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A Study of Osgoode Hall

Introduction

At first glance, Osgoode Hall is a gated greenspace that is located in the middle of Toronto at the northeast corner of Queen St. West and University Ave. Upon closer inspection, it is clear that the building that is located within the greenspace is the focus of the space and the surrounding park area is an afterthought. Originally built in 1832, Osgoode Hall has been home to the Law Society of Ontario and has since housed courtrooms, a library, portraits, statues, and other historical commemorations (Honsberger 2004). It was built within a patch of greenspace that was intended to be used as a "sanctuary" for its students, judges, and lawyers. In the past, the garden was partially owned by the Law Society of Ontario as private property and the other part by the Province of Ontario as public property (Honsberger 2004). We believe that because of this, some may still believe that it is private property and do not use the park space. This belief only strengthens because, after conducting our research, we found out that the iron gates that surround Osgoode Hall (See Appendix D), were added after the gardens were in order to keep people who were not associated with Osgoode Hall out. They were also used to represent the "quality of design and craftsmanship" of the park and the Hall, along with their importance (Honsberger 2004).

Before we were aware of the intense history of Osgoode Hall and its gardens, we intended to focus on the safety, security, and accessibility of the gardens. We saw how there were few safety precautions that were in place other than a few cameras and lights present in the gardens and that it was hard for people to get through the small openings in the gates (See appendix H). We also wanted to focus on the importance of green spaces in the city, as it has been linked to an increase in physical and mental health for those who live in the area (Kondo et. al 2018). Therefore, we entered with the hypothesis that Osgoode Hall does little to make the area available to the public and that they needed to focus on making it safe and accessible for people to use it as a green space. Since we learned of the history and how it was created, we saw that this was on purpose as they only intended it for certain people to use (lawyers, students, and judges). Our hypothesis also changed as we began to see the increase in construction around the area and by Metrolinx and the controversy that occurred because of it. They have planned on cutting down trees on the property of Osgoode Hall to build the Ontario Line (Freeman 2023). Since then, there have been protests around the hall, an increase of security and police, and many restrictions on how we could conduct our research. Which is why, based on the data that we were

able to collect, we focused on answering the questions "what was the intended use of Osgoode Hall?," and "how is Osgoode Hall used by residents, workers, and visitors today?." In this paper, we intend to argue that, although Osgoode Hall is a public space, because of its history and the fact that there is still a separation between those within the property and the public by the gates, Osgoode Hall Gardens is not being used by the general population as a green space. Our paper will present the data that we gathered clearly by separating our findings based on the kind of data we gathered, maps, soundscapes, and interviews, and we will discuss our results in conjunction with each other.

Background/Literature Review
Mapping

The physical mapped out area of a green space offers insight on the design intent and participating actors relevant to the urban setting (See Appendix A &B). By understanding the theory of environmental governance, the framework becomes more transparent as civic participation becomes more involved. The paper "*User participation in urban green spaces – For the people or the parks?*" overlooks the interaction between natural spaces and public use. Green space management and deliberative democracy, with inclusion of people and processes, contribute to communicative planning that translates to efficient placemaking (Fors, Molin, Murphy, van den Bosch, 2015). This theory becomes present in Osgoode Hall since it encompasses interactions through the physical green space and civic participation. The building is a law library and court spaces, it sees a specific User Participation inhabiting the space. Here, the users are defined as those who work, study and research in an enclosed space. Public Participation are those who generally use the park, walk their dogs, or use it as a shortcut. Both types of participants were observed when we went for interviews and initial reflections, as Users and Public were distinguished based on their purpose to use the space. This raises the question of how green spaces, where the public and civic interact such as Osgoode Hall, are presented in terms of planning and quality. The next paper "*Permeability of the city – Physical barriers of and in urban green spaces in the city of Halle, Germany,*" is a case study that outlines physical barriers and equipment available in urban green spaces. The three planning aspects: accessibility, availability and attractiveness are studied and implemented in Halle to determine if park equipment becomes a barrier. Features such as benches, tree canopy, fences, bus stops, waste bins, entrances and walkways are examined in Halle, which we compared to our own findings at Osgoode Hall. The availability of these features shows the existence of a defined urban green space, but the attractiveness is determined when these amenities become accessible to the

public (Barber, Haase, & Wolff, 2021). We used these papers to look for the necessary features that create green spaces that people want to use when creating our maps.

Soundscape

Before taking our soundscape data, we were focused on what sounds would be present in the space. After conducting our research and listening to the data which we will present further into the paper, we realized that because Osgoode Hall is in the middle of a major urban city, there will always be the sound of cars, pedestrians, and sometimes construction regardless of the time of day or season. Whereas sounds like birds and other animals would be drowned out or not present because it is winter. In a paper by Manon Raimbault and Danièle Dubois, they conducted research on urban soundscapes and found that there was always constant sound from cars, so much so that it has become background noise to those who live there (Raimbault, Dubois 2005). Therefore, many cities try to create barriers to eradicate this noise. Based on our research of Osgoode Hall, this was not an issue in the past, the only barriers that were created were the gates to keep people out and they have not been updated since. We searched for other barriers in the vicinity but besides the trees, there were no sound barriers that had any effect which we were able to see clearly after taking our soundscape data.

Interviews

Following Isabel Wilkerson's (Kramer & Call, 2007) framework of accelerated intimacy, our interview needed to tell a story that detailed the uses of the parkspace, and uncover the individual perceptions of Osgoode Hall Gardens as a public greenspace. To create a profile that aids in our research, we need to form a relationship with the recipient throughout the interview (Kramer & Call, 2007). By starting with a short script, we can provide transparency and consistency in our approach (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), and establish a non-hostile environment that is comfortable for everyone in the process. Therefore, our interview method followed a casual style, cold-approach type of interview. This approach was most appropriate for a parkspace setting, where we could find park goers for on-the spot interviewers to discover their uses and intentions of Osgoode Hall. By preparing sample questions while improvising and making revisions in our original script, we can establish accelerated intimacy (Kramer & Call, while avoiding guiding questions that could take away the true perspectives of the interviewee (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). This is the framework we used to get the information we deemed necessary in our interviews and create a space where our interviewee felt comfortable and able to answer truthfully.

Methodology
Mapping

To focus on the physical mapped space, we investigated the urban green space features, like the fence, along with the park's interaction with construction. We used walkthroughs to understand how the site limits public and user participation. Since the original design of the fence is still intact and not updated to modern accessibility codes, it posed a question whether it was design intent or design limitation by the government (See Appendix A & B). With the Metrolinx project initiated by the government, it provided confirmation that the city is involved with the space. We tried to research through a first-hand basis from our questionnaire and understand how Metrolinx impacted the building users, park users and everyone around. The construction also became a reason the park's orientation was affected, where access to city hall became more tedious. We looked at people walking through the park and around the building and walked ourselves as well to notice any patterns of crowding or accessibility. As we did this, we mapped out the space and what we believed incentivised people to use the park or any limitations that we saw which would prevent people from using it.

Soundscape

For our urban soundscape, we took our data in two separate spaces, we chose one space inside of the gardens and one space near the road (See Appendix C & D). Here, we were focused on whether we could find a difference in the soundscapes within the park and outside. We used a phone recorder to collect our data. When we got the results, we listened to it multiple times, focusing on different sounds every time to see which sounds were most prominent and which sounds we were unable to catch in our soundscape data.

Interviews

Our three interviewees consisted of a construction worker, a park goer, and an employee who had worked near the park area. This satisfied our targeted candidates of people who use the space recreationally, people who work within the space, and people who work around the space. We wanted the opinions of different park users to see how their relationship changes based on how they use/view it. We used the questions that we had prepared previously, and asked questions based on how the conversation flowed. We recorded them on our phones and went over them to create transcripts and pull out the information that we thought was important.

Reflection on Methods

Mapping

As students who are researching design accessibility to the park, our positionality offered insight on how certain spaces were allowed to interact with us. When we first visited the site, the construction block offs became very apparent, and it seemed very confusing on how to get into the park. The entrances are very far away

from each other and very small, making it our first point of notice. Then, we tried to understand the walkway connection from the park to city hall through construction barriers and how people are navigating it. Then lastly, we went inside the building to see if it was public friendly. Since we are students, no one paid any attention to us as we walked around, but some staff inside the building did refuse interviews regarding Metrolinx, even after we told them we are doing a research project.

Soundscape

As we went into our soundscape expecting to hear certain sounds, those were the most prominent to use after listening to the data we collected. For example, we listened carefully for construction noise in the background of our soundscapes. Therefore, our soundscape data might present itself differently to other listeners who did not listen with the same positionality or expectations that we had when listening. At the same time, because we were focused on getting specific sounds like construction, the locations that we chose to take our soundscape data from were the ones that were most likely to present the sounds that we were looking for. As we were looking for sounds that exhibited the surrounding urban area, we did not focus on the other locations within the space that could have had other sounds. At the same time, we were limited in the space that we had to take our soundscapes because much of the area was cut off by construction. Overall, our soundscape was only able to hear certain sounds, which, in our opinion, represented Osgoode Hall as we saw it.

Interviews

The advantage of a cold approach was that we did not need to worry about accommodating the interviewee's schedule, and we could get candid and authentic answers. However, the trade-off was that it was harder to procure interviews due to the spontaneity of the questioning process for the interviewee. Additionally, our questions that were more in-depth were difficult for some interviewees to answer, as the limited preparation given to them restricted more complete answers. Our positionality as students also significantly limited our ability to procure interviews with higher-profile candidates such as security guards and employees of the government building. Workers within the law building and courthouses often deal with sensitive information. By answering our questions - albeit unrelated to controversial topics - employees of Osgoode Hall were worried about potential answers that could compromise their jobs and saw no benefit in indulging our interviews. Furthermore, there was no consequence in denying an interview with three students.

For our back-up plan, one student in our group interviewed their father, as he had previously worked around the area for many years. It is important to acknowledge the familial positionality for this specific interview and its effect on the integrity of the interview. Before the interview even began, there was already an established intimacy between the interviewer and recipient. This benefits us as it allows the recipient to be

"comfortable enough to tell us anything" (Kramer & Call, 2007, pg. 30). The pre-existing relationship gives us concise and honest understandings of the recipient's perspective. However, because there is an existing relationship, there is no story to be built through the interview, as the interviewer already has significant context (Kramer & Call, 2007). This process puts the integrity of the interview in question, and we must ask ourselves if the interview has given us something we did not already know.

In reflection of our interview methods, a more formal approach of interviewing with multiple instances of contact between us and the employees of Osgoode Hall could have been more beneficial in our research. This way we can use our position as students to our own benefit, where we can better prepare academic articles and course work to build trust and transparency with our potential candidates.

Results/Data
Mapping

The shift from security to contemporary accessibility determined that the fence and the building are the biggest factors that are limiting access due to its authoritative nature and complicated design. As mentioned in the Halle Urban Green Space case study, Osgoode Hall's exterior iron fence, added overtime as a park element to control public access, becomes even more inaccessible due to the ongoing protests and construction (See Appendix I). We found out that since the building and the park operate separately, the public interaction was much more closely tied to the park than the building. There were protest signs around February when people were going against Metrolinx to stop cutting down the trees, and in response Metrolinx posted their own protest signs saying, "We are not here for consultation" and "We can't lose any more valuable time" (See Appendix F & G). This was the other main instance where public and park were colliding, the first being the installation of the iron fence in 1867. The other thing observed was the high security and space use within the building. Even though it is in a public space, the library seems unwelcoming to the regular public.

With the overall data that we got from mapping out the location, we determined that, regardless of the construction, the design of Osgoode Hall Gardens was not made for the public to use the park space. There were few benches or other spaces to sit, it was hard for people to enter and exit, and there were few lights or safety measures for when it gets dark. This is why we argue that the design and intended use of Osgoode Hall is what prevents people from using it as a park.
Soundscape

Overall, our soundscape data produced the results that we expected. The most prominent thing that we heard from both recordings was the sound of traffic. There was no significant difference in the noises that we heard in the recordings or the volume despite them being different distances from the street. Both of our

soundscapes also captured people talking while they passed by. The one thing that they did not capture was the sound of construction which was important to us and others because it was loud from both points, and it was blocking off major walkways and sections of Osgoode Hall and the surrounding area.

Based on our soundscape data that we collected, we believe that people do not use Osgoode Hall as a greenspace because it is difficult to relax with the different sounds in the area. The park is also used as a high traffic area for those crossing from University Ave. to City Hall which we could hear in the soundscape meaning that there are always people coming and going. By listening to our soundscape data, we could see why users of the park only use it briefly, to walk their pets, cross through the park, or for brief walks. The sounds of the surrounding urban environment and the changes the construction is making have made it difficult for people to enjoy what was intended to be a serene garden.

Interviews

Our interviews revealed that Osgoode Gardens was not seen as a parkspace, but a heavily secure workspace.

The construction worker who was repairing the building foundations inside the park, told us a story of high-security and precaution within the park.
"Security (here) is really tight. Every time you go to use the washroom. You gotta get a pat down. You do not want anything going into that building. It is very tight." (Construction Worker, personal communication, March 13th, 2023). His interview showed us that the priority of Osgoode Gardens was the law building itself, and connected our observations of security cameras, perimeter shrubbery, and gated fences, and their affordances pointed towards the security and privacy for the workspace for law students and courtroom employees, rather than for the park goers. This confirmed our belief that the history of the space limited people's access to it. Our legal aid employee who had previously worked around the space did not know the greenspace was even publicly available: "I never noticed it… neither did anybody I work with" furthermore "People are there to work. They do not go downtown to use the parks, they are busy working and focused on getting home." (D. Fontaine, personal communication, March 13th, 2023)

Analysis

As our initial enquiry shifted, the focus of this research moved to Osgoode Hall's intended use and interactions. The overall methodology implemented to understand the physical layout and design elements determined that Osgoode Hall, with its intended use of a law library, still operates under those conditions. The park users rarely interact with the building and hence do not really assume the conflicted relation between the government, the park, and the building. Green Space Governance is an

interdependent cycle of placemaking and design intents, and referring to our interviews and literature studies, the layout and program of the park shows government interference on all levels.

With vast lawns and few benches, the gardens do not encourage visitors to peruse the greenspace. Instead, the large gravel path cutting through the park serves as a walkway for visitors to cut through the park as a detour, where its midpoint serves as the main entrance for Osgoode Hall building (See Appendix E). Our interviews showed us there are few accommodations in Osgoode Gardens, but there exists a heavy emphasis on security and privacy for the Osgoode Hall itself. Not only was the availability of parkgoers scarce during our interview process, but most foot traffic also led towards the building itself. It demonstrates that perhaps the greenery of Osgoode Gardens only serves as a visual accessory to the government building, which was intended for work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the argument presented for this research indicates that the design and the
changes that surround it limit people from using Osgoode Hall Gardens. Some key issues experienced were interview refusals, Metrolinx, and weather itself. The Metrolinx project gained political and public momentum due to its controversial nature, leading to protests in the park. Since the project was still going ahead, when we tried to ask general questions about the greenspace, we were turned away by library staff and security for interviews. Even though we stated that we have nothing to do with the protest, they still refused to interview. The last issue was the winter weather, as it provided limited data for interviews and soundscapes, since there were barely any users in the park and no foliage. After investigating, we can determine that the park and building
operate separately on general terms, but the civic and green space function interact with the
urban environment as one entity. The design changes being made influence the public level
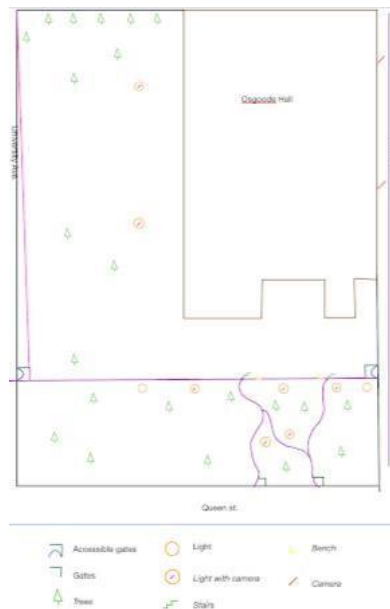response either negatively or positively.

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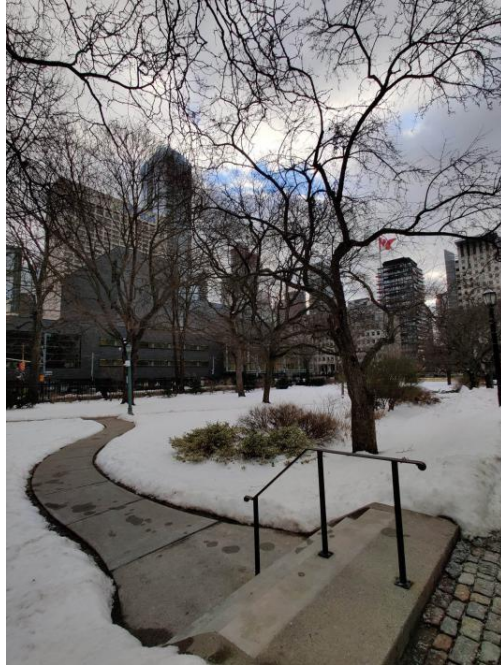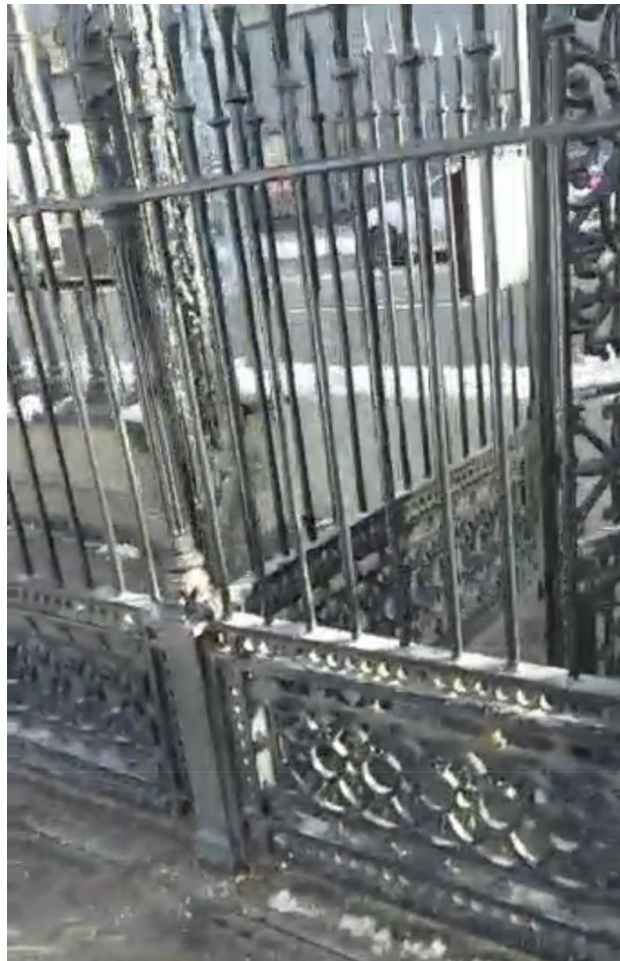
Appendix
A)

Osgoode Hall

Queen st.

Accessible gates		Light		Bench
Gates		Light with camera		Camera
Trees		Stairs		

B)

Osgoode Hall

Queen st.

Accessible gates		Light		Bench
Gates		Light with camera		Camera
Trees		Stairs		

C)

D)

E)

F)

G)

H)

I)