

Place Image in Vancouver
Vancouverism, *EcoDensity* & the Resort City

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Vancouver

Honored by *The Economist Intelligence Unit's* livability ranking as the world's most livable city for the sixth consecutive year and nestled between mountains and the Pacific Ocean, Vancouver has arguably earned the quote on the back of every BC license plate as "The Best Place on Earth."¹ The host of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, Vancouver has become synonymous with a certain type of living where people are perpetually drinking lattes and cappuccinos at the many Starbucks, practicing yoga, skiing down the many resorts surrounding the downtown core and windsurfing on the water, all while wearing the ever-popular-Vancouver-based Lululemon pants. This yuppie lifestyle is what Vancouver offers to its citizens, immigrants and investors.

1.2 Who is Vancouver for?

Leading investors, real estate agents and city officials have attempted to answer this question. This paper will review three prominent major themes in Vancouver: Vancouverism, *EcoDensity* and the resort city hypothesis. I will investigate these various themes in Vancouver in attempt to define Vancouver as a place from a geographical perspective. Firstly, I will utilize Tim Creswell and John Agnew's definition of place and what characterizes place in Vancouver. Secondly, I will define the term Vancouverism and its history including the Li Ka-Shing investment as the overarching theme in Vancouver's development and exportation of Vancouverism. In addition, this paper will create an introspective analysis of Vancouver's *EcoDensity* framework, which is currently in practice; and synchronize both *EcoDensity* and

¹ "Urban idylls." Liveability ranking. *The Economist* 28 Apr 2008. Accessed on 5 Apr 2009 <http://www.economist.com/markets/rankings/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11116839>.

Vancouverism as the dominant city plan in Vancouver and their impacts on Vancouver's place *image*. Lastly, I will utilize leading Vancouver real estate entrepreneur Bob Rennie's theory of Vancouver as a resort city to provide an alternate private development outlook of Vancouver and its sense of place. To conclude, I will attempt to define Vancouver's sense of place and place *image* given these three dominant themes.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The city as a place

Place is a word we often use in our everyday language, a word taken for granted, and "wrapped in common sense."² In order to define Vancouver's sense of place it is imperative to first understand how place is defined in human geography. Place is not a formalized academic term, however human geography is, on an intuitive level, a study of places. Place is often studied in relation to location, space, landscape etc. John Agnew has outlined three aspects of place as a 'meaningful location:' the location itself, the locale and a sense of place.³ Each of these can be studied in relation to Vancouver as a place.

2.1.1 Location

Tim Cresswell uses Agnew's definition of place as a location to answer the question 'Where?' When place is used as a verb, we are often referring to a particular location. Location can be defined as where in relation to everywhere else a place is. Vancouver, being a place, is located in the province of British Columbia, on the west coast of Canada at 49:15:00N 123:04:48W.

² Cresswell, Tim. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004 : 4

³ Agnew, John. *Place and politics: the geographical mediation of state and society*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987

2.1.2 *Locale*

Locale refers to the actual shape of a place, the walls and rooms. For a city, this means the various parks and streets. Locale also refers to the material settings associated with social relations like work, home and recreation. The locale is the physical places' interaction with the populace. Whether it be Stanley Park's recreational atmosphere, the busy shopping district on Robson Street or the academic quarters around Library Square, all of which are locales that interact with Vancouverites.

2.1.3 *Sense of place*

By 'sense of place', Agnew refers to the personal and emotional attachment people have to a place. Vancouver's sense of place would then be a combination of its location and locale. By reading Agnew's literature, it is apparent that his aim was to first offer a detailed outlook on "place as a geographical setting" so that political action, structured by "historical accumulation of local, wider –ranging and sense of place influences," could be taken. Secondly, to determine the changing character of places and politics as they change their wider environment, meaning the changes between locale and government, social-class, ethnic groups and attachments to particular places.⁴ For Vancouver this could mean a transformation of the city from the 1970's to present as seen through Vancouverism, *EcoDensity*, and the powers of gentrification.

2.2 *Place in Vancouver*

For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to understand place as a shared product of mediation. Places that we interact with, such as common spaces, like parks and recreational centers that we use in our daily routines, share, for the most part, the same meaning to the

⁴ Ibid.

individuals that use them. Places are also objects of representation as they appear in popular media. Therefore, Vancouver's meaning as a place must have a similar representation amongst people from different cultures and backgrounds. This shared sense of place is known as place image.

When utilizing policy decisions like *EcoDensity* and Vancouverism to define Vancouver as a place, it is crucial to understand that public meanings of place is often constructed by a relatively small group of powerful people at the expense of alternative meanings. Although this may be less prevalent in Vancouver's planning, it can be determined that place can be used as an object of power created to dominate over people of a certain class, gender, race or sexual orientation. Vancouver's sense of place for a homeless Vancouverite would differ from that of an elitist planner. This paper however, will determine Vancouver's sense of place through policy on the average Vancouverite living in downtown Vancouver; an introspective look on the majority of Vancouverites and not the often-disenfranchised citizens of the downtown eastside.

2.3 Literature: Vancouverism, EcoDensity and the Resort City

A simple 'Google search' of Vancouverism will recover numerous articles and critiques of this urban style and several similar definitions. The excessive rhetoric that Vancouverism has a positive impact on Vancouverites is rampant through city hall literature and its boosters - Larry Beasley, Bing Thom and Bob Rennie. My research is founded on the premise that Vancouver's sense of place has been exaggerated. There is little cohesive literature that binds together *EcoDensity*, Vancouverism and the resort city hypothesis. By bringing together the various literatures concerning Vancouver's city policy, I will attempt to fill this void in the literature concerning Vancouver's identity for Vancouverites. There has been numerous articles and titles on exporting Vancouver's planning successes, especially since the emergence of the 2010

Olympic Games and the bids leading up to them, but the effects of such an action have not been fully realized.⁵ The theoretical background of my research stems from the existing theories of Vancouverism, *EcoDensity* and the resort city. There is literature indicating the pros and cons of each of these development styles but there is no holistic approach that appropriates Vancouver's sense of place through the city of Vancouver and the private real-estate development in Yaletown and the Downtown Eastside. More specifically, there is insufficient literature that analyzes Vancouver as a resort city, namely because this theory has only recently been coined by Vancouverism spokespeople. Vancouver does have a few of the core characteristics of a resort city, but to what extent.

3.0 Urban Planning in Vancouver

The Vancouver Planning Department stresses that Vancouver is “a model of urban living admired around the world.”⁶ The Vancouver model of urban design, as mentioned in the Vancouver City's Brochure of 2007 is “lacking contemporary examples to draw from, [as] Vancouver has framed its own urban model based on a set of organizing principles for structuring and shaping diverse, integrated, adaptable and highly liveable inner city neighborhoods”

Vancouver practices “new urbanism,” which counters urban sprawl and urban segregation in hopes of reducing public reliance on cars and increased community interaction.⁷ Mixing residential neighborhoods by placing schools, stores and public transportation networks within walking distance of one's home and providing parks and public recreational centers in close proximity are all factors of new urbanism. Vancouver's Urban Design and Development

⁵ See McCann 2006

⁶ Vancouver Planning Department. *Community Services: Planning*. Accessed on 20 April 2009
<<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/PLANNING/>>

⁷ Allister, M. L., *Governing ourselves: The politics of Canadian communities*. Vancouver : UBC Press, 2004

Centre puts forward two main principles: a "High quality of Public Realm," with many parks, bike paths, walkways, and civic amenities and "neighborhood development" though mix-used land for commercial, residential, and public purposes fostering a "complete neighborhood(s)."⁸

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly from the University of Victoria defined Vancouver Planning Department as a success.

[The Vancouver Planning Department has]...the view that urban planning should be designed to create conviviality, environmental viability, economic adequacy, and a sense of place, and thus should empower citizens, is successfully implemented in Vancouver. This approach encourages public consultation processes, along with biophysical, social, and economic studies. It promotes scrutiny of the impact of development on the ecosystem. Partnering for success leads to interdisciplinary partnerships between planning units and residents, taxpayers, business communities, and other local and senior level's of governments. Such successful urban planning models are popular and thus under the spotlight, but contribute to revamping the city and its varied community images.⁹

According to Trevor Boddy, one of the city's most active promoters of Vancouverism, Vancouver has broken many of the classic rules of urban planning in North America. Vancouver has transformed high density housing into a positive idea by ensuring citizens will buy into the convenience of having public amenities all within close proximity. Vancouver has also begun to combat urban sprawl by promoting "Social Bonus Zoning." This allows for high-density development so long as there is social development such as "public amenities [like] cultural facilities, parks, schools, and social housing."¹⁰

John Punter, author of "The Vancouver Achievement" has claimed that Vancouver's planning has been an incredible success for six reasons, the first being the environmental quality

⁸ Vancouver Planning Department, *Community Services: Planning*

⁹ Brunet-Jailly, Emmanuel., "Vancouver: The Sustainable City.," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 30 (2008): 375-378.

¹⁰ Boddy, Trevor. "INSIGHT: Vancouverism vs. Lower Manhattanism: Shaping the high density city." *Vancouver Sun*, 20 September 2005.

of the city's site and setting. This means that Vancouver has preserved its location and natural sense of place. Second, Vancouver has sustained economic growth and has increased demand for housing amidst high density living. Third, there are shared political beliefs surrounding the environment, prompting policy to shift towards eco-sustainability. Fourth, Vancouver has delegated its design to the right developers, enabling their policies to take a physical form. Fifth, The Vancouver Planning department has faced adequate pressure to create policies that reflect the community's desires. Lastly, Punter attributes Vancouver's success to the long-serving politicians and planners that share the same moral code in protecting Vancouver's location and sense of place.¹¹

4.0 Vancouverism

Vancouver's history, although a young city, includes its embarrassing roots as a hippy town, where Greenpeace and ad busters once thrived. Though it has long since matured as a city, unusual things still happen in Vancouver that do not happen in the rest of Canada. Examples include foreign investors swapping condos that they have never lived in, teachers going on strike over wages that are not higher than other provinces by a significant enough margin, environmental critics fussing over the best drinking water in the world and city planners protecting mountain views by restricting building heights. Nevertheless, this is what makes Vancouver such a unique place to live.

¹¹ Punter, John., "The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design." Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003: 182

4.1 Vancouverism Defined

Vancouverism can be characterized as an urban style. There have been various definitions of Vancouverism; however, the most concise rhetoric was from The New York Times that stated:

Named after the city in British Columbia, *Vancouverism* is characterized by tall, but widely separated, slender towers interspersed with low-rise buildings, public spaces, small parks and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and facades to minimize the impact of a high-density population.¹²

More simply put, Vancouverism creates density by combining both residential and commercial spaces. However, many have argued, especially those of whom are native to Vancouver, that Vancouverism is more than just tall buildings and podiums, but more so about the spaces between them that tie the city together as one cohesive unit, and this defines Vancouver as a place.¹³ The term also refers to the livable, vibrant and sustainable city that has emerged during the 1990's. It is more than verticality; it is also about the use of space and city density. The livable city has "a podium with a minimum of three storey's of townhouses or commercial space, ensuring that the street level remains vibrant, detailed and warm." Another characteristic of Vancouverism is the civic governments control over zoning. The amenities the city offers and the "tightly controlled streetscape" is what makes Vancouver unique. Larry Beasley himself has chosen to use the very same New York Times definition as the headline of his Vancouverism exhibition in London.¹⁴ Planners are trying to make Vancouver a livable city by providing everything that suburbia does within the downtown core. Grocery stores, parks, and daycares are all within reach of housing. The city is also trying to incorporate the middle class that can no

¹² Chamberlain, Lisa. "Trying to Build the Grand Central of the West," *The New York Times* 28 Dec 2005. Accessed on 5 Apr 2009.

¹³ Montgomery, Charles. "Futureville." *Canadian Geographic* 126(2006): 44-60.

¹⁴ Bogdanowicz, Julie. "Vancouverism," *Canadian Architect*, 51(8), (2006): 23-24

longer afford to live downtown, as well as those with low income in the downtown east side. People are learning to live on foot, public transit and by bike – keeping the city tightly knit.¹⁵ Vancouver’s successes can be characterized through Vancouverism. First, Vancouver is one of North America's youngest cities, yet it has the highest residential density in North America. Second, Vancouver does not have a single freeway within its municipal boundaries. Third, its oldest neighborhoods of Chinatown and Gastown are intact, and have been protected because of local activism. Fourth, planning decisions are not in the hands of local elected officials but in those of city planners, allowing for most decisions to be made on a primarily long-term basis. Fifth, Vancouver is as multicultural and diverse ethnically as World Cities such as Los Angeles, New York, or Toronto. Sixth, what is strikingly different in Vancouver is its 20-year old social bonus policy, which organizes trade-offs between building heights and public amenities such as cultural facilities, schools, parks, and social housing. Today, downtown Vancouver is respected for its exemplary urbanism and promotion of a social mix that contributes to its current reputation of being a cosmopolitan city located in one of the most beautiful bays in the world.

4.2 Larry Beasley’s and Li Ka-Shing’s Yaletown

One of Vancouver’s most influential city officials was former Co-Director of Planning for the *City of Vancouver*, Larry Beasley. Beasley created the “Vancouver Model” and transformed the downtown core. The “Vancouver Model” has become a vital aspect of *Vancouverism*, along with other developments such as “Project 56.”¹⁶ Beasley has been recognized by the Canadian government and received the Order of Canada for taking a leading role in transforming [the] downtown core into a vibrant, livable urban community” and

¹⁵ Montgomery, Charles., “Futureville” 44-60

¹⁶ Grant. Paul. "Vancouver's architectural style in spotlight at London exhibit," *CBC News* 23 Jun 2008. Accessed on 5 Apr 2009. < <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2008/06/23/vancouver-architecture.html>>

developing “a participative and socially responsible approach to zoning, planning and design.”¹⁷

Larry Beasley played an integral role in the Yaletown development by negotiating and formulating a deal with developer Li Ka-Shing.¹⁸

After Expo 86, Li Ka-Shing purchased 67 hectares of land in downtown Vancouver for only 145 million dollars from the provincial government.¹⁹ These 67 hectares were located in the heart of the city on the Expo 86 site. Carrying a net worth of approximately 32 billion dollars, Li Ka-Shing is the richest person of Chinese descent.²⁰ With a hand in almost every facet of business, from electricity to telecommunications, real estate to retail and shipping to the Internet, Li has been Hong Kong’s Superman.²¹

The Li Ka Shing deal may seem astonishing for any developer. However, this deal came with certain ‘strings attached’ including “seventeen hectares of parks, a waterfront promenade, a community centre, eight daycares, a fifth of the units devoted to social housing—[with] all of this [to be] paid for by the developer.”²² This development exemplified the power of Vancouver’s zoning regulations. Beasley and his team negotiated the rezoning of land from industrial to a high-density residential neighborhood, a core aspect of Vancouverism. The developer, Li Ka-Shing, paid for all the parks and amenities on the site. The Li Ka-Shing development project was a measure of Vancouver’s Planning Department’s ability to enforce zoning on development. The Vancouver lifestyle, amenities and streetscape are all measures of Vancouver’s sense of place and place image.

¹⁷ "Order of Canada: Larry Beasley, C.M., M.A., M.C.I.P." *Honours*. 10 Jun 2005. Governor General of Canada. Accessed on 5 Apr 2009. < <http://www.gg.ca/honours/search-recherche/honours-desc.asp?lang=e&TypeID=orc&id=9088>>

¹⁸ Olds, Kris 'Globalization and urban change: tales from Vancouver via Hong Kong', *Urban Geography*, 19(4) (1998): 360-385.

¹⁹ Montgomery, Charles., “Futureville.”

²⁰ "Hong Kong's 40 Richest: Li Ka-Shing." *Forbes.com*. 2009. Forbes Magazine. Accessed on 5 Apr 2009.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Old, Kris., ‘Globalization and urban change: tales from Vancouver via Hong Kong’: 360-385

After the city's development permit board finalized the plans, apartment buildings emerged into the skyline. Thousands moved in during the early 1990's, however as Beasley noted, the sidewalks were empty. Beasley thought, "we worked on this place for a decade. What have we done wrong? Maybe our theories don't work. Maybe there is some sort of magic we missed."²³

What was missing from Yaletown was a core amenity. When Urban Fare first opened in 1999, the streets became vibrant as people began to walk everywhere. Yaletown became the parade of walkers as Beasley explained, "[p]eople finally started walking down the street here to get their milk instead of driving back to their old grocery stores. Then came the shops and video stores. Walking -- that's what made this neighborhood."²⁴

Vancouverism is more than just the Yaletown development and the amenities. It is also about the collaborative process between the civic government and developers. The Li Ka-Shing investment was just the beginning of a process that would take over Vancouver's entire city core. By offering developers residential density in return for a "live first design," Vancouver was able to gain its valued reputation. Beasley and the planning department rezoned Vancouver's commercial core in 1991 and allowed the Vancouverism transformation to take place. The hope that Vancouver's dense living design would bring people from the suburbs became a reality. As these livable neighborhoods emerged, the inner city became more than just a place, but an idea as well.

²³ Montgomery, Charles., "Futureville.": 44-60

²⁴ Ibid.

5.0 *EcoDensity: Environmental Sustainability*

5.1 *EcoDensity*

In June of 2006, former Mayor of Vancouver Sam Sullivan proposed a new plan for Vancouver titled *EcoDensity*. Simply stated, *EcoDensity* attempts to reduce Vancouver's ecological footprint, protecting the local and global ecology by increasing city density. Theoretically, the increased density would reduce automobile traffic and decrease carbon emissions.²⁵ The *EcoDensity* policy "commits the City to make environmental sustainability a primary goal in all city planning decisions - in ways that also support housing affordability and livability."

5.2 *A process already underway: EcoDensity as a label*

Vancouver has been lauded as a highly sustainable city, as displayed in the Li Ka-Shing development. The *EcoDensity* policy was Vancouver's way of marketing their plan of action, putting into words what Vancouver will do for the future. When the first revision of *EcoDensity* was made, many argued that it did not combat social equity. With social equity came affordable housing. Lee et Al. explain that affordable housing must be central to *EcoDensity* if it is to be an environmentally sustainable and equitable plan.²⁶ The *EcoDensity* plan was a label, for the most part, of plans that were already underway in Vancouver. Although environmental sustainability has not been at the forefront of Vancouver planning, it has played an intrinsic role in planning.

²⁵ City of Vancouver. *EcoDensity: How Density, Design and Land Use Will Contribute to Environmental Sustainability, Affordability and Livability*. Vancouver: GPO, 2008.

²⁶ Lee, Villagomez, Gurstein, Ebby & Wyly, "Affordable *EcoDensity*: Making Affordable Housing a Core Principle of Vancouver's *EcoDensity* Charter."

5.3 City Plan and the Liveable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP)

The main premise of *EcoDensity* was environmental sustainability. These were also core principles of the Liveable Region Strategic Plan and the City Plan.²⁷ City Plan was officially adopted in 1995, however its first stage of development began as early as 1992.²⁸ The plan was created by both city planners and over 20,000 citizens of Vancouver.²⁹ Over three years of vision planning was utilized to create this plan. The plan was innovative and unique because it involved a large number of citizens. Anne McAfee, who was Vancouver's Co-Director of Planning from 1974-2006 and Director of City Plans, explained that the City Plan was a large part of Vancouverism and *EcoDensity*.³⁰

City Plan also sets some new directions by: increasing housing variety throughout the city to meet people's needs and make better use of existing city services locating jobs closer to where people live to reduce travel maintaining a diverse economy moving people by transit, walking, and biking changing the delivery of city services to a neighborhood-based model and supporting stronger neighborhoods through the development of neighborhood centers, local character zoning, community-based policing and integrated service teams.³¹

When the City Plan was first developed, the environment had not yet become a factor in determining the ideal city. Vancouver was one of the first cities to promote environmental livability. The City Plan called for "activities [to be] sensitive to the environment."³²

²⁷ Although there have been earlier developments in city planning in Vancouver. I have chosen to focus on both the City Plan and LRSP only since they outline over 25 years of Vancouver planning. There is ample literature available discussing Vancouver's environmental plan from the 1920's onwards.

²⁸ Harcourt, Mike, Ken Cameron, and Sean Rossiter. *City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions that Saved Vancouver*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007

²⁹ Punter, John., "The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design."

³⁰ "Instructor: Ann McAfee" *The City Program*. Simon Fraser University: Continuing Studies. Accessed on 20 April 2009 from SF U Continuing Studies <www.sfu.ca/city/bios/mcafee.htm>

³¹ McAfee, Ann., "City Plan." *Discover Vancouver: Where events and real life merge*. Accessed on 20 April 2009 from Discover Vancouver <www.discovervancouver.com>

³² Ibid.

City Plan focused primarily on Vancouver, and the Liveable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP) focused on Metro Vancouver. The LRSP gained worldwide recognition at the 2002 Dubai International Awards as the “Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment.”³³ The LRSP focused on four main strategies: protecting the Green Zone (1), building complete communities (2), achieving a compact metropolitan region (3) and increasing transportation choice (4). The plan has been updated numerous times but was originally created in 1996.³⁴

Both these plans considered the environment in the early 1990’s. The *EcoDensity* plan does the exact same thing, yet takes special interest in creating more affordable housing and increasing social equity.

5.4 Vancouverism and EcoDensity: The Legacy

The language used by planners and other locals to describe and justify the changed priorities was in tune for the times, but it was not influential enough to last. Therefore, part of what Vancouverism and *EcoDensity* are all about is finding a way of presenting a series of changes that have been underway for a long time. *EcoDensity* is another after-the-fact justification, with some new policy rationales for environmental sustainability; and the additional contradiction that it was proposed for those parts of the city that already had all the qualities emphasized in the policy.

³³ Metro Vancouver., LRSP Workshop: Employment Location Issues and Options. GVRD Technical Advisory Committee. 2006 May 25 Accessed on on 23 April 2009 from Metro Vancouver <www.metrovancouver.org>

³⁴ Metro Vancouver., “Liveable Regions Strategic Plan” *Regional Growth Strategy*. Accessed on 20 April 2009 from Metro Vancouver <www.metrovancouver.org>

6.0 EcoDensity & Vancouverism in Vancouver – Place image and Sense of place

In 1996, the Greater Vancouver Regional District, now Metro Vancouver, adopted the LRSP.³⁵ The LRSP demanded sustainable development, calling for the creation of ‘Vancouveresque’ dense town centers in hopes of providing increased public transit systems and protecting each regions agricultural lands. However, the LRSP did not take into account the competitive nature of municipalities that compete for tax revenues. Like many large cities, Vancouver’s periphery saw an increase in single-family homes, big-box retail outlets and warehouse-style industrial business parks. The suburbs became a place for head offices and businesses, and not the downtown core.³⁶

The LRSP was, for the most part, unsuccessful. However, the plan was successful in regions such as Burnaby’s Metrotown Centre. However, statistically, between 1996 and 2001, employment opportunities outside the growth concentration area (GCA in Vancouver) was three percent higher than employment within the GCA.³⁷ As employment opportunities increased outside the GCA, Vancouver began to become a dense suburb, without sufficient employment to sustain its population, causing its citizens to travel outside of the downtown core.

The LRSP never took flight in Surrey’s planning the way it did in Burnaby. Bob Bose, Surrey’s three-term ex-mayor, explains that industrial land in Surrey was converted to business parks, which were away from transit routes and therefore created a more car dependent community. As a result, industrial firms lobbied the government to rezone agricultural land to

³⁵ Western Economic Diversification Canada., “The Liveable Region Strategic Plan.” *The Liveable Region*. Accessed on 23 April 2009 <<http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/9728.asp>>

³⁶ Olson, Kristin M., “Mobility in the Liveable City: A Case Study of Skytrain’s Impact on Mobility and Liveability in Vancouver, B.C”.

³⁷ Metro Vancouver., (LRSP Workshop: Employment Location Issues and Options. *GVRD Technical Advisory Committee*. 2006 May 25, Retrieved on 23 April 2009 from Metro Vancouver <www.metrovancouver.org>

encourage industrial development.³⁸ Both these types of rezoning and investment were against the main premises of the original LRSP. Surrey's high traffic is the result of low density planning, as many travel by car from business parks to their suburbs. The failure of the LRSP is the result of Vancouverism. The increase in land prices and residential housing led to firms relocating into the suburbs, creating a postindustrial urban sprawl of employment where rent was more affordable. As employment opportunities leave the core of these regional town centers in places like Surrey, city officials are finding it difficult to encourage sustainable high-density growth in their townships.

Vancouver's high-density development has brought about an increase in property values.³⁹ Lee et al. analyze affordability using a very simple statistic "[t]he rent for a standard condo on the west side of Vancouver was \$2,200 per month at the end of 2007, up 50% from 2004 (\$1,600 per month), and more than double the rates of 2000 (\$1,000 per month). Vancouverism and *EcoDensity* policies are responsible for both of these increases. As a result, middle-income families are unable to participate in the Vancouverism 'live first' lifestyle as property values become unaffordable. These families get pushed out to the suburbs, creating a gap in social equity.⁴⁰ Charles Montgomery, author of "Futureville" - an article about the impacts of Vancouverism - expresses that the gap between the rich and poor in Vancouver has grown twice as quickly in Vancouver as it has in the rest of Canada. If Vancouver is to be sustainable, growth must accommodate middle-income families.

Providing affordable housing for these middle-income individuals has been an ongoing issue in Vancouver. Affordable housing for the homeless, whom are easily visible in the

³⁸ Olson, Kristin M., "Mobility in the Liveable City: A Case Study of Skytrain's Impact on Mobility and Liveability in Vancouver, B.C"

³⁹ Lee, Villagomez, Gurstein, Ebby & Wyly, "Affordable *EcoDensity*: Making Affordable Housing a Core Principle of Vancouver's *EcoDensity* Charter: 3

⁴⁰ Montgomery, Charles "Futureville"

downtown east side, has been at the forefront of Vancouver's media for years. Today, there is an insufficient amount of affordable housing stock in Vancouver. Densification policies, like those of the LRSP and CityPlans have not been able to provide a sufficient amount of affordable housing for the growing population. Affordable housing development since the residential densification policies have taken effect, but have not reached the proportion the city hoped to achieve.

6.1 Exporting a Different Brand of Vancouverism

Vancouver's sense of place is dramatically different than the Vancouverism and *EcoDensity* we promote around the world. There is a clear division between the Vancouverism in the West End, Vancouverism in Coal Harbor, Vancouverism in False Creek/Yaletown and the rather negative effects of Vancouverism that are seen in the downtown east-side (DTES). Playing on the large number of empty apartments in Coal Harbor, real estate giant Bob Rennie, on numerous occasions has coined Vancouver as a resort city. Vancouver's sense of place may seem to fit the *EcoDensity* and Vancouverism characteristics in some areas; however, core parts of Vancouver have been left out, specifically the DTES and Coal Harbor. It is no surprise that at Larry Beasley's exhibit on Vancouverism in London, there was no mention of the DTES and the lack of affordable housing, which is caused by impacts of the theory.⁴¹ Eugene McCann states that:

Vancouver's image as an international inspiration for seekers of good development policy is a powerful political narrative that valorizes existing development models in the city, legitimates the actions of Vancouver's development coalition, and dampens criticism of the negative

⁴¹ Bogdanowicz, Julie. "Vancouverism."

impacts of the current policy – such as the city’s high housing prices and attendant unaffordability for the poor and middle class.⁴²

The city density policies have led to employment leaving the downtown core. The creation of business parks in North Surrey is the effect of increased rental prices in areas that have attempted to promote high-density living, which has become largely unsustainable since individuals often utilize motor vehicles as their preliminary source of transportation. The Vancouver city plan’s creators have lauded Vancouver’s planning; however, Vancouver may be experiencing too much Vancouverism. Trevor Boddy, Bob Rennie and Larry Beasley constantly call Vancouver a ‘resort city.’ The concept of a resort city does not fit well within the schemes of Vancouverism. How can ‘live first’, sustainability and high-density development coexist in a resort city? They are conflicting viewpoints that are the direct result of over Vancouverism.

7.0 Bob Rennie’s Resort City

Bob Rennie of Rennie Marketing Systems is the prominent real estate entrepreneur in Vancouver. He has emerged as the unofficial spokesperson for the Vancouver real estate market and was formerly nicknamed ‘Condo Bob.’⁴³ He has earned his reputation through marketing real estate for over 33 years. Since 2006, Rennie’s company has repetitively sold over 1 billion dollars of real estate per year.⁴⁴ A resort city has been defined in a number of ways, with the most prevalent definition being the proportion of the economy invested in tourism. However, from Rennie’s perspective a resort city is a city that has increased foreign real estate ownership, leaving a larger percentage of Vancouverites renting.⁴⁵

⁴² McCann, Eugene., “Urban policy mobilities and global circuits of knowledge: Towards a research agenda.” *Journal of Environmental Planning (40)* 2008: 4

⁴³ "Power 50 2008: Our 8th Annual Who's Who." *Entertainment Vancouver* 01 Dec 2008. Accessed on 5 Apr 2009.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Rennie, Bob. UDI Annual General Meeting. Vancouver. May 2007.

7.1 Resort City Literature

Most resort city literature takes a close look at employment. In resort cities, employment in the service and tourist industry is predominant and normally seasonal. However, it is clear that Rennie's statement was not based on employment, but on home ownership. It can be assumed that resort cities, which are normally much smaller in size, have increased foreign investment. Time-shares and foreign ownership are common in resorts in many different countries', including both Canada and the United States. Many have commented on Vancouver as a resort city but few have substantiated the claim. Therefore, Vancouver is not a resort city per se but carries many of the characteristics of a resort city.

7.2 Bob Rennie, Larry Beasley, Bing Thom

The statement that Vancouver is a resort city gained an audience once people became more aware that foreign buyers were encouraging prices to increase. When demand for housing exceeded the housing stock in Vancouver, foreign ownership became increasingly visible. On countless occasions, in speeches to students at universities or real estate conferences, Bob Rennie, Larry Beasley and Bing Thom all proclaimed that Vancouver was becoming or already had become a resort city.⁴⁶ The stark truth is that this is becoming a reality. 'Live first' is becoming 'Rent first.'

7.3 Resort City and place image in Vancouver

According to Trevor Boddy, more than half of the world's populations live in urban areas. Therefore, it is expected that most growth will occur in cities. However, to what extent will these growth centers be 'liveable' or sustainable? Will Vancouver be able to save its

⁴⁶ Boddy, Trevor. "Downtown's Last Resort." *Canadian Architect*. August 2006

agricultural lands and bring business back to the city? Vancouver has lost one-third of its head office jobs over the past six years. This is partly because 90% of the 9 million square feet of new buildings in Vancouver have been condominiums.⁴⁷ Vancouver is slowly becoming a commuting suburb where people leave the city to reach their jobs.

Vancouver is in fear of losing its sense of place. John Punter describe that Vancouver has maintained its environmental quality and created sustained economic growth. However, the large number of jobs that have relocated from the city state otherwise. Vancouver's housing is no longer the 'liveable city,' as many of Vancouver's towers are becoming what Junko Abe-Kudo refers to as "vertical gated communities."⁴⁸ These communities are better visible in Coal Harbor, which shares very little of the same atmosphere as Yaletown despite the same urban system, an Urban Fare grocery store, coffee shops and restaurants. A simple gaze up into the sun setting on Vancouver's Coal Harbor will display dozens of empty apartments owned by foreign buyers.

Due to the increased housing prices and lack of affordable housing, many of downtowns residents are not the 'live first' citizens that planners advertised. Many still drive their cars to work or simply hold on to their property as an investment, renting to those who want to live the Vancouver lifestyle. Boddy estimates that over a quarter of downtown Vancouver's buyers are international investors and another quarter are Canadian non-residents who rent out their apartments.⁴⁹

Over 30% of Bob Rennie's waterfront condominiums have been sold to foreign investors. As Vancouver builds public transportation networks, like the new Canada Line, more and more people are finding it convenient to live outside of Vancouver where jobs are accessible in

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Abe-Kudo, Junko., "Vertical Gated Communities in Tokyo." *Private Urban Governance and Communities*. 2007 Conference papers

⁴⁹ Boddy, Trevor., "Downtown's Last Resort."

municipalities like Surrey, Richmond and Burnaby. The over-Vancouverism that has taken place in Vancouver has led to the emergence of a ‘resort city’ where ‘live first’ became ‘rent first,’ and for investors become ‘buy quick’ since property values in Vancouver have done nothing but risen. Bob Rennie, on numerous occasions quoted that by “2020, we will be paying \$2020 per square foot... We are not a financial centre, we are not a head-office city, we are a real-estate city, a resort city and we are an amazing place to live.”⁵⁰

8.0 Ray of Hope

At a conference, Bob Rennie spoke that “Vancouver either stop’s growing or goes east.”⁵¹ In 1993, the DTES changed when the six-floor department store, Woodward’s closed its doors.⁵² The lack of people traffic in the area forced many other businesses to close and soon the streets became home to visible poverty and drug use. The east side became stigmatized as a centre for the poor where Vancouver’s first safe injection site opened.⁵³ If this is where Vancouver is to grow, then there will have to be extraordinary social changes. When the City of Vancouver bought out the Woodward’s building in 2003, there were hopes that it would transform into affordable housing apartments.⁵⁴ However, the city was unable to fund such a large project. What it needed was the hand of Vancouver’s developers.

When Ian Gillespie agreed to finance the project, he joined Bob Rennie in producing buildings that hoped to provide 536 condos, 200 of which were non-market housing.⁵⁵ The Woodward’s project will hold Simon Fraser University’s School for the Contemporary Arts, hoping to revive the previous artistic nature of the area. There is definitely a market that wishes

⁵⁰ Rennie, Bob. UDI Annual General Meeting, Vancouver. May 2007.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Montgomery, Charles., “Futureville”

⁵³ Ford, Ashley., “Going Green a done deal.” *The Vancouver Province*. 18 May 2007

⁵⁴ Montgomery, Charles., “Futureville”

⁵⁵ Rennie, Bob., UDI Annual General Meeting, Vancouver. May 2007

to purchase in the Woodward's investment. Rennie refers to them as the buying demographic that "instead of [them] carrying fancy car keys - they carried bicycle helmets. Instead of a PC and a briefcase - they carried a Mac and a backpack."⁵⁶ The real sustainable demographic. Will Woodward's be the catalyst that will revive the DTES? Several blocks away there are homes selling for \$2100 per square foot, and at the Woodward's, prices start at \$575 per square foot.⁵⁷

If the Woodward's tower is a success, it may be exactly what Vancouver needs to stem a second wave of Vancouverism. If the rich can coexist with the poor in Vancouver, there will be a new definition of Vancouverism. Surely, gentrifying the neighborhood and at the same time including its current inhabitants takes more than Rennie's marketing scheme. The Woodward's development may be the beginning of a city made for all people, a real *EcoDensity*, and a sustainable city, which was planned by the original ethic of Vancouverism.

9.0 Conclusion

Place image in Vancouver cannot be situated through *EcoDensity* and Vancouverism. The downtown east side is fundamentally different from the rest of Vancouver, and as Punter explained, Vancouver's sense of place is fundamentally different than advertised. The process of *EcoDensity* has been in Vancouver's City Plan and Liveable Region Strategic Plan from the early 1990's onwards. *EcoDensity* will only be successful if it incorporates affordable housing more so than its predecessors.

As Vancouverism took flight in Vancouver, the transformation of Vancouver into a resort city began. The attractive housing market has brought foreign investors to our doorstep. Real Estate investment has begun to dismantle the very principles of *EcoDensity*, where suburbanization of employment occurs and streets lay empty, an appalling vision for one of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

North America's most dense cities.⁵⁸ Perhaps, the Gillespie-Rennie development in the DTES will revitalize the city and cause Vancouverism to be redefined. Vancouver, in the coming years after the Olympics, has the ability to be one of the world's first cities that accommodates both the rich and poor simultaneously in its various neighborhoods.

Vancouver is place where ideas like Vancouverism and *EcoDensity* took flight and were practiced. The attractiveness of Vancouver's downtown and the opportunities for investment have skewed real estate prices. These policies are not Vancouver, but hope of what Vancouver is to become. Punter also explains Vancouver's successes. For the most part, they are correct, as Vancouver has preserved its location but at the expense of a locale where there is no shared place image. The DTES and the lack of affordable housing for middle-income families is a prime example of the social inequity of Vancouver. Perhaps the Woodward's tower will change Vancouver's sense of place and place image, uniting Vancouverites from all regions. As for business investment, there will be an increased reliance on public transport out of Vancouver if business infrastructure is not created, creating a high-density residential suburbia in the downtown core. Perhaps the current recession may open up spaces for business investment. Nonetheless, Trevor Boddy puts it best, as "love-hate relationships are always signs of love frustrated, and Vancouver is now ours to make or break."⁵⁹ In time, Vancouver may be able to create a sense of place and place image that is echoed in its policies of *EcoDensity* and Vancouverism.

⁵⁸ Boddy, Trevor., "Vancouver's Last Resort"

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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