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Introduction

The research conducted at the Yonge-Dundas Square (YDS) in the heart of downtown Toronto was lead with the following question: to what extent is the YDS a public or private space? We applied inductive research to conduct our analysis through data analysis and information gathering through different research methods. The conclusion is that the YDS has mixed private and public aspects. The specific public and private features will be presented with evidence in the paper later. The paper starts with a background on the history and a literature review, followed by methodologies and our reflection on the methodology. Then we will provide our results and analysis to support our conclusion. A short conclusion will finally summary our work.

Background and History

The YDS is regulated by Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management (YDSBM) established by Toronto City Council in 2001. Initially, the Toronto City Council proposed a revitalization plan to regulate the square into a public space that would “respond to the changing demands of increasing diversity of the urban population” (Galanakis, 2013). The plan also aimed to use the space to promote community activities and have the square act as a focal point of the city. Historically, the city used the YDS area as a form of revitalization, specifically giving the YDS “an important role in defining the image of a city” (Hernandez, T., & Jones, K, 2005). The YDS was marked as the milestone of the revitalization plan on Yonge Street neighbourhood after the murder of a young boy (Appendix J).

Literature review

The business improvement area (BIA) theory is based on a defined area set by the city focused on the processes that stimulate economic development and accelerating local business. This theory can be directly applied to the YDS, by suggesting the implementation of BIAs to enhance the quality of life of local neighbourhood as well as become the catalysts for civic improvement.

Jane Jacobs's opinion on physical spaces also helps us to investigate the influence of the YDS on a greater, neighbourhood scale. She suggested that safe and public spaces allow strangers to encounter and engage with each other (Jacobs, 1961). Through our interview, we had a further understanding about how her idea is presented through the operation guideline of the YDSBM. Also, we examined that the interactions generated within a public space reduced segregation, supporting Jacob's

theory (Laurence, 2018). We will further argue on whether the private sector is extensively degrading the square's feature as public space.

Rafail's research on over 6217 protest events in New York over the period of 1960 to 2006 suggested that protests oftentimes happen in "privatized public spaces" and have "become increasingly concentrated into a smaller number of spaces" (2014), specifically having "a disproportionate amount of protest activity" (ibid.). The Yonge-Dundas Square fits within the criteria as an oftentimes "privatized public space" and as a common as depicted by Rafail. The question remains: can our observations confirm if the space has become a site for concentrated political activity as suggested by Rafail

Makagon conducted an ethnographic study on New York's Times Square (NYTS) in attempts to find validity in statements that consider the space as an accurate representation of the city's democracy. Makagon argues that visitors to Times Square "channel their energies into the pretty lights and elaborate signs rather than political and social connections" where "people desire to be left alone and feel comfortable in those spaces where they can be in the presence of others while not having to give of themselves" (2003). To what extent can Yonge-Dundas Square exhibit the characteristics of commercialization reducing the impacts of public spheres and political activity in the space as suggested by Makagon?

Methodology

Our first and second forms of quantitative research were visual imagery and alternative cartography creation. Specifically, we drew from Mirzoeff's idea of visual culture in which we "assemble a worldview that is consistent with what we know and have already experienced" through images (2016). Thus, we went into the site of the YDS and searched for new angles in which narratives, theories, or evidence could be drawn and analyzed. Similarly, our methods of alternative cartography were inspired by Solnit's understanding of maps as "only an arbitrary selection of the facts on its two-dimensional surface" (2010). As a result, we chose to create a form of alternative cartography that focuses on the display of signage throughout the square utilizing photography to collect further images and compiling the images.

Our third form of qualitative research is through an interview we conducted with Mr. Taylor Rath, the general manager of the YDSBM which oversees management of the YDS. We drew from recommendations outlined in Wilkerson's concepts of 'Accelerated Intimacy' and Stacy's tips on interview protocols. The result was a preparation stage where we created and revised a large set of interview questions and prompts alongside scripts to say before and after the interview as suggested by Stacy. Following the concepts of 'Accelerated Intimacy', we actively tried to make sure Mr. Rath was consistently comfortable but also open and truthful when providing answers to our interview questions. Following the interview, we listened to the entire

digital recording of the interview, created a transcript, and analyzed key findings with consideration of Mr. Rath's positionality.

Our final form of qualitative research was conducted using limited forms of the former research methods but on external case studies of the Nathan Phillips Square and NYTS. This form of research is known as Mukhija's 'N of one plus some' in which extensive research is conducted on one case study which is, in our case, the YDS, followed by smaller studies on external spaces that hopefully allow us to generalize and better confirm our findings. The extent of the research conducted in other spaces includes visual analysis, anecdotal experiences, and news article research. Analysis of the research conducted in this method is firmly tied to our analysis of the research conducted above. Thus, we will conclude our analysis with some comprehensive understanding of being able to generalize the symbolic or causal findings with the cases of Nathan Phillips Square or NYTS.

Reflection on Methods

Some of the limitations of our qualitative research, as is with all other ethnographic-like qualitative studies, is that our research takes on a perspective. This perspective, or positionality, comes in the form of non-local students and users of the YDS, and the weather during our research time. The consequence of this positionality is that it prevents us from gaining access to certain governance and corporate structures that are important too to understanding the commercial and public aspects of the square. We can only rely on historical document and record for the urban change over-time, while failing to access local indigenous knowledge.

Whilst our previous observation and analysis about the square only considers the view of users of the square, our interview, has a divergent view from our previous research as an organizer or authority which promotes current development and change the square undergoes. Though the interview helped us to find great rationales for previous observation, it is difficult to incorporate the knowledge into our positionality. We also failed to obtain information from many other stakeholders of the square such as commercial companies and community organizations that hold events on the square.

Results

Our photographic methods resulted in 2 key findings relating to the private commercial sphere of influence in relation to the public sphere. Firstly, public, and private elements of the square were shown to oftentimes compete with one another as seen in appendix B, where, symbolically, the public signage competes with the billboards to garner viewership to spread a specific message while the public signage stating 'No Smoking' directly contradicts private sponsorship of a vaping product

produced by Vype behind it. Secondly, we found in our photographic research that this public space is extensively under use by private commercial entities. Appendix A, B, C, D, and E all exhibit the large commercialization of the space, ranging from massive wall-to-wall towering billboards to the literal 'settlement' of the Vype pop-up in the middle of the public square.

Our alternative cartography exhibited in appendix F has led to some interesting findings on the spatial distribution of public and private elements of signage in the space. The most obvious finding of the map is the imagery of towering commercial advertisements surrounding the square while being relatively sparse within it.

The interview with Mr. Rath is heavily related to our previous observations. Rath described the Yonge-Dundas Square as both a public space and an event venue from its conception. In actively cooperating with various organizations and private firms to have different kinds of events, Rath insinuated that the YDS was centre for arts and culture, thus incubating private and community events. As well, Rath noted the autonomy of the YDSBM despite being a city organization. Similarly, Rath mentioned that the billboards on the square were a result of a 5-million-dollar investment, giving the advertising company rights to commercial advertisements for 10 years. Mr. Rath also spoke of the influence of the community in the YDS' operations. From the interview, we are also lucky to gather information about events going on during the summer, which we cannot observe during our research.

We also pursued a research style as noted my Mukhija's N of one plus some model. This model used multiple secondary case studies to better generalize the findings and better understand the urban causality which occurs in the YDS. Our case studies were the Nathan Phillips Square and the NYTS.

Analysis

The redeveloped Dundas square shows a phenomenon of privatization of public spaces and reveals the utilization of mixed-use zoning to attract new investment. The YDS "[facilitated] social inclusion and intercultural communication to present specific socio-spatial practices" (Hernandez and Jones, 2005) as exemplified by our cartography (Appendix F), specifically by the various kinds of billboards and commercial buildings that make people have a strong sense of commercialization. In a way, the idea of commercialization reverses the initial purpose of the revitalization plan. The YDS, regulated differently than a traditional public space, involved different guidelines for private sector companies or non-profit organizations.

The purpose of the square and its operations are largely influenced by Jane Jacobs' conception of incubated social interactions within public space. The size and scale of the square modifies Jacob's theory by exhibiting cooperation with various commercial companies and community groups that hold various events (Appendix J).

The square not only creates opportunities for interaction as a public space but enables people with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds to present themselves on the square. In accordance with Jacobs' theory, segregation and isolation between different ethnic and cultural groups is somewhat eliminated in the YDS. However, there is a fine line that may determine an appropriate level of commercialization in the YDS. For instance, a concert held by a cannabis company in 2018 was permitted on square as it promoted the company but not the product. Also, the billboard we showed on both our map (Appendix F) and photographs (Appendix B, K) is an exchange of 5 million dollars investment including the built of digital infrastructures controlled by both the media company and the YDSBM (Appendix J). The fact that the YDSBM accepts the offer suggests that private companies may be exploiting the public features of the square.

The photographic, mapping, and interview evidence contradicts Makagon's theory of deteriorating public spaces because of a space's increasing commercialization. The YDS correctly exhibits Makagon's concepts of "pretty lights and elaborate signs" (Appendix B; Appendix C) but did not exhibit the same lack of democratization or social aspects suggested by Makagon. Our evidence suggests that the space is public when considering its various political protests (Appendix G; Appendix H) as well as the promotion of community groups within the summer (Appendix J). Thus, our evidence does not support Makagon's conceptions of commercialization in NYTS towards the YDS.

On the topic of political protests, we found that the YDS directly supports Rafail's study that asserted that "privatized public spaces" are oftentimes areas of concentrated political activity (p. 247). The evidence lies in Mr. Raths' long description of planning associated with the numerous protests organized throughout the year that utilize the YDS as a political battleground (Appendix J) as well as the imagery of the political protests conducted by students against the provincial government among cuts to the Ontario Student Assistance Plan in 2019 (Appendix G; Appendix H). Raths noted that the focus of his organization was not to stop protests from organizing, but to ensure they can organize on the square safely and orderly (Appendix J). Thus, the assertion made by Rafail that "privatized public spaces" are oftentimes areas of concentrated protesting activity is supported by the evidence we have conducted on the YDS.

Conclusion

We began this research project with a broad research question in mind: to what extent is the YDS a public or private space? We began this by first conducting research on the background and history of the YDS, followed by a literature review on commercialization, public spaces, protests, and political activity in spaces that resemble the YDS. Our methodology in our qualitative methods involved: photographic

analysis; alternative cartography; interview analysis; and Mukhija's N of one plus some method. We reflected on some limitations of the study. Specifically, the student-led perspective that influenced results in the methodology as well as the missing perspectives such as of indigenous perspectives. We then followed this with an in-depth discussion of our results from the research. Our analytical findings were:

1. That the YDS exhibits the increasing commercialization as suggested in the BIA theory;
2. That the square successfully implements Jacob's theory of a space being a place of social interactions through its annual programs;
3. That the presence of private and commercial organizations has incubated social relations within the square, but that this is a fine line in which we suspect could lead to a degradation of the public sphere should commercialization arise too fast;
4. That Makagon's suggestion that commercial aesthetics is unsupportable with evidence from the YDS suggesting no clear relationship degrades political connection;
5. And Rafail's empirical evidence suggesting that "privatized public spaces" are incubators for protest engagements in the public sphere is supported by our evidence of protest movements and management in the YDS.

In response to our research question, we conclude that the YDS is both a private and public space, specifically with both elements benefiting one another. We regard the public space as beneficial to the YDS and to Toronto because of its necessity for democracy within a city that is experiencing increasing inequality. Similarly, we regard the private sphere as beneficial because of the economic benefits of increased tax revenues, the physical improvement of spaces from investment, and advertisement revenues that they provide to the city which then can be used to fund or subsidize community-based events. However, in reference to our research, we recognize the concern for over commercialization of the square as relatively benign in our perspective particularly because of the YDS' evident capability to retain its public elements despite growing private commercialization, thus suggesting an observant but non-aggressive stance from the YDSBM.

References

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Appendix A



Appendix B



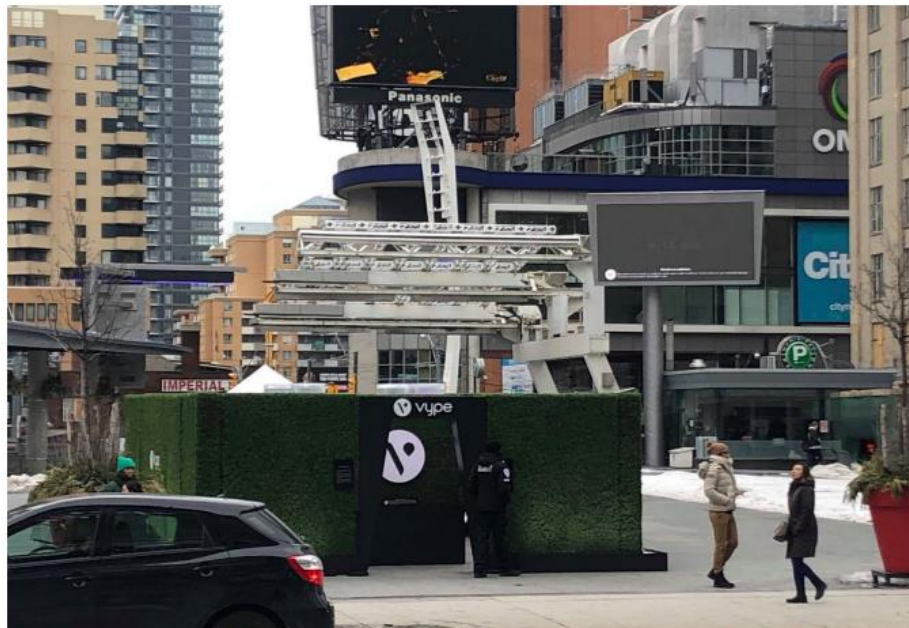
Appendix C



Appendix D



Appendix E



Appendix F



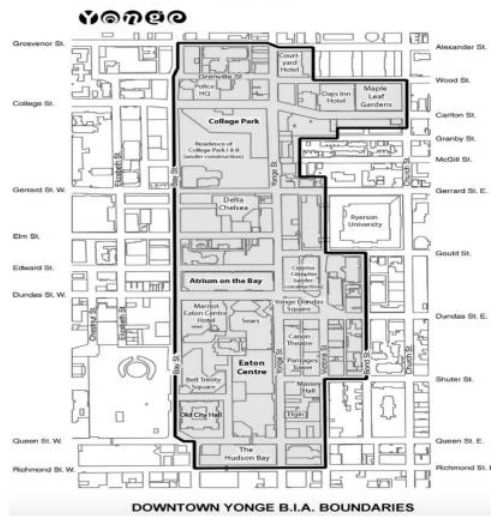
Appendix G



Appendix H



Appendix I



Appendix K

