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BRINGING PEOPLE TO THE PARK:
EXCLUSIONARY REPRESENTATIONS IN THE MAKING OF GALT GARDENS

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ABSTRACT: In 2003 the Rotary Club of Lethbridge, Alberta proposed a revitalization of Galt Gardens, a historic ten-acre park in Lethbridge's downtown. The proposal was accepted and the revitalization was completed in 2008. During these years the park changed significantly – public washrooms and a water feature were installed, and private security guards were employed to patrol the area. According to the local newspaper, developments have transformed Galt Gardens from a “hangout for the city's street population” to “an idyllic scene of children splashing and playing, families picnicking and people strolling” (*The Lethbridge Herald* July 9, 2008). My paper asserts that space is always social and political – it is always imbued with power (Lefebvre, 1991). I explore the production of space as a complex social process, part of which is representational. Employing discourse analysis I look at newspaper articles, showing how these representations articulate *who* uses the space – who has, and who no longer has, *the right to* Galt Gardens park (Mitchell, 2003). Through the “revitalization” process, Galt Gardens is seemingly made a place where “families,” and “people of all ages” can participate in recreational activities. However, newspaper representations also work to exclude, producing “the city's homeless” as unwelcome, as other-than “the public,” as other-than people.

KEYWORDS: revitalization; park; social space; exclusion.

Lethbridge is a small prairie city located at the extreme edge of the southern border of the province of Alberta. The city is just one hour from the United States, about the same distance from the Rocky Mountains, and is situated in close proximity to several large Indian reserves, including the largest land-based reserve in Canada (Blood 148). Lethbridge, which today has a population of roughly 86,000, had its beginnings as a whisky trading post in the mid-nineteenth century.

The nine-acre public park now known as Galt Gardens was outlined in Lethbridge's original city plan by Elliot and Alexander Galt in 1884 (Johnston 1988, 3). It was meant to be “a park and playground - a breathing space for the city that...would one day surround it” (Ibid.). The park, which at the time was simply known as The Square, was used “as a place to tie up horses and park...carriages...and wagons” and later as “a playing field for soccer, lacrosse, and baseball” (Ibid, 4). Over the years Galt Gardens has undergone a number of changes. Writing just over twenty years ago, local historian Alex Johnston noted that “Galt Gardens...has evolved from an expanse of native prairie to a civic playground, a meeting place, an ornamental park, and finally to a sedentary sitting down type of park” (Ibid, 9). Johnston goes on to discuss the “anti-social behaviour”¹ that became commonplace in Galt Gardens beginning in the 1950s and describes a corresponding exodus of the public from the park (Ibid, 10). An article published in the April 23, 2003 edition of *The Lethbridge Herald* repeats this claim of a problem of “anti-social behaviour,” arguing that it persists in the present:

¹ Johnston (1988) reports the following as among the “anti-social behaviour” reported to the city council of Lethbridge in July of 1965: “Galt Gardens were being used by transients. There was much litter, considerable drunkenness, panhandling and begging” (10).

over time a problem developed that led to diminished use of the park. Lethbridge: A Centennial History, written by Alex Johnston and Andy den Otter, notes that in 1944, the city's board of trade, whose Galt Gardens office also housed the bandstand, abandoned the park, which "had become a hangout for drunks and idlers." That problem persists to this day and raises the lone concern about the Rotary Club's proposal.

The Rotary Club's proposal, to which this article refers, is part of a larger Galt Gardens revitalization effort initiated by Lethbridge's city council nearly two decades ago in 1990. The revitalization was scheduled to be completed in five phases over a period of nine years. The first phase of the project, which was defined by the construction of an open-air public events facility framed by a semi-circular pergola, was completed in 1992 at a cost of approximately one million dollars. Phase two of the revitalization project was delayed until 2003, four years after the anticipated final completion date, when Lethbridge's downtown Rotary Club proposed the project as part of Rotary International's 2005 centennial celebrations.

It is this second and most recent phase of the Galt Gardens revitalization project that is the focus of my thesis research, a portion of which is discussed here. Rather than relying on the *factual* details of this latest revitalization effort, I explore instead what I refer to as representations of the transformation of Galt Gardens. That is to say, I consider how the park is made *today* through representations that focus on what the park *was*, what it *is*, and what it will *become*. First, however, I briefly address my general theoretical position regarding the character of space.

Space

As Massey (1992) notes, "the issue of the conceptualization of space is of more than technical interest; it is one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world" (67). However, an examination of the literature reveals inconsistent and often incompatible formulations of the notion of "space." A number of authors have commented on this as a contentious term (see Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1980; Shields 1991; Massy, 1992). Its difficulty lies in its widespread and diverse usages, but also in its apparent transparency and neutrality; "to question 'space,'" contends Shields (1991), "is to question one of the axes along which reality is conventionally defined" (31). The purpose of this section is to define "space" as it is used and understood in my thesis research, following specifically from the works of Lefebvre (1991) and Shields (1991). The aim is not to provide a comprehensive history of the concept, but simply to establish the basic ontological position of this research.

In contrast to realist notions of space as a neutral container of social relations, my research holds that space itself is a social product. This is an insight attributed most often to the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who, in his celebrated book *The Production of Space*, outlines three distinct, though ultimately inseparable, moments of spatial production: *representations of space*; *spatial practice*; and *representational space*. That there are three elements rather than two is indicative of Lefebvre's general distaste for binary categories. As Soja (1996) notes, "when faced with a choice confined to the either/or, Lefebvre creatively resisted by choosing instead another alternative, marked by the openness of the both/and also . . . with the 'also' reverberating back to disrupt the categorical closures implicit in either/or logic" (7).

Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of Space* is considered by most to be a difficult read. Indeed, Merrifield (1995) describes Lefebvre's writing as "tantalizing[ly] vague. . . loose, episodic and frequently prolix" and suggests these feature in the "inaccessibility of the text" (295). It is, however, at least in part, this writing style that makes Lefebvre so appealing to social thinkers interested in the study of space. Rather than a rigid typology, Lefebvre (1991) provides complex and critical opportunities for thinking about space. Lefebvre's theoretical writings have been hugely influential in bringing space back from "the dead" (Foucault 1980, 70),² and many social

² To invoke Foucault's (1980) famous comment regarding the historical devaluation of spatiality: "space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (70).

researchers interested in cities have incorporated his theoretical insights into their own work. David Harvey, Edward Soja and Rob Shields are just a few scholars who have been heavily influenced by Lefebvre's writings.³

Drawing on the insights of Lefebvre (1991), Rob Shields (1991) argues for the term "social spatialization" as a useful way to conceptualize space. Social spatialization designates "the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape (for example, the built environment)" (31). The term social spatialization "allows us to name an object of study which encompasses both the cultural logic of the spatial and its expression and elaboration in language and more concrete actions, constructions and institutional arrangements" (Shields 1991, 31).

As noted above, the present research is interested in representations of the transformation of Galt Gardens. In my use of "representations of" I reference *representations of space*, which is part of Lefebvre's (1991) theoretical framework, and which is also an important component of Shields' (1991) "social spatialization." In his influential interpretation of Lefebvre, Harvey (1989) defines representations of space as "all of the signs and significations, codes and knowledge, that allow . . . material practices to be talked about and understood, no matter whether in terms of everyday common sense or through the sometimes arcane jargon of the . . . disciplines that deal with spatial practices (engineering, architecture, geography, planning, social ecology, and the like)" (218). The concept of representations of space, then, indicates a largely discursive realm in which spatial practices are conceptualized and given meaning. Put simply, "representations of space" may be understood as "discourses on space" (Shields 1999, 163).⁴ It is important, however, to recognize that such spatial discourses are not taken to be reflective or descriptive of a "real" or "already existing" space, but are productive or, to invoke the terminology of Michel Foucault (1995), "constitutive." Therefore, when I analyze various representations, such as newspaper articles, city documents, and interview transcripts, I analyze them as practices that produce Galt Gardens as a meaningful space.

I have chosen to look at the revitalization of Galt Gardens in order to explore the ways this historically contentious park is represented as changed or changing during the revitalization process. Specifically, I want to consider how these representations might be effective in articulating *who* uses the space – that is to say, invoking the language of Lefebvre (1991) and Mitchell (2003), who has, and who no longer has, *the right to Galt Gardens*.

Methods

While my thesis research employs multiple qualitative research methods, including interviewing and participant observation, the portion discussed below uses discourse analysis to explore representations of Galt Gardens in local newspaper articles. In total I collected 51

³ A self-described Marxist, Henri Lefebvre is often considered to be a materialist (Soja 1996, 33). Indeed, Lefebvre (1991) contends that each society, with its specific mode of production, produces its own space, and that this spatial production is fundamental to the (re)production of that society. Other spatial theorists such as David Harvey (1985) and Neil Smith (1996) have taken up Lefebvre's political economic framework, analyzing the hegemonic character of capitalist space. However, one need not adhere to a Marxist ontology to benefit from Lefebvre's (1991) theoretical insights. As Borden (2000) notes, "Lefebvre's (1991) main underlying formulation for the production of space is . . . not historical or utopian but analytical" (6). Independent of his larger Marxist apparatus, Lefebvre (1991) provides a useful, if undeveloped, framework for analyzing space as a social product. Indeed, I argue that Lefebvre's triadic formulation can actually work to bridge the divide between "materialist" and the post-structural interpretations of the production of space.

⁴ This is as opposed to discourses of space which have been associated with Lefebvre's (1991) *spaces of representation*.

newspaper articles published in Lethbridge's mainstream newspaper, *The Lethbridge Herald*, between January 1st, 2003 and September 21st, 2009, selecting specifically for articles that discuss and describe Galt Gardens and that address recent revitalization efforts in the park.⁵ Before turning to an analysis of newspaper representations, however, I engage in a brief discussion of "discourse." For, like "space," "discourse" is a concept with wide ranging and often conflicting meanings (Mills 2004). Indeed, numerous scholars have emphasized the importance of spatial discourses in the construction and re-construction of social space (see Cooper 1999; Richardson & Jensen 2003; Conlon 2004; Skillington 1998).

Lees (2004) distinguishes the Marxist strand of discourse analysis from the poststructuralist strand. Under the former, "discourse analysis is a tool for uncovering certain hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve certain vested interests" (102). Marxist discourse analysis is ultimately concerned with the unveiling of ideology. Its aim is to get behind the text and discover how discourse works to serve the interests of a ruling class. Indeed, if dominant discourse is believed to be nothing more than an expression or representation of 'ruling ideas,' it seems appropriate for analysis to be focused primarily on uncovering the 'real' conditions of existence. Foucault, however, rejects the classical Marxist problematic of ideology, arguing that it reduces "the relation between knowledge and power to a question of *class* power and *class* interests" (Hall 2001, 75). Instead, Foucault (1995) adheres to an ontological position that privileges discourse over ideology.

Discourse was traditionally used by linguists to refer to "passages of connected writing or speech" (Hall 2001, 72). To speak of a medical or pedagogical discourse was simply to identify a central topic or theme. Foucault appropriated this classificatory term, radically transforming its meaning to engage with a constructivist ontology. It is Foucault who is often credited with the popularization of discourse analysis as a method in both the social sciences and humanities (Fairclough 1992, 37). In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1995) describes discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49). In other words, rather than mere descriptions or classifications, discourses work through the production of texts to construct meaningful social objects and subjects.⁶ If, as Foucault (1995) contends, discourse is always political, then we can take discourses to be tantamount to political practices, political practices that work to open up and close off possibilities for articulating particular subjects and objects as legitimately speakable.

For my thesis research I am analyzing a number of texts, including newspaper articles, interview transcripts, and official city documents. Again, this is not done to reveal the "true" nature of Galt Gardens, but to critically explore some of the ways in which the park is discursively (re)produced as a particular kind of space. To seek a "true" account of any social phenomenon is, according to poststructuralist theorizing, always a misguided and ultimately futile endeavor.

Preliminary Findings: Past, present and future representations of Galt Gardens

Having recently completed data collection, I will discuss some preliminary findings concerning newspaper representations of Galt Gardens. I have organized these findings in terms of representations of the park's past, present and future, a general narrative trend that emerged in

⁵ All editions of *The Lethbridge Herald* published between 2003 and 2007 are available electronically from an online database accessible via the University of Lethbridge library website. Those newspapers published between 2008 and 2009 are available as microform from the University of Lethbridge library microform collection. Finally, the most recent editions of *The Lethbridge Herald* are available in paper copy form in the University of Lethbridge serials collection.

⁶ According to Fairclough (2003), texts are not confined to the written and printed word, but include things such as interview transcripts, web pages and television programs (3). Perhaps even these relatively common examples too narrowly define what might be understood as a text. In his chapter on discourse Parker (1992) broadens the definition of *text* to include all things meaningful. "Texts," says Parker (1992), are "delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretive gloss" (6).

these early stages of my analysis. This narrative structure, which is already suggested by the term “revitalization,” emphasizes both an assumption of progress as well as a kind of nostalgia for a lost place - a “vital” place of decades past. While this kind of past, present, future narrative is often taken for granted as a way of conceptualizing history and the present, I argue that it might also operate towards specific ends and that it most certainly has particular effects. At this point in the analysis I am wondering whether an effect of this particular narrative, as is employed in newspaper representations of Galt Gardens, is to justify displacements and exclusions from the park. Further, I wonder how such representations have the effect of producing a particular type of public space. To be clear, this is not an historical analysis of Galt Gardens, but an analysis of how a particular narrative of past, present, future is employed in newspaper representations of the park to produce the place as a space that operates to include as well as to exclude.

In many of the 51 newspaper articles that I analyzed Galt Gardens is represented as a park that was at one time thriving - a vibrant public gathering place, a “hive of activity,” that had since become both (and somewhat paradoxically) vacant and threatening. As one article states, the aim of the Galt Gardens revitalization project is to “restor[e] the park’s former status as the social hub of downtown Lethbridge” (*The Lethbridge Herald* September 6, 2003) Another article published in the same edition reads “perhaps, by 2005, Galt Gardens will once again beat proudly as the heart of downtown Lethbridge” (Ibid.). These statements, and others like them, construct a glorified past and also suggest an imagined future. Moreover, although the future seems inclusionary, I argue that such representations also work to exclude. In other words, while a dominant theme of “bringing people back to the park” emerged in newspaper articles, further analysis suggests that this is not merely a “filling up of an empty space,” but a displacement of a particular kind of “other” park user, a user that is constructed in newspaper articles as undesirable.

Before turning to an analysis of the discourse as exclusionary, let us look at who is invited to the new Galt Gardens - who is constructed as having the *right* to the park? In analyzing newspaper articles it became apparent that certain subjects are explicitly included in representations of a revitalized Galt Gardens. First of all, a revitalized Galt Gardens is imagined as “family friendly” (*The Lethbridge Herald* April 22, 2003). This heavily coded category appears in numerous representations of Galt Gardens’ future. Further, “children,” “seniors” and “citizens of all ages” (Ibid. September 6, 2003) are employed in newspaper representations. The following excerpt from the September 8, 2003 edition of *The Lethbridge Herald* includes not only “adults and children,” but also “entertainers” and recreational users, specifically ice skaters:⁷

Picture a spacious green park, complete with lush trees, colourful flower gardens, sparkling waterfalls and crystal-clear pools, food kiosks emanating delicious aromas and entertainers. Picture the park full of people; adults and children alike walking, talking, playing and having fun. And in the winter the park is still full of people, many of them skating on an outdoor ice rink under beautifully lit trees. Now picture the park in the heart of downtown Lethbridge. Hard to imagine? Not according to the Rotary Club of Lethbridge and a city appointed committee which are committed to revitalizing Galt Gardens.

The president of the Lethbridge Rotary Club “envisions workers having their lunch around the fountain, seniors going for a leisurely stroll and families enjoying the park together” (Ibid. April 3, 2007). Here we have the discursive emplacement of “seniors going for a leisurely stroll,” “families” and “workers having their lunch.” Such texts produce a particular space (Galt Gardens) and particular subjects (“families,” “children,” “seniors,” etc.) as though they belong naturally together.

In general, representations of Galt Gardens’ future include families and people of all ages, especially seniors and children, as well as people involved in recreational activities. Such a finding may hardly seem worthy of critical investigation. Indeed, from what has been presented so far, representations of Galt Gardens’ future seem quite favorable.

However, while we have inclusionary discourse, further analysis suggests that such representations coincide with, and are contingent upon, the exclusion of “other” undesirable park

⁷ While the Rotary Club’s initial proposal included an outdoor skating facility, this idea was eventually abandoned due to a lack of funding.

users. Here I look at who is represented in newspaper articles as uninvited - as *not* having the *right* to Galt Gardens. An article published in the September 9, 2003 edition of *The Lethbridge Herald* is clear about who is not invited to the park, saying that “the city’s homeless and others who loiter in the park” must be kept away: “Money is only one obstacle [to the revitalization of Galt Gardens]. The other is developing a park that will attract residents of all ages all year long, and trying to keep the park free from the city’s homeless and others who loiter in the park, often asking for money and harassing people.” The author finishes this section of the article with this question: “What would it take to bring people back to the park?” Most striking about this quotation is the distinction made between the seemingly inclusionary language, articulated as a desire to attract “residents of all ages” and its clear efforts at exclusion, articulated as a need to keep out the “the city’s homeless,” as well as loiterers. It is clear that while it is hoped that the revitalized park will “attract residents of all ages,” homeless people are explicitly excluded from this category. They are in effect represented as other-than “people.”

The construction of homeless people as an impediment to revitalization has been documented by a number of social researchers. In their exploration of public space, property redevelopment and homelessness in San Diego, Mitchell & Staeheli (2006) found that the presence of “street people” and the homeless was posed as a continual and crucial problem in attempts to revitalize downtown neighbourhoods. The newspaper articles I analyzed constructed “the city’s homeless” as a problem of the present, a current-day threat that must be removed to ensure Galt Gardens’ revitalization:

[revitalizing Galt Gardens] will also require taking on some challenges, including ridding the park of the “undesirables” . . . the park has become a hangout for many of the city’s homeless, which discourages use by others, particularly children and the elderly who don’t feel safe in the park, especially at night. Ensuring the safety of park users is one of the key objectives of the committee and Rotary clubs as they plan Phase 2. (*The Lethbridge Herald* September 8, 2003)

According to this article, only by “ridding the park of undesirables” (a category which later in the article becomes “the city’s homeless”) can the park be legitimately used by “children and the elderly.” Interestingly, “children and the elderly” are constructed as categorically independent from “the city’s homeless” (the implication is that “the city’s homeless” cannot be “the children or the elderly”) In a final example, “other users” are constructed as those from which the “public” must attempt to reclaim the park:

Increased use of the park by city residents is predicted, and with 24-hour security and regular police patrols via foot and cycle officers, the public will be able to take back the park...if citizens start using the park more, other users will “disappear and move to other places.” (Ibid. June 21, 2007)

In these excerpts “the city’s homeless,”⁸ “undesirables,” and “others” who spend time in the park are represented as obstacles to a revitalized park. They are constructed as threatening, as a problem of the present that will ideally be displaced by “the public” in representations of Galt Gardens’ future. They are, in short, produced as the “other” users - the ones from which “the public” must recover the park. What is interesting here is that in relation to articulations of these unwelcome users of the park, the present, as opposed to the past and the future, is constructed solely as problematic. It exists between two idealized constructions, the past and the future. By virtue of described pasts and futures the present is revealed as one in which the homeless, vagrants, and those Othered as such, are not only unwelcome in the park but are cast as other than the public / other than people. For these reasons I suggest that these are not the people being addressed by the call to “bring people back to the park.” Those unwelcome in the park posed only

⁸ Note that in the newspaper articles cited the homeless are never referred to as “homeless people,” instead they are hailed as “the city’s homeless” - a consistency which speaks further to the argument developed in following sections.

the present problem - the problem from which a vibrant version of the park past might be retrieved.

Race

The creation of the city requires active place making that relies upon certain forgettings of the past, as well as some creative reconstructions. This is a positive and negative project of effacement and of production...First, native people must be conceptually *removed* from urban space. If located anywhere, native people are frequently imagined in the past or in nature. In either case, they are placed outside the city. Second, displacement requires the concomitant *emplacement* of a settler society: This place is to be made into a white place through physical settlement and occupation. (Blomley 2004, 114).

Racial categories are largely absent from the newspaper representations I analyzed. While class is commonly evoked with talk of “the city’s homeless,” and with a call for a return of the city’s “residents,” there is relatively little that is overtly about race. One exception appears in the paper’s opinion section and was sent in by a reader. In this opinion piece it is reported that a First Nations university student “was told . . . that the Rotary Centennial Plaza water feature in . . . Galt Gardens should be kept for ‘whites only’” (*The Lethbridge Herald* March 16, 2009). This article entitled “Still Work to be Done to Deal with Racism” is one of very few acknowledgements of the fact that Lethbridge remains a racially segregated city fraught with postcolonial tensions, and that Galt Gardens, in particular, is a highly racialized space.

To briefly elaborate this point, as part of my Master’s course work, in a qualitative methods seminar, I conducted exploratory interviews with a number of long time Lethbridge residents on their *experiences in* and *ideas of* Galt Gardens park. One theme emerged consistently in these preliminary interviews: Galt Gardens is a park commonly associated with those impoverished in the city and, more specifically with homeless First Nations people. I provide just one example to illustrate how this was expressed by one participant:

There’s a whole lore in this town surrounding the park, just, and what I said about the sense of ownership...I mean if you talk to the average local person it’s the indian park, you know, it’s where all the drunk natives hang out, um, so I mean like everyone I think that you would talk to would have heard a story and that’s what I mean by the lore surrounding that park, the mythology of it.

Further, to briefly address another component of my Master’s research, I also consider the spatial practices of and in Galt Gardens. Here, I note the recent appearance of large-scale, seemingly celebratory, representations of men marked through traditional dress as First Nations men, on the sides of buildings surrounding the park. These murals (which are identified as part of the park’s revitalization) together with the interviews I conducted, as well as with my own lived experiences and spatializations of Galt Gardens, all indicate that the construction of racial difference is a significant component in attempts to radically change not only the park, but, I argue more importantly, who goes there. The violent history of colonialism in southern Alberta and its apparent absence from productions of local “history,” further demand that questions be asked about the place of race in seemingly benign attempts to “revitalize” Galt Gardens park. To refer only briefly to work more substantively considered in my thesis, I contend that Lethbridge, although small, is like other western Canadian cities. Here too, histories of racist and colonial relations have played out such that various efforts effect the perpetuation of racist ideology, such that Razack’s (2000) insight that “[t]he city belongs to the settlers” (97) operates in obscured but continuous ways.

Conclusion

The purposes of this paper have been to outline my theoretical position regarding the character of space and to present some preliminary findings on the social production of Galt Gardens. Galt Gardens offers a site that is both empirically rich, and theoretically useful as a

means of exploring processes of social spatialization (Shields 1991). The focus on a public park in a small western Canadian city provides a unique contribution to a literature that tends to privilege metropolises such as New York, Chicago or Vancouver. As Zukin (2002) notes, “you don’t have to live in an ‘alpha city’ to do a major analysis. Every building, street and neighborhood is simultaneously a cultural space and a part of a matrix of power” (347). Thus, this work significantly contributes to efforts to expand analyses of space in the city.

While I have focused on newspaper representations of the revitalization of Galt Gardens, this is by no means the “whole story.” As I continue with the analytical component of my research I will draw on other sources, such as interview transcripts, field notes, and material culture to explore the ways in which the revitalization of Galt Gardens is socially produced. By combining methods, I do not aim to fully “know” the revitalization process, but rather to “know it differently,” as a productive process that is both social and political. The revitalization of Galt Gardens is, for the most part, considered to be an overwhelming success. Indeed, it may seem peculiar to critically investigate a revitalization project that has seemingly gone uncontested. It is however, the project’s apparent apolitical nature and ubiquitous acceptance that calls for a more complex and critically informed investigation. Threatened by neoliberal revitalization initiatives, downtown public spaces such as Galt Gardens are becoming increasingly important, especially for those with limited resources, such as homeless people. As Mitchell & Staeheli (2006) note, “as cities have redeveloped public space has become a key battleground” (144) and thus it is important that we pay critical attention to revitalization projects and their potentially exclusionary effects.

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