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## Introduction

Bellevue Square Park is located off Bellevue Avenue in the south of Kensington Market. It recently underwent a total revitalization, with construction beginning in December 2017, and finishing in July 2018. The project addressed ageing features such as an outdated wading pool, unpaved walkways, and a public washroom which had been in a constant state of disrepair (Somerville Construction, 2018). The site is a very interesting one to study, as its revitalization has years of history behind it. Located in a neighbourhood with a reputation for crime and drug use, the community had been calling for revitalization for at least a decade as a way to get crime out of the park, and families in. Today, significant physical changes can be observed: the dilapidated washroom has now been replaced with a sleek, wooden, wheelchair accessible one, and the scarcely used wading pool has been replaced with a much more inviting splash pad.

Kensington Market is a neighbourhood undergoing rapid gentrification. The relationship between the revitalization and broader gentrification is thus important to understand. We have accordingly pursued a research project in order to understand two facets of this relationship. Our research question is as follows: *what were the motivating factors behind Bellevue Square Park's revitalization, and what is its relationship with broader changes in Kensington Market?*

Through our multidisciplinary research, we have been able to understand both dimensions of the revitalization. While we initially questioned if new wealth in the neighbourhood was what was able to propel revitalization, we have concluded that the project was a result of years of broad-based community action for the improvement of public space. The clearest change that the revitalization has made was in the perceived safety of the park and the surrounding area. Though it is too early to tell definitively, this change implies an unintended consequence of accelerated gentrification.

## Background

Before developing our findings, it is important to explore the theoretical lenses through which we will be answering our research question. Gentrification and perceived safety are both topics which have been explored for decades. Gentrification was a term initially coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964. She describes the process by which an original working class population is displaced by middle- and upper-class individuals. Importantly, she notes that this process changes "the whole social character of the district" (Glass, 1964). We will be investigating the relationship of gentrification with both elements -- displacement and change in social character.

Our research question also centres around the theory of social capital. In his seminal essay, Robert Putnam defines social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 2000).

The scholarly community has added to this idea, distinguishing formal and informal social capital. Lower income communities may have just as much, if not more informal forms of social capital. Formal social capital tends to concentrate in wealthier communities, however (Pichler & Wallace, 2008). This distinction is of particular interest to us, as the more formal networks of middle- and upper- class residents may have more influence over the City officials who would be in charge of approving revitalization projects. As one of the quickest gentrifying neighbourhoods in Toronto, a central goal of our research was to determine whether the revitalization was a result of the long fight by original residents, or rather achieved by newer, wealthier residents who harnessed their social capital to push the City.

Finally, we make an important distinction in studying changed perceptions of the park between *perceived* and *actual* safety. We focus on perceived safety in our research, using the “broken-windows” theory as a framework. George Kelling and James Wilson the broken window as a symbol for signs of neglect in a neighbourhood, which, though in and of themselves are not harmful, indicate a lack of care in the area (2000). This first broken window, according to the authors, signals to passersby that they can break more without consequence, and to the broader community that this area is unsafe (Kelling & Wilson, 2000). It is this phenomenon which we hoped to explore through our interviews. Though it is too early to investigate actual changes in crime rates since the revitalization, we aimed to investigate if the revitalization in effect fixed enough “broken windows” to improve perceptions of safety in the park.

## Methodology

We used several methods to collect data about the park. During our initial visits, we took photographs and audio recordings of the space. Those tools allowed us to capture the moment in time in which we were making our first observations and forming our preliminary hypotheses. By the conclusion of our research, this data became useful to us in the form of evidence for certain things happening in the park – for example, the prevalence of graffiti which covered areas on the playground, the new bathroom door, and on various signs throughout the park. Additionally, the photographs served as a useful reference during the creation of our map, which we made to demonstrate the commercial gentrification that the Kensington Market neighbourhood has experienced within the last decade. The map we created also displayed the many social services which exist in Kensington Market and have been providing support for its residents for an even longer period of time. Finally, our map

included some new design features we had noticed within the park, namely the street lights and a new pathway in the southeast corner of the park.

These were some themes which we had identified as significant while performing a media review on the park revitalization. By researching news articles which were published through the course of the project to its completion we were able to form a more well-rounded understanding of who the involved actors were and the central ideas involved in the new park design.

Finally, and most importantly, we conducted interviews with a long-time resident of Kensington Market and the Senior Project Coordinator on the project in the Capital Projects division of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation department of the City of Toronto. The resident, Richard Underhill, who has lived across from the park for twenty years, was able to speak about the changes he has noticed in the neighbourhood as well as in the park post-revitalization. Furthermore, the resident is regularly involved with the Kensington Market community, and is a part of a neighbourhood group which was consulted upon for the revitalization project. The city staff member was able to speak about the process of the park revitalization from beginning to completion, explaining how certain decisions were made and the implications that may have on the final design. It was important to us to have multiple interviews with different involved actors to be able to compare their perspectives.

### Reflection on Methods

As with any research project, we are limited by both our positionality and methodology. Each researcher came to the project with preconceived notions of the park and its neighbourhood. This means that the work of each researcher will have an unavoidable degree of bias. That said, to the strength of the research, our positionality in relation to the were all very different. Whereas Amelia grew up in the neighbourhood and has positive personal associations with it, Gabrielle grew up in a neighbouring city where Kensington Market had a very negative reputation. John, on the other hand, is from the United States and knew almost nothing about the project. We were able to take advantage of a multi-researcher structure by challenging one another's ideas which may have stemmed from our own individual bias in order to create the most objective analysis possible. That said, our positionalities overlap in several ways as well, including that we are young, liberally-minded Urban Studies students. This leaves us prone to looking negatively upon gentrification, and the wealthy and powerful people that are usually behind it. This is something we actively worked to keep in check throughout our research project.

The limitations of our research methods must also be acknowledged. Each method we used had inherent limitations. Mapping the neighbourhood conveyed only changes in physical features, but not usage or perception. Photography was a valuable

tool in documenting graffiti, but was not enough to understand park usage, as we conducted research in the winter. Conducting interviews helped with this, but interviews are limited in that they convey the perspective of one person. To balance this, we interviewed people with contrasting perspectives: a resident and City official. Finally, we were limited by the timing of the revitalization project. Completed in only July of 2018, there are still many unknowns in the project. In order to produce the most robust research possible, we used multiple qualitative methods and triangulated resulting data in order to create a fuller image of the issues of gentrification and safety. That said, we cannot claim to understand the complete truth about these issues.

### Results/Data

The two main findings of our cartographic research (see map in Appendix A) were the new safety features added to the park, and the approximate 90% turnover of businesses since 2012. A typical example of turnover was a Portuguese wholesaler which was replaced with a microbrewery. The notable safety features added to the park were eight street lights, and a new, cross-cutting pathway at the south-east corner. The path cutting through was upheld by both interviews as a measure for increasing the flows of people. confirmed from his discussions with City officials that that both the lights and new pathway were intended to improve safety. Additional safety features came to light through our interviews. Richard emphasized the new bathroom. He said that the previous, large, concrete structure was a “laying duck” for illicit activity, while the new single-stall design increased visibility. Bob Duguid also noted the removal of fencing along the east side of the park, along Augusta Avenue, as another measure to increase visibility and foot traffic.

Through photographic research, we came to find that there was a substantial amount of graffiti on the new park features, despite having only been there for a few months (see photos in Appendix A). These included benches, signs, play structures, garbage bins, and the washroom door. The graffiti was still less prevalent than before however, and , Richard was under the impression that tagging had gone down post-revitalization. Our photos also captures the defensive design which was installed on seating features such as ledges and benches. The city staff mentioned that this was an anti-skateboarding measure, whereas Richard found them to be “despicable” methods of keeping homeless people from sleeping.

When asked about the relationship of the revitalization, Richard indicated that the delayed start was simply because of the time it took for the Ward to save enough Community Benefit money. The residents most influential in the community consultation process, from his account, were people who had lived there for upwards of ten years. He gave the example of a ten-year old boy who had lived across from the park all his life, who was able to successfully discourage City Staff from putting

fencing around the park. He noted as well that, because of the successful improvement in perceived safety, there was a “slightly higher end, better dressed clientele” post-revitalization. He identified a conundrum: “Do you want things to look crappy to keep rent down, or make things nice? It’s hard.” Bob Duguid shared the view that safety was a priority in the changes made to the washroom, fencing, and new lighting design, but had little to say about the implications for gentrification.

### Analysis

We have been able to conclude that the features added to the park have indeed improved local perceptions of safety. While there is no evidence that extra light directly reduces crime, there is evidence that people, especially women, feel safer walking through public spaces which are well-lit (Atkins et al., pg. 2, 1991). While the relationship between graffiti and crime is tenuous at best, it has been shown that its presence can have an influence on residents’ attitudes about local safety and community (Austin & Sanders, 2007, p. 13). This shift in attitude was reflected in Richard’s interview. Ricard, in fact, made the connection to the Broken Windows theory by name. He commented that locals have begun to feel safer now that the park “just looks spiffier”

Our mapping confirmed our general knowledge that the neighbourhood had been upscaling in recent years. Many of the storefront were clearly upscaled, shifting from mom-and-pop shops to ones that clearly catered to higher-income individuals. This was upheld by our resident interviewee describes the effect he sees on his neighbourhood: “art collectives, co-ops, people with wacky ideas can’t set up shop anymore.” Indeed, “the whole social social character of the district” (Glass, 1964) has changed.

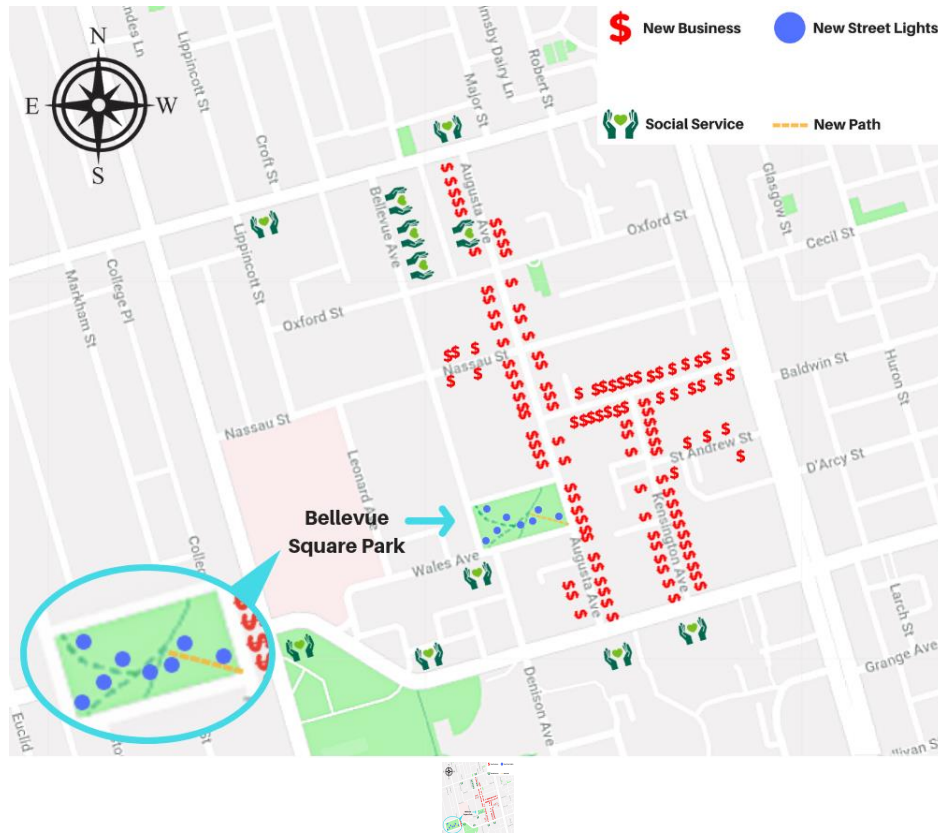
He also insight provided by our interviews were in addressing the motivating factors behind the revitalization, as per our research question. We had previously hypothesized that its implementation after years of community complaints was linked to the increased formal social capital in the area, stemming from gentrification. This was not upheld in our interviews, however. Both interviewees explained that the revitalization was a result of a long time push from residents, most of whom had lived there for many years, and indeed not a result of an increased population of wealthy residents.

### Conclusion

We came into our research project with three hypotheses: that the revitalization was motivated by the new social capital in the neighbourhood, that it improved local perceptions of safety in the park, and in turn, had implications for an accelerated process of gentrification in the neighbourhood. Through our research, we discovered

that the revitalization project was the result of a sustained effort by Kensington Market residents to rehabilitate their local park; that the new design appears to have successfully improved upon perceptions of safety of the park; and finally that while the project has the potential of accelerating gentrification in the neighbourhood, it is too early to determine whether that effect will occur.

## Map



## Photos



