Art as an Intervention in Public Space: How Art Can Act as a Medium to Cross Social Divides

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Land Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge that this work was conducted by me, a settler, in Winnipeg, or Winnipi, a place located on the territories of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Dakota, Dene, Métis, and Oji-Cree Nations. I am honoured to have been able to do my work in Treaty 1 territory, the ancestral and traditional homeland of Anishinaabe peoples. I have an obligation to further acknowledge that Treaty 1, signed 1871, took this territory from seven local Anishinaabe First Nations in order to make the land available for settler use and ownership. I would also like to acknowledge the ongoing presence of Indigenous communities in this territory and the important creative work that they are engaging in that celebrates art, culture, and community in Winnipeg.

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conversation through each sandwich made and with every laugh we still have the opportunity to

share.

Abstract

Collaborative community mural-making, as a community arts practice, intends to build community capacity with a focus on the needs and interests of marginalized members of society. Organizational efforts to collectively activate a visual identity with/in Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods can engage in the development of neighbourhood identity, representation, and pride. Mural-making has the potential to bridge a gap between/among diverse communities through visual learning and conversation. This study adopts a qualitative approach to understand Winnipeg's visual artist community's involvement in the public sphere of arts-making, key community players' engagement in order to measure community change, and *Synonym Art Consultation*'s role in the production of *Wall-to-Wall Mural and Culture Festival*. By conducting 10 semi-structured interviews and reviewing relevant scholarly and grey literature, this paper considers arts-making, as it intersects with community/cultural planning, as a tool that can construct new knowledge that is expressed in visual and artistic ways. I argue that arts-based community-centred planning can elicit a bottom-up, grassroots approach to planning practices that gives thought to more radical planning.

Keywords: participation, collaboration, community, cohesion, interaction

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Foreward

This paper came out of a need to integrate my academic interests with my love for community, the arts, and facilitation. Combining lived experience(s) with the value of education allows for further critical engagement. I have always been interested in a relational approach to education where each voice is counted regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender, class, ability, and/or identity.

Three summers ago I had the opportunity to work as a programmer/facilitator at Winnipeg's Rainbow Resource Centre, a non-profit organization that serves Manitoba's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Two-Spirit communities. It was through this role that I began to engage in collaborative community mural-making as a community arts practice. Dealing with the harms of heterosexism and homophobia, together, with the Youth of the Rainbow Resource Centre, we began to forge a path toward building stronger relationships and trust through the making of a moveable collaborative community mural. This prompted us to better understand community, unity and solidarity. It was this experience, also forwarded by *Synonym Art Consultation*, that has since pushed me to consider the spaces that we inhabit and how those spaces are often structured by our differences.

My Area of Concentration is "Urban Planning for Social Cohesion and Inclusion". This Area of Concentration sought to explore diversity as a defining characteristic of the cities that people inhabit. The Area of Concentration also sought to investigate those that are excluded and those that are included from/in urban planning processes. This Major Paper seeks to produce a framework for artistic practices, like collaborative community mural-making, for fostering social cohesion in cities.

In my Plan of Study, the three components to my Area of Concentration and Learning Objectives include Social Planning, Community Organizing and Cultural and Artistic Practice for Inclusion. The overall objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of arts ability to act as a medium, through organizational and community/social planning efforts, exposing people and communities to positive and in some cases transformative potential.

This Major Research Paper intends to present the development of my learning through the Master of Environmental Studies and Planning Program, including all coursework, workshops, and field experiences. This Paper has allowed me to fulfill Objective 1.2, to build my knowledge of alternative planning processes that honour the interests of marginalized communities by integrating their perspectives and input. I have come to realize that the processes of community development and organizing must be influenced in a way that regards community development and organizing processes from *within* the broader community that community organizers/planners are working with. Working from *within* community allows for recognition of the skills that are already there. I also learned to, per Objective 2.1, develop a theoretical understanding of social justice as it relates to the improvement of quality of life for marginalized people; focusing attention as it relates to dialogue and language to better connect with ideas related to recognition and how social constructs shape the ways in which we are, or are not, recognized in society. Finally, to, per Objective 3.1, explore and focus on a creative community model as an approach to community work, which allowed me to hone in on an arts-based approach to connecting new ideas while working in collaboration with others.

1.   Introduction

This paper considers an arts-based approach to community/social planning for the city of Winnipeg, with a focus on the ability of art to act as an intervention in public space. I will be focusing on *Synonym Art Consultation* and their annual month-long *Wall-to-Wall Mural and Culture Festival* as a case study for this research. *Synonym Art Consultation* is a curatorial collective based in Winnipeg, Manitoba; *Wall-to-Wall Mural and Culture Festival* sees the creation of multiple indoor and outdoor murals across the city of Winnipeg and celebrates each new work of art with unique events bringing together diverse communities around art, music, dance, and more (Wall-to-Wall, 2018). Quite entrepreneurial in their approach, *Synonym Art Consultation* operate in a bit of a grey area; they are not a not-for-profit but also are not considered a full on enterprise. So, they often look at ways of diversifying their funding by writing collaborative grants with a plethora of different organizations (this approach allows them to share the grant and then work on the project as a community with other organizations which, in turn, works to elevate one another, getting artists paid properly, and activating the respective businesses) while also surviving on grant funding sometimes, and on business funding where they can get in on sponsorships (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019). Still, with arts organizations getting funding cuts all the time, most funding is primarily approached through collaboration. This sort of approach to arts-based, community-centred planning focuses on cultivating a grassroots, radical perspective where participation in hyperlocal and international dialogues around issues such as Indigenous rights and socially-responsible, innovative economic development, are therein rooted in the arts (Wall-to-Wall, 2018).

It has been my intention, through this research, to better understand how mural-making, as a community arts practice, holds the potential to act as a medium to cross social divides in inner-city neighbourhoods, where discrimination based on race, ethnicity, culture, low socio-economic status, and/or substance abuse exists. Working to activate a visual identity with/in a neighbourhood, through collaborative community mural-making, can be understood to elicit a bottom-up, grassroots approach to planning practices that gives thought to more radical planning. This paper looks at organizational efforts to better understand how working from with/in community can serve to build a necessary presence among inner-city neighbourhood communities, where bridging a gap between/among diverse community members, through arts capacity to incite broader forms of dialogue, is sought. Further, collaborative community mural-making serves as a tool that seeks to build community capacity with a focus on the needs and interests of marginalized members of society; marginalized peoples and communities being those who share common identities or experiences related to race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, and physical or mental ability (Staples, 2012). Further, community capacity implies that a community can act in particular ways; it has specific faculties or capacities to do certain things that allow individuals to work collaboratively in order to implement their own solutions (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001). Building and/or bridging connections through trust, reciprocity, respect, and relational accountability are integral to this work. *Synonym Art Consultation* is centred around love for the arts, community, connection, creative expression, kindness and fun, and maintaining a safe(r) space for all (Synonym Art Consultation, 2019), while further working to create platforms for community to collaborate; working together

to promote accessibility in the arts and the importance of activating a visual identity with/in a

neighbourhood while facilitating representation through art from with/in community.

The basis of this research was organized around one specific research question: how can

art act as a medium to cross social divides in Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods? Still,

follow-up questions that were specific to artists involved with *Wall-to-Wall*, the founding

members of *Synonym Art Consultation*, and key community players were necessary in order to

prompt further analysis. A short list of these questions are as follows: what does participation

look like within the artist community, and whose stories are represented in the murals?; how do

these stories/murals resonate with the community, and how is community being honoured?; what

is the intention in the output of the mural-making process, and what does it mean to interact?; in

what way does the mural-making process investigate thinking?; what negotiations with the

community, on behalf of the artist, are taking place?; how might the murals act as a distraction to

the current urban/social crises, including gentrification?; and, are the murals drawing our eyes to

something we otherwise avoid looking at? These questions, and more, were explored,

investigated, and challenged through various forms of dialogue that include secondary academic

research, the experiences and stories of human participants that were involved in this research,

and through visual memory of the murals that are specific to this research.

Considering Winnipeg as the Canadian city with the highest proportion (12%) of First

Nations people living off reserve and in the highest degree of residential segregation (Brown,

Higgitt, Wingert, Miller, & Morrissette, 2005), myself having grown up in the city, and

witnessing the emergence of mural-making in Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods over the

last several years, I became curious to understand how mural-making in a city that is known for

it's segregation along racial and ethnic lines could potentially serve as a catalyst for broader forms of social dialogue. Further, pursuing an education in urban planning had me wondering about public space, who has the right to such spaces, and how planning is traditionally understood as a tool to better serve the public realm. With these thoughts in mind I felt compelled to explore what it means to employ an arts-based approach to community-centred planning and whether mural-making, as a community arts practice, holds the capacity to change people's perception of Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods. There are three main areas that fall within the scope of this research; cultural planning and gentrification studies, community organizing and engagement, and cultural arts practice. First, I look to the field of social and cultural planning by considering the ways in which planners and/or community organizers are able to support community needs and interests while addressing problems between social, cultural, and economic affairs. Further, focusing on gentrification studies within this area of planning I explore how the processes of gentrification affect marginalized community needs and interests while also honing in on the ability of visual art to create space in a way that provides social integration; recognizing the pitfall that art is often part of the wave of gentrification, it is necessary to note that artists hold the ability to see through beautification in inner-city areas, where arts-led displacement is not extensive (Enright & McIntyre, 2019), while imagining these spaces from with/in community, transcending static norms and conventions of space (Ley, 2003). Second, I explore the processes of community organizing and engagement while considering various approaches and practices that focus on strategies that aim to improve the quality of life for marginalized people and communities. Focusing on public participation as an exercise for solving democratic problems provides an opportunity for bottom-up approaches to community

planning and organizing to exist which, in turn, fosters cohesion among/between community members in a way that opposes structures of dominance; cohesion being the ability to provide compassion through common values and meaning, which are key elements of altruism and cultural resilience (Rose, 2016), at the social level. Lastly, I regard cultural arts practice as a component of community arts practice that is anchored around collaboration *with* communities to make art in ways that aim to express diverse identities while exploring, and taking action, on social issues.

  To provide further context and analysis, before moving into the three main areas mentioned above, I will lay out a literature review around planning theory as it relates to my thoughts about Winnipeg, mural-making, and community. I will then provide a step-by-step process of methodologies that were employed for this research which will be followed by a brief history of Winnipeg as a city that has historically planned for racial segregation of Indigenous people; this will provide context as to why activating a visual identity, through mural-making, in Winnipeg's West and North End neighbourhoods is necessary. Finally, I will both define collaborative community mural-making and provide some case study examples that I have found relevant from Estonia, Spain, and other examples of mural festivals that are taking place in both Canada and the United States. Once these examples have been set out I will then introduce the within-site study, *Synonym Art Consultation* and *Wall-to-Wall*, of which will be integrated, and in conversation with, the remaining sections of this paper.

  Still, there were two main questions I found myself asking throughout the process of both thinking about and conducting this research: what is my research story? and what is my relation to research? The point in considering these questions is that it is necessary to consider the

journey of problematizing our experience(s) of being a learner; I am a white, cis-gender male from Winnipeg, Manitoba. As a second generation Canadian, I am implicated in the history of settler colonialism in Canada. Having grown up in a suburban, middle- to upper-class neighbourhood, I was not acutely aware of the important presence of First Nation communities in the Prairies and across Canada. As aforementioned, Winnipeg is the Canadian city with the highest urban Indigenous population. In Winnipeg, Indigenous people (which include First Nation, Métis and Inuit) are subject to disadvantages both in the suburban areas of the city as well as the inner-city. Racial slurs, discriminating judgments, and extreme violence continue to divide the white community of Winnipeg from the urban Indigenous population. However, collaborative processes, according to Todd and Mills (2016), are strengthened by ongoing discourse and attention to the dynamic needs of those involved. This ultimately brings me to the point of self-location in my own research story, which Kovach (2009) explores as the sharing of one's own experiences. By positioning myself in my research in the city of Winnipeg, where I am from, has allowed me to approach this research, the interviews, and the writing in a way that is relational. I was able to work with participants through conversation and storytelling that came from a place of *within*, realizing that if I bring forward my own assumptions that I am coming from a place of working *for* a community (an effort that risks paternalism). Using a relational approach to the research created space to build reciprocity, rapport, and trust between myself as the researcher, and the participant community engaging in the research. Positioning my research as it relates to home is a story that has afforded me the opportunity to build relationships with my fellow community members. As Kovach (2009) notes, story is a means to give voice to the marginalized and assists in creating outcomes from research that are in line with the needs of

community. Furthermore, Martin and Mirraboopa (2001) explain how reflexivity challenges us to claim our shortcomings, misunderstandings, oversights and mistakes, to re-claim our lives and make strong changes to our current realities.

Bringing our lived experience into our research can provide us with transgressive ideas that do not necessarily conform to more traditional structures of dominance. Thus, critical self-reflexivity, active listening, and learning to work *with* community are concepts integral to this research. Active listening, on part of the researcher, is a necessary tool that involves building relationships of mutual respect, reciprocity, trust and relational accountability. Further, the act of active listening allows the listener to place their self and their research into the story that is being shared. No one person can say that they did not hear a story that was being shared. That story, whichever it may be, places value on alternative ways of knowing that are not necessarily attached to western research methodologies. Dialogue and collaboration, therefore, were essential throughout the research process of unpacking the activation of a visual arts identity in Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods. This sort of approach is crucial to our logical and narrative modes of knowing. Our lived experiences and/or what we experience at an inward level, although somewhat anecdotal, should be treated as a living document/textbook. Emphasis on place, as it relates to Self further allows one to create space from with/in. As a planning student whose vested interest regards community/cultural planning efforts, I have learned that it is critical that I work on matters that regard trust so as not to provide misinformation when working with Indigenous, Black, and/or newcomer/immigrant communities. This has led me to consider some other very important questions: what/where is my cultural location?; as a white researcher, how can I work to create spaces that are respectful of cultural difference?; and, how

can I better understand the gift of multiple perspectives? Both Todd and Mills (2016) place emphasis on building stronger relationships through a collaborative process; incorporating reciprocity and accountability into the fabric of my research has created a platform in learning to both unlearn settler scholarship while further understanding complex issues in a thoughtful manner.

1.1 Literature Review: Planning Theory

The areas of cultural and community planning provide tools for urban/city planners to promote cultural diversity and social integration, which enrich the lives of those who are either socially excluded from the urban centre, those who are being displaced from neighbourhoods due to affordability, and those currently living at the margins. These are issues that I have come to notice in the city of Winnipeg's inner-city areas. As such, planning has become a part of my work, and contextually is the base of this research. I believe that promoting cultural diversity through an arts-based approach to community planning and, in the case of this research, examining collaborative community mural-making as a community arts practice can work to enrich the lives of the people and communities that live in Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods.

Art, in this form, can create a sense of pride and belonging when organizational work is being executed in a way that comes from with/in community. According to Frug (1999), "there is little opportunity for individuals to create their own material life, determine their own political future, or form their own ideas from personal experience" (p. 20). Therefore, looking closely at public spaces, while focusing on the vitality of the streets, can allow for the presence of diversity

to exist. When considering culture and diversity in cities, it is necessary to plan for citizen participation; looking at planning processes with a focus on neighbourhoods can seek to build trust among/between diverse group members and, in turn, begin to shape the city for collective engagement. People who have a thorough understanding of what makes a city work should lead a planning process. According to Jacobs (1961), gentrification dislocates the heartbeat of the city, where diversity is left at the margins, rendering the centre culturally unchanged. Jacobs (1961) further describes the movement of the city so eloquently: "the ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations" (p. 50). So, if urban planners begin their process by studying and respecting the city through real life perspectives they can begin to unpack whose values and goals matter when faced with processes like gentrification. Like Jacobs, Bairner (2011) implies that the pioneer of urban walking is a way of understanding the world around us; it is on the city street that we are most likely to come into physical contact with strangers which, in turn, fosters a level of communicative engagement that allows people to better understand the valuable lesson about sharing public space. In the North Point Douglas area of Winnipeg, the focal point of this research, it was found that integrating art spaces into public spaces instigated broader involvement from people living in the neighbourhood; individuals were interacting with one another as the respective spaces were being activated, creating dialogue among/between individuals whether they were artists, residents of the neighbourhood, or a passerby (T. Syrie, personal communication, March 13, 2019). Further, according to Friedmann (1987), there are three key terms that are used to identify a definition of planning: knowledge, action, and the public domain. These terms are all useful for the theory of planning. Examining specific uses of

planning, like contemporary planning practice and modern planning practice, allows space to unpack both *how* and *why* the pragmatic knowledge of experience and human reason, as considered by Friedmann (1987), are imperative in working toward success as a planner. Looking at practices around experiential, intuitive, and local knowledges has provided a particular approach to this research that is necessary when considering the construction of new knowledge that can be expressed in visual and artistic ways. Still, it is important to question, as Wehbi, McCormick, and Angelucci (2016) do so articulately, whose voices are being represented or heard, as issues of positionality, privilege, and oppression determine the authority held by those living at the margins. This is important to consider as I think about mural-making in the North End of Winnipeg.

The main function of planning, as noted by Fainstein (2005), is to create a just city. This opposes the broad assumption that experts should guide good planning. Experts may need to field and map out the processes of planning, however, it is key that planners seek a bottom-up approach, to maintain an inclusionary process that elicit the needs of those that are directly affected by the processes of urban planning. Friedmann (1987) implies that rationality in planning identifies a relation between means and ends, where rationality must be justified in terms that are broader than self-interest. In considering the city of Winnipeg, activating a visual identity with/in inner-city neighbourhoods, while focusing on planning efforts that involve the public, makes it possible to unpack the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest that is often attached to a more corporate planning model. Giving a sense of ownership to community and maintaining accountability as planner paves space to further consider the collective interests whose individual identities are integral to good public planning (Friedmann, 1987).

Collaborative community mural-making is a medium, and catalyst, in which cultural planning efforts are sought as a means to affect community and neighbourhood change through broader forms of representation and dialogue. Mural-making as a community arts practice, therefore, can work within the processes of communicative planning where speaking truth to power, while engaging community, can work to attain a more just outcome (Fainstein, 2005). Using murals in this capacity holds the ability to maintain a level of transparency that serves to visualize ongoing social and cultural issues that are present within the respective neighbourhood where community is engaged. This has the potential to generate certain benefits like social cohesion and inclusion; mural-making is capable of bringing about positive social relationships, creating harmony among/between diverse groups in its ability to incite conversation. Murals can further add to social cohesion with their great potentiality to address social tensions, prompting alternative dialogues through visual learning. The processes of an arts-based approach to community planning prompts visual and cultural ways of knowing which can allow planners to work together *with* diverse community members in building new, and meaningful, ways of understanding how to better serve the public together.

Urban areas manifest uneven power relations where a small percentage of individuals who can afford life in the centre have access to decision-making opportunities while those at the margins are left to compete in order to survive. The Industrial Revolution brought with it the rise of bourgeois culture and, as such, dominant forces created and maintained unequal relations of knowledge and power. This, in turn, affected the ways in which alienated citizens experienced life. Escobar (1992) notes that increased interventions by professionals and democratic society transformed the spatial and social make-up of most North American cities, leading to the

objectification of people and homogenization of city populations. These interventions by

bourgeois members of society are what could be understood as modernist planning's first major

pitfall; the erasure of difference and diversity. Jacobs' (1961) honest account, as an urban theorist

whose perspective on the city came from the vantage point of a pedestrian, provides insight as to

how to promote social and economic vitality; looking at the perspective of everyday life provides

grounds for good city planning and rebuilding. When a planner works to take away culture and

community from those who have meaningfully worked with/in their communities together, they

exercise control, which serves to further displace people from their communities. This often

results in (in)access and isolation through the means of ignoring and suppressing the real order

that is drawn from the need to understand the city (Jacobs, 1961). The problem of modern cities,

therefore, is that no compromises are possible, they become a static grid (Scott, 1998). I am

interested in how compromises are possible and through what means shifts and changes this

static grid. Firstly, thinking of a city as a static grid suggests an authoritative view of space.

Considering a sidewalk view and working with/in community starts to compromise its static

structure. I propose that community actions like mural-making from with/in community makes

compromises possible in that it is no longer about self-interest, rather it is about collaborating

together, which therefore includes citizen participation.

Finally, radical planning, as a planning practice, is a process that places emphasis on

inclusion and participation, wherein the notion of insurgent planning responds to "neoliberal

specifics of dominance through inclusion" (Miraftab, 2009, p. 32). I suggest that community arts

practice is a tool that can be used through cultural planning efforts to generate a level of

insurgent citizenship for building community capacity and autonomy within disenfranchised

communities. "Insurgent citizenship", as coined by Holston (1995, 2008) and adopted into planning theory by Miraftab (2006), places value on local participation in the decision-making process by disrupting and "destabilizing the normalized order of things" (Miraftab, 2009, p. 33). Still, how do we, as planners, address and work to break down the uneven power distribution that is present in urban areas? Planning with people, where collaborative community mural-making is a medium that engenders particular tools of active listening, collaboration, and representation, creates a platform that can work to leverage the voices of those that are continuously disenfranchised from the planning process altogether.

Planning with people, through the arts, considers community and cultural planning practices that respect dialogue, local knowledge, and lived experiences. Therefore, mediation as an approach, according to Roy (2006), and in this case through activating a visual identity in a neighbourhood, can be deployed to think about how planners produce objects through material and discursive practices while further indicating how planners, especially those in the field of community/cultural planning, assert distance and claim moral purpose. Approaching community engagement through a collaborative arts practice can make planners and community members more aware of what participation looks like and how to authentically build community capacity. It is about accountability, really.

1.2 Methodology:
The Use of Mixed Methods and Within-Site Study

For this research, I employed mixed methods, combining site visits, structured interviews, secondary academic research, policy analysis, Indigenous methodologies, and case study research. Mixed methods allowed me to draw upon input from participants, to scope out

dominant themes that surfaced, and to engage in a participatory process that included giving

back to participants, and sharing authorship over the research results.

In order to assess the City of Winnipeg's understandings of community, opportunity, and

creativity, as they relate to quality of life and city building, I examined grey literature including

the City's Official Plan (OP) titled *OurWinnipeg Plan*. I also analyzed the Winnipeg Arts Council

Inc.'s (WAC) *2017-2019 Corporate Plan*, their *Creation, Participation, Inspiration: Framework

for Planning 2018-2022* strategic plan, and their *2017 Annual Report* (as this was the most up-to-

date version available at the time). Among the WAC reports, I honed in on policy that regards a

strategy for a 'percent for art' allocation on capital projects. The City of Winnipeg prides itself as

a sustainable 'City of the Arts' where communities have the capacity to express themselves

(OurWinnipeg, 2011). Understanding how this capacity is built through opportunities to learn,

share, participate in and produce arts and culture (OurWinnipeg, 2011) has led me to investigate

how the case study, *Synonym Art Consultation* and their *Wall-to-Wall Festival*, upholds these

policies within their own mandate while also exceeding a number of their strategies, as put

forward by the City. Focusing on how the City of Winnipeg and WAC's policies and strategies

intersect with *Synonym Art Consultation*'s own mandate helped to define collaboration in the

arts; *Synonym Art Consultation* places particular emphasis on artist mentorship programs, youth

programs and consultation, community engagement, and the importance of team collaboration

when considering space that is collectively defined for/by the artist community, key community

players, and their own organizational efforts during the production of *Wall-to-Wall*. Comparing

and contrasting the City's and WAC's own creative policies with *Synonym Art Consultation*'s

ongoing activated strategies provided a well-rounded analysis to understand the ways in which

City policies around quality of life for urban citizens have been supported in theory but not yet

mandated as a practice for helping the city of Winnipeg grow, as a 'City of the Arts'.

Case study research plays an important role in understanding real-life, contemporary

bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources

of information (Creswell, 2013). Through a single within-site study approach to my research I

was able to achieve an in-depth understanding of specific issues, problems, and/or concerns that

might exist around mural-making as a community arts practice. For this analysis, I collected

many forms of qualitative data, which included interviews, observations, documents, and

audiovisual materials through *Synonym Art Consultation* directly. In observing *Synonym Art*

Consultation and engaging in the processes that allow for the production of their month long,

annual *Wall-to-Wall Mural and Culture Festival* (which herein will be referred to as *Wall-to-*

Wall), I was able to identify themes and issues that are important when considering cultural and

social planning in cities, through the arts. According to Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner in

Flyvbjerg (2006), a case study is considered, as per the *Dictionary of Sociology*, as a method that

"cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the

preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses" (p. 220). However, Flyvbjerg

(2006) contends that context-dependent knowledge and experience, such as the case study

method, are at the very heart of expert activity. In the context of studying collaborative

community mural-making in Winnipeg as a means of informing planning for the arts, it was

necessary to develop a nuanced view of reality that cannot be meaningfully understood in much

theory (Flyvbjerg, 2006) while developing my own skills needed as a researcher, which is

integral to the overall processes of my learning.

Analyzing a specific "within-site" study, which is a term employed to infer a single case being studied (Creswell, 2013), established emerging narratives of creative placemaking as a means for activating visual identity within a neighbourhood. Creative placemaking animates the public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business vitality and public safety, brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire and be inspired (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). However, creative placemaking does not come without its limitations; in its ability to animate, rejuvenate and improve spaces with the means of bringing diverse people together infers a top-down approach. This insinuates that communities are unable to create spaces of their own without external help when, really, communities are their own active agents in creating a sense of 'place'. Engaging in case study research with ten participants who either identified as artists, community players, and the founding members of *Synonym Art Consultation* highlighted creative placemaking as a means to maintain cultural production that serves to connect local businesses, art, and community together in the respective neighbourhoods showcased during *Wall-to-Wall*.

Indigenous methodologies was crucial to informing how I conducted interviews and involved participants throughout the research process. I turned to Kovach's text, *Indigenous Methodologies*, to guide this aspect of my methods, considering reciprocity, active listening, creating respectful spaces and sharing authorship of the results by reporting back to the Indigenous artists. My interviews with Indigenous artists sought to understand their perspectives on how mural-making with designs and visual signifiers create Indigenous presence in their neighbourhoods. According to Kovach (2009), when doing qualitative research, use a non-extractive process, be transparent with participants about the collection of data and provide

opportunity for participants to inform the final output. As such, my research approach was aimed

at honouring the worldview of each participant with the intention of observation; observation

becomes an ethical responsibility to respect the participants while paying attention to the truth

about what place my writing is coming from, to ask better questions, to actively listen, and to be

reciprocal especially when it comes to sharing knowledge. Kovach (2009) asserts that active

listening is part of a method that elevates the research from an extractive exercise to a holistic

endeavour situating research firmly within the nest of relationships. Through listening we are

able to recognize language that points to a person's perspective and worldview, therefore

listening closely is crucial when stories and experiences are being shared. Further, an integral

part to researcher preparation is giving back (Kovach, 2009). This was principal throughout the

process of this research as it considers an Indigenous research perspective that is relational. This

research included giving back in the sense that the results from the research was shared with the

participant community, wherein they had the opportunity to interpret findings through equal

participation and full representation in the research. Due to the time needed to organize all

participants to come together being limited, I was unable to host a community event to share the

research results through a facilitative session. However, upon full transcription of the interviews,

each participant was sent a copy of their respective transcript and I either received consent via e-

mail to go ahead with the writing phase or complete edits on behalf of the participant. I also

gifted a bundle of Manitoba cedar and a goose feather to each participant for their input.

 Integrating story as a methodology, which considers representation and voice, helped to

develop relationships between the participants and myself. Kovach (2009) contends that using

story as a methodology creates outcomes that are in line with the needs of the community,

promoting social cohesion through entertaining and fostering good feeling. I specifically focused my questions on personal narratives of place, happenings, and experiences. Through one-to-one interviews I found that narratives from participants conveyed their neighbourhood experiences in conversation asserting visual representation of their hood with making murals for the *Wall-to-Wall Festival.*

In early January, upon ethics approval, I did a callout for participants through *Synonym Art Consultation*. I was provided with a list of artists and key community players that have been engaged through many facets of *Wall-to-Wall*. I originally reached out to twelve potential participants via e-mail where I explained the purpose of the research, which is centred around my interest to better understand how collaborative community mural-making can work to build community capacity with a focus on the needs and interests of marginalized members of society. I was also transparent around informed consent. Participants were all consenting adults living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. I researched community-based public art in the form of mural painting because it is accessible to the broader public and provides emerging artists opportunity to be seen, heard, and mentored by peers among/within the Winnipeg arts scene.

By early March into April, I arrived in Winnipeg with ten confirmed participants who either identified as visual artists or community players, including the co-founders of *Synonym Art Consultation* and *Wall-to-Wall*. I conducted interviews in spaces that were most accessible to the participants. Participants ranged in age from early to mid-twenties to early forties, and represented diverse backgrounds. With this small sample size, I seek to begin to uncover the ways in which mural-making can be understood as a method that builds upon visual identity through activation, representation, and a resistance to the social stereotypes that are often placed

upon marginal communities residing with/in the urban landscape. Considering there is a gap in the literature around cultural and artistic practices for fostering social cohesion in cities, this research hones in on how cultural and artistic practices, like mural-making, can work within the ongoing process of community capacity building, serving the interests of the community, while further seeking to develop a better understanding of the needs and interests of marginalized members of society.

Focusing on the artists as participants of the mural-making process during *Wall-to-Wall* allowed for me to gain a deeper understanding of how their involvement in the public sphere of arts-making can bring about various levels of participation and interaction with/in the neighbourhoods of which they are painting. As some of the artists involved in the study identified as Indigenous, I was able to explore the different investment that Indigenous artists may have within these spaces. Finally, engaging with key community players allowed me to measure change from with/in community, where the murals are situated.

1.3 The City of Winnipeg:
   ## Planning for Racial Segregation, A Brief History

The city of Winnipeg is a city where diversity has long been celebrated. There are many cultural events that take place throughout the year, exemplifying the city's ability to engage in a multicultural attitude while still exploring the diversity of different races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. However, according to Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008), multiculturalism is an ideal that most Canadians share in varying degrees yet it seeks to both hide and keep hidden the racism that does exist in Canadian society today. This allows people to feel cultured and aware of

racial/ethnic diversities while still sweeping issues of race under the rug. Although diversity is the perceived differences between individuals and multiculturalism a term that is employed to understand how power in society can be unequal due to race, gender, sexual orientation, and privilege, diversity is a term today that is often used similarly to multiculturalism.

Winnipeg is the second largest urban Indigenous population in North America, and is a place that Indigenous peoples have collectively, and strategically, decided to remake in order for their families, communities, and nations to survive and thrive in resistance to colonial occupation (Toews, 2018). The province's license plate bears the tag "Friendly Manitoba", however, Manitoba's capital is deeply divided along racial and ethnic lines, and does not provide equal opportunity for Indigenous people living in Winnipeg. Winnipeg is known for the subhuman treatment of Indigenous people who suffer daily indignities and appalling violence (Macdonald, 2015). Winnipeg's idea of diversity, therefore, does not seem to include Indigenous people, and actually erases them and renders them invisible.

In the context of urban/regional planning, Toews (2018) argues that, in the case of Winnipeg and can be connected quite generally to most urban areas, it is not merely a technical matter of improving places or maximizing profits, it is also a political strategy to preserve domination and subordination, re-entrench inequality, and silence alternative visions. Considering Toews assertions, Winnipeg's urban Indigenous communities have been stereotyped and dismissed as depositories of poverty and pathology, further erasing their presence and rendering them invisible. It is therefore necessary to examine and implement methods that work to approach an equity based model where all urban communities are rendered legitimate communities. I argue that activating a visual identity through mural-making, from with/in

community, is a good starting ground to work on authentic representation while facilitating and

encouraging conversation among/between the broader Winnipeg community. Still, Toews (2018)

notes that "development plans in Winnipeg operate as tools of domination, consolidating the

power of small alliances over an entire region, modifying the character and function of racism,

and thwarting, silencing, and dispossessing the alternative development tradition" (p. 23). This

sort of racist planning perpetuates disconnection and erasure from Indigenous peoples' assertive

right to the city. As Tomiak (2011) contends, the right to self-determination is the "collective

right to be" (p. 9). All people have collective rights yet current planning traditions in the City of

Winnipeg work to undermine Indigenous people's presences and rights to be in cities as people,

communities, and nations.

High unemployment rates and low average earnings of Winnipeg's Indigenous

communities continue to preserve the distinct division between a strong Indigenous presence in

the inner city and the largely non-Indigenous suburban parts. This can be exemplified through

Toews' (2018) perspective:

> Winnipeg's city centre maintains that of a dominant urban redevelopment vision that
> prioritizes luxury condos for the wealthy over the basic human rights of the poor, such as
> those of the homeless to shelter… it is a swift and powerful rejection of both right-wing
> theories of poverty and homelessness in Canada [where access to housing is viewed as an
> outcome of personal rather than social failings] and liberal spins on those theories (p.
> 179).

This is problematic since the core area of the city is highly concentrated in poverty and not

conducive to maintaining a healthy community. Brown, Higgitt, Wingert, Miller, and Morrissette

(2005) define a healthy community as one that is continuously creating and improving the

physical and social environments, and expanding those resources that enable people to mutually

support each other in performing all functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential. Still, without equitable and meaningful provisions for Winnipeg's Indigenous communities to inhabit the urban landscape through adequate housing, for example, harbours an attitude of racial superiority. Toews (2018) expresses that the history of settler-colonial dispossession has worked to inform redevelopment decisions currently made in the present. Such decisions allow competition for housing in a tight housing marking easier to engage in discriminatory practices. According to Carter (2010), landlords have greater flexibility to discriminate based on a range of characteristics: race, ethnicity and colour, lack of references from previous landlord and a perception of so-called problem tenants. Such discrimination against Indigenous peoples limits their success in attaining affordable and adequate housing (Walker, 2003). This deepens their level of social marginalization and further disengages them from mainstream programming.

Working to solve problems that are individually identified involves people taking democratic control by participating in planning, bottom-up decision-making, and community action (Silver, Hay, & Gorzen, 2004). Tomiak (2011) concludes that Indigenous people in the city of Winnipeg represent a vibrant, growing community with much to offer and therefore deserve the same recognition, respect, trust and understanding as the non-Indigenous cultural groups in the city. Yet, community organizing efforts can often manifest as paternalistic development agendas imposed upon communities from the outside. Approaching change through cultural arts practices that come from with/in community, can eradicate feelings of exclusion while simultaneously generating a broader social dialogue to educate the broader public.

Throughout the analysis of this research I will make an effort to express the ways in which community engagement and community/cultural arts practices can make it possible to confront the uneven power dynamics in urban spaces. Exploring how community and cultural arts practices, like collaborative community mural-making, can begin to pave a positive path toward social cohesion and inclusion in its ability to highlight the importance of engaging in a bottom-up approach to community organizing efforts. Artful and alternative ways of knowing can be used as an intentional mechanism for building reciprocity, relational accountability, and a visual identity in inner-city neighbourhoods.

1.4 On Collaborative Community Mural-Making

My aim with this paper is to investigate collaborative community mural-making as a way of meaningfully inciting broader forms of dialogue that can therefore serve as a mechanism for social cohesion among/between diverse communities. Approaching community interests and needs through this particular medium allows space to build individual and collective autonomy, where artful and alternative ways of knowing works to bridge a gap where inter- and intra-community differences exist. Fleming (2007) asserts that the mural-making process is a collaborative one, which can create interest in place and a sense of pride by turning the actual walls of the community into valued works of art. Planning with people through the arts, therefore, is a vital tool for any agency aiming to make best use of its resources and to co-ordinate effectively with its community (Fleming, 2007). Learning to trust in collaborative, imaginative, and intuitive processes allows individuals to enter into spaces of multiple unknowns (Conrad & Sinner, 2015). Conrad and Sinner (2015) further contend that it is through

collaboration that we can invent a different social imagery and transform our way of knowing. Exploring arts-making, as it intersects with city-building, provides a platform where new knowledge is constructed and therefore expressed in visual and artistic ways.

Mural-making is a form of public art that imprints image into public space, acting as a catalyst for political imagination and a recreation against the commoditization of art by its markets and institutions (Lindner & Meissner, 2015). Community-based public art, is not inside a gallery or museum and is therefore more accessible to everyone. It exists in a space where the people it affects, and those it reaches beyond the boundaries of its execution, are able to engage in social issues through broader forms of participation and collaboration. Consumption-based art, on the other hand, engages in the idea of ownership, which therein becomes a reflection of status and self-identity, and is usually only visited in institutional/inaccessible spaces, like a museum and/or art gallery. These sites of consumption render art as something to be acquired, falling within a category of who is/isn't able to enter into these spaces. Thus, it is important to consider three fundamental questions regarding the enjoyment of art in the public sphere: how do murals improve and recuperate public space?; does the imagery of a mural signal and affirm certain people?; and, how do murals re-create urban space? Still, it is necessary to note that collaborative community mural-making is a process by which both art and culture are incorporated as a strategy of giving memory a stake in the present which, according to Fleming (2007), is what placemaking is all about.

To better understand the historical art context of mural-making, I extract examples from Latin America, where mural-making came from political movements. During the post-Revolutionary period in Mexico, 1920-40, there was a shift in social dynamics that resulted in a

search for national "Self", one that could be expressed in visual form (Folgarait, 1998). At this

time, Latin America was a territory marked by the abuse of power where people were living in

the midst of violence, corruption and impunity day in and day out (Ledezma Campos, 2018).

This abuse of power is not too different from how Canada's Indigenous people are treated within

urban centres. Where racial capitalism, as engendered in Winnipeg's current development and

planning trends, draws a parallel, as revealed by Toews (2018):

> The concept of racial capitalism conveys the fact that capitalism, rather than homogenizing, rationalizing, and demystifying social relations, has continuously tended, as political scientist Cedric J. Robinson wrote, "to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones"… racism [therefore] naturalized the socially manufactured attacks and inequalities that capitalism requires, making them seem proper, inevitable, and just (p. 18).

Much like planning in Winnipeg, the historical art context of mural-making in Latin America

points to an ideological apparatus where, according to Althusser in Ledezma Campos (2018), the

state spreads an ideology that convinces the masses that while the quality of life that they have

may not be the best, it is acceptable. Thus, the mural artist is seen as the skilled maker of images,

the specialist contracted to find some visual form of the needs of many parties, and as an

individual, a special, condensed form of social processes (Folgarait, 1998), it holds the potential

as a collaborative practice to create conditions in which culture and art are not separated in

present times (Fleming, 2007). As Bain (2013) states:

> Let us think about margins as much as centres, of work as much as play, of ways of being in the city that do not correspond to bourgeois forms of entertainment… and let us find ways of imaging the city in these terms as well (p. 3).

Imaging the city in the way Bains describes, mural-making, in its varied approaches from past to present, from Latin America to Canada, opens up creative spaces that explore issues of place, community, and belonging. Giving voice and space to be heard, through community arts-making, can work to transform the social conflicts and miseries that are experienced in the city. This sort of transformation fosters a sense of urban excitement and wonder among urban dwellers and can ultimately achieve the creation of vibrant communities, incorporate a participatory culture, and maintain open access (Fishman, 1982). Throughout the remaining sections of this paper, I aim to examine how collaborative community mural-making can act as a medium to cross social divides, as a form of intervention in public space. Strategically, artists can use designs that reflect their own disenfranchised communities thereby redefining the urban spaces that refuse them, this is how mural-making intervenes and is therefore an intervention. The work of collaborative community mural-making can serve as a means of bringing visibility and attention to underserved communities by local communities creating murals on their own terms (Wehbi, McCormick, & Angelucci, 2016).

1.5 Examples of Mural Festivals:
Context and Analysis

In this section I consider different festivals and programs that reconstitute urban citizenship in public spaces through community-based art. This section serves as a literature review of festivals to provide further context and a deeper analysis of the within-site case, and my research.

Stencibility, a street art festival in Tartu, Estonia, believes in free independent street art. Their manifesto holds five guiding principles: public space belongs to everyone who uses it; it is

everyone's duty to take care of it like you would in your own home; the purpose of street art is to enrich, not ruin, public space; all additions are welcome — if you don't like it, improve it and, to guarantee ultimate creative freedom, actions can be guided by common sense and not by law (Stencibility, 2019). Although I have not been to visit the Festival myself, it is clear that the focus of Stencibility is to support the active scene of street artists and to claim a right to public space. The guiding principles stated above point to collective and individual autonomy over the arts-making process, as it exists in public space. This sort of autonomy in the arts can offer vehicles for gaining insight into social issues while taking action through partnership with people who experience first-hand the causes and consequences of social issues, provided it is coming from the local context (Wehbi, McCormick, & Angelucci, 2016).

In Fanzara, Spain, is the "Museo Inacabado de Arte Urbano" (MIAU), translated in English as the "Unfinished Museum of Urban Art", where individuals are free to collectively co-create. In this peaceful and quiet mountainside town, MIAU was born with the aim of being a social movement that fostered coexistence among the residents of the small town (Atlas Obscura, 2019). This constantly changing town is a great example of what curating community looks like; the MIAU project became a collective experience of coexistence, collaboration and reciprocal exchange of learning between artists, neighbours, volunteers and organizers, all through urban art, where the residents take part in creating and maintaining the art (Atlas Obscura, 2019). Artists don't create communities, rather they work with them, according to their collectively identified desires and needs (Rooke, 2013), therefore encompassing an alternative way of creating community and recovering the local memory and pride. This is a powerful cultural

planning tool that can be used to transmit value in the arts aimed at achieving community and

social cohesion.

In the United States, there exists the world's largest outdoor art gallery known as Mural

Mile in Philadelphia. Walking through Mural Mile (via Google Maps) there is noticeable effort

of a visual identity being built, exemplifying arts capacity to provoke change or, at the very least,

making it possible to witness how murals in public space can make visible a co-existence of

difference (Sandercock, 2000). The City's Mural Arts Program, created in the 1980s in response

to the city's graffiti problem, has helped put over 3,600 designs across the city (My Traveling

Joys, 2016). However, it is necessary to note that the idea of graffiti being a "problem" comes

from its association with gang activity, wherein this sort of understanding of graffiti renders

invisible an art form engendered in expression, politics, and culture. Although Google Maps does

not provide the perfect platform for viewing, I am able to notice a co-existence of difference as

social imagery presents itself around themes of homelessness (where, apparently, the mural

'Finding Home' was made with the help of a number of Philadelphia's homeless community

members), a history of steelmaking, a change in work and gender role of women, and the

depiction of a gay Pride festival.

Further south, in Miami, Florida, is Wynwood Walls. This particular area of Miami has

brought the world's greatest artists working in the graffiti and mural-making scene. The late

Tony Goldman, who had conceived the vision for Wynwood Walls, noticed the large stock of

warehouse buildings in the warehouse district of Wynwood and was inspired to create a centre

where people could gravitate to, explore, and to develop the area's pedestrian potential

(Wynwood Walls, 2019). Focusing mural and graffiti art somewhere more central, as has been

done in the district of Wynwood, highlights public space as a shared space; pushing the broader public and/or audience to find alternative ways of co-existing with/in these spaces.

In Canada, there are three main festivals/programs that stood out during my research: the Die Active program as part of the Definitely Superior Art Gallery in Thunder Bay, Ontario; the Vancouver Mural Festival held during the second week of August, annually, in Vancouver, British Columbia; and, the MURAL Festival of Montréal, Québec.

Die Active is a program in its tenth consecutive year of providing in-depth arts educated programming at Definitely Superior Art Gallery. What is unique about this program is its continued vision is directed at mentoring and supporting future young artists (ranging from the ages of 14-30) while creating unique and contemporary graffiti murals, publications, performances and public art (Definitely Superior, 2019). The focus is to increase the visibility of the 780 plus emerging local artists of Thunder Bay and, on the one hand, to foster creativity and collaboration while, on the other hand, working to strengthen community through the encouragement of sustainable practices in alternative modes of working (Definitely Superior, 2019). Programs that exist like this hold the potential, at both a regional and national scale, to impact the public through creative imaging while innovating a diverse social meaning of place.

Vancouver Mural Festival (VMF), organized by Create Vancouver Society, a Registered Non-Profit dedicated to artistic and cultural development in the Lower Mainland (Vancouver Mural Festival, 2017) exists as a platform for Vancouver's diverse art scene, with a mission to contribute to the city's cultural legacy. With a focus on highlighting local culture, this mural festival exemplifies how murals, as a public art form, can act as a catalyst directing the public toward deeper, more meaningful conversations about socio-cultural faced by the city and artist

communities. The main goal of the murals curated and executed during VMF is to create a visual identity not only aimed at celebrating the city's diverse local cultures but to also emphasize the histories of surrounding First Nations (Vancouver Mural Festival, 2017). The activation of a visual and cultural identity through mural-making serves to honour and elicit voice in open and accessible public spaces. Harvey (1992), in speaking of open and accessible public space, asserts that one should expect to encounter and hear from different social perspectives, experience and affiliations.

Lastly, Montréal's MURAL Festival celebrates the international urban art movement over the course of eleven days in June; the Festival was established in 2013 with the primary goal of being an important gathering place for the celebration of the global artistic community (MURAL, 2019). Born out of a free-culture movement, which is understood as a social movement that promotes the freedom to distribute creative works in the form of open content, artists from around the world are invited to participate every year with their own personal perspectives of the art being accounted for. However, it is difficult to conclude MURAL as a Festival that is working to approach community engagement from a place of with/in as it comes across as one where the primary focus is to promote tourism to the city of Montréal in the form of one big urban party. Considering the high profile institutional funding of this Festival by the likes of Fido, Hennessy and Red Bull it seems as though it is a commercial venture with an ultimate goal of making a name in the arts globally.

The purpose of highlighting these examples of different mural and culture festivals, and programs, that exist both globally and nationally is to provide a deeper analysis and context for the within-site study that is the main focus of this research. The arts provide a landscape of

collaboration and participation that engender, at times, visibility among diverse cultures and communities; by providing these examples I seek to impart a surface understanding of how art can be used as a mechanism to empower diverse cultures and talents to collide in ways that build alternative ways of seeing and living together. Collaboration, in this sense, can be understood as the sharing of responsibilities between parties in the creation of something new, fostering a deepening of the modes of communication, where recognizing the limitations and the potentials of a collective relationship are integral through the arts-making process (Helguera, 2011). Further, proponents for advocacy planning suggest that an appropriate response to inner-city conditions is for planners to stop trying to represent the public interest and work with/in disenfranchised groups to generate actionable goals/outcomes (Thomas, 1994), allowing space for reflection and/or critical exchange (Helguera, 2011). Community organizing and engagement frameworks draw a parallel to the theory of advocacy planning in which the objective is to cultivate community capacity through a bottom-up, grassroots approach. As I consider the dialogue of the within-site study throughout the next section, and the remainder of this paper, I will explore what it means to create space through mural-making to work with/in diverse inner-city communities. I will also investigate further how art as an intervention in public space can work to increase the city of Winnipeg's vitality while creating opportunity for citizen participation. The goal is to use this research to advocate public awareness for the value of mural-making as visual identity in cities.

1.6 Within-Site Study:
Synonym Art Consultation and Wall-to-Wall Mural and Culture Festival

My research inquires into the artist community's and key community players' roles as they relate to the practice of collaborative community mural-making in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. I have examined the work of *Synonym Art Consultation* and their month-long *Wall-to-Wall* Festival, hosted annually during the month of September. Although the research was conducted throughout the time of March and April, 2019, outside the Festival timeframe, I have acquired detailed stories around the processes and experiences leading up to, during, and after the organized dates of the Festival.

Synonym Art Consultation describe themselves as a curatorial collective committed to providing meaningful employment and mentorship opportunities to artists and to facilitate the celebration of art and culture with unique, inclusive, community-minded events that serve as safe(r) spaces for diverse populations (Synonym Art Consultation, 2018). *Wall-to-Wall* is a mural and culture Festival, hosted and curated by *Synonym Art Consultation* that takes place through the month of September across the city of Winnipeg.

The Festival hosts the creation of multiple indoor and outdoor murals across the city and celebrates each new work of art with unique events that aim to bring together diverse communities around art, music, dance, and more (Wall-to-Wall, 2018). The Team at *Synonym Art Consultation* strive to cultivate a grassroots contemporary street art movement in Winnipeg while participating in hyperlocal and international dialogues around important issues such as Indigenous rights, social responsibility, and innovative economic development, all of which are rooted in the arts (Wall-to-Wall, 2018).

Co-founders of *Synonym Art Consultation* and *Wall-to-Wall*, Chloe Chafe and Andrew Eastman, were interested in the challenge of combining grassroots art and education with a contemporary edge, in a city where the mural history is already quite rich. Both were previously involved in Winnipeg's art and restaurant industries, so they started with the idea of dropping the division that often exists between art, the hospitality industry and the general public. This is critical as their entrepreneurial approach maintains a level of integrity that is geared toward bridging connections between diverse industries and people. For example, where Art City, a not-for-profit community art studio dedicated to providing free art programming in Winnipeg's West Broadway neighbourhood, that celebrates the youth as their greatest resource (Art City, 2019), *Synonym Art Consultation* (having also partnered with Art City in the past) approaches their work through multiple angles. Their entrepreneurial skills have made them an organizational leader in the city of Winnipeg through their multiple partnerships and programs that include the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), Art City, Graffiti Art Programming Inc., Business Improvement Zones (BIZ) across the city, neighbourhood renewal corporations, urban planning and design firms, restaurants, inner-city youth programming, artist mentorships, and their broad community engagement initiatives, to name a few examples. Approaching the arts through the creation of a more accessible arts community is a necessary step toward generating awareness and showing humanity in often forgotten, segregated neighbourhoods. Activating a neighbourhood through visual identity becomes a broader agenda for change, growth and transformation in a way that builds character and quality of place (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010), which can be leveraged to serve a community's interest and build on educating the broader public around social issues such as racism against Indigenous people and violence against women. Relying on their long-standing

relationship with media outlets to help tell the stories of the murals produced through *Wall-to-Wall* assists in expanding the reach of the broader social conditions that exist in the neighbourhoods that they are working with/in. As community leaders they hold various training for community which includes safe(r) spaces training (of which Uzoma Asagwara, the founder of Queer People of Colour - Winnipeg, was consulted through a lengthy process of collaborating on a safe(r) spaces policy and strategy), lift training, and training in the use of and administering of Naloxone (a medication used to block the effect of opioids in the case of an overdose) in order to the support the ongoing Methamphetamine and opioid crisis in the city.

Six years ago, when *Synonym Art Consultation* came out of the woodwork, there was a huge influx in Winnipeg of new restaurants and coffee shops opening. Eastman remembers it being a total new wave that Winnipeg had never really seen before (personal communication, March 20, 2019). Inevitably, this sort of influx is also a wave of gentrification where value in land rises and therefore serves as a vehicle that pushes individuals out who can no longer afford the cost of living that comes with the increase of land use value. Still, Winnipeg, although on the cutting edge of a lot of things, is generally known to be behind in particular trends, especially when it comes to restaurants, art and coffee; now it is a city that is pushing the envelope a lot more (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019). Although *Synonym Art Consultation* is undeniably within the process of gentrification, as beautification is part of this wave, they are conscious that they cannot stop development from happening. Their efforts, however, seek to engage community responsibly in their grassroots approach to consultation with youth, elders, guest curators, and community centres, which can maybe soften the blow.

Chafe and Eastman both recall feeling a creative spark, collaboratively, and felt that together they could work toward something to create a difference. Deciding on *Synonym*, being two completely disparate words that share meaning, came from seeing a bridge in between so many things like hospitality, art, the public, different collaborators, and themselves, that, like the word itself, came to share meaning between/among the diverse communities that they were, and still are, setting out to work with (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019). For Winnipegger's, myself included, it is easy to dream about moving to a bigger, better city but the duo noticed the social and urban crises that affect the overall vitality of the city of Winnipeg and saw potential in staying to work with/in community, particularly in predominantly marginal and lower-income neighbourhoods, to generate a more positive and integrated urban network. Recognizing that everyone, whether it be the hospitality world, art world, or general public, were segregating themselves into their own respective communities, branding a curatorial collective that is accessible to the public was an important and necessary starting point (C. Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Two years into *Synonym Art Consultation*, Chafe had started working at Studio 393 with inner-city youth, through Graffiti Art Programming Inc. (Graffiti Gallery), doing art programming; Studio 393 is a free youth-led arts studio, an initiative of Winnipeg's Graffiti Gallery, and is dedicated to connecting emerging artists to each other and to community organizations that will help them grow as individuals and artists (Graffiti Gallery, 2019). Graffiti Gallery, an organization that has been present in Winnipeg over the past twenty-one years, has maintained its space as an art gallery since January 1999 and has continued to offer emerging young artists an opportunity to show their work (Graffiti Gallery, 2019). With *Synonym Art*

Consultation being closely connected to Graffiti Gallery, through Chafe's work with Studio 393, both Chafe and Eastman found themselves diving into the community arts world in a really big way:

> We saw the value of incorporating youth and mentorship, and partnering with some of these organizations that had been, like they were the ones that started all of the murals and a lot of that community engagement, they did those first levels of work [premiering the first ever graffiti style art exhibit, for example]. But then after, you know, an organization working twenty years, we were kind of able to come in and help them to take their practice to the next level and really work as such a Team and create platforms for the youth that were working throughout the year. So, really in those formative years starting to work with Graffiti Gallery and Studio 393 was a huge shift for us (C. Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Shifting their platform to be more centred in the community arts world, through their partnership with Graffiti Gallery and Studio 393, Chafe and Eastman recognized an opportunity to collaborate in a way that seemed to benefit an already longstanding community arts organization by elevating arts and culture in the city of Winnipeg, while honouring Graffiti Gallery as pioneers of the work and, in turn, creating a more accessible arts community. That does not go without noticing their humility in the learning process of this partnership; the generation before them were open to helping them so that they, in turn, could help others. Approaching accessibility that sees the value of incorporating youth and mentorship, Chafe and Eastman were then able to use *Synonym Art Consultation* as a platform to transfer skills that focus on maintaining diversity while leveraging opportunity to/for local artists:

We were kind of noticing that some of the mural artists were, there wasn't a huge diverse population that had those mural skills. It's a pretty specific skill. So rather than just being like, well, too bad, there's not enough mural artists, so we're just going to choose, you know, these cis white men, that are very skilled and amazing, but to be truly representing communities visually that are of such different diverse platforms, that it was important for us to then transfer those skills on to the next generation of artists (C. Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Chafe and Eastman, both having traveled globally, noticed thriving public art and engagement scenes, which Winnipeg seemed to have but not to the sort of community level with really high impact, contemporary art in the streets that they were witnessing abroad. Eastman notes that, alternatively, they could have brought in artists from around the world, which lots of mural festivals do (as exemplified in the previous section) where they just fly in big celebrity artists who create these incredible works of art that become iconic for neighbourhoods, however, they wanted to try and foster a grassroots street art movement in the city (personal communication, March 20, 2019). Wanting to bring a more contemporary edge to Winnipeg's existing mural scene the duo of *Synonym Art Consultation* began emphasizing education as a dominating factor and focused their attention on building specific skillsets for the artists:

We started training up, not only the youth from Studio 393, but also like our peers and all of our friends that were in these art shows in warehouses with us… training them up to have the skills to translate their art practice onto a huge wall in the community, which is a really specific skill that involves site management, training on how to use a lift and painting on scale, projecting the image and lots of different technical skills that they just didn't have (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

With the sixth edition of *Wall-to-Wall* coming up this September, 2019, their first edition started in 2014 in the West Broadway neighbourhood which is originally one of Winnipeg's oldest

neighbourhoods. According to Tourism Winnipeg (2019), West Broadway maintains an urban

vibe due to more diverse, ethnic and new-immigrant populations. The first edition, that started as

a three day Festival, simultaneously coinciding with West Broadway's biggest community event,

the Sherbrook Street Festival that happens the Saturday after Labour Day every September, was

a pretty small scale first event where *Wall-to-Wall* saw through three interior murals and one

exterior mural. They originally pitched the idea of the Festival to the West Broadway BIZ,

which, as I will explore further in this paper, was an intentional starting point for *Synonym Art*

Consultation to begin taking the time to connect with various community organizations rather

than them just coming in and exploding art everywhere (C. Chafe, personal communication,

March 20, 2019). Accessibility being the key ingredient to *Synonym Art Consultation*'s approach

to *Wall-to-Wall*, it became really important to tell the stories of the murals, the artists, and what

the images actually represent, which is essentially why the duo turned it into a month long

Festival:

> To talk more about the Festival as it grew, every year has kind of had its own little new
> addition. I think in the last couple of years, it's always been about collaboration, but
> we're sometimes just reminded that, even just talking about this and being like, 'yeah, the
> first spark was collaboration' and it just always comes back to that. And so now we're
> collaborating with huge organizations, not only Graffiti Gallery, who we've collaborated
> with right from the beginning, but also the Winnipeg Art Gallery now and the University
> of Winnipeg, and Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre [a strength and value-based family
> resource centre delivering community-based programs and services within the philosophy
> embodied in their name; Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata translates from Ojibway into the phrase,
> "we all work together to help one another" (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc., 2019)],
> and these huge pillars… it's not just us scheming up these projects all the time, although
> that is a lot of what we do. But it's also giving space to other people to use this
> platform… bringing in these other voices (A. Eastman, personal communication, March
> 20, 2019).

Diversity is an important defining characteristic of the cities that people inhabit; in most large metropolises it can be understood that a rich cultural mix exists where streets become characterized by diversity in ethnicities, languages, religions, foods, and customs, creating more complex and fluid identities (Harding et. al., 2018). However, when neighbourhoods in a city go through processes of gentrification, many low-income and racialized communities face the problem of being displaced, dislocated, and alienated from the spaces that they call home. City building in any urban area is inevitable because there are always, constantly competing forces to maintain domination in the centre. As such, the processes of gentrification often maintain a level of exclusion, which, as a result, pushes marginalized communities out of the urban realm. The displacement and rejection faced by marginalized people informs my research direction. I seek to understand urban planning strategies that include arts as a tool for social cohesion and inclusion. Inclusion in this case means having access to the benefits of the city. Considering the relentlessness of gentrification, there are neighbourhoods that are dilapidated and in need of some serious investment to maintain the integrity of the small businesses and local communities that exist with/in those areas. So, revitalization efforts that specialize in activating a visual identity and elicit diverse community voices can change the dynamics in which gentrification is perceived; moving from an egregious city building agenda, as is currently the case in Toronto, to one where people start noticing, interacting on the streets of, and spending time (and money) in the respective neighbourhood's they are visiting. Realizing that any effort to beautify and/or revitalize a neighbourhood is considered to be part of the gentrification process, approaching it from with/in community prioritizes the needs of those it affects the most. In order to proceed

toward more ethical consultation practices, *Synonym Art Consultation* is working with other parts of Canada, specifically western Canada (with cities like Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver) to maintain dialogue to strategize a broader educational component that fights gentrification, starting with fighting very cis white line-ups of artists employed in the mural-making process. Focusing on arts-based approaches to better understand, construct and communicate new knowledge gives meaning to the ways in which humans interact with their social and built environments. If community knowledge and values are marginalized due to city building efforts, there is a need to make them more visible through an arts-based approach to planning.

2. Gentrification and the Arts

This section will briefly set out across the spheres of gentrification studies. I will explore city building efforts that have historically, and currently, served as a catalyst for the displacement of marginal groups living in inner-city neighbourhoods while predominantly focusing on art as a tool for planning initiatives that involve organizational efforts to work with/in community. The stories in this section, and the subsequent sections thereafter, will come from *Synonym Art Consultation*, as well as a select number of artists and key community players who have been involved in *Wall-to-Wall*. My intention is not to be conclusive, as the value of the arts cannot be fully quantified and a degree of uncertainty regarding their role in a city's overall success must be accepted (Azmier, 2002), but to make a strong case, by using the within-site analysis, for recognizing how collaborative community mural-making can enhance a city's vitality; activating public space through visual identity can work to bridge the gap that exists between/among

diverse communities, where city building initiatives often serve as a mechanism for social division.

Gentrification presents a paradox; "as residents with high levels of disposable income move within ready access to cultural experiences… reduces the space available for diverse arts and cultural activities, and makes the cost of accommodation for artists and other cultural producers prohibitive" (Glow, Johanson, & Kershaw, 2014, p. 495). To make clear, I have not sought to speak to gentrification as it relates to housing initiatives and the ever growing suburbs, as that would be another paper. I explore (in part) the historical processes of gentrification while honing in on the role of art and community initiatives in public space. To understand what collaborative community mural-making can achieve as a tool to work with/in predominantly lower-income, stigmatized neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood change is explained primarily in terms of who moves in and who moves out (Smith, 1996), however, as local governments seek new development opportunities, the attributes of place are crucial to the success of their strategies, and this means that the role of the arts and cultural policies is highlighted because arts and culture help to define the distinctive character, image, authenticity and advantages of a location (Glow, Johanson, & Kershaw, 2014). Still, art, when linked to gentrification, can be problematic when it takes the form of the art elites, which is essential to buying culture straight off the rack of the world market; it becomes consumer-based art that capitalizes on the 'sweat equity' of community-based artists (Davis, 1990); 'sweat equity' being their own labour in the work of renovation — to the renewal of the neighbourhood (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005). Further, Davis (1990) outlines the importance of committing to a city's own community artists, organizations and diverse street cultures that exist

because if we are not paying attention at a hyperlocal level there runs the risk of uprooting neighbourhoods and privatizing public space.

Creating communities of opportunity, which Rose (2016) defines as the gift of being together, involves compassion, which can serve as a medium that enhances a city's common sense of purpose, giving rise to an integrated view of wholeness that generates resilience, healing and the deepest well-being. In considering that it is uneven power relations, which undermine the social fabric that keeps communities together, it is necessary to note that particular neighbourhoods where the murals have been, and will continue to be executed might have previously experienced disinvestment and a middle-class exodus due to the processes of gentrification. Smith (1996) claims that the language of revitalization suggests that affected neighbourhoods were somehow devitalized or culturally stagnated prior to gentrification. So, then, does the process of art in public spaces affect urban residents without regard to their knowledge, opinions, and interests? Fainstein (2010) implies that equity outcomes of citizen deliberations, through neighbourhood revitalization programs, are unpredictable and are likely to vary according to particular values of active participants. However, it is the role of the planner that can affect the character of deliberation and move participants toward a greater commitment to just outcomes. Recognition, therefore, is imperative for planning as it requires special attention to the creation and governance of public space (Fainstein, 2010), yet it also allows for creative communities to bring learning and action together, which, according to Marino (1997), is essential to mural-making. Further speaking on murals, Marino (1997) believes that collective processes of production are understood to be a significant part of constructing alternative and organizing action. Focusing attention on the city of Winnipeg, where gentrification is slow,

where murals are emerging out of a need to activate space through the creation of a visual identity, and sees through a collective process of community mural-making in the public sphere, makes it possible to witness the ability of community-based art to transmit information while influencing those who receive it. Habermas (2012) asserts that the public sphere is a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed and comes into being in every conversation. As such, the public sphere can push citizens to their greatest potential, if they are able to confer in an unrestricted fashion, with the freedom to express their opinions.

In the West Broadway neighbourhood, the home of *Wall-to-Wall*'s first edition of the Festival, there is a change that has been happening over the past several years; homes are becoming more expensive to own, rent prices have increased, and several new businesses have relocated in order to make West Broadway their new home. Talia Syrie, the owner of *The Tallest Poppy*, which is a restaurant in the heart of the West Broadway neighbourhood, describes the changes she has seen since opening the space in 2014:

> I think we are part of a change that's happening in that neighbourhood [speaking to community focused events/initiatives regularly hosted in her restaurant that have, in part, been executed by *Synonym Art Consultation* and activated during *Wall-to-Wall*]… but also, I think there are certain things that are happening in that neighbourhood that aren't that great that we're probably a part of too, you know?… when I was kind of that age that I wanted to live in the West Broadway neighbourhood or Wolseley, it was a pretty punk rock neighbourhood… there was some danger there… Langside [a street located in West Broadway] was called "gang-side". Mostly it's expensive now. And it's for people who are affluent compared to the way it used to be (personal communication, March 13, 2019).

Although Syrie has never really been a resident of the West Broadway neighbourhood, she still

notes the changes happening there as moving away from the tendency to be accessible. Still, as a

business owner in the neighbourhood she is optimistic, and hopeful, that the events hosted in her

restaurant, partnered with *Synonym Art Consultation*, like an artist residency program, First

Friday (city-wide public events that include art gallery openings, and social and political

networking) and, newly, Drag Brunch have served as initiatives that enhance the vitality and

excitement of the neighbourhood. Further describing the states of change in West Broadway,

Syrie notes:

> There's all this money coming in and then there's RAY [Resource Assistance for Youth].
> There's just like a bunch of kids who are not about it, you know? They're not having it.
> They [RAY] do a lot of work with street kids and kids who are having a time, you know,
> young people, troubled, troubled, troubled young people. But it's like they're there on the
> street and like Stella's [a local cafe and bakery that has multiplied across the city over the
> past decade, of which one location sits directly across from The Tallest Poppy] can
> "Stella-fy" the street as much as they want but like, yeah, there's still those kids and
> they're there (personal communication, March 13, 2019).

Syrie is not implying that this is a form of resistance to gentrification, rather, it's just a central,

inner-city neighbourhood that sees the processes of gentrification very slowly. The changes in the

West Broadway neighbourhood are not pushing the youth she speaks of out, they just have

nowhere to live, they are homeless. Thus, youth and mentorship programs like Graffiti Gallery's

Studio 393 and the youth consultation processes that are activated during *Wall-to-Wall* engage in

an arts-informed approach that seeks to mobilize inner-city youth though a collaborative process

(like mural-making) that serves to generate empowerment, camaraderie, and expression.

The West Broadway neighbourhood has a very high number of young people living there between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, staggeringly higher than the overall city of Winnipeg. Leah McCormick, the executive director of the West Broadway BIZ (who has recently stepped down from her role since this research was undertaken) explains that with a high number of young people living in the neighbourhood that the demographic points to a lot of artists as well as a lot of people living below the poverty line (personal communication, March 7, 2019). The West Broadway BIZ borders the West End BIZ, Downtown BIZ, and Wolseley, which is not a BIZ zone. However, as the years have gone by there has been less and less of a distinction between West Broadway and Wolseley (L. McCormick, personal communication, March 7, 2019). Describing these two neighbourhoods as interchangeable these days is common:

> At one time West Broadway was more known as a less safe neighbourhood, a more affordable neighbourhood, and more inner-city, and all the challenges and fun things that go with it. Whereas Wolseley was a bit more sort of like hippies, or yuppies, depending on which decade we're talking about. But that sort of line has really blurred over the years (L. McCormick, personal communication, March 7, 2019).

With the demographic of the two neighbourhoods housing young people, including artists and those of low-socioeconomic status, during a time of change that both McCormick and Syrie speak to, highlights the slow form of gentrification taking place.

Describing West Broadway as an example of a neighbourhood where some of the murals aren't loved by all, considering their historical context, McCormick explains that prior to partnering with *Synonym Art Consultation*, and ultimately giving the go-ahead for the first edition of *Wall-to-Wall* in West Broadway, that the West Broadway BIZ had a really

unconventional and unorganized way of allowing murals to go up. According to McCormick, there was a need to engage in a grassroots approach to community-based art that focuses on a younger, newer generation of artists to bring forward necessary dialogue and, in turn, help to guide the vision for the neighbourhood (personal communication, March 7, 2019).

Although West Broadway is where *Wall-to-Wall* began, the remainder of this section, and paper, will also consider Winnipeg's West End and North Point Douglas neighbourhoods, where the Festival has arrived during its most recent editions (since this research it has also expanded to both Brandon and Boissevain, Manitoba). The West End is a multicultural area known for colourful street art and Vietnamese, Filipino, and Indian cuisine. The West End Cultural Centre (WECC) is also located in the heart of the neighbourhood and stages multiple events throughout the year that include concerts, readings, and community festivals. North Point Douglas, which is the neighbourhood that is at the heart of the research findings, where exists the Main Street strip which Toews (2018) contends as an important site of encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; the large Indigenous presence on Main Street "leads to the only interaction many non-Native Winnipeg citizens have with Native peoples" (Toews, 2018, p. 212). The eastern point of the neighbourhood was a traditional gathering place for Indigenous tribes for ceremonial rites, having occurred prior to European contact, and continued until urbanization in the 1870s. Post World War II, North Point Douglas became the settling ground for many European immigrants, predominantly Jewish and Ukrainian. Having grown up in the suburbs of Winnipeg, I had come to understand this particular neighbourhood parallel to what Goldberg (1993) describes as the generated pathologies of Indigenous peoples in the urban setting; criminality, poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, disease, and insanity. As a neighbourhood that has

not seen much development in the past decades and has been egregiously labeled through a history of stigmatization and discrimination, it is crucial that approaches to revitalization incorporate building an Indigenous presence. As I continue through the within-site analysis, it is my aim to present how *Synonym Art Consultation*, through *Wall-to-Wall*, has worked to create a visual identity from with/in these neighbourhoods, with broader aims to redefine and maintain this particular neighbourhood as an active community entity.

Pat Lazo, co-founder of the Graffiti Gallery and visual artist, notes that until buildings in Winnipeg were being painted north of the Canadian Pacific Rail Line, where exists the North Point Douglas neighbourhood, the City had never considered them as heritage status and now, due to visual activation and imaging, they are gaining heritage recognition (personal communication, March 5, 2019). Mural-making, as a community arts practice, can act as an accelerator of urban change, has the ability to shine a light in underrepresented areas which, on one had, can serve to make such a neighbourhood visible while, on the other hand, can generate a particular sense of awareness where integrity in the built form is recognized and therefore worth preserving.

Cameron and Coaffee (2005) describe the cultural analyses of gentrification as identifying the individual artist as an important agent in the invitation of gentrification processes in old working-class neighbourhoods, which includes the use of mural-making and cultural facilities, often sponsored by local government and other public agencies, as a promoter of regeneration and associated gentrification. This takes the form of 'positive' gentrification as an engine of urban regeneration (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005). However, a community arts practice approach in neighbourhoods that have yet to see rampant development hit, but are in need of

exterior revitalization due to the decrepit state of its built form, is necessary. Such revitalization

efforts can act as a medium to change the way a neighbourhood is perceived. In the increasingly

complex world of the arts and the applied arts, there is a growing need for cultural intermediaries

to intervene to aid in the act of interpretation (Zukin in Ley, 2003). Speaking to the processes of

gentrification and the benefits of *Wall-to-Wall* in neighbourhoods like North Point Douglas,

Chafe explains:

> We're definitely not specialists in gentrification, necessarily, but again, it just kind of
> goes back to working with/in community. So again, with those levels of consultation with
> youth, levels of consultation with elders, guest curators, community centres, and again,
> the engagement portion of it. Also, the celebrations, the safety elements. We really come
> at it from a grassroots level, and we don't have city planning backgrounds. So we do
> definitely have to also trust, we have a trusting relationship, I would say, with the West
> Broadway BIZ, the Downtown BIZ, with the North End Community Renewal
> Corporation (NECRC). That they are doing that work also because we really cannot
> manage everything… we will not necessarily be in charge of the condos going up and we
> can't necessarily predict that kind of climate. So it is, I would say, a big part of our way
> of operating is that sort of trust in those organizations that are monitoring those type of
> things (personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Although *Synonym Art Consultation* cannot, as a collective, stop future development from

happening, they can maybe soften the blow. Especially with the education component being

crucial to their platform, along with accessibility. Maintaining an education component through

the activation of large walls with visual art is necessary in the fight against gentrification (C.

Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Considering future development and revitalization, Andrew Sannie, the Recreation and

Wellness Liaison for NECRC, an organization that is committed to the social, economic and

cultural renewal of the North End of Winnipeg (North End Community Renewal Corp., 2019),

explains that the City of Winnipeg's Community Services Department was in the midst of

creating a larger recreation document (personal communication, March 6, 2019). The document,

meant to be passed out to people working in recreation in the neighbourhood, was looking at a

few different areas that included transportation, parks and recreation facilities, and arts and

culture. Sannie, being directly involved in the arts and culture conversation noticed some focus

areas:

> One of the major focus areas was to create an art identity in the North End because
> people are familiar with the arts… there's a lot of focus on the arts in the neighbourhood
> but there's no solid identity. And so, I left with that and that really sparked something in
> me. It just sort of seemed like that was something that was necessary, especially if people
> in the neighbourhood are talking about it and I thought, I feel like we could do more…
> my first thought was to look around and see what exists (personal communication, March
> 6, 2019).

The focus on creating an art identity in one of Winnipeg's most underserved neighbourhoods

brings thought to modes of radical planning where planning with people, through community

arts-based initiatives, hold a high level response to addressing the impacts of potential and/or

current processes of gentrification. Still, looking for specific policies/objectives within NECRC

that speak to the creation of an arts identity, Sannie came across Project Re(NEW). Project

Re(NEW), where 'NEW' stands as an acronym for North End Winnipeg, holds within it a

revitalization and community development agenda with a focus on restoring urban surprise,

pizzazz and diversity to a neighbourhood in which time and change have not been kind (North

End Community Renewal Corp., 2014). Since 1998 NECRC has been working to revitalize

North End neighbourhoods and firmly believe that revitalization and growth can only happen

when local residents are involved at every level of development (North End Community Renewal Corp., 2014). With objectives to attract new business, enhance walkability, increase income diversity, improve storefronts, and address poverty, it becomes extremely important for NECRC to promote broad-based community involvement in planning for and developing impetus for change in challenged North End neighbourhoods like North Point Douglas. So, NECRC, through their Project Re(NEW) study, found that Indigenous artists continue to be overlooked for the critical role they can play in building economies and constructing effective and culturally appropriate social networks. As such, Sannnie saw a need to bring *Wall-to-Wall* to the North End and, specifically, North Point Douglas, pushing it to expand beyond the boundaries of West Broadway, the West End, and Downtown:

> I went to visit Pat Lazo and we sat down and I was just asking him about, because they [Graffiti Gallery] were involved in Project Re(NEW), so they were one of the groups that were engaged… So I was like, just give me the down-low, you know, give me everything. And he kind of broke it down for me. And from there we just devised an idea, so we were like, well, how could we get this going? And his first suggestion was, well, *Synonym Art Consultation*, you know, they've started *Wall-to-Wall*. Maybe it's something where we bring *Wall-to-Wall* to the North End of Winnipeg, which they hadn't really gone past Downtown at that point. You know, 'cause that's where the people are (personal communication, March 6, 2019).

Approaching revitalization through arts and culture can ultimately serve to generate a sense of pride by making a neighbourhood matter through the perspective of art. When artists are given creative autonomy to produce original ideas that might work to inspire a visual story, it can therefore work to activate an art identity that speaks to the experiences of the marginalized neighbourhoods they are working with/in.

2.1 Intervention in Public Space and 'Gentle-Fication'

The emergence of community art practice grew from a need for contemporary society to find a space to speak, where artists and community members are able to participate in the public sphere in critical dialogue, and can manifest through action (Conrad & Sinner, 2015). According to Conrad and Sinner (2015), there are three main themes that the mural-making process can generate in the public sphere: empowerment, camaraderie, and expression, all of which can work to break down stereotypes through the sharing of experiential stories. However, the field of gentrification is also a field of relationships, practices and historical traces where artists can be positioned within the dominant class (Ley, 2003). Research also points to criticizing cities for promoting new artistic activities in areas without including or inviting participation of longtime residents (Rich & Tsitsos, 2016). Envisioning hope for his North End community, artist Kenneth Lavallee, one of *Synonym Art Consultation*'s *Wall-to-Wall* artists, imagined an artful process that would include community members in the painting of a Star Blanket mural (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4). Eastman, not wanting to tell Lavallee's full story, discloses that Lavallee was working at Neechi Commons (an Indigenous and specialty store based around the principles of an Aboriginal owned and operated worker co-operative that is now closed) as a bannock baker, looking out onto Main Street and seeing these kind of brown dilapidated buildings, knowing the rich history of murals there and having seen them growing up, envisioned draping the buildings in the North End with Star Blanket images (personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Figure 1. *Star Blanket Project*, 2017. Ma Mawi Centre (King St.).
By Kenneth Lavallee, Annie Beach, and artists from Indigenous
Family Centre. Photo by Emily Christie.

Although much research points to the criticism of artistic activities not including longtime

residents, Annie Beach, a visual artist that assisted Lavallee on the Star Blanket project explains,

in a Star Blanket documentary, that it is a project that includes and welcomes everyone (The Star

Blanket Project, 2018). For Lavallee, this particular project was important because he wanted to

ensure that communities feel they are being represented visually but also holds a deeper desire to

cover all of Main Street in Star Blankets to commemorate Murdered and Missing Indigenous

Women and Girls (MMIWG). His desire is for the community to feel a sense of pride, that they

are not forgotten, and to reveal and offer hope (The Star Blanket Project, 2018). Delaphine

Bittern, another artist and community member that assisted in the Star Blanket Project opens up

about having been homeless in the past and how engaging in painting for a project at such a

large, public scale helped build her self-esteem (The Start Blanket Project, 2018). Additionally,

Eastman notes that part of Lavallee's vision was to have community members working with him on the mural itself (personal communication, March 20, 2019). So, having hired community members, not volunteers, was crucial to this partnership. Part of the reciprocity and relational accountability for the duo of *Synonym Art Consultation*, and Lavallee as the artist, was to engage in paying people who were accessing particular programming in the respective buildings that the Star Blankets were being painted on, therefore becoming a very localized community activation.

Figure 2. *Star Blanket Project*, 2018. Helen Betty Osborne Building.
By Kenneth Lavallee, Annie Beach, and community artists.

Projects that take place in any community, whether intended to be subversive or inclusive, require careful negotiations by the artist and those involved in the process. Focusing attention hyper-locally, through collaboration, can open up space for people to learn to trust in collaborative, imaginative, and intuitive processes (Conrad & Sinner, 2015). This sort of trust, between all parties engaged, can allow individuals to enter into spaces of multiple unknowns.

Levi Foy, Executive Assistant of Indigenous Affairs at the University of Winnipeg, assisted in the facilitation of a Star Blanket on the Helen Betty Osborne Building, which is the

last place Tina Fontaine was seen alive. Also known as the Wii Chiiwaakanak Centre, it houses

the education building, the Urban Education Training Program, the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning

Centre, and the Aboriginal Education Training Program. Foy speaks to the importance of

symbolism and building a necessary presence within the University of Winnipeg neighbourhood:

> So there's the Star Blanket mural right across [from a Daphne Odjig mural]. They're
> looking onto each other. So, it's really interesting symbolically because if you're entering
> the University of Winnipeg neighbourhood, coming from the west, going to the east,
> you're greeted by two Indigenous symbols, right… now when you have, you can kind of
> soften that blow [of development] now with murals that people can see themselves, that
> speak to the people, right… if you're a white student from anywhere outside of this
> neighbourhood, and you don't understand the context of why a Star Blanket would be…
> if you're an Indigenous student and you don't understand, and the Star Blanket isn't a
> thing that you grew up with, you don't understand really why this is an important symbol,
> right [speaking to his main concern with public art]… so many people view art as just
> being a frivolous activity… so people still have to put in a lot more work into public
> art… but if you're looking at a Star Blanket wrapped around this building [the Wii
> Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre], or wrapped around Ma Mawa Wi Chi Itata Centre, or
> you're walking anywhere, you don't really understand it, right. You don't really
> understand what it means until somebody tells you the story of the Star Blanket and this
> is Kenneth's vision of how it happened. Maybe a few people will go back and be like,
> 'why the hell would they choose that? What is this design? I've seen it several times now
> [across the city]. What is this?'. So, it has a definite opportunity to transform or change a
> few people's minds or inform people in a different way (personal communication, March
> 14, 2019).

Visual art in public space can serve to generate broader conversations, but not always in a

transparent way. Although the opportunity to change/transform peoples minds, or inform them in

a different way might seem minimal, what is important is arts capacity to generate dialogue,

inciting further questions about place, identity, and diverse cultural understandings. This sort of

activation in a space becomes a primary point of conversation that might serve as a catalyst for

people engaging one another in the meaning behind particular pieces of public art, especially

pieces that are representative and connected to identity. Addressing arts capacity to act as a

medium to cross social divides, and the importance of activating visual identity through mural-

making, Foy explains further:

> I don't think people understand the actual way that it can happen until it actually happens, right… there always has been art in Winnipeg and there always has been a booming arts scene here from as far as I could tell, but it was always pretty isolated and it existed in its own silo and it existed outside of actually having to interact with the community… what's happening now with the Star Blanket Project and all the mural projects and stuff is you get to see people who are, people get to see themselves reflected in the city's landscape. And for the Indigenous community, for many people in the Indigenous community, that's important because we don't get to see ourselves reflected in anything outside of a couple of little plaques at the Forks [a historic site in Downtown Winnipeg located at the confluence of the Red River and Assiniboine River]… we don't get to see our names on the streets where they should be. There is no memorialization of the people who actually found this place (personal communication, March 14, 2019).

For *Synonym Art Consultation*, creating diverse visual identities for the neighbourhoods they are

working with/in is crucial. Chafe explains that they are always trying to ensure that they have

equality in their lineups, that they are having many different voices represented in the

communities (personal communication, March 20, 2019). Art is a form of praxis (where praxis

embodies both reflection and action) and can be used upon the world in order to transform it. The

world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction

where reflection, true reflection, leads to action (Freire, 2010). This sort of interaction allows for

changes in the way that people engage in interactive spaces to happen. Foy speaks of his friend

Bittern, from the Star Blanket documentary, and her experience of engaging as an artist:

She was doing art before… like she did it for herself and she did it for her family. She didn't ever think that she could do anything that was, you know, that was being able to be digested by the entire city. And so when she first painted the murals on the Red Road Lodge [a former single room occupancy (SRO) hotel on Main Street that was purchased in 2003 and converted into an abstinence based, supportive housing facility for homeless and at-risk individuals], when she finished she was so, so happy. Like she was so proud and she was like, but she also not only was proud of that, she also got paid to do it, which is a huge thing. When you're somebody who has never been told that your artwork is worth anything and that the skills that you possess have no value, for your entire life, to be able to be paid and to be able to produce something that's so, and be part of a Team that was such a beneficial experience for her (personal communication, March 14, 2019).

Neighbourhood renewal activities can directly address issues of gentrification through community-level conversations and engagement (Rich & Tsitsos, 2016). So, the community focused approach taken by *Wall-to-Wall* includes choosing the lineup of artists, and working *with* community members who are local to where the murals are situated. Critics claim frustration over arts-based interventions because they often emphasize fun and exploration while avoiding critical discussion about displacement and poverty (McLean, 2014). *Wall-to-Wall* is a Festival that engages in such critical discussions where urban artistic interventionist work makes visible racialized exclusions and hierarchies often inscribed in urban space. They engage in such discussions through their partnerships with funders, institutions like the University of Winnipeg, and their involvement in various levels of community consultation. Further, they maintain accountability engaging a mentorship program and providing authorship for artists to activate a visual identity that symbolizes their culture and the community they are working with/in.

Figure 3. *Star Blanket Project*, 2017. Ma Mawi Centre (Jarvis Ave.).
By Kenneth Lavallee, Annie Beach, and artists from Indigenous
Family Centre. Photo by Joseph Visser.

Today, state-led gentrification is being promoted in the name of community regeneration

in the face of supposed social/community breakdown/degeneration (Lees & Ley, 2008).

Although gentrification can be disguised as an urban renaissance, arts and culture have a strong

positive impact on the quality of life within cities by playing a powerful role through social

cohesion and revitalization, with efforts aimed at creating a vibrant urban culture of creativity

and innovation (Azmier, 2002). As cities find themselves engulfed in inter-urban competition,

they concentrate on developing a broad range of cultural activities to catalyze private

development, increase consumption by residents and tourists, improve the city image, and

enhance local quality of life (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). In this context, the City tends

to engage in promoting such events in order to capitalize on urban culture in a way that is not

always necessarily accessible. However, *Synonym Art Consultation* has taken on the task of

making *Wall-to-Wall* accessible to everybody from a grassroots level:

We keep ourselves accountable by collaborating and consulting the neighbourhood, not only the idea of communities, but the neighbourhood itself can kind of band together around this visual identity that they get to interact with everyday. And then again, that's enhanced through the programming that we offer along with it… our programming generally is free, accessible programming to as many people as possible. So I think art in its many forms… does equalize… I think the accessibility of the art being in the streets as well, it just belongs to everybody so everybody can feel a sense of ownership of that piece and that experience of having maybe attended or seen an activation around it and, in turn, hopefully feel a sense of ownership of their neighbourhood and their community and their neighbours and everyone who hangs out in that neighbourhood (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Through curating a visual identity *with* the neighbourhoods that they work with/in, *Synonym Art Consultation* promotes interaction around the visual identity being created during *Wall-to-Wall* in order to band community together. Sannie speaks of this as sort of a 'gentle-fication' process, coined by Tony Goldman, the mind behind Wynwood Walls in Miami, where it is important to acknowledge that the art is going up and that it is painting over a lot of the problems but that there is also a greater goal of that art (personal communication, March 6, 2019). The greater goal of the art, then, is social dialogue. In a documentary on Miami's Wynwood Walls, *Here Comes the Neighbourhood*, 'gentle-fication' is described as having the ability to stabilize the community without displacing longtime residents (Here Comes the Neighbourhood, 2011). 'Gentle' revitalization should honour the wisdom and intelligence that's already there in the neighbourhood (Here Comes the Neighbourhood, 2011). So, this sort of 'gentle' revitalization reflects the idea that the best defence against both displacement and disinvestment in a neighbourhood is to work toward building an ample housing supply with high ownership rates, while still focusing on a moderate pace of new investment. Sannie further contends that although

they are beautifying the neighbourhoods they are working with/in, from a business perspective, they could probably bring a lot of money to the neighbourhood and then there is still the question of who is also being hurt by this? (personal communication, March 6, 2019). It is an important question to consider, especially when beautification can often lead to higher investment in a neighbourhood, further leading to displacement of residents and communities. Yet, the power of art is able to transform knowledge about a community and/or neighbourhood. The most gigantic murals in the city are located, in a stigmatized neighbourhood in Winnipeg's North End, however, people from outside the area are beginning to stop in and get out of their car to walk around (C. Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019). This act of intervention, through mural-making, brings about a deeper sense of awareness of the surroundings that exist within a desolate area that is easily overlooked. The activation of a visual identity from with/in community can serve as a medium for humanity to be recognized in what is really a spectacular neighbourhood.

Figure 4. *Star Blanket Project*, 2016. Red Road Lodge.
By Kenneth Lavallee. Photo by Adam Kelly.

3. Community Organizing and Engagement: Mural-Making as a Means for Collaborative and Creative Place-Making

Synonym Art Consultation is concerned with a bottom-up, grassroots approach to community organizing and engagement. Collaboration and accessibility are core approaches for *Synonym Art Consultation* to authentically represent communities and neighbourhoods from with/in. Activating visual identities through mural-making as a community arts practice also need collaboration and accessibility. Therefore, I will be discussing how their approach to community organizing allows for the expansion of democratic processes by making public space accessible for marginalized members of society.

The act of community organizing brings individuals, who share common goals, together into public life while focusing on active participation with/in disenfranchised neighbourhoods (Smock, 2004). When communities collectively work together through the sharing of common goals it becomes possible for their needs and wants to be better served. In order to promote the well-being of communities in this way, organizers must look at building community capacity. As the concept of community change becomes more complex, capacity-building therefore becomes more about "strengthening the abilities of people to address problems, develop resources, and accomplish goals" (Checkoway, 2009, p. 7). Approaching community organizing in this way can foster collective engagement in order to solve problems, while addressing shared values and goals. Further, popular participation through conflict can also be understood as an integral function in building community capacity as it enables urban residents to identify shared problems in order to develop a vision for the future.

Community engagement is an important indicator in fostering a cohesive community. If we engage with one another we are better able to hear, and understand, the difficulties around particular differences that members might face among/within their own community. Additionally, dialogue is crucial when working to meet the needs of other groups or members of a community. It allows for transparency around particular issues that arise while also acknowledging the diverse lived experiences of other community members. Not one person shares the same lived experience, so dialogue that fully engages in the wants and needs of each community member (although difficult at times) is important when working to develop a common goal.

Communities can fall victim to the harms of paternalism when a group of people see themselves as experts rather than collaborators that seek to work with/in. According to Nikitin (2012), this can intimidate a community while making them feel impotent. The processes of community engagement, therefore, must be influenced in a way where it is regarded as a process that comes from *within* the broader community. Forging alliances with those who share similar values/goals will allow community members to move beyond participating (Connolly, 2006). Artists' activity in this process is assumed to simultaneously foster social inclusion and social control while also activating community engagement in ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Bain & Landau, 2017). Bain and Landau (2017) further contend that artists are often singularly held responsible by civic leaders to realize place-narratives *for* a community rather than *with* them, which creates a fundamental barrier to community engagement. Working *for* a community can be considered a paternalistic approach to community engagement; the freedom and responsibilities of community members and their interests are ultimately characterized by restriction. Core concepts of initiating community

change, then, include starting with people with lived experience and who are directly affected,

and working together, collectively, to generate desirable and possible change (Checkoway,

2009).

Considering place, and arts capacity to transform the social environment, it is not merely

what was there, but also the interaction of what is there and what happened there (Fleming,

2007). Nikitin (2012) implies that public art projects are the promise of the creative place-

making movement and will be most effective when they are part of a larger, holistic,

multidisciplinary approach to enlivening a city or neighbourhood, therefore contributing to

community life and to the service and vitality of public spaces. A primary function to plan for

place-making is to foster the community's investment in art as a fixture of the community; "it is

a process whereby people take ownership of their surroundings, staking a claim in the narrative

that brought them to this point, and reclaiming both their visual environment and their

community memory" (Fleming, 2007, p. 228).

Wall-to-Wall is a Festival that celebrates the importance of involving participating artists

and the public audience in the conception of its murals. *Mending* (Figure 5), a mural by Toronto-

based artists, Bruno Smoky and Shalak Attack, originally from South America, painted a portrait

of an Indigenous woman mending a heart on North Main Street, in Winnipeg's North End.

Explaining the importance of the land but also of the historical spaces being painted on, in order

to reclaim community memory, Chafe describes the symbolic nature of *Mending*:

> That's literally the epicentre of MMIWG, like on that parking lot there have been horrific
> acts against Indigenous women. When we were speaking with Shalak Attack and Bruno,
> and the PA System [Toronto-based visual artists Alexa Hatanaka and Patrick Thompson],

they're all involved, it was really important to us, that was our responsibility to explain
where they were painting on. Like the land, so not only that they're painting on Treaty 1
[Territory], but also this historical space in the world that they are painting on… before
you kind of send a random design it's important that you do know the importance of the
space that you're painting on (personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Representation is critical when working with/in community as it involves the processes of active

listening and asking better questions. A necessary, yet structural approach, to community

organizing is considered as the community approach, also understood as the communalization

approach (Boothroyd & Davis, 1993), where outside forces should not take away the power from

the community that is being developed. This supports the idea that the majority of the work is

coming from *within* the community. When it comes to public involvement, many marginalized

communities face the problem of how a community is envisioned. This becomes an issue as

social control surfaces, working to keep political dominance in order. So, working from *within*

community allows for recognition of the skills that are already there. During the process of

imaging *Mending* onto the large four-storey wall, community consultation was imperative as

there were cross-connections being illustrated, visualizing a global connection that exists

between/among many Indigenous communities:

They [Bruno Smoky and Shalak Attack] wanted to do a tribute to the city and to that
corner specifically, and also to kind of reference that there are connections between the
Indigenous communities of South America and North America. And so, they sat down
with the elders in the community and workshopped the different symbols that they
wanted to integrate. Which was a very spectacular process. So that was just kind of like,
you know, from start to finish, and it took artists like that who are so open to that
dialogue, to feedback, to listening, to really create this cohesive artwork. And I've never

really seen anything like that from the people that live on that corner that would just stop in their tracks and start crying (C. Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Not only is *Mending* a very moving piece of imagery that, from start to finish, saw community members "that actually live on the street, that live down the road, that is their neighbourhood, that is their land and largely the Indigenous community and who all day would just talk to the artists" (C. Chafe, personal communication, March 20, 2019), but also is an example of community organizing and engagement from an 'outsider' perspective. Both the artists and *Synonym Art Consultation* worked together, with local elders, to create a baseline goal of working to enhance the quality of life for those that live in the neighbourhood where *Mending* now exists. Together they embodied an ability to enable urban residents to identify shared problems and work collectively to develop a vision for the future of the community they are working with. Although the artists were open to feedback and dialogue with local elders, successfully work shopping the different symbols they wanted to integrate to create a more cohesive artwork, working through mentorship with local artists might have made for a more meaningful approach.

Figure 5. *Mending*, 2016. By Bruno Smoky and Shalak Attack.
Photo by Nic Kriellaars.

A good public space is not only inviting, but builds a place for the community around an

artwork and arises from collaboration with the users of the place who articulate what they value

about it and assist the artist in understanding its complexity (Nikitin, 2012). Sannie, a partner in

the consultation process of *Mending*, explains that in order to work from with/in, active listening

was a key factor when working with elders who felt that localizing the Indigeneity to this

particular place was important, especially when it was being designed from an outside

perspective:

> It's unceded territory. So we're going to listen. So then what we did is we worked with a
> few different elders… and they just kind of gave us some background of things that we
> should add. And so, in her shawl, we included some signs like the infinity sign from the
> Métis people and some other things… there was a bunch of symbology that's relevant to
> this [place]… so we worked with the artists and we incorporated some things that made a
> little more sense. And so we put that up (personal communication, March 6, 2019).

Through a wide variety of forms of expression, the arts are instrumental in satisfying aesthetic need for culture in today's urban centres; culture is what defines a person, a social group, or even a country as far as establishing a role, gaining power, and representing point of view (Goldberg-Miller, 2017). Lazo, another partner in the *Mending* consultation, notes that the impact of the mural was incredible due to the fact there is a sixty foot building at the gateway of where it becomes the North End:

> So you go under this underpass, the rail underpass, and then you've got this giant sixty-by-forty foot wall with a South American Indigenous woman sewing up a heart… you can see it from way far way… it's got such an impact, visual impact, and I guess also the significance of the location was so huge because we had to be respectful that there's a memorial for a lady that had gone missing… who was found by the railroad tracks deceased… we had to be very respectful and do consultation with the community and also recognize that we're on Treaty 1 Territory (personal communication, March 5, 2019).

3.1 Advocacy Planning and Capacity Building

Representation, being an integral part in the construction of the murals during *Wall-to-Wall*, is based out of a need to move beyond a singular, monolithic approach to community organizing, community arts practice, and overall planning efforts. As such, it is relevant to consider the emergence of advocacy and equity planning within this section as it serves as a guideline to better understand the importance of incorporating the direct needs of a community. Historically, planners have not sought or trained themselves to understand socioeconomic problems, their causes or solutions (Davidoff, 1965). Today, contemporary planning practices can, at times, use advocacy more authentically by focusing on building community capacity by actively listening to the needs of diverse communities, therefore taking the role of interpreter.

With the emergence of advocacy planning, current contemporary planners are provided with necessary tools: meetings to include racialized people, and women, while working together with city officials (or private, public, and non-profit organizations) through a shared vision of pluralism (Clavel, 1994). This has created a positive shift from institutionalized power to a more necessary focus on neighbourhoods; focusing on neighbourhoods engages planners in necessary work to build on important dialogue around issues of representation.

Although *Synonym Art Consultation* is not a planning collective, but are a curatorial arts collective they still work to engage in the processes of planning which can be recognized in their ability to work *with* individuals while simultaneously considering the vested interests of community from *within*. Jordan Stranger, an Oji-Cree visual artist from Peguis First Nation who has been involved with *Wall-to-Wall*, speaks to the importance of local experience, representation, and activating a visual identity that focuses on building an Indigenous presence in Winnipeg's North End:

> Their goal [NECRC] was to put some colour on the street and speak to the community. And it meant a lot to me that it was there because I grew up in Point Douglas, on Curtis, and I spent a lot of time in that neighbourhood, a lot of time on Main Street, when my dad was in school, and I had a lot of friends in that place. It just meant a lot to me to be able to honour that community with that colour and that life. And a lot of people would come up to me while I was painting and a lot of people, they'd come up and they'd be like, 'this is amazing bro'. And they'd like shake my hand, give me a real good hug. And I'm like, 'wow'. And especially a lot of Indigenous people, they saw the mural and they would put their hand up [imitating gesture], you know, like this is fucking great because they never seen that before in Point Douglas. Their own culture being painted on a wall in such a massive way. And every time someone would come up, Chloe [of *Synonym Art Consultation*] would be like, 'talk to this guy, he's the artist, he's your guy'… she would never try to take ownership (personal communication, March 12, 2019).

Speaking to the mural, *Change/The Four Seasons* (Figure 6), that Stranger had imaged onto the

wall of a North Main Street building, in the heart of North Point Douglas, collaboration and

respect were crucial to the whole process. This approach to community capacity building helps to

promote the well-being of the particular community of interest by focusing on the people, the

built environment and social networks (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001) as they exist

throughout the mural-making process. Motivated by an agenda of social justice which targets

sometimes disparate individuals, community groups, or 'vulnerable' groups, the work of

'curating' communities brings local people together by working *with* them (Rooke, 2015). This

particular mural that Stranger has activated is characterized by his ability to work as part of a

community through critical and creative responses to the processes and effect of regeneration

(Rooke, 2015). The point, then, of the partnership between NECRC, *Synonym Art Consultation*,

and Graffiti Gallery is to come together in Winnipeg's North End, including the respective

neighbourhoods where *Wall-to-Wall* has been celebrated, is to work from *within* community, to

collaborate, and to focus on the importance of togetherness while recognizing the beauty of

lifting the cultural arts in a neighbourhood that is historically centred around Indigeneity:

> That to me was like, just to see it all happen, and knowing where I come from,
> understanding the teachings that were given through our culture, there's seven of them;
> one of them is respect, and that, being brought up from that, from knowing that
> foundation to still love everybody, not to judge the place, anything, you don't know. And
> for Chloe and them [speaking to the partnership described above] to come through there
> and to give Indigenous artists a chance, to promote us and really pump us up and treat us
> like we're VIP's, you know. I was blown away. I came out of nowhere, you know, I just
> showed up on the scene and I didn't know anybody and they just said, 'come on, we'll
> help you out'. And now I'm doing pretty well for myself… I got opportunities because of
> that mural on Main Street (J. Stranger, personal communication, March 12, 2019).

The relationship between community art and community development recognize the arts as being an asset that promotes healthy communities, gaining support as resources for intervention and prevention efforts (Lowe, 2000). Stranger's mural, *Change/The Four Seasons*, is an example of a public artwork that serves to bridge a gap between community art and community development. His approach as an artist is to come from a place of with/in and to make negotiations with his community:

> It was mainly the owner preference [of the mural design]… but whatever work I had done in the past was for the community and he [building owner] had picked stuff I had done in the past… the mural represents change. When something new comes into our life, we need to take the time to stop and acknowledge it. The four seasons were used to represent the change we must accept and turn it into something positive, such as the rainbow which also represents all people on Earth. Air, land and sea, community, totems of our past and present. These are all elements that needed to be incorporated. Point Douglas was where I grew up and I wanted to honour the people of that community with these items in mind (J. Stranger, personal communication, March 12, 2019).

The artist, sponsoring organization, arts community, and local community, in working together can be affected positively by using art as a catalyst for community development (Lowe, 2000). Stranger, in his work, is committed to mapping assets from a place that comes from *within* community. He does not ignore the issues of what is affecting a community, however, activating such a visual identity "does change the perspective of the neighbourhood… it proves that you can put it [art] anywhere and it can change anything, that's the power of art" (J. Stranger, personal communication, March 12, 2019). Although somewhat anecdotal, and can change depending on where it's being implemented geo-spatially, art has the capacity to help a

community in the sense that it makes people feel good. When a community is being recognized as people with diverse identities, art helps to create space for the broader public to participate in the process, bringing a sense of inclusion and pride to the neighbourhood and, in turn, building on social cohesion between/among active citizens.
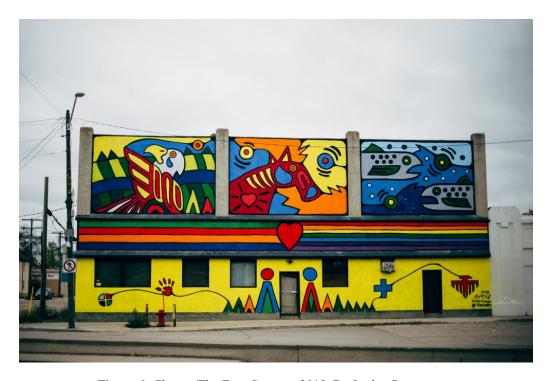

Figure 6. *Change/The Four Seasons*, 2018. By Jordan Stranger.

4. Cultural Arts Practice: Engaging Citizen Participation

Synonym Art Consultation is interested in exposing people and communities to positive potential through mural-making as a community arts practice. Art, in this capacity, can therefore, in some cases, hold transformative potential. This section will explore art as a mechanism that considers social integration as a way of looking at social action that moves beyond obtaining one desired goal. The intention here is to reflect on the ability of citizen participation, neighbourhood diversity, and Socially Engaged Art (SEA) to mobilize different cultural and artistic practices that

moves beyond mere representation. Engaged communities participate in self-reflexive dialogue (Helguera, 2011), which ultimately creates space for the development of self-identity. This section will also therefore explore how the development of self-identity can further allow for the exploration of important tools like communicating and team learning.

Citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power that allows for engagement on behalf of the broader public which, in turn, enables a redistribution of power that serves to include marginalized communities in the future processes, whether it be political and/or economic, that affect urban life (Arnstein, 2007). Additionally, there are several facets to citizen participation that work to empower communities in urban planning processes. The most critical to citizen power, and can be considered the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation, is informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities and options that allow for a two-way flow for negotiation (Arnstein, 2007). *Synonym Art Consultation* leverages the talents of community-based, visual artists by creating a platform in community organizing/engagement. This approach serves as a mechanism that can enhance educational projects, influence policy development, and facilitate community dialogue (Kuly, Stewart, & Dudley, 2005). Community arts practice, specifically mural-making, can considerably strengthen the civic realm in its ability to recycle community memory and inspire other stories (Fleming, 2007). *Wall-to-Wall* works to strengthen the urban spaces of which it is activated through its ability to generate a visual identity with/in the neighbourhoods it lands in. The Festival artists and organizing team(s) work collaboratively to activate large-scale murals that are representative of the communities of which they are situated. In doing so, they are able to recycle community memory, therefore highlighting the culture and lived experiences of the people that reside in the respective neighbourhoods being

painted. As a Festival that runs only one month throughout the year, this allows for people to see versions of themselves and their community in the images being activated.

Life/Together (Figure 7, Figure 8), two separate murals that sit across from one another, on North Main Street, represent two pairs of distinct and oppositional animals: the rabbit and the snake, the bear and the deer. The intention, on behalf of the artists and the youth that were consulted in the process, is to simultaneously acknowledge the strength and necessity for diversity and independence while embracing the need for acceptance, tolerance and mutual respect of individual differences, positioning the animals head to head so that they are gazing into one another's eyes in a peaceful manner (Synonym Art Consultation, 2018). As part of the collective artists statement, these animals will stand alone and beautiful in and of themselves, yet they will forever exist in a state of mutual awareness, acknowledgement, trust and respect for one another; the words *Life/Together* can either be read as a statement, or they can stand alone, in the hopes of each wall making a strong, simple positive statement that speaks to the very essence of community (Synonym Art Consultation, 2018).

Figure 7. *Life/Together*, 2017. New West Hotel. By Pat Lazo, Gabrielle Funk, Travelling Sign Painters, Jessica Canard, and Siyee Man. Photo by Joseph Visser and Emily Christie.

Gabrielle Funk, a visual artist, whose visual arts practice is multifaceted, but also involves public art-making, and has been kind of initiated and forward by *Synonym Art Consultation*, speaks to her involvement as a mentee in *Wall-to-Wall*'s mural mentorship program and the importance of participation and collaboration:

> The stories that are represented in the murals through the mural mentorship program, I think our role was to take what we've learned from the youth [of Studio 393], and talked about with the youth, and then also our own individual disciplines and identities as artists, but also the community that we were coming into and creating the work that would stay there and change the face of the community. I feel like we were trying to represent all of the stories and then in that, the simpler, the better, not trying to homogenize anything down into sameness (personal communication, March 15, 2019).

Funk is speaking of creating art for the neighbourhood, with/in the neighbourhood, which allows for a platform to exist that focuses on issues of representation and identity. Eliciting and honouring the voices of youth is also crucial as they are often an underrepresented and undervalued demographic. Further speaking to acceptance and what it means to co-exist, Funk notes:

> The basic idea of dualism [of the animals], but also acceptance and co-existence that is peaceful but also not without its very notable differences that could create an acknowledgement of differences. But as far as whose voices [represented in the murals], I think it was just our struggle in creating it but also like the end result was everybody's because it's a community project. It's a public artwork. It's not going up in some individuals home for them to choose whether or not they can take it away. Everyone has to deal with this once it's up. So it better be as embracing as possible and representative because they're so huge (personal communication, March 15, 2019).

Part of citizen participation, as exemplified through the processes and anticipated outcome of *Life/Together*, always depends on the collective that is engaging in the work, but also comes with figuring out each individual's strength and weaknesses. Being in dialogue, as a group, is a guiding tool to better sort through each individual capacity when working through the processes of mural-making: "…being able to relinquish control, control over everything, and then also give where needed and take where needed and contribute boldly" (G. Funk, personal communication, March 15, 2019). The binding experience, really, is that in community projects like *Life/ Together*, they are all working from a place that comes from with/in community, together. Every community has its challenges, especially in multicultural cities like Winnipeg, where people are coming from many diverse backgrounds and where division along racial/ethnic lines is visible. Still, it is necessary to learn to co-exist and acknowledge such differences in order to accept them and embrace them; the answer is not to just ignore differences (G. Funk, personal communication, March 15, 2019). Working with/in a community where there is obvious adversity, collaborative community mural-making serves as a medium to create a sort of visibility of the co-existence and community ties that exist.

Figure 8. *Life/Together*, 2017. MEDI-CARE Pharmacy. By Pat Lazo, Gabrielle Funk, Travelling Sign Painters, Jessica Canard, and Siyee Man. Photo by Joseph Visser and Emily Christie.

The social indicators, according to Kuley, Stewart and Dudley (2005), demonstrate that the inner-city areas are places of high need and few resources. Thus, it is crucial that trust is a factor that plays into dialogue when working with/in diverse, inner-city neighbourhoods. As a stakeholder in any community initiated project, you need to be ready to talk to the community. Doing so serves to build a level of trust between the community and the artists engaging in the mural-making process:

> Having people at the site of the mural while it's being created, not that it's going to necessarily dictate the content, but it's going to affect those artists that are there… we just try and offer as many access points for the public and professionals and elders and the community itself to come in and be a part of it (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

Engaging in dialogue has to be a part of every step and allows for a hyper-local community experience. Those who have higher rates of arts involvement are more likely to participate in their communities and to have positive attitudes about being involved in providing community service (Kuley, Stewart, & Dudley, 2005). Community involvement and dialogue, therefore, become synonymous in that together they serve to make a positive difference for engaged individuals, particularly those that come from low socio-economic backgrounds; the human, social, economic and cultural capital builds upon community capacity and, in turn, serves to provide a level of social cohesion among/between individuals. Some of the key concepts around social cohesion explore alternative ways in which planners and/or organizers are better able to unpack the harms of exclusion and marginalization brought on by the processes of urban

planning; placing equitable value on people is pivotal when working toward building community capacity.

Art can act as an accelerator in its ability to unpack the harms exacerbated by our social/ built environment(s) while also serving as a connector between/among diverse communities. *Synonym Art Consultation* considers a relational approach to the mural-making process by focusing attention on connecting people, including the artists and community to the art: "…even going back again to this idea of *Synonym* and these two various meanings coming together and we just want to get everybody paid and get every community member on board and just make this city a better place" (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019). It can be further understood that part of this relational aspect also includes critical reflexivity which Freire (2010) describes as allowing human beings to become more than the situation that they are currently in; they will be more, the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it.

4.1 Community Arts Practice and Neighbourhood Diversity

Community arts practice is a necessary tool that can be used when working toward activating a visual identity, one that is reflective of the existing neighbourhood diversity. Collaborative community mural-making, therefore, can stimulate more diversity within the engaged communities. Focusing on neighbourhood diversity with/in Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods, through the processes of mural-making, allows for space to honour and elicit the voices coming from *within* the community, the end goal being recognition and representation. *Synonym Art Consultation*, through *Wall-to-Wall*, engage communities in a way that recognizes

their inherent dignity and supports defending their rights, with/in the spaces they are working, in order to generate dialogue with people that further allows for broader participation in self-reflexive dialogue. According to Frank (2004), this is an approach where one must be willing to allow their voice to count as much as yours.

In the context of urban planning processes, particularly efforts of revitalization and beautification, participation in local art projects can mirror participation in public consultation (Rooke, 2013). Community arts practice, such as collaborative community mural-making, which can be understood as a part of a regeneration process when considering the renewal of inner-city neighbourhoods, serve as opportunities for the participation of local people. Still, a successful city neighbourhood is a place that keeps sufficiently abreast of its problems so it is not destroyed by them (Jacobs, 1961). Winnipeg's North End neighbourhoods, based on the definition provided by Jacobs, are not considered successful in that the rhetoric that serves to divide the Indigenous community members from the non-Indigenous involves a level of subordination; "Indigenous peoples' decolonial claims to urban land, space, and resources are systematically denied, displaced, and dispossessed by an urban redevelopment agenda" (Toews, 2018, p. 16). Thus, the ongoing behavioural attitudes from the broader non-Indigenous, mainly white, communities of Winnipeg maintain current social constructs based on race, ethnicity, and culture. Indigenous Winnipegger's initially headed to the North End in an attempt to reduce their exposure to degrading encounters at the hands of white landlords, businesses, and police, as experienced in the city's urban centre (Toews, 2018). Where neighbourhoods can become segregated spaces based on a politics of difference, planning for diverse and creative communities can serve as a mechanism that can work toward empowerment for marginalized communities. Collaborative

community art, therefore, plays an important role in terms of its capacity to illuminate a political

issue in a way that leads to mass mobilization and action (Cohen-Cruz, 2002). Additionally,

according to Wehbi, McCormick, and Angelucci (2016), arts-informed and arts-based practices

have also advanced social justice causes and against oppressions. Research within the field of

neighbourhood diversity and the role of the arts has pointed to the positive impacts due to an

artistic presence, which catalyzes positive neighbourhood change which includes decreased

poverty, increased housing values, and job creation alongside enhanced social cohesion (Foster,

Grodach, & Murdoch III, 2016). As such, community arts practice involves a level of activism

that is not only about our collective but also our multiple identities, highlighting the ways in

which we are all more responsible to one another when we are in a web of relationships and, as

Cohen-Cruz (2002) implies, that is what arts-based community work provides.

Collaborative community mural-making is a tool that can help us to arrive in certain built

environments with an ability to recognize the diverse identities attached to those environments.

In order to debunk relations of power and stigmatization, as experienced in Winnipeg's North

End neighbourhoods, there becomes a necessary need to engage in community focused public

arts-making that aim at providing opportunities for understanding, constructing, and

communicating new knowledge. In considering how art can help to benefit a community,

Stranger notes:

> Everybody has a soul, everybody has feelings, everybody has things that they deal with…
> thinking about how it [art] helps people and how it can benefit a community comes from
> all of that, knowing that you have to have them [the community] in mind, that you cannot
> be so selfish with your art. You can't be selfish with your approach (personal
> communication, March 12, 2019).

Art is a visual language and communicative device that is made up of a network of relationships that is both spacial and temporal, it changes over time. Like art, our environments are constantly shifting. It is this constant change within our built environment(s) that allow for people to take from their own lived experiences in order to contribute to the transformation of society. Community-based art is an affective practice that builds upon social issues in order to create awareness, understanding, and a higher level of public salience. As such, what Stranger's comment points to is that artists can then being to question their own identities while still considering questions of power and identity, collaboration, representation, and appropriation.

Part of the *Wall-to-Wall* mentorship program focuses on youth engagement in order to further impact community development. When considering the determination of mural designs and the credited authors of the murals that are executed during the Festival, every stage happens through community consultation. Through the mentorship program, all sorts of artists, whether it be visual, dance and/or hip-hop artists, run workshops with youth for the better part of a week with their own sharing of art practice and teaching skills, but also learning from the youth. According to Eastman, "the youth will create art, or dialogue, or a song, or a dance around certain concepts that they want to explore… then it becomes the inspiration for that mural, for that artist to then go and paint the mural" (personal communication, March 20, 2019).

The Sutherland Hotel, on Winnipeg's North Main Street, is a building widely known by most Winnipegger's for the troubles that exist within and has been a focus of media attention due to drug use and the marginalized people it houses. Built in 1900, the Sutherland Hotel was in

need of cosmetic revitalization. During *Wall-to-Wall*'s 2018 edition, artists Kenneth Lavallee and

Dee Barsy worked on a mural titled *The Fancy Shawl Dancers* (Figure 9) that now covers the

full exterior of the Sutherland Hotel. Prioritized as a youth engagement and community

development project, youth were invited to a centrally located venue to participate in a free,

abstract art workshop. In their artwork, participants explored some of the biggest issues facing

youth today in Winnipeg, which included alcohol, drugs, mental health, and personal safety

(Synonym Art Consultation, 2018). Other topics discussed were self-care, chosen family, and

support systems (Synonym Art Consultation, 2018). Expanding on the idea behind the mural,

Barsy explains:

> We [her, Lavallee and *Synonym*] went into the community, specifically a placed called
> Studio 393… we consulted with the community through Studio 393, and the youth, by
> doing some brainstorming art workshops where youth were able to talk about issues that
> are important to youth in Winnipeg (personal communication, March 11, 2019).

Working to deconstruct issues of oppression, as a community, in this case the youth of Studio

393, provide a platform to explore key elements and characteristics of ideas such as

intersectionality, where intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped

by the interaction of different social locations, can fundamentally alter how social problems are

experienced, identified and grasped to include the breadth of lived experiences (Hankivsky,

2014). Barsy, whose birth family is from Skownan First Nation and adoptive family being just

Manitoban, opens up about the experience of being a visual artist, particularly in regards to *The*

Fancy Shawl Dancers, and how ownership and autonomy over the mural changed her as an

artist:

> *Synonym* let me have, well they let me do whatever I wanted to do. And they trusted me, my artistic ability, or my vision, and whether it turned out or not, they let me do it and it was a confidence builder for me, which is good because I'm able, in my arts facilitation roles, I'm able to share that confidence. Because… when I go into a community centre, or a school, I'm walking in there as a more confident Indigenous woman and what those young artists, young people, kids get from me I think is better (personal communication, March 11, 2019).

According to Rooke (2013), the most ethical projects are those that genuinely offer opportunities

for communities to work with artists, finding questions they wish to explore together. This

participation and collaboration in community arts practice can work to engage with multiple

aspects of diversity in productive, positive ways (Foster, Grodach, & Murdoch III, 2016).

Additionally, research suggests that the arts are attracted to and can stabilize racially and

ethnically diverse neighbourhoods while maintaining or even increasing such diversity (Foster,

Grodach, & Murdoch III, 2016). Building a necessary presence that celebrates neighbourhood

diversity, where autonomy was provided for the artist on behalf of the organization and, in turn,

voiced from the youth through the consultation process is symbolized in the making/constructing

of *The Fancy Shawl Dancers*: the courage and respect that young men and women as well as

youth of all gender and sexual identities embody as they support their friends and loved ones

through the issues that the mural explores, honouring the voice of Winnipeg's Indigenous youth

while also acknowledging the selfless efforts of the various caring adults in supportive positions

(Synonym Art Consultation, 2018). The symbolic nature of *The Fancy Shawl Dancers* and the

representation of issues that are important to those that were being consulted at the time exemplifies an attempt to try and change the reputation of the Sutherland Hotel through visual art, in a positive way. Placing emphasis on the visual aesthetic of a neighbourhood not only activates a particular visual identity but also changes people's perception of safety. McCormick contends that, in the West Broadway neighbourhood, "we've [West Broadway BIZ] been successful at changing people's perception of safety in this neighbourhood by simply making it more beautiful, colourful" (personal communication, March 7, 2019).

Art can be all encompassing, allowing artists and community members to contribute to social change in a way that can bring varied and unique ideas to the collective. When art is made by the community, for the community, it allows individuals to reflect upon their innermost desires while still involving others. It also affords an opportunity to see and feel what change is like and how art is positioned to move people, inciting new questions while provoking curiosity.

Figure 9. *The Fancy Shawl Dancers*, 2018. Sutherland Hotel.
By Dee Barsy and Kenneth Lavallee.

4.2 Socially Engaged Art: Mural-Making through Collaboration and Conversation

Socially Engaged Art (SEA) expands the depth of social relationships while promoting ideas like empowerment, criticality, and sustainability among participants (Helguera, 2011). SEA mobilizes different cultural and artistic practices beyond mere representation. SEA calls for an artist to be attentive to the interest of a community through dialogue and collaboration. Collaboration with communities to make art in ways that aim to express diverse identities therefore allows for further exploration of social issues and considers various levels of participation and community impact.

Mural-making is a visual art practice that, when used in the public realm, can incite conversation which, in turn, allows the audience to become participants of what can be considered a dialogical art form. Focusing on the processes of collaborative community mural-making, I look to Helguera (2011) who introduced the concept of SEA, which is understood to be an intervention to both space and art, where conversation becomes the medium. Helguera (2011) suggests that conversation is the centre of sociality. Dialogue, being a focal point to *Synonym Art Consultation*'s approach to the activation of murals during *Wall-to-Wall* directs attention to relational dynamics that are engendered in the sharing of experiences. Maintaining relational accountability throughout the mural-making process embeds those involved in various modes of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility which holds the potential to transform existing power relations that are not engendered in acts of domination. So, how does dialogue affect the mural-making process and, in turn, how does the mural-making process affect dialogue? In unpacking this dichotomy, considering how particular forms of enrichment are generated serves

to create a platform to better understand how social/visual dialogue might manifest in the lives of the mural artists but also in the lives of the audience participating as spectators of the murals, even after the process is complete. According to Freire (2010), the world and human beings do not exist apart from each other they exist in constant interaction. *Synonym Art Consultation* is using both reflection and action (praxis) in order to change the world around them, with/in the neighbourhoods they are engaging, *with* the communities. This sort of interaction creates space for people to see themselves, but also see a relational experience in one another. So, when a large-scale mural is activated and imaged it is therefore allowing that transformation of the world to be projected for the broader communities, specifically those residing outside the boundaries, to work at better understanding the lived experiences, and social issues, that are being represented from *within.* What is remarkable, then, is that collaborative community mural-making exists as a form of praxis which serves to attract artists, communities, and key community players in a nuanced way that can incite reflection among and between those engaged in the process. This can lead to action that resists the dominant forces in society who tend to exacerbate the urban and social crises within our built environment(s).

Conversation and dialogue, as it relates to dialogical cultural action, aims at surmounting the antagonistic contradictions of the social structure, thereby achieving the liberation of human beings (Freire, 2010). In considering the co-creation of a mural depicting experiences of psychosis, for example, Conrad and Sinner (2015) contend that arts-informed approaches have been identified as an effective way to collectively draw out and examine participants' experiences by engaging them in doing research. Additionally, Conrad and Sinner (2015) believe that the co-creation process, as a method of knowledge generation, is important to the growing

literature on knowledge translation cautioning researchers to consider an interactive iterative view of research that attends to the social context and highlights social and interpretive ways of knowing. As such, the collaborative process through co-creation holds the potential to allow those engaged to explore diverse social imageries, which can work to transform our ways of knowing. Uneven power dimensions might exist throughout the co-creation process so it is necessary to thoroughly consider whose voices are being counted. Still, ongoing conversation helps to navigate and negotiate the uneven power dimensions that do exist.

For *Synonym Art Consultation* it is integral that *Wall-to-Wall* maintains deep collaboration with both artists and the spaces that they are visually activating in order to centre around the focus of community wants and needs. Activating a visual identity in Winnipeg's North End, where voices tend to go unheard, and the area often looked past, the mural-making process has moved beyond just painting a mural:

> Just painting a mural wasn't enough for us because we'd already been doing these shows at restaurants where it was like, you hang the art on the wall and that's awesome but it's also about that event and that activation and that promotion and the community outreach, and like giving accessibility to the public to see these artworks (A. Eastman, personal communication, March 20, 2019).

This approach to community planning/organizing, through activated and engaged spaces, points to the importance of human connection. Working from with/in, together as a community, provides a necessary collaborative atmosphere that transcends the visual identity that *Wall-to-Wall* sets out to create. With community programming, artist mentorships, and building a youth mentorship program with Graffiti Gallery there becomes a focus on relationship building. Eastman explains further, "if people can create memories around these artworks and be spending

time with them, they will have such a deeper resonance with them in the long-term as

well" (personal communication, March 20, 2019). Additionally, Chafe emphasizes on the

important questions that seek to understand what community connection is and how it will serve

to last longer in people's hearts, while aiming to make them feel good:

> We get the huge privilege of working in different neighbourhoods and we wanted to
> space them out so that we could authentically tell these stories and have the community
> have the time and space to connect these artists, especially if we are bringing them in
> from out of town. So, if we're ever bringing in artists from out of town, or even locally, to
> try and give them all at least one week. We always say block off a decent chunk of
> September so that you can have that time to make those connections (personal
> communication, March 20, 2019).

Emphasizing time and building community connection brings a level of transparency to the

stories that are being imaged on to a wall and, in turn, are foundational to building trust and

respect. Working to activate a visual identity, particularly in inner-city neighbourhoods where, in

the case of Winnipeg, gentrification is slow moving but revitalization almost necessary, allows

for a focus of attention on issues of place, community, and belonging (Lindner & Meissner,

2015). Further, marginal spaces like Winnipeg's North End neighbourhoods, that are often

neglected, overlooked, weakly classified, and in a state of becoming are essential to the

development and sustenance of an artistic identity (Bain, 2003). Spaces where community art is

the focus are also credited with generating economic revitalization through the adaptation of

older, at times vacant, buildings and attracts visitors who, on the one hand, support local

businesses and other cultural enterprises while, on the other hand, leverage opportunity for artists

(Grodach, 2009). From an economic perspective, Sannie notes that the goal of NECRC

collaborating with *Synonym Art Consultation* by bringing *Wall-to-Wall* to the North End is to

"get people down here [North End] to check out the art and then make them stay for other things

like good food… so, basically draw them in for a reason and make them stay for

others" (personal communication, March 6, 2019). Cultural planning and programming,

therefore, is a broad strategy for economic and community development, including

neighbourhood, community, and downtown revitalization (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010).

Building a strategy for economic development and city revitalization is necessary, when

done correctly, however, it is also important to focus on the context of which it is approached.

Although Kester (2004) does not address community arts practice specifically, I find his

observation about how art can hold a defining practice around the facilitation of dialogue/

conversation among diverse communities, constituting a dialogical art practice, to draw a parallel

to the stories behind the murals that are being activated during *Wall-to-Wall*. *Synonym Art*

Consultation, by focusing on representation and collaborative efforts that are community-based,

make it possible to image their murals in ways that can be viewed as a kind of conversation,

inciting different meanings, interpretations, and points of view that come from *within*. Foy,

speaking to the fascinating medium of mural-making in Winnipeg and it's ability to expose

people to things they might not otherwise be exposed to, notes:

> The way it's kind of evolved, particularly with *Synonym* and Graffiti Gallery, and all of those people who have done a lot of work in making this type of art [murals] palatable and accessible for so many people… I've seen it just kind of change the way that people even engage in interactive spaces. I had a client when I was working at Aboriginal Health and Wellness whose housing had broke down and so we had to place them in the New West [Hotel]. And this was a time that they were painting the New West Hotel. And, um, the New West always had, for as long as I can remember, just had a shitty reputation. But

when the painting was done, he was so, so proud to live in that building (personal communication, March 14, 2019).

The mural that Foy is describing is titled *En Masse* (Figure 10). It exists on the New West Hotel, on North Main Street. *En Masse* translates from French to "as a whole" or "all together"; *En Masse* is another mural in Winnipeg's North Point Douglas neighbourhood and sits directly across from Stranger's *Change/The Four Seasons*. En Masse is a Montréal based, multi-artist collaborative drawing project that included local Winnipeg artists; it draws life from the many creative individuals who take part in the project to create large-scale, highly spontaneous drawings in black and white while exploring the creation of a collective vision (Synonym Art Consultation, 2019). This mural in particular, Sannie describes, adds to the social diversity of the neighbourhood:

> The *En Masse* piece alone had like eleven artists, or something wild. It's really exciting to see. And when you look at that you notice different things. The artists are putting different pieces of themselves, and their stories, on the wall, or things that mean something to them and their lived experiences, here in Winnipeg, up on the wall or wherever else. And I think that's one thing that we, I feel pretty proud. Maybe I'm wrong here but I feel like we've done a pretty good job in just being as diverse with the artists as possible, and telling as many different stories as we possibly can (personal communication, March 6, 2019).

Activating art that creates broader forms of dialogue for the people on the streets to see and connect with further builds upon issues that regard representation and identity. Considering an Enlightenment philosophy, Kester (1985) describes that that sort of aesthetic experience constitutes an idealized form of communication. *Synonym Art Consultation* is using mural-

making as a means to intervene and help rejuvenate severed social connections, which Hall and

Robertson (2001) reveal can promote community discovery and awareness by directly enhancing

social connections. Collaborative community mural-making, as a form of public art, can

therefore provide a sense of social cohesion in that it is a particular art form which has as its goal

a desire to engage with its audiences to create spaces within which people can identify

themselves, perhaps by creating a renewed reflection on community, on the uses of public spaces

or on our behaviour within them (Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2005) and, as such, can open a

space for critical thinking (Cohen-Cruz, 2002). Moreover, *En Masse* serves as a visual connector

that adds to the social diversity and characteristic of Winnipeg's North Main Street. Syrie, not

only the owner of The Tallest Poppy but also a resident of North Point Douglas, describes her

experience as a resident:

> It's amazing. It's so wonderful. I mean, I just find it very exciting. Like, I just, especially
> while the project was going on, I didn't know what was going to happen also. They kind
> of like, they really do pop up. It's like an exciting surprise. You wake up in the morning
> and all of a sudden like, Matea [Matea Radic, a local Winnipeg artist who was engaged in
> the activation of *En Masse*] is basically outside of your house and you're like, 'oh my
> god!'. I started riding my bike to work, which I never did before because I got to go by
> slowly and see, you know, and I'd get to chat. Granted, a lot of those people are my
> friends and whatever. So, I just didn't want to zoom by, you know. I wanted to be able to
> take a minute, take it in and see what was going on. And then on my way home it was
> different. It was just so exciting every day going down Main Street and getting to see
> what they had done (personal communication, March 13, 2019).

Considering the distinct characteristic of SEA, which according to Rooke (2013), is the

continuous and skilful navigation of the relationship between artistic intention and adaptation to

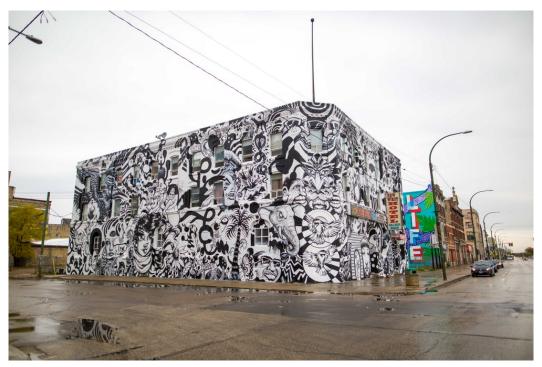circumstance and local conditions. The multiple artists engaged in *En Masse* were able to pull a

project together and make sense of it critically; the project was a freestyle collaboration where the images within the mural came not only from the stories of the artists and their lived experiences but also from listening to the conversations of the nearby public and residents of the New West Hotel. Speaking to the sense of pride and/or belonging that *En Masse* has the potential to provide, while also describing the ways in which both the short-term and long-term residents were considered, Syrie notes:

> Somebody gave a shit about their building. And like, I don't know if you know about the window sills, all the paintings that he did on the window sills, the secret paintings? So, I can't remember the artist's name, I met him. He did this thing where he painted little notes to the people that lived in the hotel, that only they can see because it's just on their window sills, like just on the tops of their window sills. Just really sweet notes like, 'I hope you have a really nice day' and 'I think you're a great person'. Just these little, like little cheery notes to people. Just on their window sills… people would of course hang out with their windows and watch him and engage him… and I think that makes a difference in people's lives when you have an uplifting note and you look out your window and it says 'I think you're beautiful' (personal communication, March 13, 2019).

What Syrie is pointing to is the capacity for *En Masse*, as a visual piece on an overlooked building in Winnipeg's North End, to focus on a greater effort to transform the local concrete and/or objective reality. Therefore, in this case, socially engaged practice is able to mediate and negotiate difficult social relations and offer creative responses to them (Rooke, 2013).

What is powerful about community arts practice is its ability to create necessary spaces of counter-hegemonic struggle against the limiting accounts of human struggle. *Synonym Art Consultation* is re-approaching community development/engagement through the arts which therefore, as implied by Spiegel and Parent (2017), can work to develop self-esteem, build

autonomy and self-regulation, create a sense of belonging and solidarity, honour pride in

diversity, and support resilience among citizens. Still, is it really possible to remake ourselves, as

citizens, in a different image through visual art intervention? And, who has access? Harvey

(2003) discusses the right to the city and explains that this particular right is not merely a right of

access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our hearts desire. *Synonym Art*

Consultation's *Wall-to-Wall* Festival engages in the support for communities to remake

themselves by activating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality which, according to

Harvey (2003), is one of the most precious of all human rights.

Figure 10. *En Masse*, 2017. New West Hotel. By Jason Botkin, MC Baldassari, Storm Angeconeb, Jade Renee-Harper, Matea Radic, Jay Cabredo, and Takashi Iwasaki. Photo by Simon Rusnack.

5. Conclusion

Mural-making in the public sphere, as a community arts practice, has the potential to, not only individually but also collectively, remake the city through our daily actions and overall lived experiences. Thus, in open and accessible public spaces one should expect to encounter and hear from those who are often placed at the margins, whose social perspectives, experience and affiliations are different from the dominant bourgeoisie (Harvey, 1992). Cities act as centres of diversity, places where confrontation exists, which moves people toward creativity and innovation. According to Fernandez (2008), engagement in community arts is now everywhere which is indicative of the growth and development of artists and arts organizations that now exist in communities of people in creative activities within their everyday lives.

City residents benefit from the work of artists in the sense that it allows people to engage more deeply in the wonder and excitement of the city. Still, the ability for art to intervene in public space relies on organizational efforts to work from *within* community. *Synonym Art Consultation*'s capacity to give artists and community space, through their various consultation processes and partnerships, for autonomy and ownership over the mural-making process allows for a particular story to be imaged at a large-scale; stories that are representative of the historical spaces that speak to the memorialization of MMIWG, that celebrate the voices of the youth, that serve to build an Indigenous presence in a city where Indigeneity should be celebrated and not pathologized, and, finally, stories that recognize the people of their respective neighbourhoods. So, if planning practices, with a focus on an arts-based approach, collaborated more closely with arts-makers then cities would become ever more vibrant, ultimately refreshing and revitalizing

the overall public well-being. Co-existence means we learn to listen and accept the stories of those around us, and be open to how that might change our own story. Participation that meets the needs of people can potentially work to redistribute power dynamics in a way that might empower diverse communities. Engaging in dialogue and collaboration, through art, seeks new ways to connect people in public space. Although art may not be able to absolutely solve the urban/social crises that exists at street level, it holds the ability to act as a medium to cross social divides in its ability to centre dialogue around individual and community experiences, where recognition allows for the creation of new ways of knowing.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

Despite the opportunities afforded by this Major Paper, I acknowledge that there are various limitations to my research. The first and most evident limitation is that using an arts-based approach to planning is anecdotal. It manifests in different capacities and, although it can be a catalyst for change, it works in different ways depending on the geo-spatial context. So, for Winnipeg, with the processes of gentrification being slow moving and revitalization in some inner-city neighbourhoods almost necessary, there is the capacity to activate a visual identity, which can, in turn, build a sense of pride and belonging. However, in other, more global cities, development is more rampant and so there may be a missed opportunity to activate such identities from *within* community. Therefore, future research is needed in this regard to better understand and qualify how art can address the nuanced experiences as they relate to the needs and wants of communities as they exist elsewhere.

Second, a thorough overview of the impact of mural-making upon residents and community members within the activated spaces were limited by both time and space afforded for this paper. Taking the time to canvass the neighbourhood, door-to-door, and speak with residents and business owners would be within the scope of a larger project. This approach would generate a broader analysis that might offer more criticality and a better understanding of the economic benefits art has afforded the respective neighbourhoods. Third, as the research period was implemented during the late winter months, conducting a more thorough investigation during the month-long activation of *Wall-to-Wall* in September would provide further insight. This would allow the potential for further opportunities to build a progressive action plan that could be presented to municipal planning staff and private consultants within the field. Finally, despite the brief history of Winnipeg as a city that plans for racial segregation and the stories that were shared on behalf of the Indigenous artists involved in the research, added complexities of Indigenous people were not included. Focusing on place-making narratives that centre Indigenous experience with/in urban areas might generate further conversations. This has the potential to position planning practices through a more informed cultural approach that could further develop marginalized communities and contribute to overall public well-being. Still, does mural-making in the city of Winnipeg address the issue of Indigenous dispossession of urban land? Does the mural-making process promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without added oppression? Do murals allow for self-expression that confronts powerlessness? Does art in the public sphere bring about social and behavioural shifts? In considering an objective of mural-making to further facilitate social change, these are a few questions that should be examined for future research.

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Addenda

Sample Interview Questions

- What does participation look like within the artist community, and whose stories are represented in the murals?

- How do these stories/murals resonate with the community, and how is community being honoured?

- What is the intention in the output of the mural-making process, and what does it mean to interact?

- In what way does the mural-making process investigate thinking? For example, what is being painted over both literally and metaphorically?

- What negotiations with the community, on behalf of the artist, are taking place?

- How is the mural design determined? Who is credited as the author(s) of these murals?

- What do you feel is the objective and intent of coordinating the murals executed during *Wall-to-Wall*?

- How are participating artists and public audience involved in the conception of the murals?

- How do you factor in dialogue, when building trust with the communities in which you work?

- How is the mural-making process taking up the following characteristics:

    - Relational: How does mural-making connect people including the artists, community to art, and community members to local business?

    - Interventionist: How do you see the murals intervening into the city space, does the visual change a sense of space?

    - Situated: Are the murals situated within current political and social affairs? How so?

- Participatory: How does mural-making encourage community participation? Is there a participatory process after the mural is made?

- How was the community perceived prior to the execution of the murals and how is community perceived now that the murals exist?

- How might the murals act as a distraction to the current urban/social crises? Are the murals drawing our eyes to something we otherwise avoid looking at?

- What sort of processes of engagement have you noticed?

- Do you know if the resident's knowledge, opinions and interests were considered in the making of murals?

Sample Informed Consent Form

Date:

Study Name: Art as an Intervention in Public Space: How Art Can Act as a Medium to Cross Social Divides

Researcher: Grant Calder, Master in Environmental Studies (Planning) Candidate, York University, Faculty of Environmental Studies. (647) 291-3146, grant.calder87@gmail.com

Supervised by: Lisa Myers, Cultural and Artistic Practice (CAP) Coordinator, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Room 284, Health, Nursing & Environmental Studies Building, York University, 4700 Keele Street. (416) 736-2100 ext. 77446, **lismyers@yorku.ca**

Purpose of the Research: We want to better understand how collaborative community mural-making can work to build community capacity with a focus on the needs and interests of marginalized members of society. We will be engaging with the artist community, as participants of the mural-making process, in order to unpack how their involvement in the public sphere of arts-making can bring about a particular awareness of the burdens that social crises exacerbate within the build environment of the city of Winnipeg. We will also be engaging with building owners, where the murals have been executed, in order to measure community change. And finally, we will also be engaging with *Synonym Art Consultation* to better understand how the criteria for authoring the murals is built and how participating artists are determined. It is our hope to discover how arts-making, as it intersects with city-building, can potentially construct new knowledge that is expressed in visual and artistic ways. These goals will be achieved, in part, by asking you to help explore one key research question:

• How can art act as a medium to cross social divides in Winnipeg's inner city neighbourhoods, and how has artists' participation in collaborative community mural-making changed them and the perception of the existing communities?

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to participate in an interview that will not exceed 75 minutes. This interview can be audio-recorded, or, if you prefer, scribed via hand-written notes.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomforts from your participation in the research. There is the potential that in discussing the output of the mural that it might bring up uncomfortable issues faced through your lived experience. You have the right to not answer any particular questions. If you find that risks have caused you distress, resources are available.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the

nature of any relationship you may have with the researcher(s), study staff, or York University, either now or in the future.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: Benefits might include gaining useful knowledge about self that you may not have discovered or about the mural-making process. There is the potential for it to provide further education regarding the urban/social crises that exists in Winnipeg's inner city neighbourhoods.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence your continued participation in future mural and culture festivals. Your decision will not influence invitation to participate in future initiatives or your relationships with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

If you wish to withdraw after the study is complete, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete. After the research becomes publicly available it will not be possible to withdraw your data.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence. Data collected throughout the project will be recorded via a digital recorder or hand written notes. Only research staff will have access to this information. The data will be stored for 2 years and then destroyed after the study, unless you indicate otherwise (i.e. you want your data returned to you). Hard copies of the data will be destroyed (shredded) through a confidential document shredding process. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. No data will be associated with any identifiable information (name, etc.).

Questions About the Research: If you have any questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact:

Grant Calder either by telephone (647) 291-3146 or by e-mail, **grant.calder87@gmail.com**, or Lisa Myers either by telephone (416) 736-2100 ext. 77446 or by e-mail (**lismyers@yorku.ca**)

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines

If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University or by phone (416) 736-5914 or e-mail **ore@yorku.ca**

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project conducted by Grant Calder, under the guidance of Lisa Myers. I have understood the nature of this study and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

I agree to participate in the research: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____