

Rethinking Multicultural Planning: An Empirical Study of Ethnic Retailing

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Abstract:

The recent waves of immigration have dramatically impacted urban landscapes and economies of Canada's largest metropolitan regions. One notable phenomenon is the rise of ethnic retail strips and centers as physical markers of increasing multiculturalism. The dynamics of ethnic retailing pose various opportunities and challenges for municipalities; yet, our knowledge of its complexities is limited and current literature on multicultural planning offers little useful guidance in planning practice. This study examines three retail strips in the inner city of Toronto, namely East Chinatown, the Gerrard India Bazaar, and Corso Italia, and one suburban Asian theme mall, the Pacific Mall in the City of Markham in an attempt to identify the role of urban planning in responding to the rise of ethnic retail neighbourhoods. The findings of the four cases indicate that urban planners have been unable to intervene actively in ethnic retail and direct its development and growth. The planning legislative structure and the lack of policy support hinder planners' capacity to be proactive. Planners cannot work alone to build multicultural cities. This paper concludes on the importance of municipal intervention and interdepartmental collaboration as useful implications for multicultural planning practice.

Key words: ethnic retailing, multicultural planning, ethnic strip, Asian theme mall

Résumé:

Les récentes vagues d'immigration ont considérablement affecté les paysages urbains et les économies des plus grandes régions métropolitaines du Canada. Un phénomène remarquable est la montée de bandes ethniques de détail et des centres en tant que marqueurs physiques de

multiculturalisme croissant. La dynamique du commerce de détail ethnique posent diverses opportunités et des défis pour les municipalités, et pourtant, notre connaissance de sa complexité est limitée et la littérature actuelle sur la planification multiculturelle offre peu d'indications utiles pour planifier la pratique. Cette étude porte sur trois bandes de détail dans le centre-ville de Toronto, à savoir East Chinatown, le Gerrard India Bazaar et Corso Italia, et un centre commercial de banlieue thème asiatique, Pacific Mall dans la ville de Markham dans une tentative d'identifier le rôle des villes la planification pour répondre à la hausse des quartiers ethniques de vente au détail. Les résultats de ces quatre cas indiquent que les urbanistes ont pu intervenir activement dans ethnique détail et orienter son développement et sa croissance. La structure de la programmation législative et le manque de soutien politique entravent la capacité des planificateurs d'être proactif. Les planificateurs peuvent pas travailler seul à construire des villes multiculturelles. Cet article conclut sur l'importance de l'intervention municipale et la collaboration interministérielle comme conséquences utiles pour la pratique de planification multiculturelle.

Mots clés: commerce de détail ethnique, la planification multiculturelle, ethnique bande, centre commercial thème asiatique

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INTRODUCTION

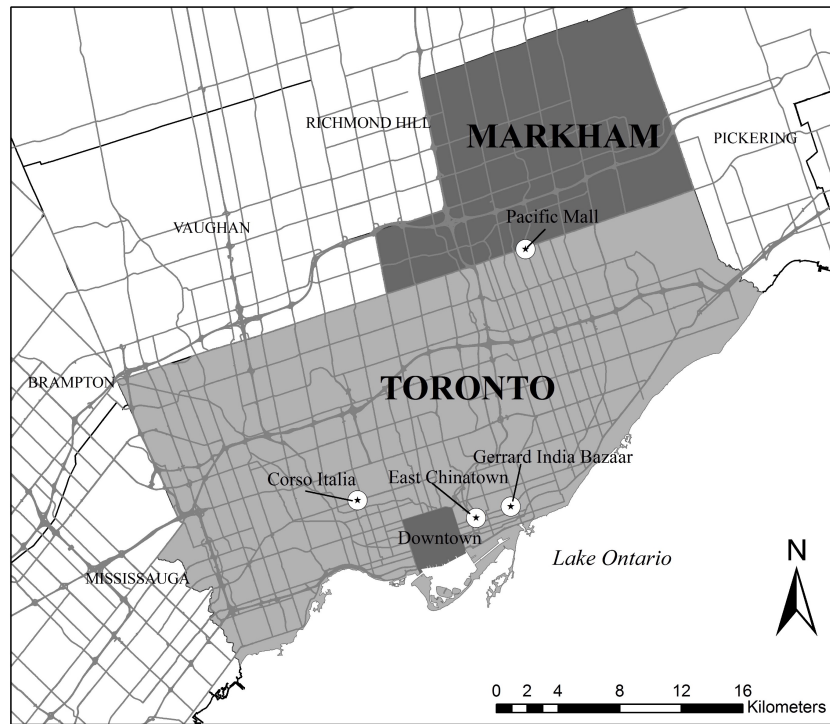
The recent waves of immigration have dramatically impacted urban landscapes and economies of Canada's largest metropolitan regions. One notable phenomenon is the rise of ethnic retail strips and centers as physical markers of increasing multiculturalism.

This ethnic retail phenomenon is important to study because its dynamics pose both opportunities and challenges for municipalities. On one hand, ethnic retailing generates significant benefits to urban economies, to immigrant integration, to the retrofit of traditional neighbourhoods, and to community building. On the other hand, the enclave-setting of many of the ethnic retail districts could be easily construed as cultural exclusivity and insularity leading to weak community relationships with surrounding neighbourhoods. There are also controversial issues related to land use, traffic flow, and parking allocation in extreme cases (Preston & Lo, 2000; Qadeer, 1997, 1998; Wang, 1999). These opportunities and challenges are also in need of planning's focus on land-use change over time because it takes years for these neighbourhoods to develop and their legacy has a long-lasting imprint on our urban landscapes. Accordingly, urban planners at the forefront of urban development must understand this new community and land-use dynamic because they are accountable for addressing these changes and consequent multicultural challenges that arise from them.

However, there are major gaps in our understanding of the dynamics and complexity of the ethnic retail phenomenon, especially with regards to its physical interactions with urban spaces. Current literature on multicultural planning advocates for cultural sensitivity and inclusion in planning practice based on a limited number of empirical studies. Responses to ethnic retailing and its consequent impacts on urban space are scant, with little useful guidance in planning practice. Municipal public policy addressing economic development, land use, and transportation planning in relation to ethnic retail development has been relatively uninformed. There is urgent need to explore the planning processes underlying the spatial and physical changes of ethnic retail neighbourhoods so as to better accommodate the growing immigrant population, facilitate their retail activities, and enhance the community as a whole.

In response to these gaps in research and practice, this study investigates the following questions: What is the role of urban planning in responding to the rise of ethnic retail neighbourhoods? Specifically, how do urban planners get involved in various ethnic retail developments? What have they done or should have done to maximize the social and economic contribution of ethnic retail? Do urban planners adopt a proactive role as urged by multicultural planning advocates? If not, what are the challenges or constraints? In order to capture a broader spectrum of ethnic retail neighbourhoods, three retail strips in the inner city of Toronto, namely East Chinatown, the Gerrard India Bazaar, and Corso Italia, and one suburban Asian theme mall, the Pacific Mall in the City of Markham were selected as case studies (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Four Case Study Sites



Map produced by Wendy Choi

Several research objectives were pursued, including: the exploration of major development issues among different ethnic groups in different commercial settings, how these issues are handled and why, the examination of the key players involved, and the identification of the role of urban planning in ethnic retailing. 74 interviews were conducted with key informants including merchants, city officials, and community agency representatives. The findings indicate the limited role of planning and offer an explanation of the practical constraints inherent in the planning system. This paper concludes on the importance of municipal intervention and interdepartmental collaboration as useful implications for multicultural planning practice.

MULTICULTURAL PLANNING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The increasing diversity of today's multicultural society has provided a more complex setting for urban planning. A number of empirical examples focusing on various aspects of land use (e.g., commercial activity, housing, places of worship, public spaces, and design control) illustrate the impacts of immigrant settlement on urban spaces and the challenges planners are facing (Agrawal 2009; Burayidi, 2003; Germain & Gagnon, 2003; Harwood, 2005; Kumar & Martin, 2004; Qadeer, 1997, 1998, 2009; Qadeer & Chaudhry, 2000; Sandercock, 2000; Thompson, 2003). Cultural clashes and corresponding public controversies are presented in extreme cases within a Canadian context, such as debates over "monster homes" and Asian theme malls, and ethnic tensions in housing complex (Ley, 2000; Li, 1994; Preston & Lo, 2000; Qadeer, 1997). In many of these cases, planners have demonstrated varying degrees of ignorance or insensitivity to ethnocultural diversity in their practice. Thus, they are often under criticism for their "planning for land use but not land users" mentality that results in uniform treatment for everyone, regardless of race and ethnicity. As Wallace (2000, p. 20) points out, "most planners see immigration as standing outside their area of responsibility, and consider their work to be technical, not cultural".

Multicultural planning advocates have promoted cultural sensitivity and inclusion in planning practice; they urge planning practitioners to be more responsive to the needs of ethno-cultural communities, and adopt a proactive role that can incorporate ethno-cultural issues in the planning process (Burayidi, 2000, 2003; Milroy & Wallace, 2002; Pestieu & Wallace, 2003; Qadeer, 1997; Rahder & Milgrom, 2004; Sandercock, 2000, 2003, 2004). A number of diversity-oriented planning approaches are offered, such as collecting ethno-racial data, involving ethnic minorities

in the decision making process with effective communications, acknowledging cultural needs in planning policy development, recruiting and training culturally sensitive and inclusive planners, and providing diversity education at planning schools.

There is no doubt the aforementioned approaches are of importance for planners to consider when dealing with multicultural challenges. However, there is insufficient empirical evidence that this ethno-cultural awareness provides useful guidance in planning practice. According to research, and as revealed in this study, planners continue to be absent or reactive in relation to ethnic-sensitive land use issues. How to put the multicultural planning recommendations into day-to-day planning practice remains a question (Burayidi, 2003; Harwood, 2004; Qadeer, 2000; Rahder & Milgrom, 2004). Driven mainly by good intentions to celebrate multiculturalism, most multicultural planning arguments have not yet produced research findings with illustrative recommendations for planning practice.

In addition, research thus far has not yet addressed the planners' professional mandate and the deficiencies in the planning system. The planning system is legislatively bound, but the planning profession per se has little legitimate power and authority. As a result, "despite the planning ideal of a holistic, proactive vision, planners are frequently restricted to playing frustratingly reactive, regulatory roles" (Campbell & Fainstein, 2003, p. 8). Studies conducted in the past three decades have shown planning legislation and policies lack explicit guidelines on planning for multiculturalism (RTPI, 1983; Milroy & Wallace, 2002; Qadeer & Agrawal, 2011; Wallace & Milroy, 1999). In a recent survey of planning policies of 23 U.S. and 19 Canadian municipalities,

Qadeer and Agrawal (2011) find that few citywide culturally specific policies were adopted for the development of cultural institutions and ethnic business enclaves or malls. Such developments were normally treated with case-by-case adjustments.

Researchers raise questions about whether the planning system has the capacity to accommodate ethno-cultural diversity in land use decision making (Harwood, 2005; Milroy & Wallace, 2002). Same land use conflicts (e.g., places of worship, ethnic commercial centres, residential form) reoccur in different countries despite local differences, as Milroy and Wallace (2002) observe, and the authors ask “whether the key challenge is really that of adapting to ethnoracial diversity or whether it is the constraints of the planning profession itself” (p. 5).

Successful proactive planning practices in Vancouver, Australia, and the US have established a series of legislative policy frameworks that make specific reference to ethno-cultural diversity. Meanwhile, city councils appoint institutionalized organizations to supervise the implementation of these diversity-focused policies. Recruiting a dedicated multicultural staff ensures the delivery of community services to diverse groups (Burayidi, 2003; Edgington & Hutton, 2001; Uyesugi & Shipley, 2005; Thompson, 2003). Despite the identification of these best planning practices, there is no comprehensive planning model for planning practitioners to follow. The discourse of multicultural planning remains on a case-by-case basis and cannot offer concrete solutions for planners to apply in their daily practice, since it does not fundamentally improve deficiencies in the planning system.

Qadeer and Agrawal (2011) suggest “reasonable accommodation” as a practical strategy to combat the challenges to multicultural planning practice; a strategy that recognizes pluralistic interests as well as advances general planning goals for the society at large. However, concrete examples of “reasonable strategy” were not offered in their article and the authors admit that “much more work needs to be done to flesh out this strategy” (p151). Commenting from a theorist’s perspective, Sandercock (2011, p. 158) argues that the theoretical shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism, “that is, a shift from the celebration of ethno-cultural differences to the building of bridges between cultures, establishing political community rather than ethno-cultural identity as the basis for a sense of belonging in multicultural societies”, has significant implications for planning practice. Both notions will cast light on the future development of planning theory and its practical applications in a multicultural society.

In light of the above, there is important need to provide a more solid empirical basis and to reveal the complexity of planning practice amidst diversity. One of the windows into this investigation is ethnic retailing, a field that is seldom touched upon in current literature intersecting retailing and multicultural planning, notwithstanding a number of exploratory studies (Preston & Lo, 2000; Qadeer, 1997, 1998; Wang, 1999). It is important to discuss planners’ role in the physical developments of ethnic retail neighbourhoods, the constraints they face and the reasons behind them. Empirical studies will contribute to a better understanding of the reality of multicultural planning, how ethnic retail activities impact urban spaces, how the planning system responds to diversity, and whether there are effective planning programs, initiatives, or policies in place to deal with ethnic retailing.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This research is exploratory in nature and adopts a case study approach. Case study methods are often recommended strategy in an exploratory research. Multiple case studies prove to be more appropriate when many actors are involved and the subject matter is complex. In order to illustrate the dynamics of ethnic retail activities, the research focuses on the Chinese, South Asian, and Italian business communities, because these three important immigrant groups represent major immigration settlement trajectories with the influences of different immigration policies and provide possible comparisons between groups and/or within one group.¹ The four chosen neighbourhoods are major business concentration areas of these three study groups. These case studies provide illustrative examples of urban planners' involvement in ethnic retail development.

To ensure quality control, triangulation of data collection modes and data sources were employed (e.g., various groups of informants, primary and secondary data collection, qualitative and quantitative data analysis). The study identifies three groups of people as major players for in-depth interviews: ethnic entrepreneurs who own or operate businesses in the case study areas, city officials (city councillors, planners, and economic development officers), and community agency representatives who are involved in the areas' development processes. Research began with 19 interviews (see Table 1) with key informants who are knowledgeable about the case settings, their historical development or have research expertise on related issues. These interviews helped inform the development of the interview guide and the selection of second

round of key informants. In phase two, 55 semi-structured interviews with the three groups of key informants (see Table 1) were conducted.

Table 1: Summary of Interview Participants

* Interviews were conducted between 2004 and 2006.

EC = East Chinatown; GIB = Gerrard India Bazaar; CI = Corso Italia; PM = Pacific Mall

		EC	GIB	CI	PM	Total
Phase Two Interview (purposive & snowball sampling)	Merchants	7	7	8	12	55
	City Councillors and Assistants	3		3	1	
	Planners	1		3	2	
	Economic Development Officers	1	1	1	1	
	Community Agency Reps.	3		1	N/A	
Phase One Interview (purposive sampling)	Business Community	2	1	1	2	19
	Local Librarians	1	1	1	1	
	Community Agency Reps.	1		N/A	N/A	
	Academics	N/A	1	1	2	
		2 specializing in general urban retail				
	Planners	1			1	
Total						74

Business participants were recruited through store visits and city officials and community agency representatives were approached via telephone or email. Interviews were conducted face-to-face except for two conducted on the phone and were one-hour long in average. Audio-taped interview data were transcribed using verbatim transcriptions. In Corso Italia and the Gerrard India Bazaar merchants were invited and interviewed in English with one exception.² In East

Chinatown and the Pacific Mall interviews were conducted in Cantonese and Mandarin, the first languages of both the merchants and the researcher. For analytic consistency, these interviews were transcribed into English.

The interview guide for merchants included questions about business profile, development issues, needs assessment, and working relationship with city staff. The interview guide for other groups of interviewees mainly addressed the following issues : 1) retail/neighbourhood development process and issues 2) attitudes towards ethnic retail 3) municipal policy, vision statement and/or economic development approach with attention to ethnic retail 4) the role of planning and collaboration with City departments.

In addition, an archival research of local data (e.g., census and business profiles, community newspapers, business association newsletters, municipal policies, planning documents, council minutes, staff reports, and consultant reports) was conducted in order to provide background and contextual information about each of the study areas. Also, participant observations were conducted through numerous field visits to each site.

The data gathered informed four case studies. In each there is a focus on major developments in the area and the key players involved followed by discussions on the role of planning. To provide a snapshot of the four neighbourhoods, Table 2 introduces their development characteristics, and presents several key census indicators (i.e., home language, ethnic origin, and visible minority population) to delineate the ethnic characters of each neighbourhood as compared to the city-

wide data.³ In addition, the table provides business profiles in each retail precinct including data on number of businesses, business composition, and vacancy rate.⁴

Table 2: Neighbourhood Profiles

Source: City of Toronto, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; CSCA Business Survey Data, 2000-2009;

Statistics Canada, 2006

	East Chinatown	Gerrard India Bazaar	Corso Italia	Pacific Mall	City of Toronto	City of Markham
Total Population	23,950	14,665	14,325	14,510	2,476,565	260,755
Neighbourhood Development Characteristics	incrementally developed ethnic enclave since the 1960s; predominant presence of the Chinese population; mainly serves local Chinese customers	accidentally developed since the Naaz Theatre opened and showed Hindi films in the 1970s (Hackworth & Rekers, 2005); not sufficient South Asian residential population (9.8%) to support local co-ethnic businesses; mainly serves regional co-ethnic and mainstream customers	maturely developed community since the 1950s; held the biggest events in the local history, such as visits of Italian presidents and Queen Elizabeth II, and celebrations of Italy's World Cup victories that drew 200,000 people; transformations from "Little Britain" to "Little Italy" (Buzzelli, 2001); later a reception destination for the Portuguese community and now mixed with Latin American and Asian businesses; serves local and regional customers	mall developed in the mid 1990s; major Chinese settlement area, where the Chinese population was more than double the city average by each census indicator; serves local and regional customers	N/A	N/A
Top 3 Non-official Home Languages (2006 Census)	Chinese 23.1% Vietnamese 2.7% Portuguese 0.8%	Chinese 13.6% Urdu 2.6% Vietnamese 2.1%	Portuguese 16.7% Italian 10.9% Spanish 6.5%	Chinese 54.5% Tamil 2.7% Tagalog 2.1%	Chinese 8.3% Tamil 2.1% Italian 1.9%	Chinese 24.1% Tamil 3.5% Urdu 1.4%

	East Chinatown	Gerrard India Bazaar	Corso Italia	Pacific Mall	City of Toronto	City of Markham
Top 3 Ethnic Origins (2006 Census)	Chinese 33.1% English 18.1% Irish 15.7%	Chinese 22.1% English 21.0% Canadian 17.6%	Portuguese 30.7% Italian 27.6% English 8.1%	Chinese 72.3% East Indian 5.3% Filipino 5.3%	English 13.8% Chinese 12.5% Canadian 10.8%	Chinese 35.5% East Indian 11.3% English 10.1%
Top 3 Visible Minority Groups (2006 Census)	Chinese 31.6% Black 5.2% Southeast Asian 3.0%	Chinese 20.3% South Asian 9.8% Black 4.5%	Latin American 8.8% Black 4.8% South Asian 2.3%	Chinese 69.8% South Asian 8.6% Filipino 4.9%	South Asian 12.0% Chinese 11.4% Black 8.4%	Chinese 34.2% South Asian 17.3% Black 3.1%
Number of Businesses (approx.)	150	140	250	300	N/A	N/A
Business Composition (2000-2009 average)	Food: 39.6%; Retail: 23.5%; Services: 36.9%; low-end, low variety	Food: 36.8%; Retail: 42.3%; Services: 20.9%; large variety of South Asian specialty goods	Food: 27%; Retail: 46.1%; Services: 27%; high-end fashion stores and European styles	Food: 14.2%; Retail: 66.3%; Services: 19.5%; highly specialized in retail; very large variety; Asian theme	N/A	N/A
Vacancy Rate (2000-2009 average)	14%	9.1%	5.9%	2.6%	9.8% (shopping strips); 8.3% (community shopping centres)	N/A

CASE 1: EAST CHINATOWN

Major Development Issues and Involvement of Key Players

East Chinatown centers on the intersection of Gerrard Street East and Broadview Avenue in the

east end of the inner city of Toronto. With a vacancy rate that was higher than the City average (14.0% vs. 9.8%) and deteriorating building stock this neighbourhood faced challenges in terms of providing an attractive location for business. Beginning in 1998, the local Chinese Chamber of Commerce, East Toronto (CCCET) initiated a Chinese Archway project in an attempt to revitalize the local business environment (Figure 2).⁵

Figure 2: The Chinese Archway in East Chinatown

In this revitalization process, synergies were created between various players, namely the local merchants, councillors, economic development officers, and community agencies. The local business community represented by the CCCET invested much effort over a decade to revitalize the struggle-to-survive status quo of the area. When being asked about the major concerns in relation to the archway development, business leaders emphasized *“at the beginning city officials had no idea of what a “Chinese Archway” is ... and what exactly Chinese culture is. We must express ourselves and make our voice heard”* (Merchant CM4, June 14, 2004). Hence, the community’s top priority is to open political channels and utilize political resources, as one merchant proclaimed:

We need to make it clear that now politicians must listen to us and serve our needs. If they can’t satisfy us, they won’t get elected anymore ... As long as the councillor supports our proposal, City staff must do their job (CM3, June 14, 2004).

The CCCET first approached the then City Councillor, Jack Layton, who was later the leader of Canada’s New Democrat Party (NDP). Layton played an important role in launching the project and securing the land for the archway. To pay tribute to his contribution to the community’s

development, the CCCET supported Layton and other NDP candidates at the federal, provincial and municipal elections, hoping to establish consistent political connections and support for the archway project and the community in the long term. Positive and constructive relationships between Chinese merchants and local politicians were key to moving the project forward.

In reply to the question about experience of dealing with city staff, merchants reported that the



Economic Development Office (EDO) played an active role, since East Chinatown is one of the priority areas in the City of Toronto's Employment Revitalization Program; the EDO not only allocated funds, but also facilitated communications between internal and external stakeholders and undertook community outreach and consultation to assist the CCCET in expediting the project. It is EDO's mandate to advocate for businesses and advance the economy; to this end, EDO initiates a series of creative programs, such as capital improvement, banners and murals, community-based research grant, and apply them to the archway project.

In addition to EDO's active involvement, the revitalization efforts in East Chinatown are based on community engagement and support. Active community agencies together with CCCET facilitated large-scale community consultations to develop an East Chinatown capital improvement plan, as well as a series of market research and business surveys. A mural project was completed to beautify the archway site under the community joint venture.

The archway proposal was approved by City Council in 2004. In addition, the City committed half of the construction cost. The archway officially opened in 2009, eleven years after its inception.

The Role of Planning

City planners' involvement in the retail development of the East Chinatown area was minimal, and limited to providing building permit approvals. The growth and improvement of a commercial area do not seem to be included in planners' daily agendas. Consequently, community outreach is not substantially involved in the planning process. It is only when a community voices their needs that planners respond to them, as two interviewees attested in reply to the interview question "what is the role of planning":

We [planning] don't really establish and do outreach in that way [like EDO] ... We're always responding to what people bring to the city ... We're not actually leading. It's kind of grassroots, right? ... The community comes up with the ideas and then we help them implement them (Planner CP1, May 9, 2005).

They [planners] don't initiate [things]. The push comes from the people living in the area ... They [planners] cannot radically change [the area] ... but if the local merchants[suggest changes], because commercially it is going to benefit and culturally it is going to benefit, then things can happen (Community Agency Interviewee IA2, May 13, 2005).

CASE 2: GERRARD INDIA BAZAAR

Major Development Issues and Involvement of Key Players

About 1.5 kilometers east of East Chinatown, the Gerrard India Bazaar is located on Gerrard Street East between Greenwood and Coxwell Avenues (Figure 3). It was approved as a Business Improvement Area (BIA) in 1982. A BIA is a voluntary association of local business people and property owners within a specified boundary, who work together with the city to improve and promote their business area.⁶

Figure 3: Gerrard India Bazaar

There is no question forming a BIA is important for the business community to ensure a nurturing business environment and a strong partnership with the City. However, while a standardized BIA program generally offers beautification and improvement templates, it is not sufficient in dealing with more complex issues in relating to cultural differences. Interviewees reported several major challenges over the years. For instance, South Asian patrons are familiar with chaat stands on the sidewalks, selling freshly barbecued corn on the cob and other savory snacks; however, they may not be aware of the garbage issues the discarded corncobs, corn

husks, and betel nuts cause. Furthermore, some South Asians believe that feeding pigeons can bring good luck, yet they disregard the fact that it also causes pigeon infestation. These issues can easily become a source of friction between neighbourhood residents and the Bazaar businesses.

There are also unexpected business practices clashing with the norms of the host society, as an area planner reported:

India Bazaar keeps running into planning [department] because things are happening without building permits ... They would build the structure on the side of their building and they wouldn't understand ... it's a City piece of land there; you don't own it, so you can't build on it ... Their initial issue with the City had to do with trying to understand what the rules are. That's the natural cultural difference that both sides have to learn how to communicate (CP1, May 9, 2005).



Another example was a restaurant that used portable trailers as indoor seating space, picnic

tables under colourful sari-tents in a large patio, and a semi-outdoor kitchen open to the patio. It recreated a traditional scene of a South Asian street eatery, but did not meet City regulations, such as fire and safety standards (Councillor IC1, July 28, 2005). ⁷

The Role of Planning

As was the case in East Chinatown, planners were absent from the retail development of the India Bazaar. When city officials were asked “what is the role of planning”, some argue that it is beyond the Planning Department’s jurisdiction, because of the economic development focus of the BIA and its small scale improvement initiatives:

There is no planners’ job here. [Instead], it’s economic development office’s job (Councillor IC1, July 28, 2005).

The community, the councillor and the businesses have more decision making on planning in business areas, but not the Planning Department ... Planning tends to do on a larger scale, and not so much on a smaller scale (Councillor Assistant CC2, March 3, 2006).

The opposing view argues that the Planning Department should collaborate more with the EDO on the area’s long term development. In particular, there is a need to:

figure out what the interface between the two operations is and [how to] play a lot more proactive role to get things done ... It should be a matter of getting the expertise ... together to understand the importance, the timing, the commitment the BIA is making, and putting every effort that we have into bringing these changes about (EDO IE1, May 10, 2005).

CASE 3: CORSO ITALIA

Major Development Issues and Involvement of Key Players

Corso Italia is located on St. Clair Avenue West from Westmount Avenue, just east of Dufferin Street and slightly west of Lansdowne Avenue and has been designated as a BIA since 1984 (Figure 4). A major development issue in the area was the streetcar right-of-way dispute. In 2003, a new Official Plan identifies St. Clair Avenue West as one of the City's avenues to be allocated for higher density and mixed-use developments. To support this vision, the City launched a dedicated streetcar Right-of-Way (ROW) plan along St. Clair Avenue West serving as a precedent to promote ROW on other avenues across the City. However, the City's ambitious vision faced opposition by the local business community that even reached court.

Figure 4: Corso Italia

Merchants in Corso Italia were most concerned with the reduction of on-street parking and the loss of sidewalk space for the construction of the ROW passenger platform in the middle of the road, because on-street parking is critical for businesses who have a regional draw of customers and the area has a tradition of sidewalk cafés and outdoor patios, with trees and pedestrian activities on the street, reflecting an Italian or European city lifestyle.⁸ Concerning the ROW would damage the retail strip, merchants actively participated in public consultations to get their voice heard. They also hired architects to develop an alternative design, but it was rejected by the City. Therefore, Corso Italia merchants were further convinced the ROW was a “done deal”, decided and defended by the City. In addition, merchants challenged the Environmental Assessment process that ignored immigrants who do not speak English well and were

discouraged to participate in public meetings, because “*all of the information is presented on boards and in oral presentations in English*” (Community Agency Interviewee CIA1, November 10, 2005). In the end, local merchants and residents opposing the ROW sued the City for violating the Planning Act, but the court gave the City a green light to pursue the ROW project.

Compared to the cases in East Chinatown and the India Bazaar, merchants in Corso Italia had higher level of public involvement and made a stronger impact on local issues, which in turn, brought the local councillor onboard in their fight. The EDO was not involved in the matters of the ROW project, and have focused on BIA issues alone. When it comes to the working relationship between EDO and the planning department, interviewees echoed similar issues raised in the cases of East Chinatown and India Bazaar, that the collaboration between the two functions needs to be strengthened and go beyond restricted departmental focus on retail developments or by-law requirements:

I think they have to start to mend those fences and develop that relationship again.... It's got to be collective ... You need to have both. And you need to come up with a comprehensive plan, not just economic development, not just how high should the building be and shadowing (Councillor CIC3, November 24, 2005).

No non-partisan group can provide community outreach in an unbiased manner in this context, as other community agencies had accomplished in East Chinatown and the India Bazaar.

The Role of Planning

City planners who represented the City to promote the ROW project and a city-wide vision of avenue intensification unavoidably became merchants' rivals at the forefront of the dispute. City planners, particularly transportation planners, were dedicated to community outreach to promote the ROW plan. They organized public meetings and workshops almost once a week for a year.



Planners also recognized the cultural preferences of the community during the ROW public consultations (Planner CIP1, December 6, 2005).⁹

However, the opposition city planners encountered in the local community was beyond their control. In addition to the NIMBY syndrome, cultural factors played a role in the mistrust and inefficient communication planners experienced with the community, as one planner who was in charge of the ROW project concluded:

Part of it too...is a cultural issue... It's just...how we communicate with different cultural groups when we're doing a public process. I was told by one of the councillors (he's Italian) that... "You're really in a no-win situation here, because in the Italian community, if you're upset with something or upset with someone, you're expected to be fairly emotional about expressing

your feelings and that you don't like it, and so on. And so when you challenge someone, you expect that they're going to respond back in the same way that they will be, you know, fairly aggressive and say 'Oh, you're wrong'". But... we [planners] are trained to be polite, not confrontational, not emotional. You keep it very straight. And this councillor said to me, you know, "When you do that, people in the Italian community think you're hiding things" [Laughs]. So right there, there's mistrust. Guaranteed ... It's about how people communicate and how people relate and how you build trust. In a multicultural neighbourhood, that can be incredibly difficult (CIP1, December 6, 2005).

When asked if the department had hired planners from Italian backgrounds to do outreach, the planner admitted, *"that probably would've been a good idea"* although language translation was provided (CIP1, December 6, 2005).

CASE 4: PACIFIC MALL

Major Development Issues and Involvement of Key Players

The Pacific Mall is located at the major intersection of Steeles Avenue East and Kennedy Road bordering the City of Markham and Toronto (Figure 5).¹⁰ In the past three decades, Markham has experienced unprecedented transformation from an Anglo-Saxon rural small town to a fast-growing "ethnoburb" with influxes of immigrants and capital (Priesnitz, 1990; Wang and Zhong, 2013). The Chinese community had a significant representation of Markham's population (Table 2).

Figure 5: Pacific Mall

In response to the growing Asian-oriented market, the Pacific Mall was developed during the mid 1990s. It features 270,000 square feet of retail space with innovative condominium ownership that mainly targets the Chinese community who prefer to own properties for residential or business purposes.¹¹ At the time of the site plan approval, parking and traffic were the major issues that the Town raised and studied, because *“the small unit sizes and the resulting staffing inefficiencies, and a generally greater intensity of commercial activity”* (Heaslip 1994, p. 5), inevitably generate higher demand for parking and increase traffic. The conventional shopping centre parking standard could not accommodate Pacific Mall’s expected parking demands. Although the final parking spaces have exceeded the by-law requirement, and technically, the proposal has solved the parking and traffic problems, years after the development, these problems continue to exist and are larger concerns for future development, as this councillor and planner argue:

It’s a success, but it’s a pay-off for that success ... The residents had to suffer because of the [traffic] problem (Councillor PCI, February 21, 2006).

I’ve heard...Pacific Mall described as “the victim of its own success”... Traffic is gonna be the biggest challenge ... in the existing development and future expansions... Is that going to impact their viability in that location? We have to wait and see. (Planner PP1, January 19, 2006)

What is worth mentioning is that, far beyond land use or technical issues, the condominium Asian theme mall phenomenon has entered a socially and culturally embedded controversy. The most publicized social and political dispute was the controversial “Carole Bell incident”.¹²

Although the Council and staff preferred to follow market forces in search of a signal whether to proceed with an ethnic-oriented development or not, when dealing with the incident, they could not simply leave things to market forces to work out; they had to take action in response to the community outcry.

Unlike the business communities in the retail strip cases of inner city, merchants of the Pacific Mall had little involvement in mall-related business matters. Similar to a residential condominium, the Pacific Mall requires majority votes from store owners to approve major business decisions. It is generally hard for merchants to reach consensus and meet the required number of votes, as interviewees indicated. So minding one's own business and leaving the mall to market forces seems to be the norm. In addition, the Condominium Act authorizes only property owners to vote, which limits the participation of many of the business tenants, who do not have voting rights on matters that actually affect their businesses directly.¹³

As to municipal interventions, the Town Council demonstrated large degrees of uncertainty with



regards to the Asian theme mall development. Meanwhile, with a pro-business attitude and an economic driven agenda they were open to new ideas and new development opportunities. The EDOs carried most weight in the Council's final decision by providing an economic impact assessment, which perceived the development of the mall as an economic engine for the area.

The Mall's developers, who are originally from Israel, have an instinctive sense regarding the rapidly changing ethnic market and they have seized the opportunity for profit. After the success of the Pacific Mall, more condominium Asian theme malls have sprung up or are being proposed along Steeles Avenue. The area will provide 1.9 million square feet of retail space (more than twice the current space), if the proposed developments are built (Heaslip, 2011). The new development projects will tremendously transform the urban and social landscape of the local community, and developers are the major force of these transformations.

The Role of Planning

In the case of the Pacific Mall, Town planners were involved only in the site plan approval process finding technical solutions for parking space and traffic congestion. From planner interviewees' perspective, all shopping mall developments are no different from each other, although it is well known that Asian theme malls target an ethnic market and their site plan approvals may require another set of technical criteria (e.g., parking standards) (PP1 & PP2, January 19, 2006). Planners do not view the development from an ethnic perspective; "*looking from that way is discrimination*", as one planner insisted (PP2, January 19, 2006).

Overall, the approval process of the Pacific Mall proceeded within the planning regulatory framework. A planner who was directly involved in the development, neutrally comments:

It's just a site plan application. We went through the by-laws ... Condominium tenure is the thing we want to understand ... We were not certain if the ownership is a right thing to do (PP3, February 7, 2006).

DISCUSSION: THE LIMITED ROLE OF PLANNING

The findings of the four cases indicate that urban planners have been unable to intervene actively in ethnic retail and direct its development and growth. In each case, planners were absent or only played a limited role dealing with technicalities. Did planners recognize that ethnic retailing has the potential to promote the economic vitality of our cities; thus, when it thrives a city can benefit? Interviews with all planners indicate the answer is absolutely “Yes”. However, when being asked about whether this ethno-cultural recognition should be institutionalized in planning policies or, at least, be recognized at the practical level, planners’ response is “No”. The typical explanation from interviewees is the “planning for land use but not land users” mantra that has been largely criticized by multicultural planning advocates. Planners argue that being culturally neutral is important, because they do not want to discriminate any group of people. Besides, planners “*can't dictate who [business] locates in a certain place*”, and “*who [customer] drives in from outside the neighbourhood*” (CIP2, CIP3, November 22, 2005); they leave ethnic retail developments up to the market and to the community to make demands.

What are the constraints that hinder planners from being more active in ethnic retail matters?

This study argues that planners' "socially value free" philosophy in land use decision-making may be a reflection of the constraints inherent in the planning system, and these practical constraints and planners' professional mandate should not be overlooked. The planning system simply lacks compatibility with a multicultural society. Planners are in a difficult position when addressing development challenges relating to cultural differences, because they lack legitimate authority and policy backing.

First of all, the planning system is legislatively bound; it has its own legislative structure and planning procedures for the community at large. The Ontario Planning Act sets out the ground rules for land use planning across the province. Municipalities prepare planning documents, such as Official Plans and zoning by-laws to regulate and guide land developments with a city-wide perspective. These planning legislations do not differentiate people or the public according to their ethno-cultural backgrounds nor is there explicit planning for multicultural communities.

In practice, it is the mandate of the planning profession to follow set rules and policies within legislative boundaries. Planners must abide by the Ontario Planning Act and their decisions must be sanctioned, not only by elected representatives but also, occasionally, by the Ontario Municipal Board, an adjudicative tribunal that hears appeals on land use disputes. Under this context, planners must, by the nature of their profession, make land use decisions with a broader city-wide perspective, without consideration of specific groups at the local level: building a transit priority corridor on St. Clair West; the need to respect zoning and building permits in the India Bazaar; and finding a parking solution to condominium retailing. At times the City's vision

coincides with local interests. This is demonstrated in the building of the China Gate as a multicultural symbol of the City and in the development of the Pacific Mall as the promotion of the Town's economic development. Other times, the City's vision and local interests conflict leading to community dispute, as occurred in the streetcar right-of-way controversy in Corso Italia. Obviously, in such circumstances, planners are not sympathetic to small groups and do not act as advocates for local needs. Yet, this attitude can easily cause friction with local communities.

Unlike EDOs who work outside of a legal framework, planners are in an awkward position; they cannot initiate ethnic retailing, which is up to ethnic retailers, nor can they decide when and to what degree they should become involved, yet, they are being accused of passivity mainly reflected in their technocratic approach and inexperience in planning amidst diversity.

Second, there are no specific municipal policies in place to govern the development of the four case areas, except the Official Plans and zoning by-laws. Ethnic retail develops either as unplanned strips or as planned centres, and generally speaking, they are governed by similar policies to their non-ethnic counterparts. There is no explicit policy with specific attention to ethnic retail as confirmed by planner interviewees. For example, the City of Toronto's Official Plan only acknowledges that "ethnic shopping malls have developed" (City of Toronto, 2010, p. 3-33). In general, "multiculturalism is celebrated and cultural diversity supported" (p. 1-3) and "recognizing the ethno-racial diversity of the community" promotes fair public process to effectively implement the Plan (p. 5-20). Neither did the policies in the Official Plan of the City

of Markham make reference to the large scale ethnic mall developments. In the Pacific Mall case, the only acknowledgement was the change in its zoning designation from “Special Commercial” to “Major Commercial”, years after its development because of its broader regional market size.

In the three retail strip cases, the Employment Revitalization Area program, the BIA programs, and the transit development project are in place only because shopping strips are part of the public urban space; as such they undoubtedly draw public interest and require the City’s attention, and not necessarily because of their ethnic component. A higher parking standard is always required in ethnic mall developments, as other cases in the literature illustrate (Preston & Lo, 2000; Qadeer, 1998; Wang, 1999). This proves that since the traditional shopping centre hierarchy is becoming irrelevant to ethnic malls, current zoning by-laws may be incompatible or invalid, requiring careful pre-planning and site specific modifications.¹⁴

Without explicit policy statements that acknowledge ethnocultural diversity and its consequent physical outcomes, the development of ethnic retail neighbourhoods is normally treated by municipalities in a reactive and ad hoc way and simply left to the market or the community. Despite the ethno-cultural dynamics of these areas and the continuous retail activities over the years, no secondary plans, community improvement plans, or site and area specific policies are applied to these areas in response to the various spatial needs, identity constructions, and physical developments. Planning practice remains disconnected with the multicultural reality and the role of planners in directing the development of ethnic strips or ethnic malls is limited as it is

difficult for planners who must fulfill their mandates with a broader city-wide perspective to focus on local retail area development without specific policies to follow.

CONCLUSION:

The cases do not report stories of success in multicultural planning practice. The proactive multicultural planning approaches discussed in the literature seem to be disregarded in practice, where planners carry the least weight in the development processes of the four ethnic retail neighbourhoods, compared to other key players, such as merchants, politicians, and economic development officers. This study confirms that it is the constraints of the planning profession (i.e., the planning legislative structure and the lack of policy support) that have restrained planners' flexibility, creativity, authority, and capacity to facilitate the developments of these neighbourhoods and serve multiple public interests at both the city and the local levels. The investigation of the four ethnic retail cases enriches our empirical knowledge of multicultural planning in practice and contributes to building a foundation for further theoretical insights in this area. The study also offers planning practitioners the following reflections on the lessons learned .

This paper does not suggest a “business-as-usual” approach for planners, because simply leaving the future developments of ethnic retail neighbourhoods to the market or to the community seems problematic; planning intervention still requires in response to the challenges and opportunities posed by ethnic retailing.

For example, in the case of East Chinatown, a single archway structure cannot rejuvenate the declining neighbourhood; despite merchants' continuous efforts for over a decade, businesses are still struggling to survive. In India Bazaar, the key players have to learn how to work with each other and communicate in a better way. In the absence of strong business leadership, the area continues to stand at a crossroads in terms of its future development. The case of Corso Italia suggests that the development of an ethnic retail area should not be viewed in isolation, as simply a business matter; rather, it is intertwined with many aspects of community planning, such as transit use, public space, housing density, and community activities. Similarly, Asian theme malls are not a stand-alone phenomenon; instead, they should be treated as an important part of the community connecting with other key functions.

In addition, issues related to an ageing population, ethnic succession, tourism development, and gentrification are prominent in traditional ethnic retail strips as documented in the literature (see Buzzelli, 2001; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; Wang, 1999). Potential issues related to Asian theme malls are worth mentioning too. When a large-scale ethnic retail facility is entrusted to market forces, the fast changing ethnic market may bring additional and unforeseen challenges to the community, such as a saturated market, neighbourhood tensions, and area decay.

Before it is too late for municipalities to mend the new situation, city authorities are responsible for sustaining these neighbourhoods and creating a holistic vision for them. Support of ethnic retail sustainability requires the interdepartmental collaboration of city officials, including, but not exclusively, local politicians, planners, urban designers, economic development officers, and

other city staff in service delivery functions. Planners cannot work alone to build multicultural cities. Specifically, the interdepartmental collaboration between the Planning Department and the Economic Development Office should be strengthened as they are the two core municipal functions that deal with ethnic retail development. Simply applying standardized beautification templates, such as the BIA program, or reviewing development proposals is far from sufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of these areas. Meanwhile, further empirical studies of ethnic retailing are needed and there is still room to discuss planners' role in future research of multicultural planning. Increasing cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness in planning practice is important, but it surely is not enough. Finding concrete solutions to multicultural planning challenges posed by ethnic retailing has a long way to go, and we are learning as we go.

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Notes

¹ Italians were among the earliest immigrant groups that settled in Toronto and are one of the largest groups in Canada. The Italian immigrant population has substantially declined since the 1970s. Chinese also have a long immigration history in Canada. In contrast to the Italians, the post-1967 immigration waves favoured by the new immigration policy boosted the Chinese group as the largest visible minority group according to the 2001 Canadian Census. The “new” and “old” immigration patterns result in various retail forms, such as the old Chinatowns and the new Asian Theme Malls. South Asians have much shorter mass immigration history than the other two groups, but have grown very fast as the largest visible minority group according to the 2006 Canadian Census.

² One merchant from India asked his son who speaks English fluently to translate for him.

³ The study retail areas are typified with concentrated ethnic businesses and spatial links to immediate residential areas and community services. In this sense, they are neighbourhoods serving the needs of local and/or regional population. The census data of the three inner-city strips are based on a series of neighbourhood profiles compiled by the City of Toronto. Each neighbourhood comprises at least two census tracts, and the minimum neighbourhood population is between 7,000 and 10,000. The three inner-city strips of East Chinatown, Gerrard India Bazaar and Corso Italia are located in the census neighbourhoods of South Riverdale, Greenwood-Coxwell and Corso Italia-Davenport, respectively. The City of Markham does not have a compatible community database. Hence, I used three combined census tract data from the 2006 Canadian Census to compile a social profile for that case study.

⁴ The business data were retrieved from the Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity (CSCA) at Ryerson University. It includes annual surveys of commercial strips and major shopping nodes in the Greater Toronto Area between 2000 and 2009.

⁵ In the Chinese architectural tradition, an archway is used as a symbol to preserve and glorify the essence of the Chinese culture.

⁶ Currently, there are 73 BIAs across the City of Toronto under the supervision of the Economic Development Office. A BIA is run by a board of management which comprises elected volunteers, who are property owners and business operators, as well as at least one council member. The Economic Development Office of the City of Toronto also assigns Commercial Area Advisors for outreach and work with BIA members. The board prepares an annual budget for capital improvement projects which require the approval of members and City council. After its approval, the City collects a special tax levy based on the proportionate value of each property's assessment within the boundaries of the BIA. The funds are returned to the BIA to manage during each year's budget. Generally, the funds are used for streetscape improvement, event planning, marketing and promotional campaigns, etc.

⁷ The restaurant owner later built a new permanent restaurant on site, but because of a variance dispute for seating space before the Ontario Municipal Board, it was not open until 2011, and the temporary trailers were finally torn down after fourteen years of use.

⁸ The first sidewalk café in the City of Toronto was established in Corso Italia, as area merchants recall. According to three business interviewees, CIM1, CIM2, and CIM5, La Sem, a small Italian-style patisserie introduced the first sidewalk café in Toronto in the 1960s. The then city councillor Joseph Piccininni, who was from an Italian background, was instrumental in issuing the first outdoor café permit from City Hall.

⁹ For example, local people demanded the project reflect the ethnic background and cultural identity of the community. In response to their requests, planners considered incorporating the history and culture of the neighbourhood into art work displays, or the design of a streetcar shelter as an, “identity bay” that showcases stories and anecdotes from the neighbourhood. In another example, in both Italian and Portuguese cultures, funeral procession occurs across the street with the coffin into the funeral home. The planned raised right-of-way, with its six-inch curb, could, potentially, disturb access to a local funeral home which requires special street crossing treatment for its services, such as pavement with a different texture and a drop-down on the curb.

¹⁰ The City of Markham was named the Town of Markham from 1972 to 2012. The recent name change reflects Markham’s unprecedented urban growth from a “town” to a “city”.

¹¹ Some of the features that distinguish condominium malls from mainstream shopping centre developments include: condominium ownership, the absence of conventional anchors, smaller store size (200 square feet in average), variable store hours, and no control of tenant mix.

¹² In June 1995, the Deputy Mayor Carole Bell made inflammatory comments on the concentration of Asian theme malls, calling it “racial monopoly” and the cause of social conflict (the Toronto Star, 1995, para 5). Bell’s comments deeply offended many people in the community who later accused her of racism. A Mayoral Advisory Committee comprised of council and public members was created in order to heal the growing rift in the community and promote cultural reconciliation.

¹³ In a condominium mall, individual store owners are entitled to lease their business unit to tenants. In the Pacific Mall, the developer still retains ownership of a large portion of the second floor and leased units to approximately 100 individual stores. The rest of the 200 stores are mixed with store owners and tenants.

¹⁴ Conventional retail planning policies tend to use a hierarchical system to classify shopping centres at the neighbourhood, community, and regional levels based on several criteria, such as floor areas, store numbers, market size and sales (Jones, 2005). However, when planning condominium malls, this hierarchical system is irrelevant in determining parking standards, retail sizes and uses, retail facilities (e.g., anchor stores), and retail forms.