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Term: Fall 2023

The Distinct Geographically Defined Socio-Economic Case of Yorkville's Toronto Reference Library

The Toronto Reference Library, located at 789 Yonge Street in Yorkville is the pinnacle of high-end commodification. This area is home to many luxury companies including Cartier; Prada; Hermes; Gucci; defined as an area of high income. This poses many barriers of entry to socioeconomically “less wealthy” individuals, who cannot afford the inflated prices of Yorkville. However, the Toronto Reference Library, a public common within Downtown Toronto acts as a medium ground for all, paradoxical to the highly economically segregated Yorkville community. The Median income per capita within Yorkville is \$88466, 12.88% greater than Toronto's average income per capita of 78373 dollars. Thus, posing the question to whether wealthier populations use the TRL, or, if it is paradoxical in nature? Due to the high barriers to entry into Yorkville, our observational findings and interviews correlate low TRL use among residents, instead adopted by less wealthy populations pertaining to students; unhoused individuals; recent immigrants; individuals seeking employment; using the TRL as a public resource in a highly economically segregated area.

In light of discovering unique inclusionary aspects to the TRL and the distinction between how different classes of people interact with the services provided, such as coffee shop users versus library users, we start to wonder how diverse groups differentiate in their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood around it. Encounters with the users of the TRL suggest that the Yorkville community is disassociated to their public library. During an interview with a Balzac's Barista, a cafe located at the entrance of the TRL, individual “Z” describes their observations on the contrast between Cafe and Library users. Z describes that the users of Balzac's are generally individuals who are associated with higher incomes, posing fancier items of status, purchasing a coffee before going to work. In contrast, Z claims that the users of the library tend not to fit the image of a Yorkviller, oftentimes representing populations like students, underhoused or recent immigrants. Thus, if eye witness accounts of library users do not pertain to the status of Yorkville and its residents, the Library paradoxically serves as a common ground for those who are often restricted to Yorkville.

Interviews with individual users of the Library, two students, for personal confidentiality, they will be referred as “E” and “S”, describe feelings of non attachment to Yorkville. Despite preferring the libraries at TMU, the TRL provided them with a large access to educational resources, required for their schooling. Despite travelling a few kilometres to the TRL, individuals E and S do not use the Yorkville community for its luxurious amenities, describing a feeling of disconnect from the wealthier individuals

that tend to take part in Yorkville related activities. Thus, is the paradoxical distinction between the users of the TRL within the Yorkville community unique to Yorkville? If so, what are the socio-economic themes apparent to distinct Toronto Public Library (TPL) branches? This requires a comparative analysis on the socio-economic disparities between other neighbourhood branches of the TRL compared to Yorkville TRL.

The current day image of Yorkville does not fit the free and accessible nature of the TRL, making individuals feel out of place when not using the library, such a paradox can be explained by the historical nature of Yorkville. This is likely a result of its proximity to public transportation, and the populations occupying Yorkville. The TRL is located just 30 seconds from the intersection of Yonge and Bloor, which puts it directly on both the 1 and 2 subway lines. This proximity to public transportation means that people will come from all across the city to access the books and the study space at the TRL. Historically, Yorkville served as a modern day Kensington Market, serving home to much of Toronto's hippy culture. Yorkville served as a common ground for all individuals, regardless of education, wealth and barriers to entry, serving as the best location for a Library.

The area in downtown Toronto surrounding Yorkville can be split into six ranges of median household incomes as seen on our map. Toronto's median income per capita is roughly \$78,000, where each range can be compared to the median income per household. Dark blue, lime green, light blue, and tan sections on the map all represent areas where the median income is lower than that of the Toronto average. Neighbourhoods with dark green and pink have median incomes higher than that of the city average. A majority of the downtown core featured in this map have a median income lower than that of the city average, with just 5 neighbourhoods including Yorkville having a higher-than-average income. Additionally, there are just 15 Toronto Public Libraries featured in the downtown core of Toronto, including the TRL.

When observing the entire map, we noticed several patterns. Most prominently is the fact that the vast majority of Toronto public libraries are located within neighbourhoods with below average income. Some noticeable ones are in areas surrounding Yorkville, for example the public libraries located within Chinatown, Alexandra Park, Downtown Yonge, Moss Park, Bloordale Village, Parkdale and Mirvish Village. These areas all have an income of less than \$70,000, with lower income neighbourhoods like Moss Park having an average income of \$22,000. Our map correlates the location of libraries within Toronto to be built in areas of average lower income, due to potential socio-economic barriers that limit access to educational resources. This pattern contrasts the placement of the Toronto Reference Library as it is situated within one of Toronto's wealthiest areas, Yorkville. Our findings, based on Toronto's demographic statistics label Yorkville as having an above average median income per capita of \$90,000. However, using the historical context of Yorkville, we can develop a deeper understanding on the TRLs location, and the locations of other TPL. Our research suggests that there are distinct correlations between the development of

libraries in transit accessible areas boasting hippy culture. There are several libraries that follow such trends, including TPL locations between Dufferin Grove and Little Italy, with high accessibility by street cars and bus routes and the major hub for hippy culture located on the Ossington strip. Many other libraries follow this trend, including two libraries located near Kensington, Queen West and Bloordale village, four TPL located within hippy and highly accessible areas.

When analysing the paradoxical nature of the TRL and Yorkville on a Toronto wide scale, it is clear that this instance is particular to Yorkville. The historically hipster community located in Yorkville helps develop a sense of understanding to why the TRL is situated within one of Toronto's luxurious and segregated areas. However, such a paradox builds a better understanding of the location planning behind alternate TPL: specifically high public transportation access and hipster, less wealthy neighbourhoods. This correlation was confirmed when mapping all the TPL locations within downtown Toronto, marking the paradoxical nature of the TLR and Yorkville as an outcome of gentrification and the commodification of luxurious goods.

Work Cited

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