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### Transformative spatial governance

*New avenues for comprehensive planning in fragmented urban development*

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## 5. Space matters: linking micro-scale social efforts through space in Jane-Finch, Toronto

This chapter has been submitted as a single-authored article to an international peer-reviewed journal.

Multifaceted micro-scale social efforts constitute a major characteristic of contemporary urban development. When nested in complex governance arrangements, the creation of linkages between fragmented projects and initiatives enhances their capacity and influence. This paper argues that space in this respect represents a widely neglected yet crucial element. Empirical evidence from Jane-Finch, a disadvantaged low-income area in Toronto, illustrates the role of space in creating linkages between social efforts, as well as to the wider communities in which they are embedded. It focuses on community and entrepreneurial activities, illuminating their different but equally important roles in assisting in creating connections between people. An actor-centred analysis unravels the roles, relationships and conflicts between social agents involved in the provision and construction of spaces, providing an explanation for the lack of systematic spatial interventions despite their potential to amplify the impact of social efforts in Jane-Finch. The paper concludes by emphasising the value of enhancing not only community, but also entrepreneurial activities by foregrounding considerations pertaining to physical space more central in planning studies.

### 5.1 Introduction

Multifaceted micro-scale social efforts that take on various forms, often area-based, such as resident initiatives, bottom-up mobilisations and local community projects, constitute a major characteristic of contemporary urban development dynamics. Bringing forward claims for urban built environments in line with their explicit social objectives, existing research reveals how market-oriented forms of spatial governance tend to compromise and fragment these efforts, as well as impede integrative public sector planning interventions addressing their spatial needs (Tasan-Kok and Baeten, 2012; MacCallum et al., 2009). Planners not only increasingly interact with these forms of city-building endeavours (Cars et al., 2002), but planning is instrumentalised to accommodate private sector interests in entrepreneurial governance arrangements underpinning urban built environments.

Correspondingly, planning theorists are concerned that planning is losing its ‘substance’ and call for transformations by putting micro-scale social efforts at the core of planning practices (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2019; Albrechts 2016; Wolfram, 2016; Filion, Kramer and Sands, 2016; Song, 2015; Kennedy, 2007; Moulaert et al., 2007).

In this paper, I argue that space plays a crucial role in creating linkages between fragmented micro-scale social efforts, as well as to the wider communities in which they are embedded. When nested in complex governance arrangements, the creation of linkages constitutes a major factor to enhance a project’s or movement’s capacity and influence (Pahl-Wostl, 2009; Ostrom 1999). However, the physicality of space is often neglected in this respect, and in recent discussions in planning studies on the need for transformation, substance is predominantly understood in a normative (Albrechts, Barbanente and Monno, 2018), not a spatial sense. By providing detailed insights into the role of space affecting community and entrepreneurial activities in the disadvantaged Jane-Finch area in Toronto, I contend that more attention should be paid to physical characteristics and the built environment. I particularly highlight the importance of community-oriented entrepreneurial activities in creating spontaneous, un-orchestrated connections between people and advocate for the inclusion of entrepreneurial consideration in planning interventions in low-income neighbourhoods, not only for economic, but also for social objectives.

From this vantage point, I reconsider Ball’s (1986: 477) critique that “physical structures are often treated as a passive backdrop to other social processes in urban theories”. To overcome these shortcomings, I utilise Ball’s framework of the *structures of building provision* in my analysis as it allows for a thorough examination of social agents and avoids the over-simplification or generalisation of actors involved “in the production, exchange, distribution, and use of a built structure” (ibid.: 455). Simultaneously, by putting forward a trivalent lens to investigate actors and processes from a *historical, functional and political perspective*, it roots the analysis of specific spatial structures in their wider institutional contexts. With regards to micro-scale social efforts, it prevents the commonly adopted narrow focus on community activities adjusting spaces according to their needs (Özoğul and Tasan-Kok, 2018), as well as the negligence of the institutional constraints that actors, for example planners, face (Flyvbjerg, 1996), particularly considering the entrepreneurial governance of Toronto’s built environment.

The analysis reveals how modernist planning practices of the past created challenging conditions for micro-scale social efforts by spatially fragmenting them. Local social agents have to navigate the consequences of a modernist built environment, shaping both community and entrepreneurial activities. Particularly entrepreneurial

activities emerge as influential in providing spontaneous opportunities to create linkages, countering the lack of suitable community and public spaces in the area. Nonetheless, physical structures constitute impediments to actors' resourcefulness and social efforts. Despite actively appropriating existing physical structures in terms of functions of spaces, most agents involved in micro-scale efforts are users, not providers of spaces. Their social and economic position in relation to other agents involved in Jane-Finch's built environment limits responses to their spatial needs. As entrepreneurial governance limits the scope of municipal planners to systematically intervene and reconstruct the built environment, feelings of neglect and marginalisation result in contentious relationships in Jane-Finch's structures of building provision. Not only are spatial interventions inadequately used to enhance the impact of community and entrepreneurial activities in Jane-Finch, but micro-scale social efforts are marginalised in the city's wider spatial governance.

The paper is based on in-depth fieldwork in the Jane-Finch area conducted within the framework of the DIVERCITIES project<sup>8</sup>, including experiences and information shared in 59 interviews with community activists, entrepreneurs, public sector planners and policymakers, as well as ethnographic observations. It starts by exploring the link between space, community and entrepreneurial activities framed by planning studies' conflicted engagement with the built environment and the recent interest in micro-scale social efforts. The following methodology provides insights into the process of my data collection and analysis. I then contextualise the Jane-Finch area by discussing its embeddedness in Toronto's modernist planning history and entrepreneurial governance. In the analysis, I systematically present experiences and observations of actors involved in micro-scale social efforts in Jane-Finch following Ball's framework, discuss their relations to other actors involved in the area's building provision and highlight the conflicts that arise. I conclude with a discussion underscoring the need to place space more centrally in the emerging body of literature on transformation through micro-scale efforts in planning studies.

## **5.2 Bringing space (back) into the equation**

Planning studies' conflicted engagement with space stems from the spatial determinism that underlays modernist planning principles (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2010). I see the rejection of Euclidean notions of absolute space, in which built environments were considered as key determinants of human behaviour (Hall and Tewdwr-Jones, 2010), as a source of contemporary hesitation of engaging particularly with the physicality of space. Ball (1986) lamented the peripheral engagement with physical structures by urban theoreticians more than 30 years ago. In terms of the recent literature underscoring the importance of micro-scale social efforts to

transform prevailing spatial governance arrangements (Song, 2015; Albrechts, 2010; Kennedy, 2007; MacCallum et al., 2009), space is also often placed in the background of social processes. In the following, I make the case for the influence of space on micro-scale social efforts, on the exemplary basis of community and entrepreneurial activities.

From the mid-20th century onward, Euclidean views on space were increasingly questioned and understandings largely shifted towards Leibniz's philosophy of space as relational (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2010). Following this line of thinking, sociologists, and geographers in particular, started to engage more thoroughly with the intricate relationships between physical structures and human behaviour. They highlighted the social enactment of physical spaces through relations, as well as the fact that communication and social interaction are influenced, but ultimately not determined, by the built environment (Goffman, 1963). Rather, physical structures and buildings are seen as an imposition of order in the multiplicity and complexity of activities defining a space (Amin, 2008).

Countering the idea of scientific rationalism as the basis for intervening in built environments, planning studies experienced a communicative turn which started to dominate academic discourse since the early 1980s (Allmendinger and Twedwr-Jones, 2002). Closely tied to relational understandings of space, it drew attention to stakeholder relations, debates and consensus seeking in complexifying governance processes (Sager, 1994). However, the communicative turn was also criticised for lacking an object in terms of material consequences (Fainstein, 2000). Scholars, for example, pointed out that just processes do not automatically lead to just spatial outcomes (Davoudi and Bell, 2016). Furthermore, the perception of planners as central actors in deliberation processes was criticised for the neglect of wider institutional constraints, as well as assumptions that ideal speech "would melt away deep structural conflict" (Fainstein, 2000: 456). The latter is today particularly approached through the lens of the neoliberalisation of urban development (Purcell, 2009), which creates entrepreneurial governance dynamics in which public sector organisations as well as the general public, increasingly act, or are expected to act, in an entrepreneurial manner (Rossi, 2017).

Micro-scale social efforts, which have gained increasing academic attention in recent years, have been approached in terms of local social innovations (MacCallum et al., 2009), community place-making (Palermo and Ponzini, 2014) and grassroots initiatives (Albrechts, 2016). This focus correlates to the frustration of scholars of market-oriented, entrepreneurial governance, who are in search of alternatives (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2019). Micro-scale social efforts tend to target issues of local service provision, environmental sustainability or social justice, and frequently

centre around the notion of communities, which can be both area- or interest based, existing beyond family and kinship ties (Crow and Allen, 1994). However, their existence has also been connected to neoliberal notions of self-responsibilisation “as a key element of new forms of self-governance and subjectivity” (Trnka and Trundle, 2014: 136). Furthermore, and despite evidence on the crucial role of material conditions influencing perceptions, attitudes and interactions (Raco, 2018) and how adequate physical infrastructures to accommodate community activities tend to outweigh production costs (Teriman, 2011; Williams and Pocock, 2010), analyses tend to concentrate on the social rather than the physical dimensions of space.

Moreover, existing research reveals how entrepreneurial governance particularly enhances those social efforts that are somewhat in line with capitalist growth objectives, while compromising and fragmenting others (MacCallum, et al. 2009; De Souza, 2007). Creating linkages is therefore of fundamental importance, both with other efforts to pool resources and enhance impact, as well as to targeted individuals and groups in line with their objectives. As Germonetta, Häussermann and Longo (2005: 2019) argue, “social innovation in governance at a local level, taking into account civil society, will only hold good when new links are established between excluded and integrated segments of the local society.” In many policy contexts, discussions on linkages between local residents – for instance in terms of social cohesion – retreat from acknowledging structural explanations for growing inequalities and exhibit divergent expectations on levels of engagement when it comes to socio-economically stronger or weaker communities (DIVERCITIES Policy Brief, 2014).

Furthermore, policy and planning interventions targeting socio-economically weak areas often lack explicit commercial objectives (Rankin and McLean, 2015; Fincher et al., 2014). This is unfortunate as research illustrates the value of commercial activities such as entrepreneurship even beyond economic gain (Minniti, 2008; Johnstone and Lionais, 2004): “social commitment, non-profit goals and benefits for the neighbourhood [can act] as (additional) drivers for entrepreneurship besides calculated and self-interested individual behaviour” (Trettin, Neumann and Welter, 2011: 5). Furthermore, as Bailey (2015) stresses, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it is essential not to assume that potentially low entrepreneurial outcomes are the result of negative attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Instead, it might illuminate factors such as inadequate access to markets, finance, and professional networks, as well as discrimination and insufficient policies and regulations (Hackler and Meyer, 2008; Markley, 2007; Nolan, 2003). However, also with regards to entrepreneurship, the influence that the built environment and

local regulatory frameworks incur on small-scale entrepreneurs is often neglected in entrepreneurship studies (Beckers and Kloosterman, 2014).

Space does matter for entrepreneurial activity (Williams and Williams, 2012). Not only do planning instruments (which enable pro-growth strategies) indirectly influence the “specific types of inhabitants and companies” (Madureira, 2014: 2376) that are being attracted, but as a basic condition, companies and firms require spaces that accommodate their activities (Beckers and Sleutjes, 2014). The same holds true for social entrepreneurs. The availability and affordability of these spaces is strongly determined by the built environment and zoning regulations (Beckers and Kloosterman, 2011). Restrictive spatial planning considerably reduces commercial activities in neighbourhoods, for instance based on single-use zoning, compared to those that allow for mixed functions (Folmer and Risselada, 2013).

While physical space clearly matters for community and entrepreneurial activities, explicit discussions pertaining to the built environment are often left to disciplines such as architecture or urban design. It led me to reinvigorate Ball’s critique of the neglect of the built environment as an explicit focus in urban studies. Ball’s critique was directed at Marxist-inspired theoreticians in the 1970s who ascribed the creation of the built environment to an “undifferentiated interest of capital” (ibid.: 452) without dissecting the social agents and their interactions involved in its actual production process. Therefore, he developed an alternative framework

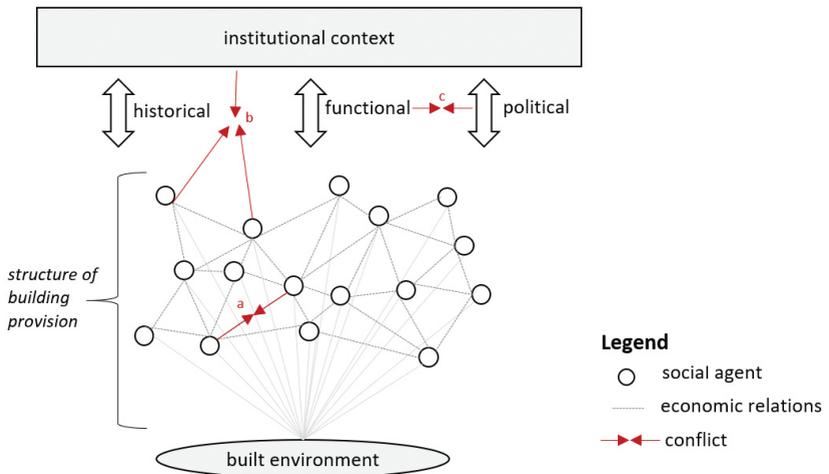


Figure 19. Schematic representation of Ball's (1986) framework for studying structures of building provision

on the *structures of building provision*, in which he proposed a social relations focus which simultaneously places the built environment as central. Figure 19 provides a schematic representation of my understanding of his framework.

The *historical* perspective draws attention to the prevalence of many physical structures over time, which can have considerable effect on “the pattern of life within a city” (Ball, 1986: 456). The *functional* perspective highlights the usages and contemporary social relations of building provision, and the *political* perspective particularly stresses state interventions in the built environment (ibid.). Furthermore, Ball highlights three types of potential conflict: between social agents (*type a*); between one or more social agents and the wider social and economic processes (*type b*); or “between agents in different structures of provision” (Ball 1986: 456; *type c*). In the following, I utilise this framework to examine the social agents engaged in micro-scale social efforts in terms of community and entrepreneurial activities, and their relations in the structure of building provisions in the Jane-Finch area in Toronto. While Ball primarily highlights the economic relations between social actors, I follow Guy and Henneberry (2000) who argue that a strict distinction between social and economic relations is artificial, and therefore, analyse social and economic relations concurrently.

### 5.3 Methodology

Jane-Finch is one of the most deprived and stigmatised areas in Toronto. It is located at the northern fringe of Toronto (Figure 20) and frequently hits the headlines as one of Canada’s most notoriously troublesome communities. Data from the 2016 Census Profile Series illustrate that individual incomes in Jane-Finch reach between 37-60% in large parts of the area, and a maximum of 80%, compared to the Toronto Census Metropolitan Average of CAD 50,479 (Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, 2019). As such, Jane-Finch is one of the lowest income areas of Toronto. Stigmatised and spatially disconnected from Toronto’s downtown, Jane-Finch’s population of approximately 82,000 is highly diverse and has, for instance, one of the highest proportions of youth, refugees, low-income earners, and social housing residents in Toronto, and due to the relative affordability of residential property, it has become a popular arrival point for newcomers to Canada (Tasan-Kok and Özoğul, 2017).

Between September and October 2015, I spent six weeks in the Jane-Finch area and returned to Toronto in May 2016 to answer follow-up questions. During my time in Jane-Finch, I utilised ethnographic methods of observing and interaction with social agents, through participant observations and guided tours through the area by community members and local organisations. I spent time at a Sunday

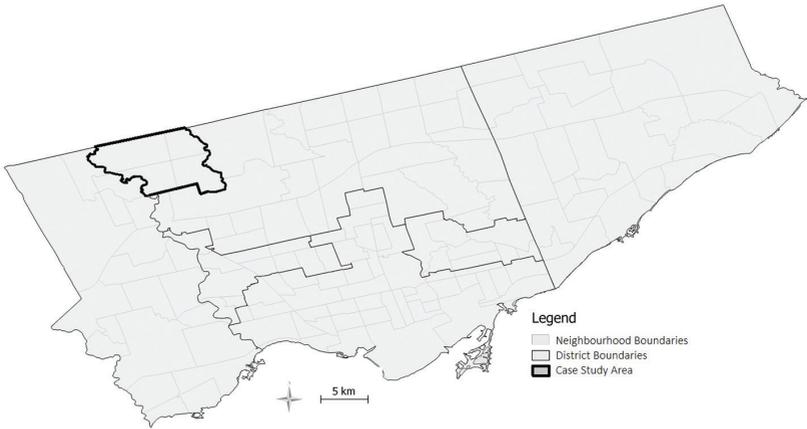


Figure 20. Jane-Finch: case study area in Toronto

flea market in one of the shopping malls and followed a local entrepreneur trying to selling small items imported from abroad, observing how he navigated the area's modernist built environment. Furthermore, I participated in meetings of organisations and initiatives joining forces to enhance local entrepreneurship in Jane-Finch, as well as being a part of discussions and events organised by local community agents. Additionally, I conducted a wide range of in-depth interviews in this respect. In total, I collected experiences and opinions from seven representatives of neighbourhood-based social initiatives located in Jane-Finch, as well as 36 entrepreneurs who were, as it emerged, to a great extent engaged in social forms of entrepreneurship, philanthropy or perceived themselves as informal role models to the local community (Özoğul and Tasan-Kok, 2016).

During the data collection process, the importance of a specific set of spaces – the area's two shopping malls, several fragmented strip malls in the area, and small scattered community spaces in residential buildings and warehouses – emerged inductively, indicating how they carry both important commercial and social functions for local residents. Therefore, I also conducted interviews with two mall managers, with five municipal city planners and four social policymakers working for the City of Toronto, as well as five planners working for the social housing agency Toronto Community Housing (TCH). In these interviews, I addressed the limitations of physical space to the Jane-Finch communities more explicitly.

All interviews were semi-structured and adjusted to the interviewees' positions and experiences. Due to the informal nature of many micro-scale social efforts and entrepreneurial activities in Jane-Finch, six interviewees did not feel comfortable signing the consent form despite full guarantee of confidentiality. Their interviews were not recorded and only used to support the general research findings. In the analysis, I present the research outcomes in an aggregated manner and use

Ball's (1986) *historical, functional and political* lens to present the extensive data in a systematic manner. I mostly refrain from referring to individual interviewees directly, in order to preserve their anonymity, and present my interviewees narratives enmeshed with my personal observations and impressions from the field.

#### **5.4 Modernist planning and entrepreneurial governance of Toronto's built environment**

Social agents involved in Jane-Finch's building provision cannot be understood without its connection to Toronto's modernist planning history and the area's embeddedness in Toronto's entrepreneurial governance. In the last sixty years, Toronto underwent a metamorphosis "from a provincial town to significant urban heavyweight" (Levine, 2014: 1) with strong repercussions on its built environment. During WW2, Toronto's form first began to change from the characteristic grid of Canadian cities at that time, with the first projects following more organic structures (Sewell, 2009). Spilling over from the United States, anti-urban sentiments and corresponding modernist ideas of the ideal city were enhanced by the establishment of the Toronto Planning Board in 1942 (*ibid.*). A plan published by the board one year later presented a vision of neighbourhood restructuring centring around ideals of the 'modernist suburb' as a counterpart to high-density, mixed-used inner city areas. Especially the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which had taken over the assets of the Crown Wartime Housing Corporation which provided social housing during the war (Mcafee, 2006), gave these ideals expression in property development projects on the outskirts of the city.

In 1949, the first master plan for Metropolitan Toronto was published, declaring the harmful character and unsatisfactory living conditions of high-density areas (Sewell, 2009). It was followed by the establishment of the Metropolitan Toronto Municipal Federation in 1953, which had its own Metro Toronto Planning Department (Boudreau, Keil and Young, 2009). The underlying rationale of the federation was that Toronto's rich downtown would contribute to the "cost of infrastructure and other development in the booming but tax-poor suburbs" (Boudreau, Keil and Young, 2009: 50), a model that never operated the other way around once conditions started turning (*ibid.*). Metro Toronto prepared a master plan, which was supplemented with more detailed district plans. The first of these district plans "was prepared in February 1962 by Eli Comay, then commissioner of planning" (Sewell, 2009: 125), covering District 10 – the area that is today known as Jane-Finch – and outlined how approximately 650 acres of farmland were to be transformed into a functioning community (Rigakos, Kwashie and Bosanac, 2004).

Modernist ideals and rapid population growth contributed to suburbanisation

dynamics, and Metro Toronto’s suburban municipalities experienced large-scale property development between the 1950s and 1980s. Even though the end of the 1960s increasingly saw citizen movements and a wider public begin to challenge “the idea that developers and planners could refashion the city to their liking” (Sewell, 2009: 137), notably those led by Jane Jacobs, lower-tier municipalities were keen on “maintaining low property taxes and providing a hospitable environment for developers” (Horak and Moore, 2015: 186). The municipality of North York, led by mayor Mel Lastman between 1972 and 1998, which covers the Jane-Finch area, represented an archetypical example of neighbourhood organisations having little say in large-scale property development with social concerns being largely absent from development agendas established through close-knit relations between municipal actors and large developers (*ibid.*).

Since its construction as a model modernist suburb, the physical structures of Jane-Finch remained largely intact. The plan, which focused on the large-scale production of public housing, emphasised the combination of low, medium, and high-density housing. Correspondingly, the Jane-Finch area has townhouses, semi-detached dwellings and high-rise apartment buildings, yet the ‘tower in the park’ design has become characteristic of the area and shaping wider public perceptions (Tasan-Kok and Özoğul, 2017; Stewart, 2008). In line with modernist principles, the built environment in Jane-Finch features large open green spaces but lacks attractive public spaces (Galanakis, 2016). Primarily based on single-use zoning giving the area a predominantly residential character, large avenues and a car-centred design dominate Jane-Finch. The main intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West is framed by large grey parking lots and two shopping malls (Figure 21). The shopping malls were already designated as the area’s cultural and economic ‘centre’ in the 1962 plan (Rigakos, Kwashie and Bosanac, 2004), and despite the seemingly



unattractive intersection, still form the physical centre and heart of the area.

*Figure 21. Impressions from the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West*

The main agents involved in Jane-Finch's initial construction were Metro Planning which set the framework, the public housing agency Metro Toronto Housing, developers and, to a lesser extent, anticipated middle-class residents. The realisation of the plan without corresponding social infrastructures, however, led to the first examples of social unrest as early as the 1970s (Sewell, 2009). In general, "neighbourhood-level organisations had little influence over policy, and neighbourhood politics was dominated by ratepayers' associations" (Horak and Moore, 2015: 186). As Ball (1986) argues, physical structures "influence the pattern of life within a city and also economic and social interaction at a much wider scale" (Ball, 1986: 456). In Jane-Finch, "ultra-high-density, wide open unguarded spaces, [and] continued under-resourcing and under-servicing" (Rigakos, Kwashie and Bosanac, 2004: 16) created massive problems and led to stigmatisation and disconnection from other parts of the city.

In the 1980s, Toronto's economy shifted towards the service sector and redirected strongly towards a global market in line with 'global city' discourses, while "little attention was paid to the fact that the weak welfarist institutions of the Fordist period were crumbling" (Boudreau, Keil and Young, 2009: 42). International investment and property development firms were on the rise and Toronto's downtown office boom was enhanced by planners allowing private developers to increase heights for small social contributions (Desfor et al., 2006). With the ambition to establish a 'mega-city', enhance competitiveness and reduce costs, the conservative provincial government amalgamated the old city of Toronto with five surrounding municipalities in the metropolitan region in 1998. Fiscal pressures on the 'new' City of Toronto included responsibility for public transit and social housing. However, to prevent business flight, "the City's high commercial property tax relative to surrounding suburban municipalities places pressure on local politicians [...which...] creates an environment in which new policy initiatives that require a significant commitment of City funds rarely win council support" (ibid.: 182).

Hulchanski (2010) has vividly illustrated how Toronto underwent income polarisation from the 1970s, with income levels compared to the city's average dropping considerably in the north-eastern and north-western parts of the city, corresponding to the former independent municipalities that, due to amalgamation, were transformed into inner-suburban districts like North York. Pockets of poverty are prevalent in the Jane-Finch area, which in fact consists of four neighbourhoods, Humber Summit, Humbermede, Black Creek and Glenfield-Jane Heights, and contain a relative high share of Toronto's iconic high-rise apartment towers, many

of which have dilapidated over the years. Neighbourhood revitalisation efforts of the City of Toronto, and a ‘tower renewal’ programme which has been institutionalised as the Tower and Neighbourhood Revitalization Unit in 2015 are aiming to tackle both physical dilapidation and social issues such as poverty, exclusion and stigmatisation (Tasan-Kok and Özoğul, 2017).

Nonetheless, “a paradoxical picture emerges in which neighbourhood revitalisation is on the city’s policy agenda and is linked to concerns about rising crime and violence; yet the opportunities for the political expression of neighbourhood concerns remain weak because institutional and fiscal capacity are fragmented” (Horak and Moore, 2015: 182). Entrepreneurial governance and competitive city-planning creates limitations in terms of social interventions in Toronto’s built environment (Kipfer and Keil, 2002). And even though Toronto is home to a host of small-scale non-governmental projects and agencies, Horak and Moore (2015: 190) argue that many of them are “not particularly well suited to participate in comprehensive neighbourhood revitalisation initiatives.”

## **5.5 Space, community and entrepreneurial activities in Jane-Finch’s conflicted structures of building provision**

Despite its bleak first impression, and to the surprise of many outsiders, the Jane-Finch area is home to vibrant and multifaceted micro-scale social efforts (Tasan-Kok and Özoğul, 2017). They range from the community-oriented urban farming project *Black Creek Community Farm* and the formally organised youth centre *The SPOT* as part of the *Jane-Finch Community Family Centre*, the grassroots initiative *Jane and Finch Action Against Poverty*, and informal meet-ups of elderly immigrants. Community activities are here understood in terms of initiatives with the objective of benefitting local social arrangements and conditions beyond the individual, and can include a wide range of activities such as urban gardening, meet-ups, workshops, lessons and classes, coaching, counselling and socialising. Community activities in Jane-Finch are manifold. However, a frequent lack of coordination and the precarious funding situation fuels competition between fragmented initiatives (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok, 2013).

Furthermore, entrepreneurs from the area are strongly inclined towards community-oriented forms of entrepreneurship, engage in philanthropic work, set up their own initiatives to encourage others from the area to start businesses, and perceive themselves as role models and act as mentors (Özoğul and Tasan-Kok, 2016). Community-orientation in this sense encompasses commercial activities targeting needs in the local community by entrepreneurs being or having been

community members themselves. It also includes community development efforts by entrepreneurs who are, independent of their commercial activities, using parts of their generated capital to invest in existing social efforts or developing their own community programmes. The diverse array of these micro-scale social efforts plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of inhabitants in Jane-Finch, who often face complex challenges (Tasan-Kok and Özoğul, 2017). The following examines the influence of space on these efforts and unravels their embeddedness in the structures of building provision following Ball's (1986) framework.

### 5.5.1 Challenges of navigating activities in a modernist built environment

*“There is a lot of support, it is just like, I don't know man, a lot of these opportunities are hidden. You know what I am saying? If I'm not able to find them, how are kids able to find them?”<sup>9</sup>*

(Interviewed social entrepreneur and community activist)

Once in existence, construction costs tend to prevent extensive redevelopment of built environments (Ball, 1986). For social agents involved in Jane-Finch's community and entrepreneurial activities, it means that they need to navigate a modernist built environment in their daily activities, which has remained largely unchanged since its construction. As the quote of the interviewed social entrepreneur and community activist above exemplifies, being aware of and accessing the wide array of existing social efforts in Jane-Finch is not always easy, and the area's spatial layout emerges as major contributor to this end. As one municipal planner who works in the area explained: *“the challenge with Jane and Finch is that the built environment has isolated pockets.”*

Social agents engaged in community activities repeatedly described this fact as an impediment to lay new linkages in the sense of reaching out and attracting residents to their programmes and initiatives, particularly those who are new to the area. Spatial dynamics were, of course, not the only reasons mentioned. For instance, competition between different projects and services was described as being so high that different providers would not always refer individuals to the right programme fitting to their needs, despite being aware of it. And, for example, interviewees involved in grassroots initiatives noted that some social organisations providing services in the area do not *“always have the best interest of people at heart.”* Instead, they were criticised for operating in the area for ulterior motives, using the bad reputation of the Jane-Finch community to attract funding to sustain their own organisation. It was lamented that bottom-up projects had to compete with these

more established organisations, which often have more experiences writing grant proposals, when resources are made available for the Jane-Finch area. However, the lack of physical infrastructure accommodating community dynamics, particularly in terms of spaces for community activities in a ‘community hub’, was a recurrent critique.

For entrepreneurs, the severity of challenges related to Jane-Finch’s modernist physical structures was highly dependent on the type of entrepreneurship and their development trajectory. The western part of the area is partly covered by an industrial terrain which allows for industrial and commercial uses. The interviewed entrepreneurs who settled in this area often possessed lengthy periods of work experience before becoming independent, a substantial amount of starting capital when they set up a business and their services were often very specialised, servicing a niche market instead of being dependent on foot traffic from potential customers. They stressed the locational value in terms of being close to the highway and close to the city without being downtown, and they were often not rooted to the Jane-Finch communities. Rather, community representatives lamented that the industrial terrain is not only spatially but socially disconnected from the area and enterprises there are hesitant to hire employees from Jane-Finch due to the negative stigma attached to the residents.

On the other hand, entrepreneurs who themselves grew up in Jane-Finch often came from difficult situations of economic hardship, single-parent households, being newcomers to Canada or having had conflict with the law as teenagers. Their trajectory of starting a business looked very different. They often started without or with only very little capital and they encountered many obstacles throughout the process. However, it was particularly those entrepreneurs who related their own experiences to their efforts of not only making financial benefits but “*giving back to the community*”, aspiring and supporting individuals who find themselves in similar situations than their own. The majority of this set of socially-oriented entrepreneurs utilised assistance and support provided by micro-scale social efforts in their development trajectories and reflected extremely positively on the effects on their business success. Mostly, the projects and initiatives they utilised had nothing to do with explicit entrepreneurial skills but were valued for support ranging from emotional assistance and encouragement to practical things such as providing food and diapers when money ran out at the end of the month. At the same time, interviewees were very realistic about accessing those opportunities. As one explained: “*it is not so much what you know but who you know, and newcomers don’t have those connections.*”

Through the dominant residential single-use zoning and car-centred design,



Figure 22 Open green space between apartment buildings in Jane-Finch

most social interactions in Jane-Finch take place within buildings. Most of the large, empty open spaces between the apartment blocks are not animated and the wide avenues do not encourage walking in the neighbourhood (Figure 22). As a consequence, social encounters tend to require purposeful planning, increasing the social importance of the two shopping centres and the few strip malls in the area as several spaces in which interactions may occur in an unplanned, untargeted manner. One mall manager described it as follows: *“people who first come to Canada and get an apartment across the street, they will want to understand how their city works. And the best thing they can do is come to the shopping centre.”* The chance of simply stumbling upon one of the many grassroots initiatives in Jane-Finch without having social relations with people connected to them is very small.

There is a scarcity of office, retail and community spaces in Jane-Finch, despite the area’s relative affordability compared to other parts of the city. Community service providers described it as a paradox of rental prices in some malls being as high as downtown despite being located in a low-income area and gave the example of vegetable prices being among the highest in the whole of Toronto: *“Why? Supply. There is not a lot of retail space in the community, so they jack up the prices of vegetables in order to pay for the rent.”* Concretely, for entrepreneurs who cannot afford these rents, it creates massive problems. I followed one entrepreneur, for example, who was selling small items imported from abroad. Walking by foot to avoid purchasing a public transport ticket, he selected main intersections with heavy traffic to lay out his products on a blanket and try to sell his items. *“I am selling in different places. I just store stuff at my place and when there is an occasion, I set up and sell”*, he explained. With only a few potential customers passing by every now and then and considering that his items were not very big value, such as scarfs and incense sticks, provides insight into his precarious situation. Answering the question whether he would not

make more profit elsewhere, he elaborated: “Once people know you, they know what you have. When you go into a new area, people look you up and down. And if they never see me before, they ask, are you gonna be here next week? They wanna develop a relationship. So, it is better to stay in one area and be consistent before you move to other areas.”<sup>10</sup>

From a historic perspective (Ball, 1986), the structure of building provision in Jane-Finch draws attention to the influence that built environments can play on social dynamics within an area as well as other parts of the city. The built environment provides disadvantageous conditions for the creation of linkages between micro-scale social efforts, and particularly for new residents who lack social connections in the area. It is also one of the factors that fuels competition between different initiatives. Moreover, the experiences and reflections of social agents involved in community and entrepreneurial activities also exemplifies that built structures are an imposition of order in the complexity of activities defining a space (Amin, 2008). Nonetheless, social agents do not simply surrender to the limiting spatial conditions as the following section illustrates.

### 5.5.2 Functional appropriations of space

*Seniors are occupying seats in front of a food stall, some are chatting, some are just sitting next to each other, one sits alone and reads a newspaper. They sit in front of a sign restricting sitting to several minutes and only combined with consumption. One hour later, the same group of seniors still lingers around in the same spot. No one consumes anything.*

(personal observation)

The functional perspective on structures of building provision stresses that the built environment can serve different functions to different agents (Ball, 1986). A difference often exists, for instance, between users, owners and investors and the purpose that a building or physical structure has to them. Social agents involved in community and entrepreneurial activities in Jane-Finch are often limited to a role as users. Nonetheless, and while being very explicit about the limitations that the built environment incurs on their activities, they are actively involved in appropriating the existing spaces to the best of their ability.

Due to the lack of a community hub or centre in Jane-Finch, many community activities are forced to retreat to what Tasan-Kok (2015) calls ‘leftover spaces’. They include rooms or basements in apartment buildings. The community organisation *Jane-Finch Community Family Centre*, for example, is a major player in terms of social



Figure 23. Jane-Finch Community Family Centre

service provision, covering a wide range of issues such as poverty reduction, early development, youth, elderly and mental health both by providing more structured programmes as well as by organising drop-in classes and sessions. However, without knowing where it is located, it is rather concealed (Figure 23).

Social organisations and initiatives moreover can be found in the malls, which provides them with more exposure. Similar to the advantages of entrepreneurs being located in the malls, which was highlighted both in terms of the fact that “*guaranteed traffic in a sense that you know people that are residing here will come here three or four times a week*”, according to a business owner renting space, and to establish relations with and learn from other entrepreneurs, community activities located in these spaces benefitted in terms of possibilities to create these linkages. Mall owners explained how they offer different agencies and projects discount on rents to run their activities in the malls. This includes the availability of space for branches of city-wide non-profit organisations, community-based organisations, day care, health and youth centres as well as meeting spaces for groups, such as elderly immigrants, all contributing to the fact that the two shopping malls form not only the spatial but also social centre of the Jane-Finch area.

The value and function of malls as “*community shopping malls*” was repeatedly underscored, and mall managers stressed the benefits from a retail point of view. By working with social efforts, both supporting them but also directing vendors to specific support programmes and initiatives, they also attract potential customers. As one manager explained, having “*community agencies that provide social assistance and services within our trade area have a lot of advantages. It is beneficial for both parties because we are trying to empower people. Hopefully, when they feel empowered, they get jobs or keep the jobs they currently have. In return, they get paid, they have money and come back to us because they have a tie with the retailer.*” This attitude and self-perception as a community shopping mall also translates to a form of leniency, for instance in terms of the seniors occupying consumption spaces for extended periods of time



Figure 24 Seating area in community shopping mall

as illustrated in my observation above. With very limited attractive public spaces in Jane-Finch to casually meet and interact with others not to mention harsh winters,

malls draw in people for no specific purpose other than to just hang around (Figure 24). However, compared to the elderly, groups of youngsters were less welcomed, denoting a very different experience for youth due to a lack of inclusive and safe spaces in Jane-Finch (Galanakis, 2016).

The personal engagement of individual agents who are not only users of a built structure, but are in a position to influence its function beyond that, is fundamental. For community activities in apartment buildings, for instance, the provision of space is dependent on owners and their relationship to social agents involved in community efforts. Similarly, one mall offers a programme to function as springboard for local entrepreneurs in the area, by providing programmes targeted to newcomers who are not proficient in English, and by running a weekly Sunday flea market for entrepreneurs who cannot afford to rent retail or office space in the area (Figure 25); described as “a project to generate more than money: It is mostly to generate opportunities. If you came in and decided to sell scarfs, we would give you the opportunity. There are no ties, no contracts.”



Figure 25. Space inside the shopping mall during a regular day (left) and during the Sunday flea market (right)

The strong neighbourhood attachment expressed by various interviewees is strongly tied to the social relationships and community dynamics that enact the physical spaces in Jane-Finch. Another point that frequently came up was the resourcefulness of residents, community activists and entrepreneurs, initially by force due to the challenging circumstances in which they found themselves in, later turned to their advantage. Despite their best efforts however, the limitations on creating linkages between social efforts was expressed clearly, and the malls also

only provided a limited amount of space. Furthermore, low spending power with high rents for commercial and business activities led many entrepreneurs, also community-oriented ones, to leave Jane-Finch once they were financially capable to do so. Despite the attachment, the underlying message of many social entrepreneurs followed the rationale of one who explained: “*you have to go back to the kids because I was from there and I was able to make it out and so can you. You have to learn how to do that.*” The functional perspective (Ball, 1986) demonstrates that systematic spatial interventions could improve the situation for micro-scale social efforts and further amplify the impact, but the following section will illustrate how their frequently economically weak position in relation to other agents involved in the building provision in Jane-Finch provides obstacles in this respect.

### 5.5.3 Obstacles to systematic spatial interventions

*“The City is more interested in people with big money.”*

(Interviewed entrepreneur from Jane-Finch)

*“Five years ago, our sites in Jane-Finch, there was no market, there was no appetite, we just wouldn’t generate enough value to redevelop Jane-Finch.”*

(Interviewed planner)

The *political* perspective of Ball’s (1986) framework emphasises the role of the state in intervening in the built environment as well as the struggles between agents over the content of the intervention. Considering the entrepreneurial governance underpinning the built environment in Toronto, the limited influence of state actors in the face of private-sector driven development emerges in Jane-Finch and illustrates the disconnection of activities in the area from larger-scale policy frameworks. Concretely, it meant that while interviewed planners and policymakers acknowledged the “*hidden character*” of community infrastructures in Jane-Finch, they described their limited scope to intervene. Actors living and working in the area, in turn, felt neglected and frustrated, creating conflicting situations and contentious relationships between agents involved in Jane-Finch’s building provision.

Feelings of marginalisation were repeatedly expressed by social agents from Jane-Finch engaged in community and entrepreneurial activities. Thereby, the lack of community spaces played a major role again, but was not considered as a priority for the City. Entrepreneurs felt neglected by the City’s economic policy and programmes, which they perceived as overlooking the potential of small-scale entrepreneurs from disadvantaged areas, such as themselves, and favouring

those that start from a position with extensive capital. Micro-scale efforts trying to enhance entrepreneurship dynamics in Jane-Finch outlined their unsuccessful attempts to create an entrepreneurship hub to support entrepreneurs, such as the one selling small imported items at crossroads or another to provide a communal kitchen that fulfils health regulations to formalise small catering businesses. Municipal neighbourhood revitalisation programmes, designating Jane-Finch neighbourhoods as priority neighbourhoods for investment, were considered as having “*not much impact because there weren’t significant resources around it.*” Feelings of marginalisation were enhanced by new developments in other parts of the city, where new multi-functional community facilities were constructed as part of larger revitalisation schemes and that received a lot of media attention, such as in the downtown neighbourhood Regent Park.

Frustrated with the situation, movements and initiatives exist in Jane-Finch advocating for change, such as the resident-led grassroots coalition *Jane-Finch Action Against Poverty*. While the latter takes on a broader perspective on various issues affecting local residents, other initiatives are more explicitly targeted at the built environment. The *Community Action Planning Group of York West*, for example, takes “action on the development and planning of our social and physical environment” (CAPGYW, 2019), and the *Community Action Planning Group*, describes itself as a “voluntary body that is in the process of building a core of activists concerned about a range of development issues or more aptly a lack of development in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood” (Urban Space Gallery, 2019). Planners working in Jane-Finch at both city and district level, in turn, described Jane-Finch as a “*very challenging community in terms of planning boards*” and adversarial community leaders, which they called “gatekeepers”, were at times obstructing work in the area.

Planners also explained that it “*did not make much sense to start planning and place-making in the [Jane-Finch] corridor*” before, but that the development of a subway extension close to Jane-Finch and new light rail transit might spur private investments and offer an “*opportunity to reassess the area*”. As a “*potential catalyst for change*”, according to one interviewee, it allows the City Planning division to create a framework for public and private investments in terms of a more legible street network, public realm improvements, parks, and community facilities. Since community activists have advocated for these sorts of improvements for a long time, there was a great degree of suspicion on the actual implementation of these objectives. Initial plans connected to the new light rail transit by Metrolinx, a Crown agency managing public transport, however, included the construction of a storage facility for up to 75 vehicles at the heart of the Jane-Finch intersection and were met with much resistance and public outcry.

Similarly, social housing provider TCH is running a programme called ‘Reset’ in selected sites in the Jane-Finch area, which involves the renovation of social housing units in close collaboration with residents and local initiatives. The programme, as interviewees described, has been developed particularly for locations without market-interest, for instance in the sub-area Jane-Firgrove, which has one of the highest concentrations of poverty in Jane-Finch and the city as a whole. Interviewees moreover explained that they were constantly re-evaluating the real estate markets, land values and private sector interests, looking for opportunities for public-private partnerships to finance redevelopment. With the new subway connection being built close to the Jane-Finch area, they saw new potential to attract private sector interest and ultimately generate enough money to improve building sites in the Jane-Finch area.

Two zoning bylaw amendments which were adopted by the City Council in June 2014 as part of the City’s Tower Renewal programme, are drawing high hopes from agents involved in micro-scale social efforts. Through a rezoning process in selected trial sites, including a few buildings in Jane-Finch, the programme allows commercial and community activities to take place on the lower floors of apartment towers to encourage local economic growth and to allow for a diverse array of facilities and businesses ranging from offices, retail stores, and restaurants to community, religious and medical centres, libraries and shelters (RAC Zoning, 2018). Even though the programme depends on the willingness of private property owners to collaborate, the availability of new community and commercial spaces was welcomed and, for instance, connected by one interviewed activist to the fact that *“people in the area don’t just want help. They want to help themselves.”*

Thus, looking at the social and economic between agents from a political perspective illuminates their positions of power. Due to their weak position in economic terms, micro-scale social efforts advocate for change in the built environment and form coalitions but are ultimately not in a very strong position to negotiate. They feel neglected by state actors, who in turn proclaim that their hands are tied lacking financial means to intervene on a larger scale in Jane-Finch’s spatial environment.

## **5.6 Discussion and conclusion**

In this paper, I illustrated that space matters in linking micro-scale social efforts. Jane-Finch, created through a modernist planning exercise, deeply influences the nature of community and entrepreneurial activities in the area. The spatial layout, restricting zoning regulations, and a lack of social meeting places intensify the challenges that residents, entrepreneurs and community organisers face. Despite their resourcefulness of both actively navigating and appropriating spaces through

their practices and established social relations, the Jane-Finch area lacks physical space to better accommodate, link and amplify the impact of micro-scale social efforts. Framed by a theoretical discussion on planning studies hesitant engagement with physical space, and the treatment of space as a by-product rather than a focus when it comes to community and entrepreneurial activities, I argue that much can be gained from foregrounding space through structures of building provision in research endeavours as well as planning interventions.

In Jane-Finch, spatial conditions limit the visibility of micro-scale social efforts which in turn hampers their ability to create linkages. The wishes of local agents for spaces in form of a community centre or an entrepreneurship hub to accommodate their activities are linked to establishing a stronger foothold in the area. While systematic interventions of Toronto's local administration are desired, top-down interventions are resisted. In the provision of new, community-responsive spaces, retaining the dynamism of activities and flexibility of functions instead of structuring and linking, and controlling everything, is of crucial importance. In fact, a key outcome of the insights of the Jane-Finch area are the benefits of commercial and entrepreneurial activities that certain spaces such as the shopping malls provide in terms of spontaneous linkages and encounters. Entrepreneurial activities provide opportunities especially for newcomers to connect with more established residents and to learn about formal and informal support mechanisms in the area that may remain otherwise hidden.

However, insights generated through utilising Ball's (1986) analytical framework illuminate a number of conflicts. First, conflicts between different social agents in a specific structure of building provision (*type a*) are immanent. They occur in terms of social service provision organisations competing with each other, divergent functions of space for different agents such as residents for whom the main intersection has an important social function versus the intention of Metrolinx to use the space as a storage facility for its light-rail vehicles, and between municipal planners and community activists. Second, conflicts between social agents and wider social and economic processes (*type b*) can be illustrated by the fact that agents involved in micro-scale social efforts are very clear about their spatial needs, but the entrepreneurial governance underpinning Toronto's built environment prevents these needs being met.

Areas like Jane-Finch, which do not attract considerable private sector interest to finance systematic interventions in their built environment, are not included in larger-scale property-driven revitalisation schemes, in contrast to more centrally located areas where location, market demand and property prices create different conditions for, and relations between, public sector and market agents in structures

of building provision. And third, different structures of building provision can be in conflict with each other (*type c*). The clearest example in Jane-Finch is that the historic building provision reflected in the area's modernist spaces are in conflict with the functional one. Overall, Ball's (*ibid.*) framework proved beneficial in generating these insights, albeit the results show that particularly the political perspective should move beyond the state as a major determinant of interventions into the built environment.

Micro-scale social efforts are often presented in an idealised manner and the recent literature in the field of planning studies on governance transformations through these efforts particularly focuses on counter-hegemonic movements. However, as the experiences from Jane-Finch show, and as it is the case with any other governance actor or organisation, micro-scale social efforts cannot be generalised. Furthermore, as in any other social and economic relationship, harmony should not automatically be assumed nor conflict be embraced. Moreover, in line with Guy and Henneberry's (2000) argument that social and economic relations cannot be easily entangled but are often inherently intertwined, entrepreneurs in Jane-Finch display not only interesting tendencies towards social forms of entrepreneurship but are also important figures in a set of crucial micro-scale social efforts. With their simultaneous profit orientation, they would not necessarily be categorised as counter-hegemonic, stressing the value of approaching micro-scale efforts from a broader frame.

Lastly, the case of Jane-Finch shows how planners working both for the City of Toronto, and TCH, are constrained in their actions due to the wider institutional context in which they are embedded. The problem is not only that space is not utilised to the advantage of the local community by connecting micro-scale efforts, but also that activities and initiatives in this disadvantaged area are marginalised in Toronto's wider spatial governance. It shows that an overly enthusiastic view on planners' ability to simply place micro-scale social efforts at the heart of their spatial interventions in the name of transformation is not easily operationalizable. At the same time, uncovering different agents in the structures of building provision demonstrates that the actions of individual actors, be it the mall manager or a planner, do matter and do make a difference in the relationships in building provision. I suggest that planners can best amplify the impact of micro-scale social efforts by paying close attention to the importance of linkages between them through space. Considering entrepreneurial governance arrangements, these linkages will likely be small-scale in areas like Jane-Finch, which do not attract much private sector interest to finance large-scale revitalisation, but will provide crucial support to the capacity and leadership of local actors. Future research should uncover the mechanisms of transformation of overarching governance arrangements on the basis of micro-scale efforts in entrepreneurial, market-oriented settings.

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