

The Toronto Reference Library (Image 1), is the city of Toronto's head library branch, located 789 Yonge Street in the expensive Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood, catering to a diverse set of users. When walking in front of the library one is greeted with two common sites, men and women in formal wear coming from a conference or meeting standing in sharp contrast to the homeless people in the shadows doing illicit activities such as drugs and public drinking. The juxtaposition has led to questions about the different ways the library is used by different people and the role it plays in its neighbourhood.

This essay seeks to provide an answer to the primary research question "What is the relationship between the elite Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood and main public library it houses." This essay will argue that the library has an important role in creating community in the Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood through effectively accommodating the needs of diverse stakeholders, including Bloor-Yonge residents, library users outside of the neighbourhood, as well as community institutions. This will be shown through photo-analysis, interview analysis, as well as through additional background research and literature review.

This paper will first begin by providing background information and a literature review. Then, this essay will identify our research methodology, and provide reflection on these methods. Lastly, the essay will highlight the results collected through the research and provide an analysis of the data.

Background Information & History

The Toronto Reference Library is in the high-profile area Yorkville. The Yorkville neighbourhood is known for its high-end stores, businesses, and luxurious residences. The area is note-worthy for its status as the priciest retail strip in Canada, wherein, many of the businesses and residences solely cater to upper-classes. However, Yorkville's status as an elite neighbourhood has been a development overtime. In the 1830's the village of Yorkville was established by Joseph Bloor and William Jarvis as a suburban retreat. Over time the Victorian houses characteristic of Yorkville developed into a place for "hippie culture," and in the 1960's Yorkville was seen as the centre of counter-cultural movements, characterized by poetry, art, and live music. Due to its status, it became a site for protest, and due to rise in policing as well as the development of the Bloor-Danforth subway line which increased land-values, Yorkville transitioned into the retail hub. The Reference Library was built under this context, supported through the development of the Bloor-Danforth line. Acknowledging the urban history of reinvention and renewal prompts an important discussion about how

the past leads to what neighbourhood has become today. One of the city's neighbourhoods has developed in a way that seems to be in sharp contrast to the homeless people that occupy the front of the library.

Literature Review

In evaluating the relationship between libraries and the communities they are in; this paper will assess different theories regarding the role and impact of the library on the neighbourhood. This will be expressed in sociological theory of the "The Third Place" by Ray Oldenberg. Additionally, these ideas will be explored in theories regarding the library as a tool for building social capital. Moreover, the theory by Barbara Sen will explain how libraries can effectively cater to diverse clientele.

Ray Oldenberg is an urban sociologist who developed the theory of "The Third Place," wherein, he argues that this exists in contrast to the first space (home) and second place (work). The Third Place is characterized by neutral ground, wherein, no one is obligated to be a host (Oldenberg, 1989). In a neutral location, individuals can enter and exit the space as per will. Moreover, third places are characterized by having low or no costs associated with its usage (Oldenberg, 1989). Additionally, a third place should be accessible both physically and mentally, and function as a leveller, wherein, social interaction can exist between people of different socio-economic status (Oldenberg, 1989). The public library has been identified as a fundamental example of The Third Place. Oldenberg argues that the third space fundamental to an individual's wellness and strengthens community ties through social interaction and promotes involvement in politics, democracy, and civil society (Oldenberg, 1989).

A similar theory describing the role of the library in the community are those around the library as a tool for Social Capital." Social capital is "the links, shared values, and understandings in a society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together" (Vårheim, 2014, 2). Social capital is created through the expansion of social networks, especially for otherwise marginalized populations. The public library is an effective producer of social trust and therefore social capital as its providers universal information, treat all patrons equally (Varheim, 2014). Through being universalistic public institutions, the library provides places for meetings, through both physical space and by facilitating the expansion of social networks through free classes, discussion groups, and staff contact for patrons (Varheim, 2014). Through these services, the library can build up social trust, for example, the studies have shown that 98.7% of users have evaluated the library as places of high trust and safety. This is especially prevalent amongst immigrant and refugee groups. In both Norway and Arkansas, immigrants expressed using their local library extensively for language classes, and a place to bring their children (Varheim, 2014). Through accessing library services, they have been able to establish social networks, and their

community involvement and social trust has increased as a result. The library in this case, acts as a civil connector for underprivileged groups.

As seen above, the library is a valuable tool for underprivileged groups, however, as Barbara Sen identifies in "Multiple Strategic Orientations: The Public Library as a societal Organization," the library is a community organization with a multitude of different stakeholders (Sen, 2014). Based on the Cumbria library system, Sen creates a model which illustrates the complexity of issues faced by public library, however, identifies that a successful public library manages the needs of its diverse user-base by having an orientation that combines community needs, as well as those of the market (Sen, 2014). Under Sen's conception the market orientation can be facilitated through allowing private actors to use public spaces for fees paid to the library system, such as coffee shops or paid event space. Having these different outlets draws individuals who would not otherwise use the library (Sen, 2014).

Methodology

For this project, our research and data collection focused primarily on photo-visual, interview analysis, and additional background internet research. Qualitative data collection aims at "exposing the human part of the story," (Jacob, 2012) which was the objective of our research in evaluating the contention between the Reference Library and the Yorkville neighbourhood. Our data collection process began with an inductive approach to research, wherein, we began exploring movement in the Bloor-Yonge intersection, however, as we collected more data, we began to focus on the Reference library, due to the themes of community service provision.

As a result of this inductive approach, when photographing we began from the intersection and took over 200 photographs of anything that appeared noteworthy, of buildings, signage, and people. After collecting a substantial amount of data through these photographs we identified key patterns based on our observations and recognized the theme of contentions in the usage of the space, in library programming, and in issues of safety. The photo-visual analysis highlighted the idea that images are ubiquitous in society and that the "study of images or one that incorporates images in the creation or collection of data might be able to reveal some sociological insight that is not accessible by any other means" (Mirzoeff, 1962).

In addition to photo-visual analysis, we also conducted four separate interviews with the aim of collecting data from a multitude of different perspectives and stakeholders. In this, we interviewed to library users whom we identified at the library, we also interviewed the executive director of the Bloor-Yorkville business improvement area, and two residents of the Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood. To ensure that our interviews were effective, we prepared interview protocols based on our existing research, using the principles put forth by Jacob and Ferguson. We

established free-flowing conversation with our interviewees through open-ended questions that would promote a variety of answers (Jacob and Ferguson 2012). Using the principles of Accelerated Intimacy, we were able to obtain interesting information by establishing comfortable relationships with our interviewees through the seven phases (Wilkerson, 2007). Additionally, using methods of interview data-coding our research was able to narrow in on key themes and evidence to support our thesis (Weiss, 1995). Data coding identified themes which were then used to guide additional background research.

Lastly, we conducted additional research to fill in the gaps about library programming, library usage, as well as other information about library complaints. Our last method was the N of One Plus some method, which involved using secondary case put forth by Mukhija. By using a secondary case, we were able to strengthen the “external validity” of our research on Reference Library and allowed us to draw a more convincing narrative regarding the roles of flag-ship public library branches and their relationships to the elite communities that they inhabit (Mukhija, 2010). Like the Toronto Reference Library, the Stephen A Schwarzman library in New York City also inhabits an elite neighbourhood and holds private and elite events for corporate/private actors, while maintaining an effective relationship with the community by also providing services for a diverse actor, such as services for the homeless, or English language programs.

Reflection on Methods

The extended case method by Buroway highlighted the role of our group as researchers and some of the limitations that we faced as students. In this “reflexive science,” our research methodology was characterized by deep engagement in our research site. As part of this reflexive science, our research process highlighted two key principles of the extended case method, which were intervention, structuration. Our experience seeking an interview from the reference library was characteristic of the intervention. Intervention is described as “the mutual reaction that we discover the properties of social” (Buroway, 1998, 16). Additionally, interventions are a virtue to be exploited” (Buroway, 1998, 16). “Interventions reveal much about themselves when under stress or in crisis and transmit hidden secrets of the participants world” (Buroway, 1998, 16). Being rejected from interviews with the library gave us significant data, highlighting the way that the library responds to questions of accountability. For instance, if the library offers free services and programs for the public, why they did they refuse to answer questions?

The limitations of this process also highlighted the principle of structuration, which argues that research is shaped and is shaping “external field of forces” (Buroway, 1998). In this, our research was limited by the time and context by which the

assignment took place. For instance, the library refused to answer any questions that we had, citing an insufficient research policy that would be completed in 2020. Other limitations of this project included, the time pressures under which we were forced to conduct interviews. We were unable to schedule interviews in advance, and as such we were rushed which may have undermined the comfort interviewees had in answering questions

Data and Results

Our different methods of research facilitated the collection of a significant amount of data. The photo-visual analysis demonstrated two key underlying themes, public services/community centred-services, and contentions. The data collected from photo-visual analysis, coupled with data collection from other sources gave us a clear depiction of how the library was used. Contentions inside and outside the library were highlighted through photographs that demonstrated development notices for luxury condominiums, advertised with the words "this is luxury." In another photograph, taken of the other side of Yonge Street, the image highlights several homeless people resting on the benches underneath the shade of the Reference Library roof. Inside, the photographs of the YMCA-Toronto Public Library immigrant services settlement desk, and the innovation hub. The photographs served as data for the diverse ways the library is used by "opposing groups."

The interviews reveal a significant amount of data relating to the usage of the library, and the relationship between the library and the Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood. Three different interviewees of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and locations of origins within the city, describe coming to the library for several different purposes. For instance, one individual describes visiting the library for its computer services, "Oh yes, I came here first to use an expensive software, Sculptris, that I don't have on my own computer, and it was easier to subway here than use the bus and go to Humber College." While another user states, "I read the books here, I take my kids to study here, I meet my friends at the coffee shop, and now I am looking at registering English classes, so I can get better at it." These are simply two ways the library is used, and the Bloor-Yonge neighbourhood resident describes coming to the reference library for "a networking event for professionals in the IT field", and "working at the reference library once in a while, or at Balzac's in the reference library when my wife is working from home and has to talk out loud".

In addition to this, through the interviews we were able to collect some information about the relationship between the library and the site. The interviewee from the BIA stated that "I would say that they are [The Reference Library] a community hub that is a destination that drives traffic to the neighbourhood. So, if a coffee shop, restaurant, or business gets frequented when people are in the neighbourhood for the reference library, there is community benefit as a result."

Moreover, the interviewee who lives in the Bloor-Yonge neighbourhood stated that they “liked the reference library it brings culture to my neighbourhood which is otherwise dominated by high-end shopping”, and that “I don’t feel like the Reference Library is solely for people outside of the neighbourhood but actually appreciate its convenience and proximity to me, and like I said before I use it sometimes”.

The additional newspaper and internet research we conducted about the Toronto Reference Library allowed us to confirm and expand on some of the facts that we collected through photography and interviews, allowing us to identify an effective answer to our research question. Our research was primarily concentrated in identifying a few different services available to individuals through the library. For example, additional research highlighted that the library provides services to homeless people, outside of its physical shelter, but has a full-time social worker, and that other social work organizations regularly hold free drop-in sessions at the library (Toronto Public Library). Additionally, the library has financial literacy sessions, and classes on coding, computer usage, and expensive technology like 3D printers that are free for all to use (Toronto Public Library). While many of these services are free, it is evident that this is not entirely the case at the Reference Library, where the Reference Library allows for the reservation of library space at a substantial fee. The Bruma and Appel Salon is described by the library as “a cultural and literary destination,” through its hosting of different speakers and various events. For instance, in the past Emily Nausbaum of the New Yorker has come to speak at the Salon (Toronto Public Library). The Appel salon has seating for 575 people and can be rented for \$3,475 dollars (Toronto Public Library). Additionally, the Bruma and Appel salon has private washrooms, catering, spaces for coat-check, and own security guard, allowing it to cater to the needs of the private users of the salon, separate from the rest of the library (Toronto Public Library). Additionally, while not explicitly evidence, in our research we did not explicitly find any information or newspaper articles surrounding complaints that Yorkville residents have about the reference library. The lack of this data, in our view, can represent a satisfaction with the library’s role in the neighbourhood.

Analysis

In assessing all the data collected it becomes clear that the Reference Library serves a diverse set of users in a way that creates a strong community, making the Reference Library a community hub in the Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood. Through its diverse service offerings, the library can build up social trust and societal connections amongst its user base, for example, one of the interviewees, Emma from Korea, identifies that upon immigration through visiting the Reference Library she has been able to find English classes. Additionally, in her interview she states that she has been

able to make friends through the Reference Library. This is an example of the theory that the library, in its community, serves as a tool for the creation of Social Capital. The Toronto Reference Library also creates social capital amongst underprivileged groups, connecting homeless people to social workers and financial literacy classes by providing homeless people with community connections.

Additionally, through the data it becomes explicit that the Reference Library functions as a third place as defined by Ray Oldenberg. The Reference Library is a place where no one is obligated to host, and people of different socioeconomic backgrounds act in conjunction and in harmony with each other. Interviews and photographs demonstrate that individuals come to the reference library as a “third place” outside of home and work, for instance, individuals are photographed sitting on tables using their cellphones. The Toronto Reference Library functions as a third place and can build social trust in its diverse set of users. The Business Improvement area also views the library as having a positive impact on business.

The library also serves the elite institutions and “individuals,” that comprise of the Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood through the Bluma and Appel salon, which is “a private-public place.” For example, the Bluma and Appel salon has provided space for the University of Toronto Law School, and Manulife Insurance for private, ticketed, and monitored events. In interviewing an upper-class resident of the neighbourhood, we identified that they use the reference library, and see themselves as someone that “belongs in the space.” The Bluma-Appel Salon and Balzac’s Coffee are examples of Barbara Sen’s theory that the most effective way to manage multiple stakeholders as a societal organization is to be both community and market oriented. All these different data points collectively identify that the Toronto Reference library’s role in the Bloor-Yorkville neighbourhood is creating community by effectively serving the needs of its users, some who do not inhabit the neighbourhood, and the needs of the often wealthy, elite, actors that do.

Conclusion

The Toronto Reference Library is a community hub and a site of public service provision, it does not simply serve its surrounding Yorkville neighbourhood, but also has a broader significance to the city of Toronto. The users of the library-at first glance-are not solely Yorkville residents, with patrons’ range across race, socio-economic status, and genders. The library is an accepting place, as there is a relationship between the neighbourhood and the library as it serves all kinds of services from free of charge to holding meetings, conferences, and private events with a cost.

Evidenced through photo-analysis, interview analyses as well as through additional background research, Toronto’s largest public library is effectively able to meet the needs of people across the city and those within its neighbourhood, by

providing a number of different services for different audiences, offering a compassionate, warm place for the homeless, while also providing private event space for the elite.

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Image 1: Toronto Reference Library,
<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/torontoreferencelibrary/>



Image 2: Yorkville's Coffee House, <https://boxoffice.hotdocs.ca/>



Image 3: Yorkville,
https://www.blogto.com/city/2016/08/what_yorkville_was_like_in_the_1960s/



Image 4: Living in Yorkville, <https://www.soldbyshane.com/area/yorkville/>



Image 5: Living in Yorkville, <https://www.soldbyshane.com/area/yorkville/>

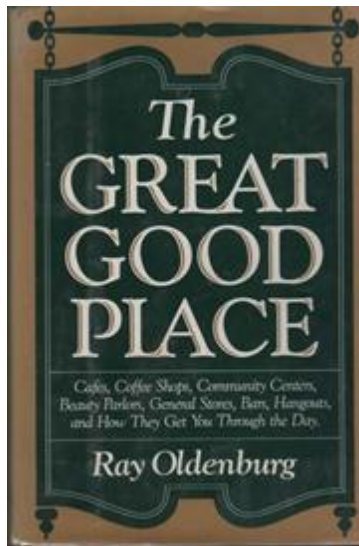


Image 6: The Great Good Place,
https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4119.The_Great_Good_Place



Image 7: Own photograph



Image 8: Own photograph



Image 9: Own photograph



Image 10: Own photograph



Image 11: Own photograph



Image 12: Own photograph



Image 13: Own photograph



Image 14: Own photograph