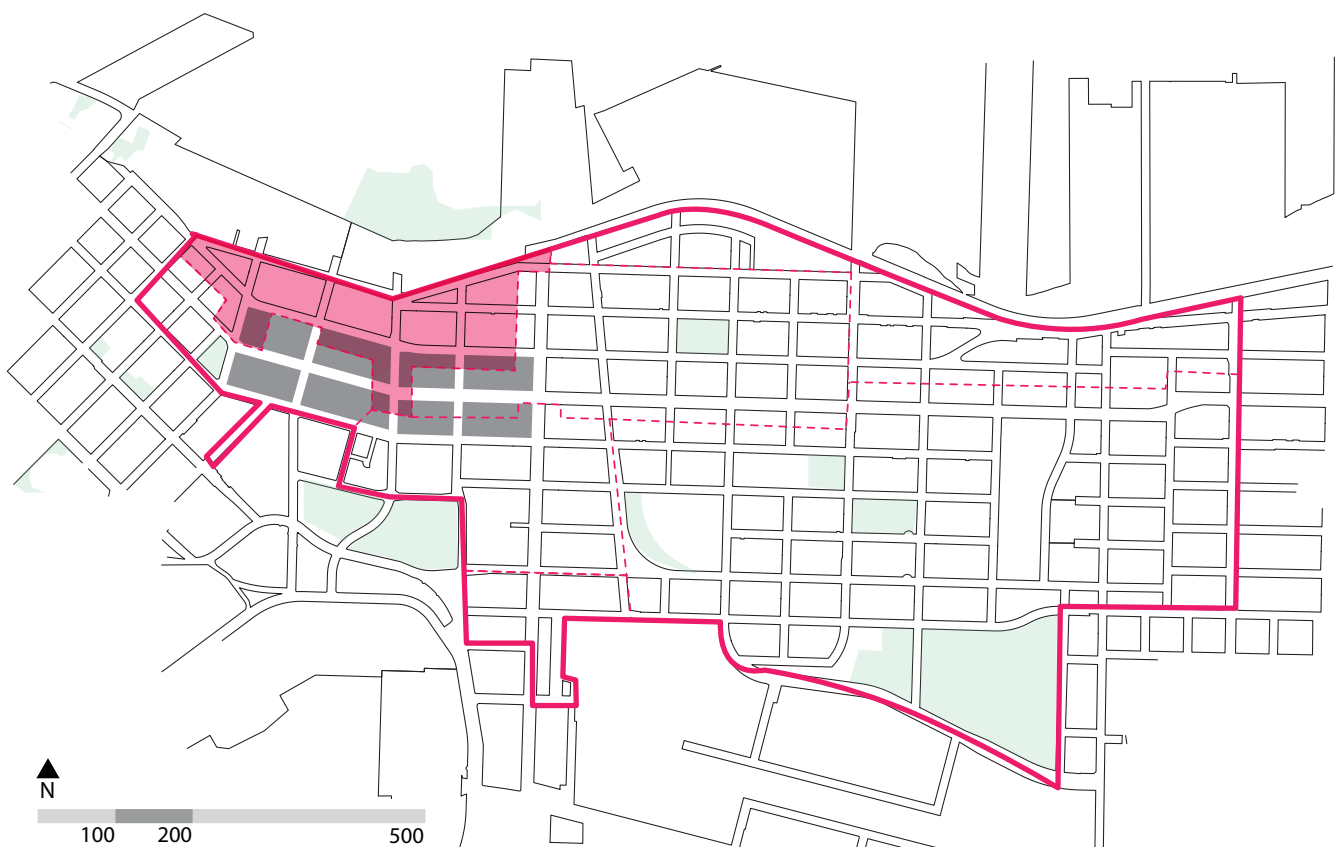




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## GASTOWN

Gastown is one of the city's main tourist areas, and is often mentioned as being the oldest neighborhood in Vancouver. The area is characterized by businesses such as restaurants, boutiques, galleries and media companies (Gastown 2013b). The area has many heritage listed buildings, and in 2001 a plan was developed in order to provide long term goals to manage the area and its historical importance. According to the plan, it is important with a social and economic situation in the area which corresponds to the costs of conservation work and its revenues (City of Vancouver 2001). The zoning restrictions encourage commercial and retail oriented development, and the area has more than 550 registered businesses (Gastown 2013b) having the streets "buzzing" (Gastown 2013a).



*Information and maps from Vancouver Open Database, digitally processed by the UBC ENDS 402 Studio and further digitally processed by author.*

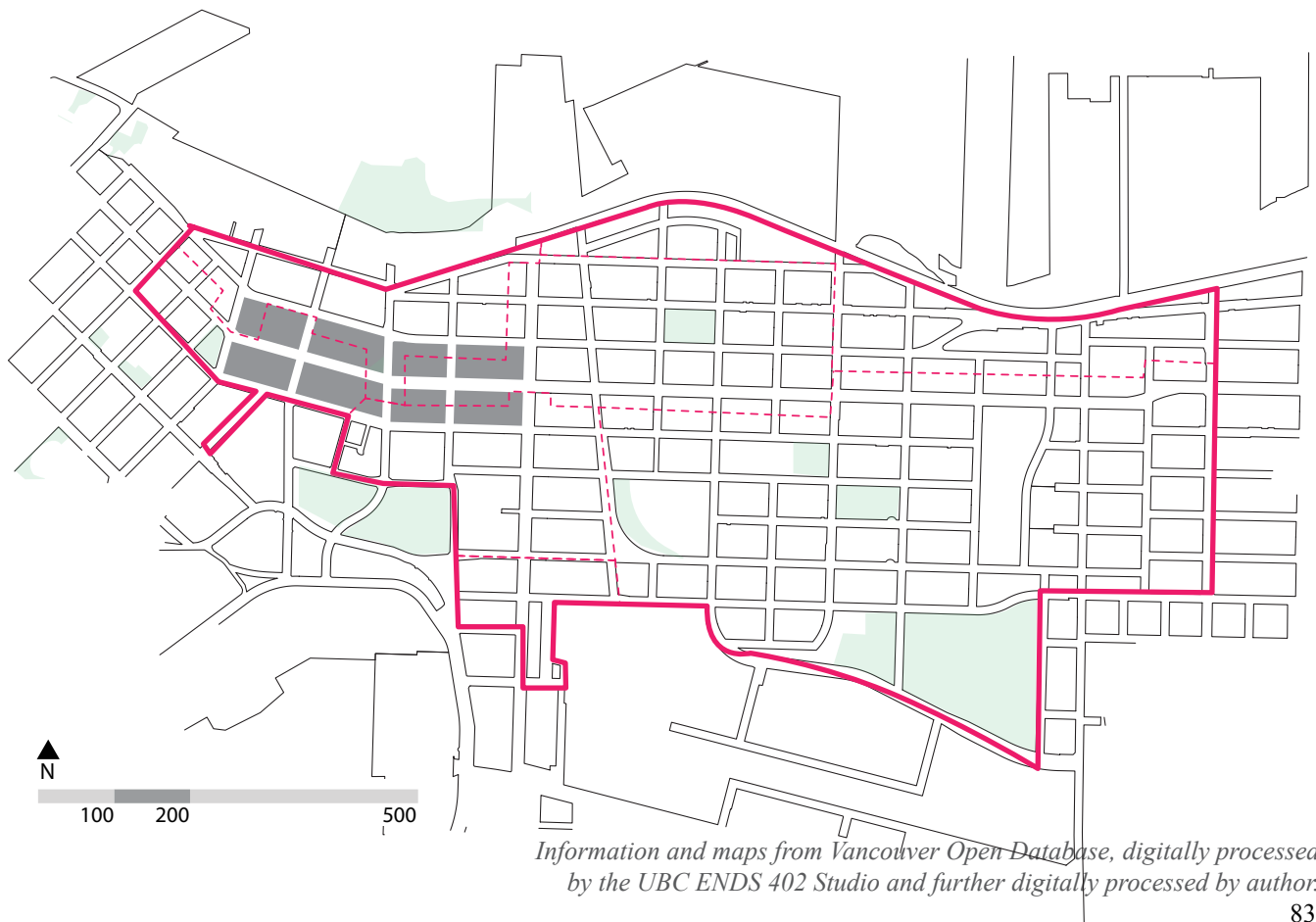




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## VICTORY SQAURE

The Victory Square area developed when Vancouver grew southwards from Gastown. By the turn of the 19th century, the area had turned into a downtown business street and most of the development in the area dates from this period, and housed the major department stores (such as the Woodward's Department Store), as well as numerous shops, commercial services, banks and restaurants. The area also contained some warehousing and light industrial activities. Today, the Victory Square area still has a commercial downtown character, as well as being a residential neighborhood. During the past decades the area has also been home to artists and other groups who converted upper floor commercial and industrial spaces into unauthorized live/work studios. Due to revitalization in the Downtown Eastside, most of these spaces are now gone (City of Vancouver 2005).







## OPPENHEIMER DISTRICT & JAPANTOWN

The Oppenheimer District (Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District–DEOD) is considered to have the majority of the community assets in the Downtown Eastside, along with Hastings Street. The area is considered to be a somewhat “protected zone”, where the zoning restrictions advocate a focus on “social housing, affordable food stores, social and peer support services, gathering places, and cultural community places of spiritual significance” (City of Vancouver 2013d, p. 18). This is an area in which the City tries to restrict the area, through zoning, from becoming a commercial area with businesses which target people with a higher income.

Historically, Vancouver housed a large population of Japanese immigrants, where a majority worked with the construction of the CPR and the urban transportation lines. The Japanese community was mainly located in what went under the name Japantown, located in what today is mainly small-scale industrial lands in the Oppenheimer District. During the Second World War, the Japanese community was evacuated from their homes and sent away to internment camps in the interior of B.C, while the city confiscated their property and turned it into City property (Wong 2011, pp. 72-73). Today, the area is still considered to be working class, where the history of the Japanese community is recognized and respected (City of Vancouver 2012).



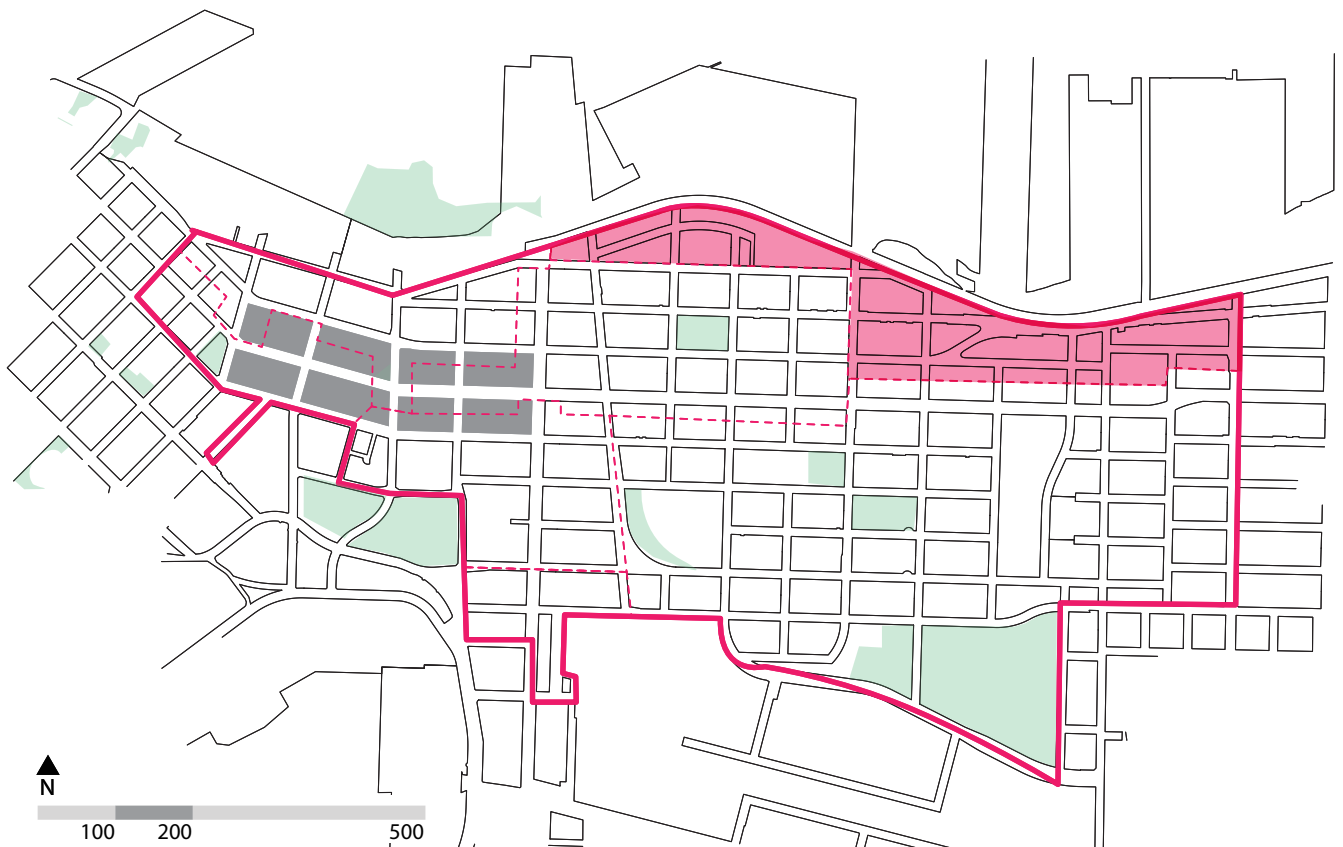




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## INDUSTRIAL

The majority of the Industrial Lands in the Downtown Eastside is composed by one-storey industrial buildings and surface parking lots, and its boundary is neighboring the DEOD and Stratchcona areas. Service and repair businesses such as auto repair, clothing manufacturing, food manufacturing, digital printing and wholesaling is the key production types in the area. In 2013 a rezoning application went through which approved a new housing development by Hastings Street, in close proximity to Stratchcona. The project aims to be a starting point of the development of Hastings Street in an Eastward direction (City of Vancouver 2012b).



*Information and maps from Vancouver Open Database, digitally processed by the UBC ENDS 402 Studio and further digitally processed by author.*

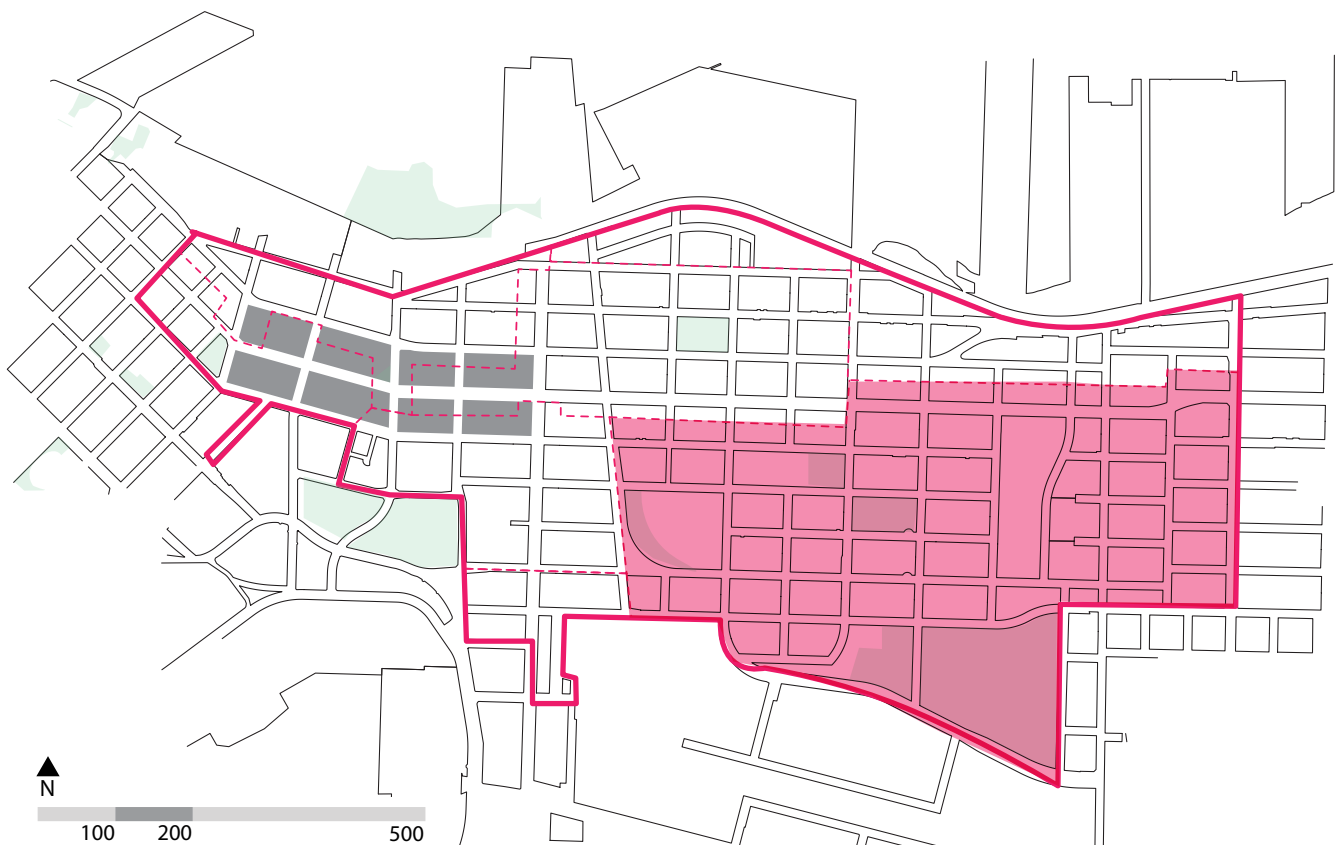




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## STRATHCONA

Historically, Strathcona has been a residential area with a mix of cultures (Japanese, Jews, Blacks and Eastern Europeans) (Yee 2005). The area is characterized by row-houses, and today it is mainly a middle-class family area where house renovations and streetscape upgradings has become a common sight. In legal terms, Strathcona is part of the Downtown Eastside, but many people do not associate the area to the urban landscape a few blocks away. Even though the neighborhood is described as “as diverse as ever” (Strathcona Residents’ Association 2013), worries on gentrification is an issue concerned among the residents. During a meeting with City representatives for the Local Area Plan, initiated by local residents in the area, residents expressed their worries on Strathcona developing into an area where working people soon won’t be able to afford to live (meeting on February 6th 2013, Strathcona Community Center).



*Information and maps from Vancouver Open Database, digitally processed by the UBC ENDS 402 Studio and further digitally processed by author.*



## *SOCIAL ASPECTS IN THE DTES*

### ***Low-income and Housing***

According to numbers presented by the City of Vancouver (2012), 63.3 percent of the residents in the DTES area are considered as low-income and the area has the lowest per capita income for any urban area in the country. Thirteen percent of the workforce which works in the area also live there (City of Vancouver 2012a). The low-income cut-offs (LICO) are based on the percentage of income spent on food, shelter and clothing (Ponting 2005). The term “low-income” and the use of it can by some be hard to take a position to. A representative of the planning process which is taking place for the area (described on page 90) describes his first meeting with the term: “here in Canada, it [the term] seems to be discussed quite openly and freely, and it’s disparaging because it puts people in a disadvantaged position and I try to discourage that speaking, because it’s stigmatizing“. Others mean that the term accurately describes the reality of economical differences, and that the disparagement lies with those who look down on those of lower-incomes.

Compared to other Downtown areas, the Downtown Eastside contains a proportionally larger amount of social housing (state owned rental housing, managed and owned by either the state and/or non-profit organizations). In the leader of a local newspaper, the author points to the large amount, according to the author, of social housing and housing for a low-income population is “miraculous”. The existence of this type of housing, which also means a certain type of residents, in “the core of the second-most expensive city in the world” is a proof that the city and province are putting in a lot of economical effort to support the community: “That adds up to 150 social and supportive housing complexes within the core of the second-most expensive city in the world. The large number of that type of housing in so small and costly an area is miraculous, and speaks to the enlightened and extremely costly approach the city and provincial governments have taken to house the disadvantaged. Anyone who believes otherwise, or that this sizable stock of subsidized housing is in danger of disappearing any time soon because of gentrification, is a fool” (McMartin 2013). Others mean that affordable housing rapidly is decreasing due to higher rents and exclusion of welfare people from many Single Room Occupancies (SRO) in the neighbourhood, as well as through social housing which are renting on market rates; rents which to low-income households may be unaffordable (Carnegie Community Action Project 2012).

In the Downtown Eastside, there are 174 registered non-profit organizations, which according to a City Planner is “huge”. He considers the organizations to be “incredibly resourced, the capacity.. the social and human capital here is extremely advanced and resourced”. The dominating non-profit organization which cater “the-hard-to house” (Proudfoot 2011, p. 102) is the Portland Hotel Society (PHS). Since the 1990’s, the Portland Hotel Society has been the dominant on articulating the neighbourhood’s problems and what they consider to be appropriate solutions (Proudfoot 2011). Apart from housing facilities (usually staffed units) they also manage a safe injection site (Insite), community gardens and businesses in the spirit of social enterprise in the area.

### ***Demographics and Gender Related Issues***

In relation to the total indigenous population in Vancouver, a significant part lives in the

Downtown Eastside. The First Nation's population is comprised to two percent of the overall Vancouver population, but in the Downtown Eastside, around 40 percent of the approximate 16 000 people living in the area are Aboriginal (figures from 2005), while 20 percent are estimated to be East Asian or Latino/a (Robertson & Culhane 2005). Many "carry the physic, material, and bodily scars of continued colonial oppression" (Blomley 2004, p. 149) There are also small groups which identify as African Canadians, Eastern Europeans, as well as Middle East and Central and South Asian. A large part of the Euro-Canadians are elderly and disabled (Robertson & Culhane 2005). The Downtown Eastside has a gender split which is comparably higher than the city in general, with a male overrepresentation in the division of 60/40. Only in Strathcona does the gender representation resemble to the general 50/50 split.

Blomley (2004) argues that "the concentration of many poor, native people – many of them women – in spaces such as the Downtown Eastside is no accident" (Blomley 2004, p. 150) According to Blomley, the colonial process is also gendered. As a result of colonization and patriarchy, native women are statistically overrepresented in Canadian cities after having migrated to urban areas for various reasons (see Blomley 2004, pp. 150-151). Also the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside reveals an overrepresentation of native women; the figure is as high as forty percent. This is a vast number, and is considered to be a result of the negative effects of colonization (City of Vancouver 2012a). Parts of the area, which are struggling with poverty, homelessness and unsafe housing, constitutes an unsafe environment for women and increases the vulnerability for sexual, emotional, mental and physical violence. The rates of physical and sexual violence against women are reportedly closer to the double compared to other regions of Vancouver (City of Vancouver 2012a). A telling example of the vulnerability from violence and abuse, both from individuals as well as the legal system, is the case of the Missing Women. During a period of 20 years, over 60 women disappeared from the Downtown Eastside before the justice system took action and revealed a case with the murders of over twenty women, many of them sex workers or drug users. Every year a memorial march is held in memory of the victims, and has been described as "a powerful reminder of the ongoing epidemic of violence against marginalized women in Canada, particularly against Aboriginal women, sex workers and women living with addictions" (Ben-net, Eby, Govender & Pacey 2011).

Some argue that due to the risk of gender-related abuse among vulnerable groups in the Downtown Eastside, the space in itself offers the opportunity for support through for example Women Centers and informal social networks.

### ***Drug Use in the Downtown Eastside***

In Vancouver, illicit drugs have played a big role throughout the history, mainly explained by the fact that the city is port of entry for imported supplies to Canada. The Hell's Angels chapter in Vancouver is the richest in North America, a fact which by some has been explained as connected to the drug market of the city (Shier 2002). The use of drugs in the Downtown Eastside has always been present, but also, the drug market has changed character according to what the market has had to offer. During the 1970's, 62% of the 9000 heroin addicts in Canada lived in Vancouver, and a majority resided in the Downtown Eastside. In the 1980's,

crack made its entry on the market as a more affordable alternative to the popular drug cocaine. Most of the trade during this time took place on Hastings Street, mainly on the stretch between Cambie Street and Main Street.

According to a figure from 2005, 4900 of the neighbourhood's 16 000 residents are thought to be injection drug users (VANDU 2010) of heroin and/or cocaine, and/or mixed combinations of legal and illicit drugs. This is a vast number, but one must also remember that the majority of the residents in the area are not drug users (Robertson & Culhane 2005). At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Downtown Eastside has been described an area in which many marginalized people feel a sense of acceptance, without being stigmatized for their addictions (Proudfoot 2011).

### ***A Strong Community***

Even though the area has large proportions of social and economical issues, many Downtown Eastsiders have a strong connection to the area and its, to some, tightly knit community. The fact that there is a unique community in the sense of belonging and acceptance for each other is something which has been brought up during the interviews and research for this study. A lot of the published information on the Downtown Eastside tend to have an authority perspective. The interviewed community activist means that one main cultural difference of the most troubled parts of the Downtown Eastside compared to many other neighborhoods in the city is that it exists a willingness to interact with each other on the street. She considers the values on the streets to be characterized by a social, open and respecting atmosphere: "It's a far more social space than what you will find anywhere inside buildings. People just interacts with each other a lot." But also in the city planning documents from the Local Area Plan, positive aspects are mentioned, such as the area being "a vibrant and welcoming environment", and acknowledges that "many low-income DTES residents fear they will lose this environment with gentrification and change taking place over time"(City of Vancouver 2012a, p. 35)

## ***DEVELOPMENT PLANS***

### ***Social Mix and The Local Area Planning Process***

The Downtown Eastside has been subject to various community planning initiatives, documents and reports. According to Heather A. Smith (2003), revitalization programs and planning initiatives released by the city 1995 mainly focused on the areas of Gastown, Victory Square and somewhat Chinatown. For a long time, during the late 20th century, some of the city's planning maps didn't even label the area (Smith 2003). According to Heather A. Smith, the Downtown Eastside is going through a simultaneous process of upgrading and downgrading. In an article from 2003, she calls this process an "intra-neighbourhood polarization", where Gastown and Victory Square went through intensive upgrading projects during the late 20th century and left other parts of the area in decay (Smith 2003). In 2008, the City of Vancouver released a report on ten years of planning for revitalization in the Downtown Eastside, *10 Years of Downtown Eastside Revitalization: A Backgrounder* (City of Vancouver 2008). The report presents the con-

cept of “revitalization without displacement” (City of Vancouver 2008, p. 8) which is the overall philosophy the city has for the area. It promotes social mix, which encourage new residents with moderate income to the area, something which is considered could help support new as well as existing businesses. The concept of revitalization without displacement aims to include development where the same amount of low-income residents will be able to continue living in the area, but to also be joined by other socio-economical groups - which is considered to add greater diversity to the neighbourhood. The strategy includes introducing housing forms to attract moderate income people, as well as through “Encourage market residential in heritage buildings through heritage incentives”, “Look at incentives for secure market rental housing such as parking relaxations, allowing smaller suites, density, and height relaxations” and to “Ensure that zoning for market housing does not compromise the ability to achieve 1 for 1 replacement for SRO units” (City of Vancouver 2008, p. 12). According to the report, the need for retail goods and services which would cater the wished for diversity, including low-income residents, is important. They mention the Woodward’s project as successful in that it “recruited a grocery store and drug store as anchor tenants” (ibid. p. 19) but that the “types of retail locating in the new and renovated buildings will not provide the low cost retail and services needed by the low income residents” (ibid. p. 19). As a way to encourage the putative diverse community to meet, a community atrium space was designated for in the Woodward’s project. For a few years the atrium space also had a non-profit organization, the W2 Media Cafe, which functioned as a “community meeting space and social enterprise cafe serving artists and residents of the Downtown Eastside and Vancouver. Serving healthy, high quality food and drink and employing DTES residents, the cafe is like no other in the neighbourhood, offering a globally connected experience in a hyperlocal, community-supportive context.”. The W2 got evicted from the space in late 2012, only a year and a half after its opening, due to the inability to pay the strata fee on \$90,000 for the space. The space has been closed since early 2013 and has in writing still its doors closed.

The Carnegie Community Action Project has criticized the strategy of social mix in the Downtown Eastside as “welfare for the rich”, “a poor-bashing philosophy”, and argues that “social mix destroys more low-income housing than it creates” (Carnegie Community Action Project 2012, p. 14). They argue and criticize how residents are separated by separate entrances and amenities of the housing complexes, depending on if you live in social or market housing. They also argue that price and culture is separating, or rather excluding, low-income residents from the more well-off; “Security guards and higher-income shoppers and residents treat them with scorn. The unique sense of belonging low-income DTES residents have has been eroded in the Woodward’s area” (ibid., p. 14). One social planner from the City agrees that the Woodward’s project didn’t succeed fully with its aim of social mix, mainly because of the failure of providing low cost retail options and spaces/environments where vulnerable groups feel welcome.

Since early 2012, the City has worked with a Local Area Plan planning process for the

Downtown Eastside. A Local Area Plan is a policy document which provide guidelines and direction for an area, including land use, housing, urban design, transportation, public spaces, culture, social planning, heritage and community facilities. The process, called The Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan (DTES LAP), aims to “ensure that the future of the DTES improves the lives of those who currently lives in the area, particularly the low-income and those who are the most vulnerable, which will benefit the city as a whole” (City of Vancouver 2013d, p. 2). Because of the many complex issues surrounding the area and the vulnerable groups living there, the City aimed to have an inclusionary approach to the planning process. Alongside with public meetings for review and feedback, the City has worked in partnership with the DTES Neighbourhood Council (DNC), the Building Community Society (BCS), and the Local Area Planning Committee. A Social Impact Assessment was also carried out, where City representatives performed workshops and gathered information of what impacts, “benefits (e.g. new housing) and costs (e.g. feelings of exclusion)”, a development process of the Downtown Eastside would have (City of Vancouver 2013e). The planning process is divided into four main steps; reviewing, planning, feedback and implementation. Despite the ambition to be inclusive and deliberate, the planning process has met opposition. The Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council (DNC), which has been a partaker in the process, criticized the LAPP for being a grandstanding process where present changes, taking place during the planning stages, will have too much of an impact on the neighbourhood for it to be able to take into account the vulnerability of the area. The worry is that the opinions and ideas laid on the table by the representatives of the low-income community will be useless once the plan will be implemented.

## CONFLICTS

### ***“The 3-storey building was completely vacant” - The Idea of Best Potential Use***

The perspective on urban change through the idea of “best potential use” (Blomley 2004, p. 81; discussed on page 31) is common when the Downtown Eastside is discussed by planners, business owners and city residents. This idea can be argued to be based on the assumption that the area doesn’t fulfill its full potential as a downtown area. This attitude stresses an alleged non-functionality and unfulfilled potential of the area and therefore the need of change and renewal. As an example, the most central parts of the area (along Hastings Street) has been referred to as being “inhabited”, “vacant” and “neglected”. As business owner of several restaurants in the area, Mark Brand, wondered when he first visited the area: “Those beautiful heritage buildings are inhabited, why is nobody down here?” (*The Impact of an Unconventional Solution: Mark Brand at TEDxVancouver* 2013). In a promotion video for a new housing project, planned to be built in the heart of the low-income community by Hastings and Main, the project is promoted as “bringing light” to the area, instead of what is referred to as the present “dark cloud” which allegedly is hanging over the area (*Sequel 138 Episode 3: Affordable Housing, Art*

*Space & Local Agriculture* 2012). Some critics cast light on how this rhetoric and view on land and property can be directly linked to the city's colonial history, and argues that it reveals "the attempt to repackage the past" (Wallstam & Crompton 2013). The way the Downtown Eastside, to a large extent, is discussed today can be compared to how colonialism has been discussed and justified; where aboriginal use of land was considered as primitive and a waste of the potential use of production and beautification (see Stanger-Ross 2008). In a speech by Natalie Knight (2013), these thoughts were further developed and connected to the present gentrification process which is taking place in the Downtown Eastside:

*"The idea that space and land isn't being used, or isn't really inhabited, haunts post-industrial societies through processes of gentrification, where neighbourhoods and blocks are literally seen by developers as underperforming, underutilized, marginal empty spaces to be seized, and, this keyword is revealing: revitalized. This may be a block or a building that, if you really look at it, is absolutely inhabited, is absolutely vital, is a center that produces and sustains social relationships and the bare life of real bodies. I think that the optics that are implicit in the colonizers' abilities to conceive of a space as uninhabited actually effected their abilities to perceive these places. I think their vision changed. And the current optics of land use, development, speculation, gentrification, and displacement in Vancouver right now – not to mention in places all over the world – are such that dominant conceptions and perceptions of space, and of the people who inhabit it, are truly warped. This does, ultimately, come down to bodies. A space deemed to be terra nullius, whether in the 15th century or the 21st, is a space whose inhabitants are raced, classed, and gendered in such a way as to make them invisible to certain gazes. "*

(Natalie Knight, speech at the Rent Assembly, Vancouver May 2013)

These attitudes are contested, though. Local anti-gentrification and community activists, opposing development advertised to revitalize and bring life back into the area, have carried through protest and manifestations against these issues. The Save the Pantages Site Coalition carried through a manifestation under the name "Zombie Artist Protest Against Condos in Dead Zone", a protest which was directed to the Sequel 138 project which is marketed to bring life into a "dead zone" (The DTES Not For Developers 2011). Another example on how this attitude can be expressed in the Downtown Eastside in present time is the eviction of the tenants in a building on the 100 Block of Hastings Street (see map on p. 105) in 2011. The eviction was carried out in order to enable the purchase, renovations and change of use of the building. At the time of the eviction, it was home to a local art collective (the Red Gate Arts Society), a record label (JC/DC) and music studios since a few years back. Through the purchase and renovations, the building was



turned into its present use which includes a restaurant, a gym and office spaces. The changes of the space was later presented by the mortgage company, InstaFund (Commercial), which economically enabled the renovations as a “successful revitalization of a once neglected building” (Insta Fund (Commercial) 2013). The company also implied that “At the time of purchase, the 3-storey commercial building was completely vacant with extreme deferred maintenance. The building has since undergone extensive renovation and is now 100% occupied”. The issues with deferred and badly maintained buildings in many parts of the area is a recognized problem (City of Vancouver 2008) and should be immediately addressed, and one could argue that it should be the responsibility of the property owner to keep the property in good shape. In an open letter to InstaFund (Commercial), a former tenant and member of the Red Gate Arts Society articulates the frustration over the conflicts of space which are constantly present in the Downtown Eastside: “We very publicly engaged with the city to try to prevent the renoviction of this culturally important site in Vancouver, dedicated to providing affordable space to emerging artists. /.../ Thanks for taking the time... and the space” (Riddle Walker Band 2013).

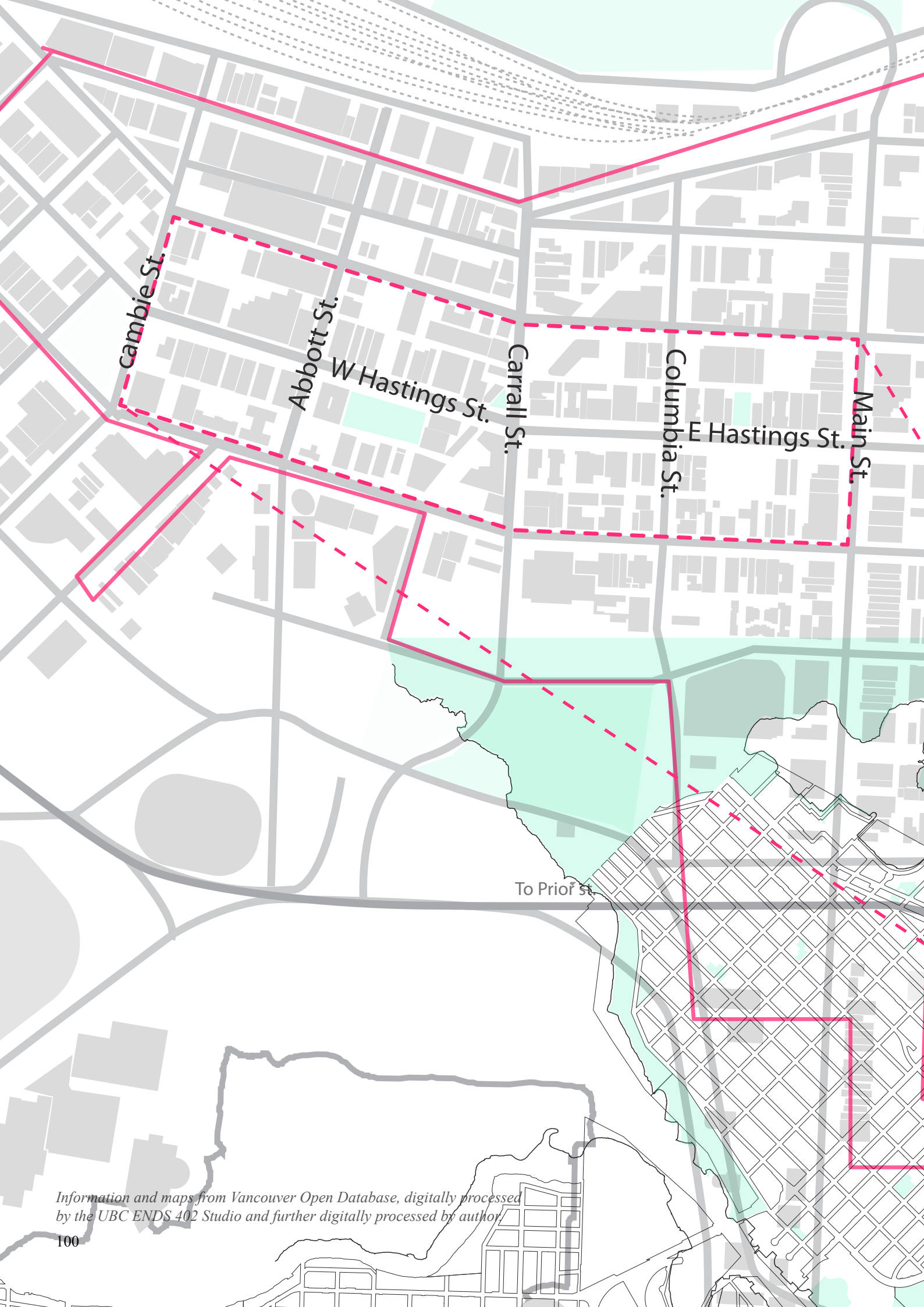




*Q: /.../ we talked about the values.. the DTES as being very diverse.. and having this kind of social spirit; but is that something that is worth keeping? Why is that so important to have in the middle of a city? /.../*

*C.O: Well, I see it differently. It's not a question of preserving anything, I mean, everything is changing. There are all kinds of processes that would happen in a city, without they're being a real estate bubble. The real estate bubble adds other things to it which drives the process much harder and faster than it would normally.. Uhm, but it's really been, I think, a process over the last 20 years of a lot of that middle-class type of people leaving the Downtown Eastside. Either people who could afford to move away, many of them have done so, and it tends to just concentrate the very poorest people. /.../ And there's literally no place for them to go, there's no \$300 hotel rooms in other parts of the Lower Mainland, you know. They can't go to Surrey, you know, where would... should we ship them all to... where are they gonna go, right?! So that's a huge factor, obviously. When you have a lot of people who need a lot of help, then you need a lot of different groups that can help them, you know. And for historical reasons it's down here, you know.*

#### **Interview with art collective organizer**



# HASTINGS ST.

## FOUR BLOCKS IN THE DTES

### INTRODUCING THE STUDY SITE

The study site contains of four blocks along Hastings Street in Downtown Vancouver, located between Cambie Street and Main Street. When the study was carried out, each block was divided into three main sections; Hastings Street, the North back alley and the South back alley. In the following chapter, each block will be presented according to this sectioning as well as the character and the most important nodes of the block, followed by a short conclusion of the results.





## OVERVIEW OF NODES

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● path walked during research





Pigeon Park

United We Can  
Bottle Depot

Community  
Garden

Insite  
(safe injection site)

Carnegie  
Community  
Center

Alexander St

Powell St

Powell St

E Cordova St

E Cordova St

E Hastings St

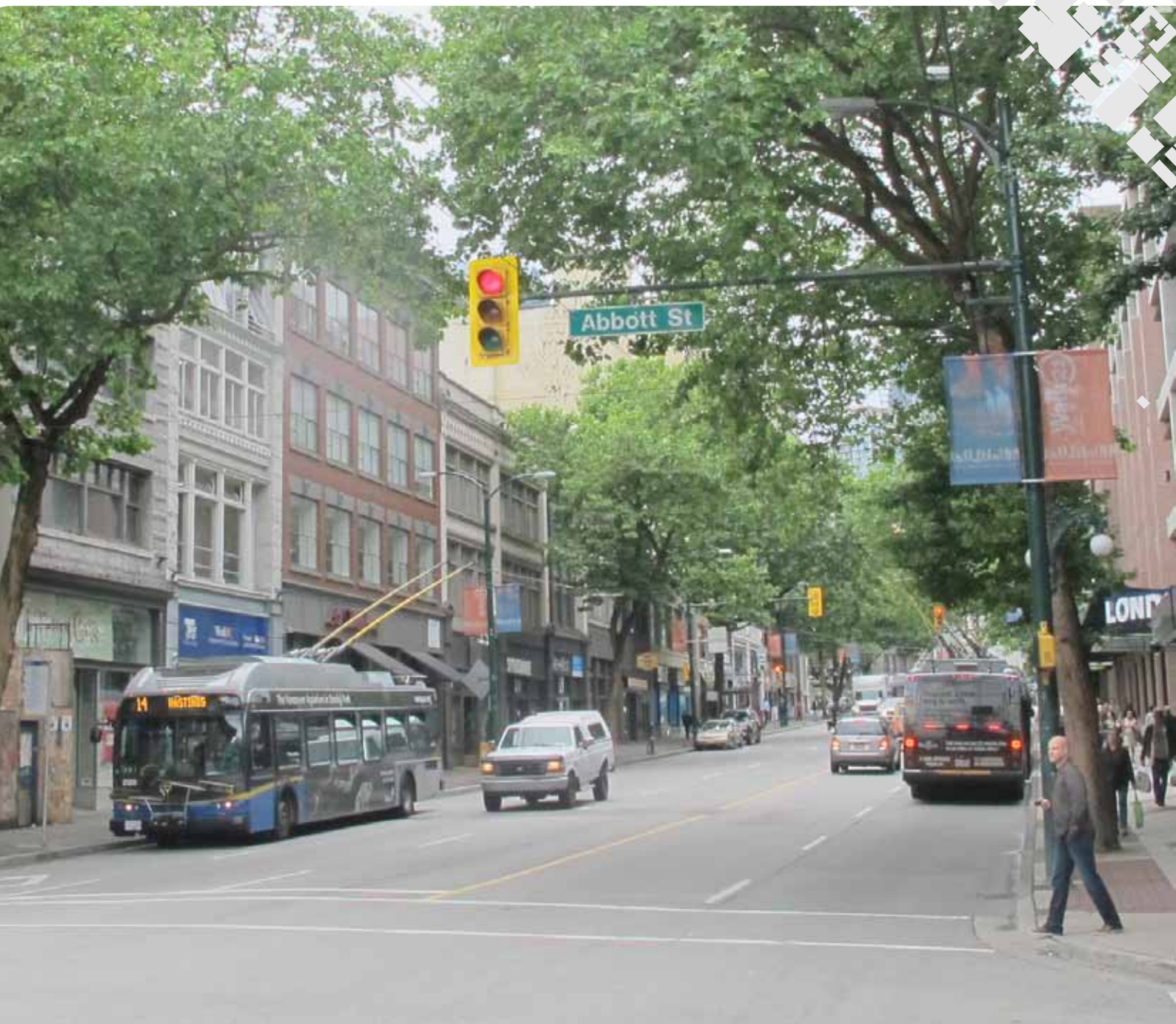
E Hastings St

E Hastings St

E Hastings St

Columbus St





**View from sidewalk on the South side where Hastings meet Columbia Street.**  
*Photo by author, June 2013*

# CAMBIE ST. → ABBOTT ST.



## THE 100 BLOCK - THE RISE AND FALL OF AN URBAN COMMERCIAL CENTER

The 100 Block has been characterized by the Woodward's Department Store since the construction of the building in the early 1900's. The department store's had a physical footprint of an entire block with its five buildings, and was a popular destination when it first opened. However, suburbanization and external shopping malls located outside the city core outflanked the department store and in the 80's the business had to close its doors. After the suburban flight during this period, as well as the closing of Woodward's Department Store, the 100 Block lost a lot of its original main use as a commercial strip. In the late 1990's, news media covered the acute situation on the 100 Block, where reports described an urban landscape which was "boarded up, often deteriorating buildings and vacant storefronts that lined both sides of the street" (Blomley & Sommers 2002, p. 19). The closing down of the department store meant the closing down of a whole block. The once thriving commercial area suffered, and many of the neighbourhood's other shops and businesses were effected by the closings of the department store (ibid.).

During the coming years, the former department store went under different ownerships and failed development schemes, which finally ended up with the Provincial Government holding it and trying to sell the property. Community activists demanded that the property were to be turn into social housing, an idea in which housing developers saw no profit (Blomley & Summers 2002). In 2002, the building was squatted and occupied by activists who opposed the revitalization plans which were discussed, an action called "Woodsquat". Eventually, after a public consultation process, the redevelopment of the Woodward's building was initiated. Today, the development contains a majority of market housing (around 500 units) as well as social housing (around 200 units). The Woodward's project was supposed to be a pilot project for the city's social mix strategy for the Downtown Eastside, something which has been criticized for not having succeeded.





View from North sidewalk at the corner of Hastings & Abbott Street.  
February 2013



The corner of the original Woodward's building by Hastings & Abbott Street houses now a bank office.  
June 2013



Entrance to atrium from Hastings Street  
June 2013

## HASTINGS STREET

When I walk down Hastings Street between Cambie and Abbott, I can recall what the street looked like when I lived here only three years ago. The North sidewalk, along the Woodward's building, looks pretty much the same. Along the new building facade there are no entrances into the space, except for a sandwich store facing the street, and a few private entrances. Instead, there is one main entrance into the new Woodward's complex, next to a bank which is located by the corner of Hastings and Abbott. Most of the facade is "closed", apart from a few meters of display window belonging to one of the convenience stores.

The South sidewalk is characterized by newly opened businesses such as restaurants, gyms and stores – what Gehl (2010) would call "exchange zones". There are still renovations taking place and a few "for lease"-signs can be seen in some of the newly renovated storefronts. During recent years, the buildings along this stretch has undertaken renovations due to the need for it. The art spaces and closed storefronts which characterized the block a few years ago are now nowhere to be seen, there is not a single trace of what was here only a few years back. One day, me and a friend of mine walk by what is now a gym and a bar. He has not seen what the space that he and his friends once rented now looks like. He describes to me where the jam spaces were located, where the shows were performed, the location of studios and the gallery. Today, the building holds new tenants, and the activities taking place in the same space now require a purchased gym pass or money on your pocket; creativity has been replaced by consumerism, and the streetscape communicates a much cleaner and more ordered atmosphere to it. With new owners, the building itself has undertaken a full renovation and the tenants are no longer noted by complaints from the fire department about being an unsafe space.

## BACK ALLEYS

The Woodward's project still has a footprint which covers almost a whole block. Compared to the surrounding blocks, there is no coherent open-air back alley here – instead that **North side** space is built in and form an atrium space. The atrium is a large open space with a basket ball court from where one also enter the two convenience stores. The space is guarded and during a majority of my visits to the site there has been a guard either inside of the space or in close proximity to the entrances. The space closes at 10 pm. The atrium leads out to an open-air space, designed for public use. It has plenty of seating options and the space feels like a small plaza, with a café, two eateries and the main entrance to the Simon Fraser University



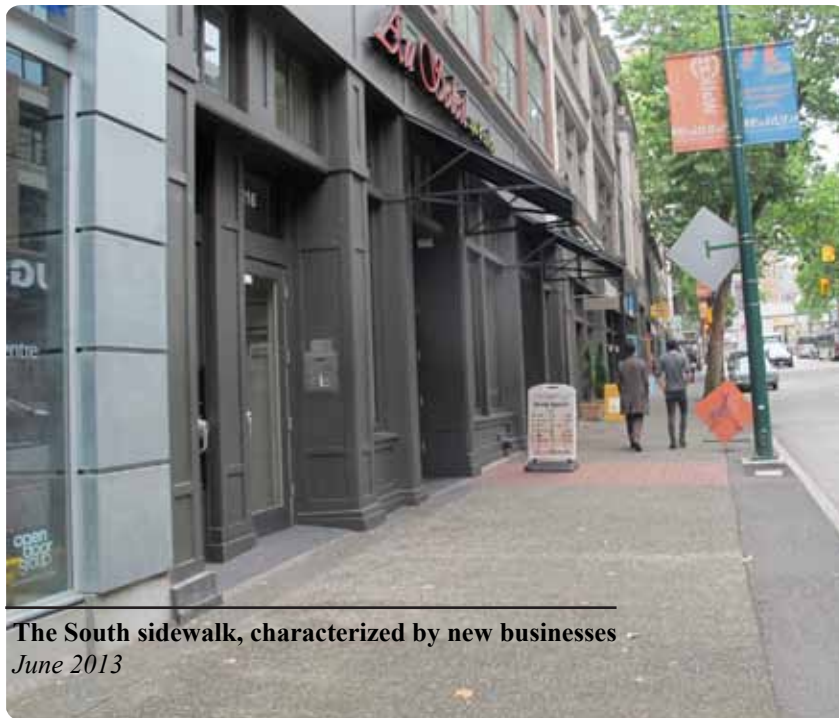
Woodward's  
June 2011







ings Street



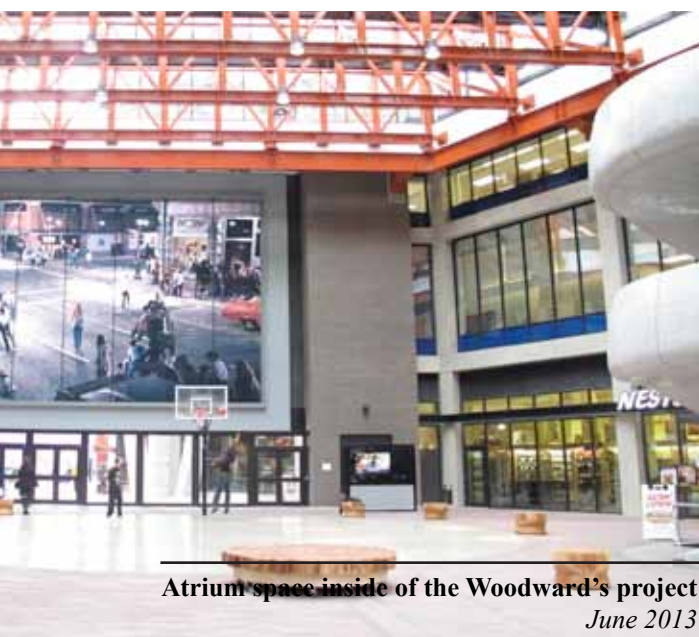
The South sidewalk, characterized by new businesses  
June 2013



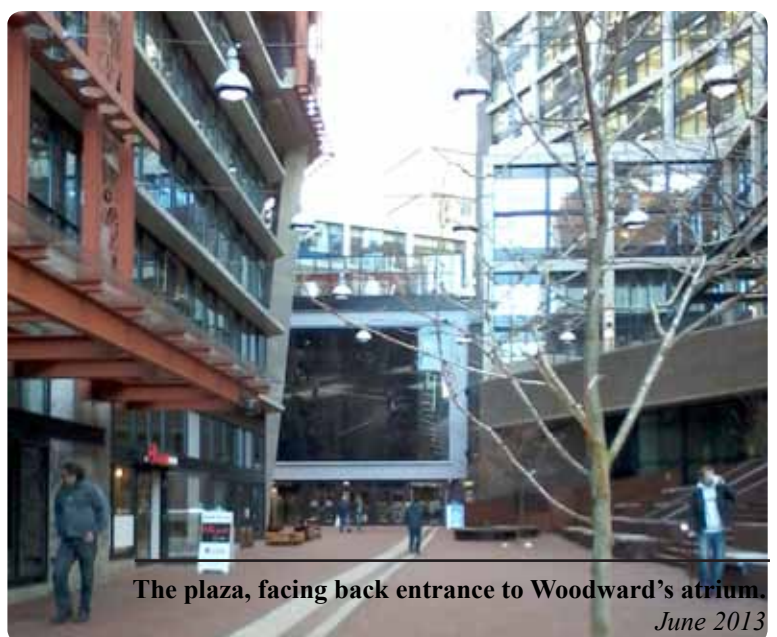
School for the Contemporary Arts.

**The South back alley** is of a more “traditional” kind; the main function is as infrastructural space for loading/unloading, garbage pickups and parking (both street parking and entrances to underground parking). One of the brick buildings are painted red, which adds character to the alley. The verticality of the building facades are broken up by windows, steps and niches; some which are fenced in to prevent trespassing, others are open and therefore provide space for occupation. The back alley also reveals an empty lot, closed off by a fence. Even though the lot has no built floors, no walls and no roof, it still functions as a bedroom every now and then. During some of my visits to the site, either a covered cart or a small, lonely tent was erased in this large space; functioning as a temporary bedroom for homeless Downtown Eastside residents.

The spatial resources provided by the space, apart from the formal infrastructural functions, are apparent when walking down the alley; by the presence of people using the space, sitting on steps or in niches, or by traces.



Atrium space inside of the Woodward's project  
June 2013

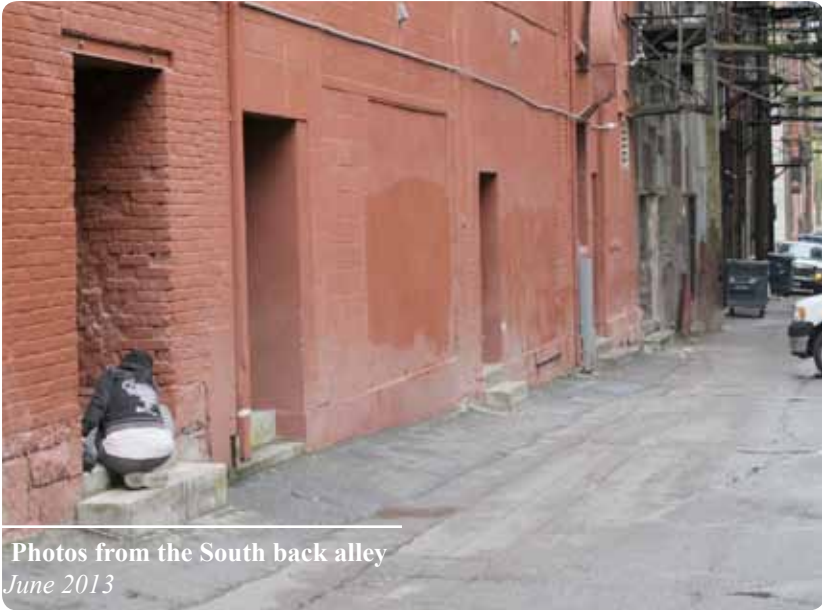


The plaza, facing back entrance to Woodward's atrium.  
June 2013





View of the plaza outside of the SFU School of Contemporary Arts.  
June 2013



Photos from the South back alley  
June 2013



The sign of a new restaurant/bar  
June 2013





## CONCLUDING THE STREETScape

### Sidewalk Use

During the public consultations which took place when planning for the project, a former tenant and organizer of an art space on the block describes how the presentation of the layout of the new building was an unpleasant surprise;

*C.O: And they showed the architectural drawings, you know the plans for the building, and it was like unacknowledged /.../ just a facade, just an ugly wall along.*

*Q: And this was the model that actually got built?*

*C.O: The model that got built. And when they built it, there was a sign on the Hastings Street entrance: "SFU students, please use atrium, Cordova Street entrance." And I wanted to go to the other side and put up a sign, "DTES residents, please use Hastings Street entrance".*

*/.../*

*Q: But don't you think that maybe "closing down" a street that had been having a lot of troubles.. that it actually could be a way to avoid having people using the space in that way..?*

*C.O: Well, it was very clear that it wasn't intended to be very welcoming when coming from that side. It was mainly just.. that was kind of the "defended" side.*

*Q: Why did they want to "close" that side off?*

*C.O: Why? Well obviously they didn't want that street life to be happening. Its clear.*

When walking along the North sidewalk, it becomes apparent that the facade doesn't encourage the act of residing. Even though the wall slightly folds every few metres, the design can be said to work against the idea of vibrant sidewalks promoted by public space advocates such as Jan Gehl (2010) and Jane Jacobs (1961). Emphasized by Gehl, the physical structures surrounding a sidewalk can either encourage or dis-encourage certain types of use through design; "Big buildings with long facades, few entrances, and few visitors mean an effective dispersal of events. The principle, in contrast, should be narrow units and many doors" (Gehl 2010, p. 93), or by, for example, placing passive units such as offices and banks on main floors of buildings. This design strategy to disperse activity can be read in the design of spatial structures and sidewalks in this block. The example of a sign by an entrance which dis-encourage use could be interpreted either as a way to decrease the use of the sidewalk, or as a way to encourage the use of the newly created plaza on the other side of the building – or simply both. The South sidewalk, with its many entrances to stores, restaurants and other businesses, has an opposite layout. The design and spatial qualities in this space encourage



people to enter from the sidewalk. Thus, none of the sidewalks provide benches or other structures which would function as encouraging the act of residing for longer periods of time.

### **Who's space?**

The fact that the public spaces by the Woodward's building are guarded (the atrium, plaza and the sidewalk outside the bank) can be linked to Zukin's (2010) and Staeheli & Mitchell's (2008) thoughts on public space and civic order. They argue that space intended to be our shared commons, but which are also affected by private interests (either through property boundaries or businesses interests, for example) may create conflict. Further they (Staeheli & Mitchell 2008) argue that these spaces can function as oppressive towards groups which aren't acting in interest of private actors, something which can be interpreted within the studied space. According to a community activist, the fact that the space has a guard can be problematic:

*Q: So, looking at the stretch between Cambie & Abbott and how that space has changed, would you compare that to a zone of exclusion, to that definition?*

*C.A: Oh, yeah, definitely. And people [marginalized groups] don't even walk up there anymore unless they live in the social housing or something. And, like, the design of Woodward's fit in more to that idea of the public sidewalk just being getting from A to B kind-of-function. /.../ But that pissed off a lot of people and made them think 'Ok, this is not about social mix' because where are people supposed to socialize?*

*/.../*

*Q: It [the atrium] was supposed to be the place for the mixed community to meet, but that it hasn't really worked that way with the Nester's and that. But it is indoor public space.*

*C.A: Yeah, which is cool.*

*Q: Does it work that way, you think?*

*C.A: Well, with all the security, obviously it won't be welcoming to anybody, it's like criminalizing.*

According to Sommers & Blomley (2002), the changes which has taken place in and around the 100 Hastings Block are inseparable with its reputation of being the worst and poorest neighbourhoods in Canada. Deindustrialization and "the reorientation of the Downtown economy toward tourism, information, and producer and consumer services" (ibid., pp. 19-20) are mentioned as the main reasons to the changes which are taking place in the area.

As a planning process, the Woodward's project has been criticized for not taking the community into consideration; neither through the actual planning process nor as a result aiming to create a socially mixed development. An artist organizer, previously active across in studio spaces which was located across the street between the years of 2004 and 2011, points out the failure of creating spaces for the community to meet, something which he claims was one

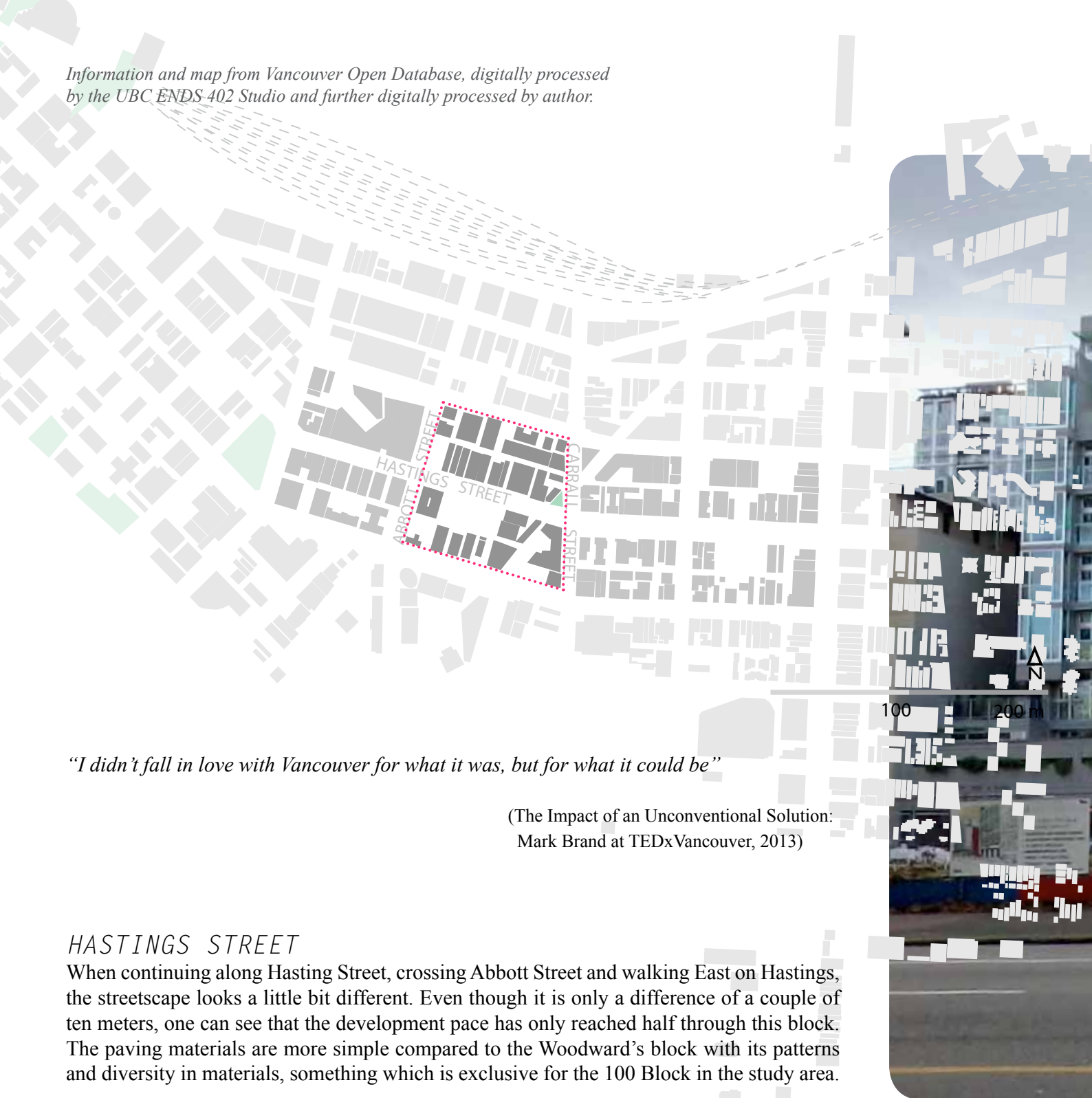
of the justifications of the project:

*C.O: So, all that remained of the community amenity for that whole development – and like I said, that was the justification for going 40 freaking storeys in a neighbourhood where there was no building more than 10-17 storeys, so three times as high – all that remained was W2 Media Arts [now closed due to inability to pay the rent] which had to pay, what, \$90, 000 a year.*

He points out that the corner of the historical building, by Abbott and Hastings, which now houses a bank, initially was discussed to be a community centre:

*C.O: And I don't know, just to see that bank there, it really galls me because it's like.. /.../ ..it's just totally uninteresting. Here's this prime area that could be integrated with the community, that is facing the real historical community of the Downtown Eastside. And now it's just generic offices and you see the back of somebody's head, you know. It's these little offices that hardly ever have anybody in them. And it's just kind of an insult, you know, that there's so little regard to the actual community. /.../ There's a plaque on the wall and there's this quote: "If humanity has a future it's through developments like this", signed Gregory Henriquez, the architect. And like the hubris of that... I mean, to think that any problems have been solved by that development is just insane, you know.*

Staeheli & Mitchell (2008) mentions that “sometimes, people who feel marginalized in the spaces of the city attempt to reclaim space – attempt to transgress or to squat space – in order to make new places that are suitable to publics that might challenge the power relations of the city and that create new ideals of citizenship and democracy” (Staeheli & Mitchell 2008, pp. Preface xxii). The so called Woodsquat can be linked to this type of reclaim of space, a subject discussed and described by Susan Pell (2008); “Woodsquat represented a movement between possibilities and limits of citizenship – an oscillation between citizenship as institutionalized and the practices that seek to challenge, alter, and transform the status quo. It was a space of insurgent citizenship, where the street was used to claim new political identities and to expand the concept of rights to a liveable city” (Pell 2008, p. 154). The demand for community spaces, the promise to provide it and then the disappointment over the failure of creating functional community amenities at the Woodward's project seem to have cast a shadow over the city's social mix-strategy. Most of the buildings in the 100 block have new tenants after the renovations which the buildings has undertaken, which, within this particular space, also expose that gentrification and “revitalization without displacement” (City of Vancouver 2008, p. 8) can be difficult to carry through.



*“I didn’t fall in love with Vancouver for what it was, but for what it could be”*

(The Impact of an Unconventional Solution:  
Mark Brand at TEDxVancouver, 2013)

## HASTINGS STREET

When continuing along Hasting Street, crossing Abbott Street and walking East on Hastings, the streetscape looks a little bit different. Even though it is only a difference of a couple of ten meters, one can see that the development pace has only reached half through this block. The paving materials are more simple compared to the Woodward’s block with its patterns and diversity in materials, something which is exclusive for the 100 Block in the study area.

The block between Abbott and Carrall Street is characterized by a large open space which functions as a community garden, a property owned by one of the largest developers in the city, Concord Pacific. Concord Pacific owns the property of two lots used as community gardens in the study area (also the Hastings Folk Garden, next to Insite). The two community gardens are facilitated and managed by the Portland Hotel Society (PHS), a non-profit organization with over thirteen residences for the “hard-to-house” in the Downtown Eastside (Proudfoot 2011, p. 102). The community garden is fenced in, and is only open at certain hours. The presently lush and green “empty” lot has had various functions before it was turned into a garden; a gravel parking lot, a site for an Olympic protest tent city and a soccer turf pit (Ball 2012). The garden adds an open atmosphere to the block, and lets both light and air in to the generally dense streetscape. Because of its location on the South side of the street, the community garden provides light to that side of the street which usually lies in shadow, creating an interesting void when walking along the street in the study area.



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# *ABBOTT ST. → CARRALL ST.*



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**View of community garden, from North sidewalk**  
*February 2013*





View of the Community Garden from North sidewalk.  
June 2013



The block contains a few businesses, such as a café, a bar, the diner Save On Meats and the department store Army & Navy, which takes up a large part of the North side of the block; both businesses originates from early or mid 20th century. There is also a new community gift/art shop owned and operated by the PHS. The Save On Meats has been located on the block since 1957, but was taken over and re-opened in 2010 by Mark Brand, the founder and owner of a handful of restaurants in the Downtown Eastside (*The Impact of an Unconventional Solution: Mark Brand at TEDxVancouver*, 2013). Most of Brand's businesses are located in Gastown, an area with zoning regulations which aim to encourage and facilitate for businesses such as restaurants, cafés and stores to build a vibrant tourist and commerce urban environment. Save On Meats is part of a social enterprise program, and the restaurant's "Sandwich Token Program" is described as a program that "acts as a bridge between people who want to give and people who need the support" (Save On Meats 2013). Brand's interpretation of the area is that it has great potential to be something else than its present use. Brand sees the potential in these streets; "Those beautiful heritage buildings are inhabited, why is nobody down here? /.../In any other major city, this is where you would hang out /.../ This is the Meatpacking District, this is the coolest spot in the city" (*The Impact of an Unconventional Solution: Mark Brand at TEDxVancouver*, 2013).



View from West entrance of North back alley  
June 2013



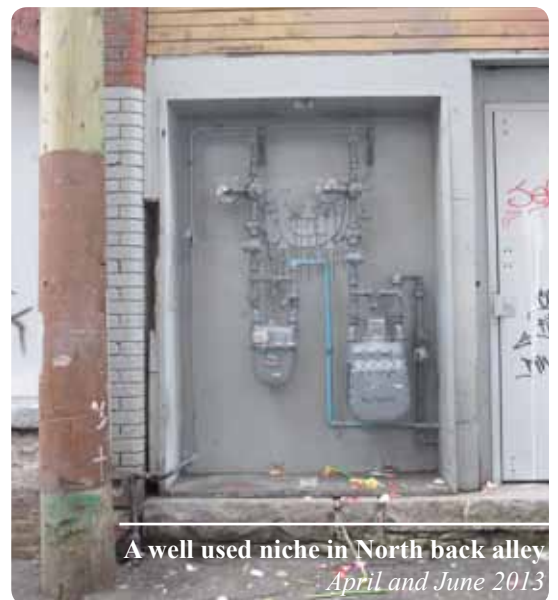




View from North sidewalk  
June 2013

### THE BACK ALLEYS

**The North back alley** have a dense feeling to it, compared to the Woodward's building complex. By the East mouth of the back alley, a small gravel parking area is located, and when walking down the alley one passes a few open, but narrow, lots which are also used for parking. In the middle of the alleyway, the Army & Navy Store has two secondary entrances which connects the store to two separate buildings. During the visits for my research, a common sight was the loading of goods in to the restaurant or to see staff from Save On Meats on a smoke break. Closer to Pigeon Park, walking East, one find a few containers and a well used niche. If only walking by briefly, one might not notice anything particular with this small void in the facade beside an electrical cabinet – but every time I have walked pass it, someone was sitting here, or there were traces from occupation; a piece of cardboard on the “seat”, some orange peel, a needle, notes on the wall. The East end of this alley way often have a strong smell of feces or urine close to a group of containers located here – even though we are very close to one of the only public washrooms in the study area, every now and then this spot is used as a toilet.



A well used niche in North back alley  
April and June 2013

The **South back alley** is characterized by a break in verticality. A small parking area by the mouth of the south alleyway as well as the spatial void, created by the community garden, affects the spatiality of this alley. Even though the fence to the garden doesn't allow for trespassing, it lets light through and provides for insight across to the sidewalk. During my visits this was the least used back alley in the study area. It doesn't provide much space to sit or get shelter, since most of the street level facades leads to fenced in underground garages. The alley also has a diagonal break, since it integrates with the diagonal line stretching through Pigeon Park. This area is fenced off for parking and private use, and creates an angle leading out on Pender Street. This, together with the fact that the alley is open for insight and has, compared to most other back alleys in the area, a fairly "closed" facade might explain the low level of use.



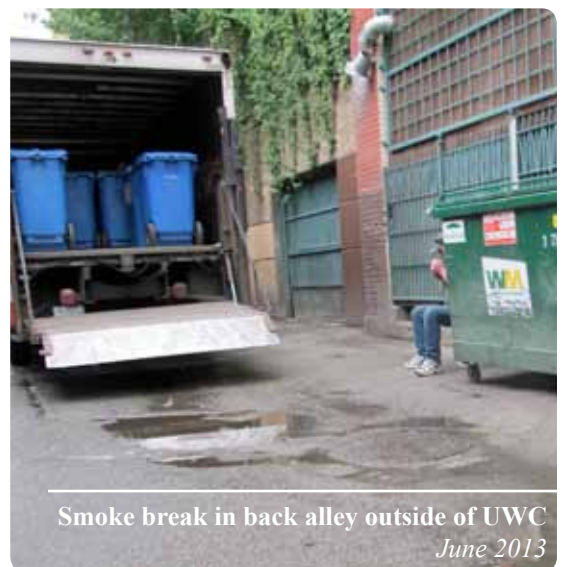
Views from South back alley  
June 2013



### *CONCLUDING THE STREETScape*

The community gardens provide green space, work opportunities and urban food production; but the structure of how property in lay-land is used as community space has been criticized as a way for developers to gain tax-reductions while the value of the property rises along with a more secure market as the geography of gentrification repositions (Vulliamy 2012). The concept of letting undeveloped property function as garden space can be interpreted as a efficient way to use space which otherwise would be left empty during stages of planning and developing the site. At the same time, it creates an unequal relationship between interests, where land-owners receive tax-reductions for what could be compared to giving charity to the community. If community-building projects, such as this garden, only functions as temporary, it may also have negative effects on the feeling of belonging to a space, something which scholars like Jane Jacobs (1961) has argued is important. On the other hand, it can be questioned whether there is a need and demand for that in an inner-city area of a larger city; which might have a population and housing market which is fluid, and therefor also changes in a fast pace in general.

When it comes to the attitude towards the study area, the way the owner of Save on Meats' sees it can be interpreted as hegemonic. His attitude towards the physical spaces and the community in these parts of Downtown Eastside could be compared to the concept of "highest and best use" discussed by Nicholas Blomley (2004 p. 84, further explained on p. 33 in this thesis). The rhetorics and assumption that nobody inhabits these spaces is to focus on them exclusively in economical terms. By putting light on the fact that there is no established consumer culture catering a middle-class, Brand also puts light on the fact that there are grounds available for establishing that kind of business here (saying that "This is the Meatpacking District, this is the coolest spot in the city" implies that the area has potential to become more attractive for young, hip consumers). In that sense, when "arriving" to the area, entrepreneurs see the potential of vitalizing an unproductive retail landscape and housing market; an issue which moves us along to Pigeon Park.



Smoke break in back alley outside of UWC  
June 2013



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**View over Pigeon Park from South sidewalk on Hastings & Carrall Street.**  
*June 2013*



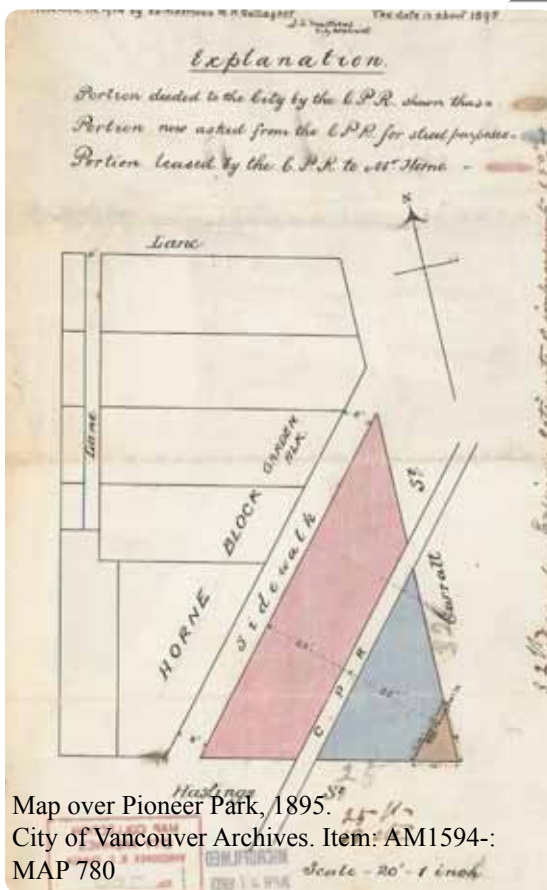
# PIGEON PARK



## A GATHERING SPACE

Pigeon Park is integrated in a diagonal stretch which cuts through the blocks of East Cordova Street, West Hastings Street and West Pender Street. Within the diagonal, Pigeon Park is the only publicly open space along it. The small square is no larger than 400 square metres and is well used by the community as a gathering space (City of Vancouver 2006). The square was redesigned a few years ago (the last design originated from the 1970's), along with the introduction of the Carrall Greenway. The Carrall Street Greenway was an initiative from the city, which aimed to “focus public realm improvements and private investment along the Carrall Street corridor which will attract visitors to the area and stimulate business activities while providing improved neighbourhood areas and employment opportunities for Downtown Eastside residents” (ibid., p. 2-3). The design steps included a narrowing of the roadway width by removing parking space from one side of the street, in order to allow for the sidewalks to expand and provide a wider space for cyclists, inline-skaters and skateboards (ibid.). The Greenway Project also contained a re-design of the actual square, including a new concrete ground surface, new lamp posts and wooden benches. The project also introduced a public toilet at the square, located by the sidewalk along Hastings Street, which unfortunately, according to a community activist, is “almost always out of order”.

The square has a beautiful canopy of beautiful robinia, maple, plane and oak trees. They are accompanied by a raised plant bed with the intention to contain short grass, but which is holding on large parts, probably because of heavy use. Along the research area, this is one out of two places where seating for the public is provided (can also be found outside of Woodward's). Ten wooden benches are placed on the square, benches with no soft-design



elements to them, something which would prevent activities such as sleeping or laying down on the seating. The benches are interestingly placed, with randomly looking angles; but by a closer look, the placement makes sense through a socializing aspect, being placed to create a space which screens off the street and assembles the square. One could imagine that the placement of the benches was intended to reflect and cater for the informal atmosphere, the “living room” (City of Vancouver 2006) sentiment, of the square.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics mainly using the park reflects the overall pattern of the study area; predominantly males. When visiting the park a clear and cold Thursday at the end of March, I write in my notebook:

*“When sitting down there are about 16 men sitting and standing around. There are a few men in my age, or younger, probably in their 20’s (maybe the age range is between 20/25-50/60). On the streets, corners and sidewalks the lunch activity is taking place. One man is laying down on a bench. There is a man laying on the ground, partly supported by the wall of one of the buildings, obviously high on drugs. /.../ I ask him [one of the men] why there are so few women here, I am pretty much the only one here. One older lady in an electric wheelchair was here a moment ago, and another woman is standing by the bench where the man sitting beside me was sitting earlier. He tells me that the women have a few different boyfriends they can go to on a chilly day like this. He starts to tell me about how many women offer sexual services in trade of drugs, how that is what the relationships may look like between men and women here.”*

Notes 2013-03-21

That Pigeon Park has a particular demographics, apart from the distinguishable gender im-







Birdseye view over Pigeon Park re-opening, 2009.

Photo: <http://ahamedia.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/pigeon-park-grand-re-opening-tues-dec-15-2009-9.jpg>



View from North back alley

balance, becomes apparent when I visit the space. During this visit, I chose to sit down on an empty bench. After sitting there for just a short while, the man approached me from a bench across from me to sit down beside me on the bench. He wondered what I was doing there, and that it didn't look like I belonged there. I asked him why, and he said that I stick out with my clean-cut looks, and he told me that his friends where he was sitting suspected that I was a police or something. I understand that my presence during five minutes on that bench must have affected the dynamics of the park, because I did not fit in there.

### *THE SUNDAY STREET MARKET*

In 2010, a protest against the perpetual ticketing of street vendors in the area was manifested at the square when street vendors and community activists occupied the square to hold a market. Since then, the market has developed into operating on legit terms, and is now held weekly every Sunday. During the six hours the market takes place, this stretch of Carrall Street (along the square) is closed off for vehicle traffic. The market is organized by the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council (DNC), and is an opportunity for residents and community members to sell goods under legal terms (Proudfoot 2011), such as clothes, electronics and a variety of different kinds of gadgets.



## A CHANGING RETAIL LANDSCAPE

Whereas the City seem to aim to include the Pigeon Park in a commercial strip, encouraging the space to integrate with the concept of stimulating business activities, the park has an important role for marginalized groups in the Downtown Eastside. In an article in the Downtown East newspaper, one can read that Pigeon Park is “a peoples’ park and a home base for community struggles for social justice” (Drury 2013). However, the legal boundaries and zoning restrictions are part of those of Gastown; zoning restrictions which encourage commercial and market development, something which has and continues to create conflicts between community activists and those who promote and encourage changes which corresponds to the ideas of business and tourist improvements as a strategy to achieve change to the neighbourhood.

During the spring of 2013, a conflict arose which placed Pigeon Park at the front line in the discussions on gentrification in the city. When a new restaurant opened its doors in a newly renovated building which is facing the square (containing formerly low-income housing turned into condominiums), it lit a spark among anti-gentrification activists. Since February 2013, a picket line has been protesting the restaurant and the changes it stands for. The protesters see this space as a fault line between the existing low-income community and businesses and activities which they consider causing psychological and physical displacement. According to a city planner, the actual legal boundaries and the mental interpretations of boundaries are causing a disjunction:

*C.P: It is interesting that the low-income community and the activists sees Pigeon Park as the defense line against change, and you know, it’s funny because the other day they were so angry about that restaurant and saying that “we will not have this restaurant in the DEOD”. Legally it’s actually Gastown, it’s not DEOD. To them it’s their district, so you know, there’s this complete disjunction between the legal boundaries of what is named and what is legally permissible - and what the community perceive as their patch. It’s a disconnect. So they are protesting and defending what they believe to be their patch.*

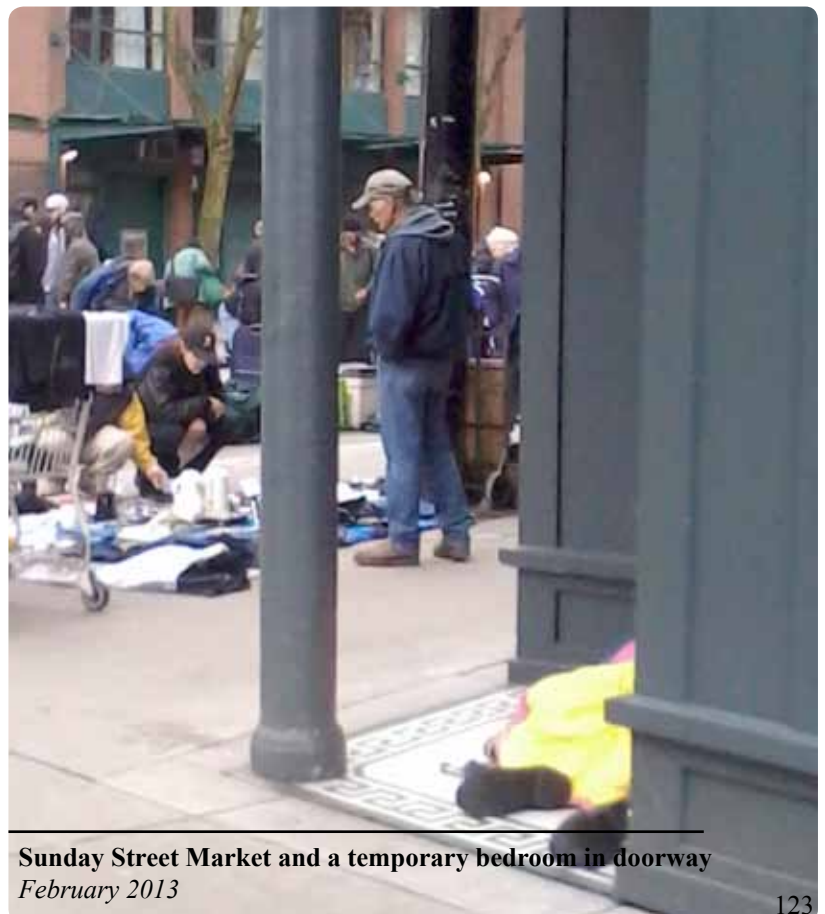
It is not only in the streets or at the planning department where these issues are discussed. The debate is also taking place in social and news media. In news media articles covering the picket against the Pidgin Restaurant, one could follow intense discussions on the subject of neighbourhood change during the spring of 2013. In an column in one of Vancouver’s largest news papers, the Vancouver Sun, the columnist sums up the conflict in a harsh tone; “But neighbourhoods, like menus, change. And as tough a meal as this may be for the protesters to swallow, they better develop a taste for it. It’s more than just pistou that Pidgin and its like are bringing to the Downtown Eastside.” (McMartin 2013). The author of the column explains how the neighbourhood is going through changes which, according to him, are of a positive kind. Brought up is the fact that the neighbourhood is deeply “infested” by a well developed drug market and sexual trade. The core message of the article is that the changes which businesses like the Pidgin Restaurant, by their presence, brings to the DTES shouldn’t be protested against. The protesters are called NIMBYists, blaming the picketers to oppose changes in “their” neighbourhood. In the comment field for the article one can find argu-



ments which say that “It’s a simple matter of not wanting to share the sandbox with the rest of society. Last century in other cities governments built sterile neighbourhoods of public housing for the economically disadvantaged. Obviously that didn’t work, but if these infantile protesters continue the common taxpayer’s appetite for the more humane current policy for low income housing in the Downtown Eastside will wane quickly. Bottom line: they want their ghetto paid for by the rest of us, AND they want us to stay away so they can do as they please. How ungrateful is that?” and “Isn’t it better to live in a vibrant neighbourhood than a ghetto which is what the DTES would become if the protesters had their way and all the new blood moved out of the neighbourhood and left it to the poor and downtrodden. Every neighbourhood needs a variety of people to survive - from every socio-economic area /.../ The DTES needs new blood to live but change is often painful” (McMartin 2013).



Picketline outside of the Pidgin Restaurant  
February 2013



Sunday Street Market and a temporary bedroom in doorway  
February 2013



### CONCLUDING THE SPACE

That gentrification is a present process in the area is known, and the example of Pigeon Park is reflecting the thoughts which Sharon Zukin discusses (2009); how businesses and the targeting of new customer groups have an effect on displacing economically weaker groups. According to Zukin, this new kind of businesses easily become an image of the fear for displacement for present residents and/or businesses (Zukin 2009). The example of Pidgin Restaurant confirms her thesis on how “the media, state, and quasi-public organizations” sees businesses like this as “symbols and agents of revitalization and therefor valuable for the development of the neighbourhoods” (ibid., p. 47). Like Zukin describes in her study of New York (2009), changes in the retail landscape of the Downtown Eastside in general and by Pigeon Park in particular may also change which customer groups the new businesses are catering and responding to. The process of encouraging new businesses, which are to cater a more socially mixed neighbourhood (as in people with a higher income), is a process which is planned for by the City, and encouraged by Business Improvement Associations, through the zoning regulations which applies to this space. Again, to quote Zukin, state agencies do have the power to “shape a new retail landscape with economic development policies, zoning changes, and policing strategies” (ibid., p. 49). According to Zukin (2009), residential gentrification are given more space and recognition as a social problem, whereas “the lifestyle pages of local media give prominent coverage to the opening of new art galleries, restaurants, and designer clothing boutiques, while occasionally noting the passing of a beloved local store”. This can be compared to the media coverage of the Pidgin Restaurant, where the opening of the new restaurant resulted in coverage in a few of the local lifestyle magazines, mostly took notice of the concept of the menu and atmosphere of the restaurant itself and not as much to its role in the gentrification process.

Some people mean that beautification and the aesthetics of space can function as excluding. According to a community activist, the Pidgin Restaurant contributes in creating “a hostile zone of exclusion”, “raising property value and contributing to that real estate speculation which means, you know, more condo development” and sends an “aesthetic signal that peo-





**Photo of Pioneer Park (now Pigeon Park), 1960's.**  
**Photo:** City of Vancouver Archives. Item: COV-S511-; CVA 780-769

ple from a certain class [*people with higher economical means*] desire”. She means that since the restaurant opened, its presence has changed “the nature of the sidewalk and the experience of walking by”. This is also brought up by a lifestyle magazine, but which comments on the visually apparent socio-economic contrasts, which the presence of the restaurant creates, as a (positive) “daring” step taken by the business owners (Da Silva 2013). Another article comments on the apparent disparity between the space inside of the restaurant and the space outside, arguing that the contrast puts focus on the inequity as a reality of the city: “Clearly, a lot of thought went into everything a diner’s eye might set upon, and that includes the wide angle view of the oft-sordid going ons across the street at Pigeon Park. There are at least a dozen seats right in the window, which tells me Grossutti and Ono are not in the least bit embarrassed by their bright projection of style and cuisine in the heart of the Downtown Eastside. And nor should they be. The contrast between inside and out might be massive, very real, and as striking to those who congregate on the northeast corner of East Hastings and Carrall as to the diners themselves, supping foie gras rice bowls and sipping Negronis in heated, cloistered comfort behind an unfrosted window, but that’s the reality of Vancouver, and I dig that they’re framing it instead of running from it.” (Morrison 2013). In a general discussion on street improvements, a City Planner mentions that improvements can result in “attracting others who might displace them and look down on them, and make them feel awkward”. Therefore, to have diners looking out over the square, where people from the most marginalized groups feel at home and where someone might be sleeping on a bench, has been a contested issue which, alongside with the protesters standing outside of the restaurant, led up to the business owner deciding to put up frosted glass in order to screen off the view in to and out from the restaurant. But he is not going anywhere.

## CARRALL ST. → COLUMBIA ST.

The corner of Carrall and Hastings Street, just off of Pigeon Park, is often fairly crowded. When passing by, one is not rarely discretely asked to buy single cigarettes or being passed the question if there is “something you need”. The North sidewalk between Carrall and Columbia is probably the busiest sidewalk stretch along Hastings Street in the whole Downtown Eastside area. When analyzing the results of this study, one main explanation is the bottle depot and charity organization United We Can (UWC), located here since 1995. UWC is an important node for bottle collectors in the Downtown area. According to a quick Google search, this is the only bottle depot in Downtown Vancouver, which might be an explanation to why it is so well visited. But United We Can also has other functions than only as a bottle depot; it is a local employer of disadvantaged groups as well as a social gathering place. According to United We Can, their mandate as a charity organization “is to create economic opportunities for people with multiple barriers living in the Downtown Eastside, through environmental initiatives. One of UWC’s key missions is improve working conditions for binners by ensuring they receive the full deposit on all their bottles and cans and have access to a working environment into which they are welcomed” (United We Can 2013).

### HASTINGS STREET

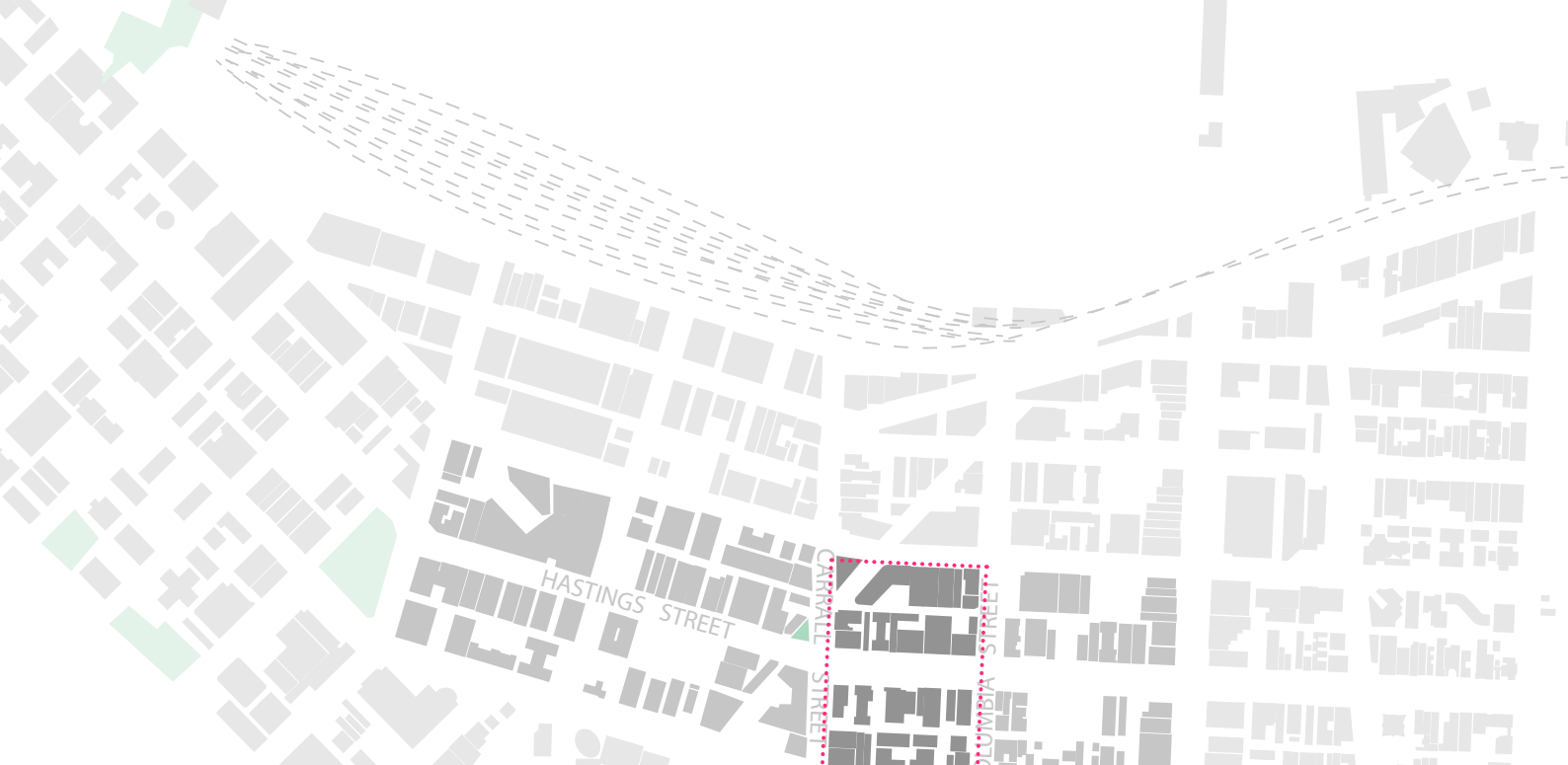
The sidewalk outside of the UWC is characterized by the high user frequency of the space. The South side, which during most parts of the day lays in shadow, is compared to the North side not as crowded. This stretch has a very low rate of functions; there is one convenient store as well as the Pigeon Park Savings, a partnership between PHS and the VanCity Bank which provides financial services to the community. The North sidewalk is used as a vending space, a space for socializing and for protection from the weather on rainy days, as well as to enjoy the sun whenever it choses to show up between the clouds. The covers are also a contributing reason to why the space is well used for socializing and for informal economies (street vending and the open air drug market), in combination with having the UWC located here. The street vendors mostly display their items for sale on the ground, or sell their things from shopping carts. Street vending without permission is an illegal act, something which

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**Street vending taking place on the sidewalk outside United We Can**  
*June 2013*











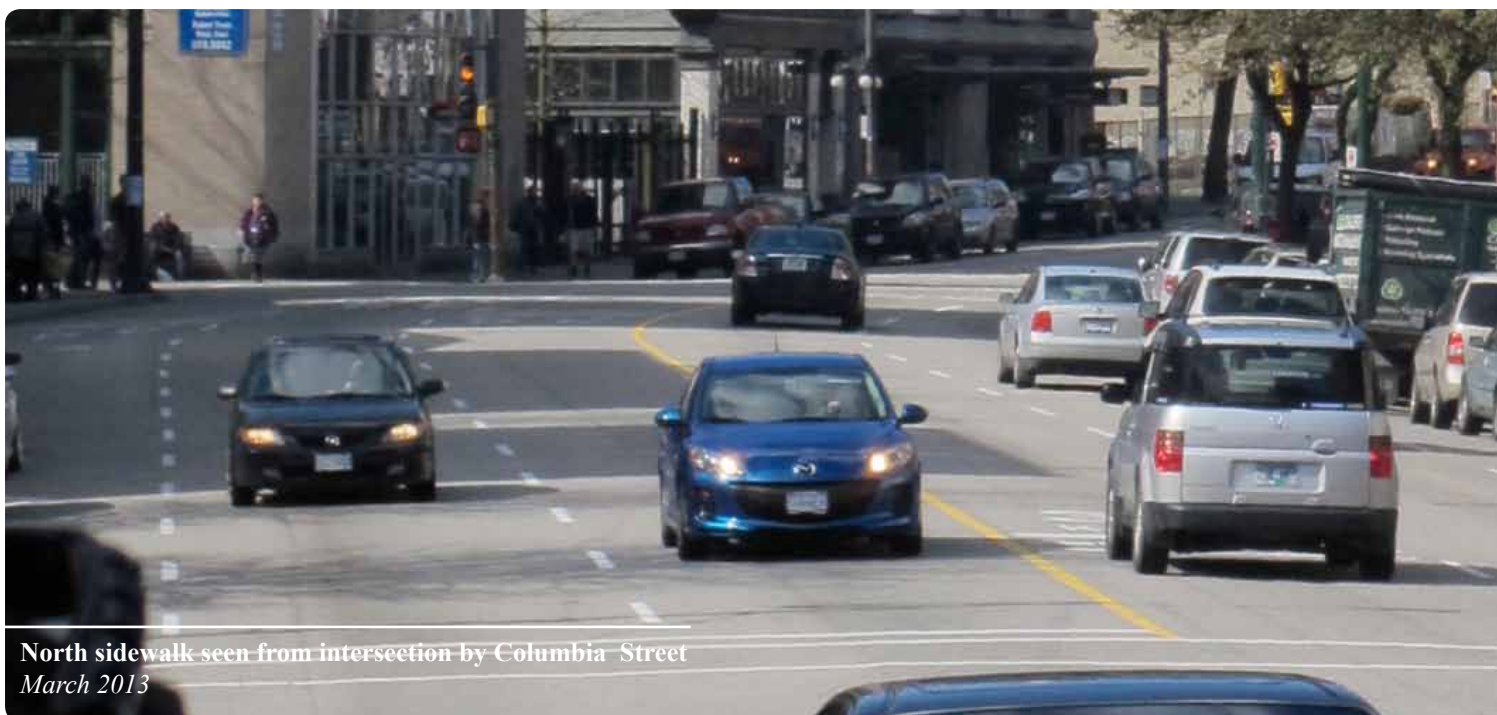
A common sight in the study area  
February 2013



forces people to be mobile with their belongings. A common sight is to see police officers frequently handing out tickets to people or talking to the vendors to have them packing their things together. In February of 2013, mainstream media published information on how 95% of the vending related tickets in Vancouver had been issued in the Downtown Eastside during the past year (2012). In relation to the 24 tickets handed out a few blocks away in the Downtown commercial area, the Downtown Eastside had an amount of 1 448 tickets (Griffin 2013). During most of the site visits for this study, the police presence was apparent; foot patrolling, passing or parked police vehicles along streets and sidewalks, arrests and ticketing were common sights. Activists in the Downtown Eastside argue that the police are acting discriminatory by targeting only this area. This is argued against by the Vancouver Police Department, which explains the targetting of the Downtown Eastside with ““that’s where the offenses occur”” (Griffin 2013) and that the city doesn’t have problems with street vending in other parts of the city. Some street vendors argue against the prohibition of their business, meaning that street vendors are “front-line eco warriors” through the acts of renewing and recycling, which they consider to fit well to the Greenest City goal; “I’m proud of all my neighbours” (Griffin, 2013).



During the spring of 2013, United We Can announced that it will move to a location outside of the Downtown area, something which might pose problems for local Downtown bidders who pushes heavy shopping carts (Hansen 2013). A development branch for a non-profit organization has applied to rezone the site for a new rental housing project, with both market (40%) and below-market rates (60%).



North sidewalk seen from intersection by Columbia Street  
March 2013





A rainy day in March, North sidewalk  
*March 2013*



South sidewalk seen from intersection by Columbia Street  
*June 2013*







South back alley  
March 2013



### *THE BACK ALLEYS*

The **North back alley** along this stretch is fairly well used. It reflects the busy sidewalk, although the level of use here is much lower. When walking by the back doors of United We Can, there are often a lot of activity going on and there are not rarely people out on breaks in the alleyway or trucks loading bottle on and off. Along the alley, facades and walls are providing many spaces to sit through steps and niches. In all of the back alleys along Hastings between Carrall and Main Street, the most common activity is drug injection. There are many places to sit down, or hide away behind containers.

When coming around the corner from Pender Street, one crosses the Carrall Greenway to continue into the **South back alley**. During many of my site visits, I have often been asked to buy drugs or cigarettes by someone standing by the West entrance. Also by the East entrance drug deals are not an unusual sight. The structure of the surrounding buildings, as well as a small fenced in parking lot, by this entrance creates a small open space. This alleyway is in general well used, mainly for individual injection, but you can also see people sitting down in smaller groups.

### *CONCLUDING THE STREETSCAPE*

The fact that the North sidewalk along this stretch is the most well used along all of Hastings Street is interesting. The sidewalk use has a fascinating dynamic, creating a busy environment where street vendors, drug dealers and socializing takes place in the same space. The space might not feel safe for everyone; if you don't feel like you are a part of this community one can easily feel alienated. The move of United We Can will, most likely, change this dynamic and also the use of the sidewalk. According to a strategic planning report from the Vancouver Police Department (VPD), one can read that "Considerable police resources are dedicated to restoring order to a community in distress. The increase in people who make their livelihood from disposal bins has upset the downtown business district" (Vancouver Police Department 2008, p. 18). The bidders are, in other words, considered as a problem which needs to be addressed – as well as many other street activities which are taking place here. Since UWC is an important node which affects the sidewalk use, I believe that the relocation of that business, and the introduction of a new use of the indoor space, will have a big impact on how the outdoor space is used. This relocation could be interpreted as a step in the direction of revitalizing the area as well as a strategy in targetting the open-air drug market and the intense street vending which is taking place on this stretch.



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**View from sidewalk on the South side where Hastings meet Columbia Street.**  
*Photo by author, June 2013*

# COLUMBIA ST. → MAIN ST.



## HASTINGS STREET

The block between Main and Columbia is the heart of the community for marginalized groups; the Carnegie Community Center and the Insite injection site, two important nodes, are both located in this block. It also contains a community garden open during daytime, an art studio/gallery space, a corner store and two bars. The sidewalks are not as busy as those between Carrall and Columbia Street, neither is street vending as common. Still it occurs, and the sidewalks are well used. The sidewalk space outside the community garden and Insite is often the busiest, and during the summer of 2013 it has been a usual site to see one or a few mobile homes placed on the sidewalk just outside of the garden, constructed by shopping-carts and plastic sheets. The property where Hastings Folk Garden is located is, as well as the community garden between Abbott and Carrall, owned by Concord Pacific and maintained by the Portland Hotel Society. Compared to the community garden located on the block between Abbott and Carrall Street, this is more of a leisure garden rather than focused on food production.

The Carnegie Community Center has been called the “living room of the Downtown Eastside” (City of Vancouver 2013f) and is a community center which addresses the local, in particular low-income, community. The center is located at the intersection of Main and Hastings Street, and functions as a main node in the area. The center has an outdoor patio, and the front stairs of the building functions as a well used gathering spot. The significance of this space was brought up in an interview with a city planner when discussing ideas brought up during the Local Area Plan process:

*C.P: I even heard some of the community saying, the junction of Main and Hastings, wouldn't it be wonderful if that could be like a traffic circle or create something that actually makes people realize that they are in a place /.../. It's not just a traffic lot, it becomes something different. It's a radical idea, because our engineers just said 'No'. The sense of place is so important for everyone who lives here.*



Although the traffic engineers prefers traditional traffic solutions in order to secure traffic flow, some changes have been made along the Downtown Eastside Hastings Street in order to at least slow traffic down. The usual speed limit for many of the inner-city streets are 50 km/h, but in 2011 the speed limit through ten blocks along Hastings Street (including the study area) was changed from 50 to 30 km/h after pressure from the community through the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)<sup>1</sup>. The organization put emphasis on the fact that the area is inhabited by many vulnerable groups, such as “seniors, families with children, and people with disabilities, mental illness, and addictions – some of Vancouver’s most marginalized residents” (VANDU 2010, p. 9), and therefor alerted the importance of safer street strategies. A study showed that for the whole city, the two worst hotspots for traffic injuries were found in the study area, in the “midblock between Main and Columbia (49 recorded incidents in six years) and the intersection of Main Street and Hastings (18 incidents)” (VANDU 2010, p. 20). In the summer of 2013, a new traffic sign and crosswalk was introduced outside of Insite, just off of the intersection of Main and Hastings Street. This kind of mid-block crosswalk is therefor now found in all blocks in the study area, except the one between Carrall and Columbia Street.

A few years ago, the block also contained the oldest remaining theatre in Vancouver, the vaudeville Pantages Theatre (Heritage Vancouver 2011). Since 2011, the lot contains an empty space, surrounded by a bright blue fence, after the building was demolished due to development plans. The site is owned by a developer company which is promoting new development with a focus on “creativity” and affordable homeownership. The project also aims to create a physical connection to Chinatown, something that would connect the two areas which both are undertaking urban renewal schemes. The project has met critique for putting the low-income community at risk through displacement and unaffordable housing options, since it is targeting the middle-class.

## BACK ALLEYS

The back alleys along this stretch are active spaces. The community garden, located outside of Insite injection site, is a somewhat well used space as a garden; but particularly active is the **North back alley** space behind it. During my site visits, this was a commonly used space for smaller groups of people. Commonly for this space, in direct connection to the Hastings Folk Garden, is to see smaller groups of people socializing or injecting (or in combination). During a few visits, there have also been parked shopping-carts and someone sleeping on a mattress placed on the ground. According to a former Insite worker, it is not unusual that people chose to inject in close proximity to the safe injection site (Insite), which sometimes have a line-up, because of the safety aspects of being close to Insite staff in case of overdosing. If looking at and reflecting upon the actual physical structures, it is interesting how the garden itself is less used than the street and back alley patches just outside of its fences. This

<sup>1</sup> VANDU has since 1998 “advocated for the interests of its membership, which consists of drug users and former drug users. It is a grassroots organization that promotes harm reduction strategies to offset the ill effects of the war on drugs.” (VANDU 2010).







Carnegie Community Center, intersection by Main & Hastings Street  
August 2013

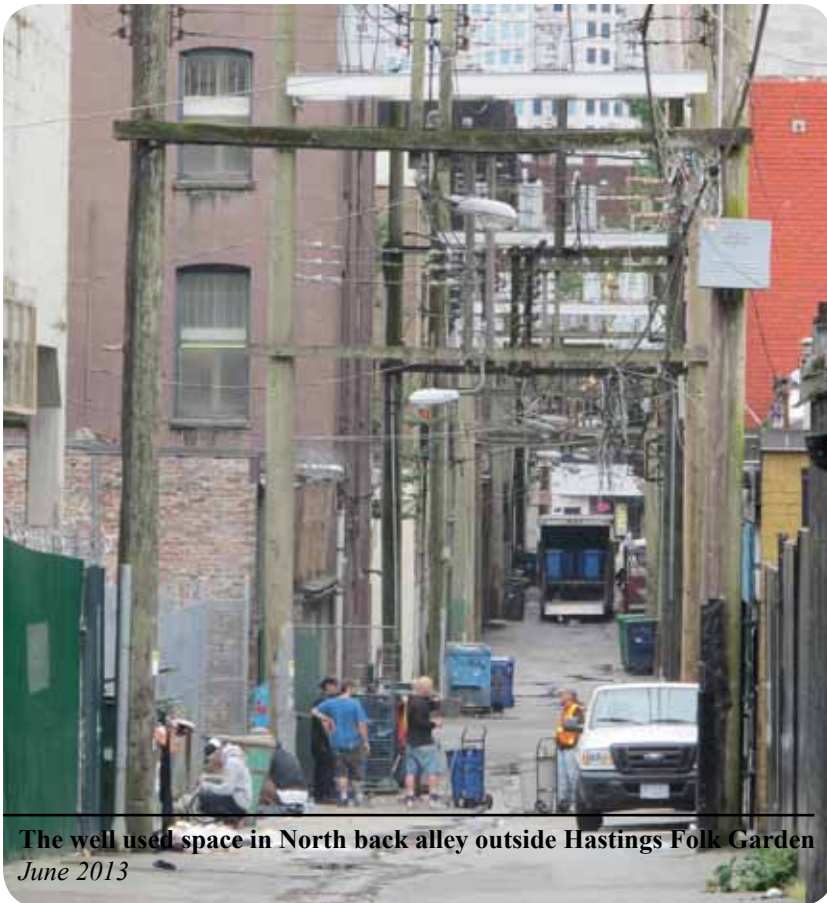


from South Sidewalk



North sidewalk, micro-home outside of Hastings Folk Garden  
June 2013





The well used space in North back alley outside Hastings Folk Garden  
June 2013



may have to do with the regulations of the space, such as the prohibition of drug injection in the garden. But the street, as well, has regulations, one could argue. Still, that space is harder to exclude people from compared to a fenced in property with a lock on it. Another reason may be that it is harder to bring carts and belongings into the garden compared to the street.

In the **South back alley** certain use patterns can be read. During my visits, the entrance to the alley (coming from Columbia) often has someone standing or hanging out there. This small strip (Columbia Street) houses a few trendy and hip stores, as well as a former gallery space. Not rarely in those transition spaces, leading into a back alley, am I asked if I “need anything”. The Pantages demolition site creates a void in the space; bringing in light to the usually closed, vertical spaces. But compared to the unbuilt lot between Abbott and Carrall Street, containing a community garden, a bright blue wooden fence keeps the linear direction and makes the area feel more protected from insight.

Compared to the South back alley in the previous block, between Carrall and Columbia Street, it is not as common to see people sitting in niches along the stretch; instead it is busier by the entrances to the alley. At the East end of the alley, a building blocks a forwards direction, and you need to turn right out to Pender Street or left to Hastings Street. When turning towards Hastings, we pass a small area which is often used by younger people, not rarely hanging out on a large step beside a container, a group which are slightly underrepresented on the streets in the study area.

## CONCLUDING THE STREETSCAPE

The active street life along this stretch, is not of the traditional kind (described by Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012) as “functional space” intended for pedestrian movement, and by Blomley (2011) as the engineering logic of orderly movement from point A to point B). It is interesting to see how the engineering logic and the “unordered” use of the space is mitigated through different solutions. The safety issues of the traffic environment on a street



where socializing takes place from across the streets, with a high rate of jaywalking, has been addressed through regulations of speed limits and through introducing more stop lights. Since Hastings Street is an important inner-city thoroughfare the slowing down of traffic in order to provide for pedestrian traffic could be seen as something positive. It implies a recognition of the present type of active street life, but it can also be interpreted as a way to facilitate for a future, more retail-oriented, street life.

The importance of the community services located on this stretch are reflected by the high use of the space by marginalized groups. This is the only space where I have seen a mobile home erected on the sidewalk for an even period of time, built by shopping carts and plastic sheets outside the Folk Community Garden beside Insite. While this may be perceived as disorderly and inappropriate sidewalk use, which is also prohibited by law, it also says something about the social and economical structures in the area. It definitely reveals that the city has acute issues with poverty which has not been successfully addressed, since there are citizens with no other choice than to live on the street. Secondly, the fact that the structure isn't immediately being removed implies either an attitude of acceptance by legal instances, a culture in the community to look after each other from being harassed by the police as well as the proximity to social services. Most likely, it is a combination of various factors. But that there is a high tolerance to obstructing objects would be to exaggerate. Even though demolitions of homeless people's property are prohibited by the Vancouver Police District, several cases of such events have been documented (Wallstam 2012; Markle 2011) in the Downtown Eastside.

According to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012), the visual and physical presence of homelessness is a public space dilemma. It can both cause discomfort among users of the space, as well as be interpreted as disturbing behavior in relation to "regular" sidewalk use. In this part of the study area, the acceptance for "non-traditional" use of the sidewalk can be said to be higher here than in other parts of the downtown area.

That one spot were identified as often being used by groups of younger people reflects the fact that the area has a rather homogenous demographic of middle-aged people, with men are in majority, and where youth are underrepresented in the outdoor environment. Another group which is rarely seen in the study area is children. Children is an underrepresented group on inner-city sidewalks (and environments) in general, and the study area is no exception. Children has in general, according to Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht (2012), been an almost invisible group on street and sidewalks since the late nineteenth century. Compared to the neighbourhood Stratchcona, also located in the Downtown Eastside, which is a family area and which provides more children friendly environments (parks, playgrounds, etc.) children are almost completely invisible in the study area. Since the study was carried out along a road in an area with a lot of visible drug use, this is not a surprising finding, and can be interpreted as positive since it means that children are protected from a potentially unsafe environment. At the same time, for those people who has children and live in the study area this might be a complicating circumstance.





## WALLS

or:  
message board  
canvas  
branding opportunity

## STEPS

or:  
hidden space for injection  
resting spot

## DOORWAY

or:  
hidden space for injection  
temporary bedroom walls

## CONTAINERS

or:  
recourse bin  
temporary bedroom walls  
bathroom walls

# CONCLUSION

## CONCLUDING THE CASE STUDY

### *SPATIAL & USAGE DIFFERENCES IDENTIFIED*

One of the conclusions which can be drawn from this study is that spatial and usage differences are apparent in the study area. The four blocks are in different stages of a gentrification process, where the most apparent spatial differences are between the Woodward's block and the other three blocks. It is also apparent that the process develops "block by block", where renovations, upgrading and renewal schemes are taking place gradually in a West-East direction. The Woodward's block can be seen as completely "revitalized", where old tenants have moved or been evicted from the former spaces due to renovations and to give space to new businesses and new tenants. Spatially, the spaces in this area provides opportunities for socializing, such as seating and a basketball court. The observations carried out in the area shows that the act of sitting was, apart from walking, the most common activity. But almost no seating is provided along Hastings Street, which makes the plaza by Woodward's to an exception. But, since the indoor atrium and the plaza are guarded spaces, it also becomes apparent that the area is under control, which can be interpreted that only certain types of use are accepted in these spaces. Also the sidewalk along the project has been planned to create a movement-oriented atmosphere, whereas the other side of the street cater a consumption-based clientele. This block differentiates from the blocks further East which have a higher rate of empty storefronts, but which still have a very active street life mainly based on informal economies; and where the sidewalk itself functions as a meeting place.

A city planner, involved with the Local Area Plan for the Downtown Eastside, recognizes this alternative economy which the street vending constitutes. He means that it is not a foreign thought for him to, in the future, define lots which are set aside for vending activities, a spot where people could vend and do trade without harassment. This could also provide an opportunity to develop the streetscape, for example by adding clusters of street furniture or through claiming a few parking lots and turn them into pop-up seating; to create little places around the vending activities. Thus, this would probably also change the nature of the vending culture which for most vendors is a survival strategy for those with very few resources. The city planner argues that "there's always somebody who's going to try and break the law or do what they need to do to sell stuff that they borrowed from someone elses apartment or whatever, you know. It is that going on, and it doesn't change whether you are aloud to vend it here or sell it illegally here." He means that by actually creating space for this kind of activity, it would create an understanding around the fact that there is a lot of legitimate livelihoods around this culture of trade.

### *SPATIAL RESOURCES*

The spatial resources which has been identified through this study can be divided on different scales. The sidewalk can be seen as a resource in itself, and has especially a great importance for those with inadequate housing or for those who depends on the street for earning their living. But also the organization of spaces into main streets and back alleys provides a resource for people who are dependent on the urban commons. As a result of this study, it can be argued that there is a clear spatial differentiation of how the main street and the back

alleys are used. Hastings Street and the sidewalk along it is mainly used for activities which addresses the public (business entrances, street vending, drug trade, etc.) and for socializing, whereas the back alleys mainly are used for solitary activities such as binning, sleeping and injection of drugs (although a few back alley spots are predominantly used as gathering points). Within these larger structures, there are certain spatial textures which also functions as resources for uses outside of the infrastructural ones (such as garbage pick-up and parking). Along Hastings Street the most apparent ones are the covers extending from buildings, providing weather protection. This is particularly apparent on the North sidewalk between Carrall and Columbia Street, where most buildings have extending covers. Since there are almost no seating provided along Hastings Street, the sidewalk curb or the ground are used for sitting, either directly on the ground or by bringing chairs or other things to sit on. In the back alleys niches and steps are used for sitting. The effects which the opportunities for sitting have on the use of these spaces becomes apparent in the spaces where this is lacking, simply since these spaces are not as well used. Since most of the back alleys in the study area provides a more secluded space, it apparent that the less insight protected a space is, the less it is used for residing during longer periods of time. The South back alley between Abbott and Carrall Street lacks both the opportunity for sitting as well as the potential for seclusion; and is also the least used back alley space according to my research. However, that the back alleys would provide a veritable privacy is not corresponding to the reality of the space; plenty of surveillance cameras monitor the area, both inside many of the SRO's as well as on the streets and back alleys. But the sense of enclosure in these spaces can provide the feeling and the possibility for solely use.

### *GENTRIFICATION AND THE EFFECTS ON THE STREETSCAPE*

Further, the study shows that the act of socializing on the sidewalk is common in certain parts of the study area. A city planner describes the street's role as a social gathering space: "people socialize in the street, they congregate, they do businesses, they share news, they find out where to buy the best whatever-it-might-be or what's on the market at that time, and find out information on where to go. 'What's going on tonight?', you know, 'Did you know about this story?'" . During the research for this study, the important function of the street as a "outdoor livingroom" has frequently been brought up as a positive factor of the space. Since it is common among residents in the Downtown Eastside to live in small spaces, not rarely unhealthy (mould and vermin are common problems), with shared kitchen and washrooms, the outdoor environment becomes an important space to meet and socialize, since the physical space which people live in can't fill that function. If the two blocks between Carrall and Main Street are compared to the two Western blocks, and the Woodward's block in particular, one can identify differences in how the sidewalks are used. The sidewalks between Cambie and Carrall are well used, but is almost exclusively used for pedestrian movement, and where the act of socializing takes place inside, at restaurants and bars. The revitalized block of Woodward's and the block towards Pigeon Park, in which new "hip" businesses (Save On Meats, The Window, Pidgin Restaurant) has showed up during the past three years, are both used differently than the other two studied blocks. That gentrification has had an impact on



the actual street life as well as on the physical space can therefor be concluded in this study. The changes have been implemented according to the City of Vancouver's concept "revitalization without displacement", and the spatial differences between the blocks, presented in this study, are intentional and have been planned for. This is an important aspect when discussing the process of neighbourhood change which is taking place in the Downtown Eastside; change is wanted, both from the City as well as from Vancouverites who dislike what is considered as disorder and an environment with high criminality. Many of the activities and the street life in the study area are unconventional, both through the perspective of how we are used to experience street life (as more "orderly"), and in the sense that some activities which are taking place in this area are classified as criminal acts. The state has a responsibility to act on that according to the Canadian legal system. Street vending, sleeping in public space, using and selling drugs, jaywalking and similar activities are all prohibited and are therefor restricted. However, the high police presence can according to Mitchell (2003) be problematic in that sense that it criminalize vulnerable groups and shift the focus from the "need to address poverty" (Mitchell 2010, p. 227-228).



*STEPS* are used as a sitting device; as in so many different urban settings.



*NICHES* are also well used for sitting or when seeking shelter.



*CONTAINERS* functions as a physical structure in the back alleys which also may provide useful things which has been thrown in the container; things to sell, use or trade with.



*FENCES* are not an unusual sight when walking in the back alleys.



*EMPTY LOTS* aren't always empty. Sometimes they function as a temporary home.



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## *REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS AND RESULT*

This study was initiated because of an interest to get an understanding of the global economy which our cities are a part of. To contextualize the urban phenomenon within the global economy could be considered as important for the profession of landscape architects, urban planners and designers. The urban fabric and its social, economical and political dynamics are an important part of the context which our profession need to consider in most of our work.

Throughout the study, the process has been dynamic rather than linear. Even though I had been in contact with some of the (more design oriented) literature used for this thesis, parts of the theory gave me new ways of looking at and understanding the urban fabric and our social and economical relations connected to it. Therefor, the path has been uneven, with sharp turns every now and then and me sometimes loosing my way along it. But through this process, the complexity of cities as phenomenon has been further confirmed as well as the fac that we will never be fully able to understand or distinguish all of the intricate layers which constitutes them.

To come as a Swedish student and perform this study have been both positive as well as sometimes frustrating. I find that people have been interested in explaining and discussing the issues connected to this study, and many have been positive to me trying to understand these issues. Even though Sweden and Canada are similar in many ways, it has sometimes been a struggle to understand the basics of the national and local political organization, housing politics and other societal systems which I, prior to this study, took more for granted would work in certain ways. But through learning about the way which the Canadian society is organized, it has also given me the opportunity to reflect over how Sweden is organized and the values and ideas which are connected to Swedish urbanity. In Sweden, so far, we have had a social safety net which has prevented situations such as the one in the study area of the Downtown Eastside; where issues of poverty, homelessness, drug use and mental illness are geographically concentrated. But one main difference which I experience is that the discussion on urban issues are given much more attention on a general level among citizens, at least according to my personal experience from Vancouver. An explanation to this might be the fact that complex issues concerning gentrification are constantly brought up to the surface since they are so physically visible, in the middle of the city, and because of the rapidity which this city develops in.

Being an international student has also been subject for personal reflections on my own role in the globalized world; being well prepared to function and take part in the mobile lifestyle which globalization has brought with it. Many times I have questioned myself and my role in the process of gentrification. This has brought to me new aspects on the fact that we, the fortunate ones with an opportunity to actually make choices on how and where to live, consume and interact within the city, have a responsibility to reflect over our choices and how they might affect people around us and the society we live in.

The aim with this study was to provide myself with a wider understanding of the city as a phenomenon and contemporary issues dominating the urban debate in many Western cities. Further, I wanted to widen my own experience of the city through the eyes of my chosen profession within landscape architecture and planning. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I have gained many new perspectives which I believe will be useful and help me in my role as a future landscape architect.





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## THOUGHTS ON THE ROLE OF THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

As landscape architects and planners, we possess professional knowledge and personal experiences of human interaction and relation to space, as well as technical and theoretic knowledge on space as process and physical matter. Through our profession, we also possess a certain position of power to shape and influence the human interaction with and within space. I believe that this also brings a responsibility to constantly try to widen our approaches through searching for new perspectives beyond our field of subject and to question ideas, norms and ideals which are hegemonic within the profession.

When it comes to the city as phenomenon and site of our profession's practice, one could argue the importance to view urbanity with a critical eye. The theory and empirical research gained through this study has given me new perspectives on the ideals that govern our ways to plan and design Western cities, as well as the complexity of issues on justice within this context. Susan Fainstein (2011) argues the importance for urban planners to take on an active role when it comes to mitigating urban resources, and for striving to avoid a disproportional focus on the interests of private investments. I agree with Fainstein's thoughts, and I also believe that it is important for our profession to take on a more active role in a public discussion, as well as to encourage those. However, as landscape architects and planners we are also limited by market factors, political decisions, social norms and aesthetic values. The ability to balance these factors is a difficult task; but I believe that this is an ability which our profession can and are able to handle when taking on projects and tasks.

The question is rather whether we *want* to create spaces which are more accepting and just; or if processes such as gentrification are a reflection on the general ethics of our society. One may also argue that cities always has inherited inequities, and that the process of gentrification is yet another shape of issues which always has been present in urban history. This shouldn't prevent us from rethinking and reshaping hegemonic urban trends, though. I believe that the role of landscape architecture and planning can be that of a participant in creating new directions and new ways of looking at urban life and our common spaces in the city. Areas, such as the Downtown Eastside, are by many considered as problematic, and the issues on poverty, drug use and mental illnesses should not be overlooked whatsoever. But it is also crucial to address the importance of actual diverse cities, where segregation between socio-economic groups are avoided and where low-income people and communities are aloud to co-exist on attractive locations in our cities. As landscape architects and planners I believe that we can contribute in creating more just cities; through being responsible advocates of our urban commons. By focusing on the importance of diversity, equality and processes of learning from our fellow citizens, before interests of consumption culture, I believe that we can contribute in making our cities more just.









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