

YOUTH AS CITIZENS, YOUTH AS WORKERS: AN ACTION RESEARCH  
APPROACH TO COMMUNITY MAPPING

by

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## Abstract

Since its relatively recent inception with the rise of industrialism, youth has been situated as a process of transitioning to labour market participation. Those that fail to secure their roles as consumers/producers, and thus adulthood, are generally framed as deviant, inadequate. The situation for youth is becoming increasingly 'risky' in the current economic and social restructuring occurring under the name of globalization, in which access to stable and adequate employment is now even more deeply stratified according to social, economic, racial, and gendered memberships. One area in which the 'youth' deficit frame plays out is in the federal government's labour market training programs for youth, such as Skills Link, an occupational and employment training program funded by the Government of Canada to help youth with 'barriers' to employment transition to stable and adequate employment.

The Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA), a Vancouver-based non-governmental organization, offers a Skills Link program titled the Youth Community Asset Mapping Initiative. In this program, youth learn about themselves and their local environment by creating community maps of Vancouver.

In this study, I examine the experience of three youth as they map Vancouver through an action research framework, ultimately asking 'What is the place of youth in downtown Vancouver?' The question that I pose as I explore their project is 'How does community mapping contribute to the development of youth citizenship?' In my analysis, I draw from photos, maps, interviews, and focus group discussions to illustrate the relational, representational, and reflective knowing they engaged in, as well as the job-related skills they developed during the process of mapmaking, such as project

management, communication, and teamwork. In doing so, I reveal the potential of mapmaking to foster youth engagement in social, civil and political rights and responsibilities which underpin modern notions of youth citizenship. However, this analysis also reveals a tenuous, inconsistent sense of community and ability to access resources (through gainful employment) that speak to economic pressures of globalization mentioned earlier. Thus, ultimately demonstrating that whilst community mapping holds the potential to engage 'marginalized' youth in citizenship roles, broader priority shifts in governance--which place humanistic goals before economic ones--are needed if we as a society are dedicated to the inclusion of all our young people.

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## CHAPTER ONE: SETTING THE CONTEXT

### **Introduction**

What is the place of youth in society? Scanning the headlines of Canadian newspapers from the year of 2006, this is the answer I found: Police hear youths turned community into 'little hell' (*Calgary Herald*, 13/04/06, A19); Voting apathy persists past youth (*National Post*, 2/06/06, A8); Study shows today's teenagers have money and love to spend it (*Ancaster News*, 11/09/06, p.13); Teenagers are getting hooked on home décor (*Tribune: Welland*, 21/05/06, B12); Youth tuning out government's message (*Penticton Western News*, 18/10/06, p. 6); Teenager who shot retired teachers arrested after escaping from youth centre (*National Post*, 18/10/06, A6); Get involved, Justin Trudeau tells youth (*Leader Post: Regina*, 20/10/06, B3). According to mainstream media in Canada, youth are criminals, consumers or simply apathetic members of society. And how do young people themselves perceive and experience their 'place' in society? I figured I should begin to explore this question by consulting my internal teenager.

### **My background**

I spent my teen years as one of those 'apathetic-consumers'. In the Vancouver suburb of my adolescence, my free time was spent at the mall. If my friends and I wanted an adventure we'd take a two-hour bus ride to Pacific Centre and shop there instead. I never thought of my city as a community—this was a place full of rednecks and farmers with big trucks and bad hair. My future was some exciting place far away, the glossy cover of *Teen* magazine. By the time I was 16 years old I was going after my dream to be a model: I had a portfolio, agent, and was on a plane for Japan with a two-month contract in Tokyo. I lasted about two years in the industry. No one ever asks me why I

quit, but rather how I got into it in the first place. There are, I think two parts to my answer. On the one hand, there was the obvious allure of glamour and fame that motivated me. On the other hand, there was nothing for me where I lived: few other kinds of self-expression and little sense of community. Perhaps it was just teenage angst, but I remember feeling totally unconnected and unfulfilled. In fact, it took me another six years and an undergraduate degree in communication at Simon Fraser University (SFU) before I started to realize that I had things to offer the world, and that I wanted to do something to make it a nicer place. The key event for me happened during my final year as an undergraduate student when I decided to participate in SFU's cooperative education program, which connects university students to temporary work opportunities in their field of study. Unsatisfied with the kinds of placements this program was offering, which were mostly large companies or big government departments, I started looking for an alternative, something smaller, something grounded in the community. That's when a program advisor suggested I apply to an organization called the Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA). I did, and I was hired, and spent the following four years with the EYA's Youth Community Asset Mapping Initiative (YCAMI). It was this experience, working with youth in community development, that led me to pose the questions central to this study.

### **Research questions**

This study follows two streams of inquiry into the process of mapmaking; and into the world through mapmaking. The first stream, in which I am the lead researcher, examines the following three questions:

1. 'How does community mapping contribute to youth citizenship?';

2. 'What forms of knowing are fostered amongst youth through community mapping?'; and

3. 'What skills do youth learn through community mapping?'

Through these questions I hope to generate understanding around young people's experience of community mapping as an approach to engage youth in examining themselves and their social and physical environments, whilst gaining research and community development skills. Using knowledge gained from this research I hope to also guide other practitioners in the field of youth development.

A second stream of inquiry explored in this project is that carried out by the youth, as they make maps of the local physical and social environment. The question that they examine is: 'What is the place of youth in the city?' Whilst this question originated from me, the project coordinator, I hoped that the invitation would engage the youth in examining the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of both the local landscape and their own lives.

## **Key concepts**

### **i. Youth citizenship**

What role and what power do we allot youth in contemporary society? This question has been extensively studied in countries such as the UK and France, with histories of institutionalized structures of youth engagement, such as national youth councils. However, only recently in Canada are we beginning to explore this concept. One such national study, *A Literature Review on Youth and Citizenship*, offers a definition of youth citizenship that resonates with the context at hand: the EYA's YCAMI. According to this definition, youth citizenship includes not only the kind of

rights and responsibilities traditionally associated with this concept (as outlined in chapter two) but must also include access to resources and community belonging:

Youth citizenship encompasses three analytical dimensions: 1) rights and responsibilities, 2) access and 3) feelings of belonging...It means actively seeking to engage so as to realize one's rights, exercise one's responsibilities, have access to political institutions, be empowered, and share a sense of belonging to the community...being a full citizen means having the resources and opportunity to participate in different areas of life. (Beauvais, McKay, & Seddon, 2001, p.2)

This more holistic concept of citizenship for youth offers a solid foundation to launch this study. However, more will be said about this and other key concepts in the following chapter.

## **ii. Community**

Community is a term that has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly debate, both as an ideal and as a tangible lived experience. In the context of this study, I offer a definition of community which resonates with the ideas of the three youth researchers involved with this project, in what Bauman (2001) describes as the sentimental community, "a warm place, cozy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain" (p.1). This notion of community seems to capture the ideas of shared space and shared commitment to one another that was articulated by the youth,

Community is a group of people that share certain characteristics, like interests, location, or religion.

Community is a network of people that you can turn to for support...that helps us to be healthy in all ways—mental, spiritual, physical.

In this way, community was conceived as positive, supportive space and place centered on human relationships.

## **Context**

### **i. The Environmental Youth Alliance**

The EYA is a non-profit, non-governmental non-profit organization that came into being as a result of a series of wilderness preservation conferences organized by Vancouver high school students. Following the conferences in 1989, the youth officially formed the EYA with a mission to promote environmental awareness amongst youth. In the years that followed, the organization moved beyond its original mandate to coordinate conferences and began experimenting with other youth and community development projects, such as the Cottonwood Community garden and a consumption awareness curriculum tool for the Vancouver School Board. As a result of these types of activities, which began to address the politicized, socially constructed nature of the physical environment—particularly within an urban context--the EYA began to broaden its concept of the environment and environmentalism:

Beginning in '93 the EYA began to move into uncharted territory. We began to view our environment from many different perspectives, not solely the ecological... we [shifted to focus on] our urban environment...and the broader social and environmental issues which give context to our environment.  
([www.eya.ca](http://www.eya.ca))

The EYA's current roster of programs reflects this integrative approach, with their activities now straddling business, educational, political, and natural environments. These programs include: the green technology and business program, which employs teams of young people to conduct energy and waste audits for businesses; the urban agriculture and greening program, which offers paid youth internships (at the pay rate of minimum wage) in organic composting, cultivation, harvesting, and food distribution within the inner city context; and YCAMI, which trains young people in research and

capacity-building to promote the inclusion of youth voice in public decision making at the local, provincial, national, and international scale. These programs share the common objective to support young people in creating social and environmental change.

## **ii. Youth Community Asset Mapping Initiative**

YCAMI was created in 2001 through the collaboration of EYA, the Kinex Youth Initiative of the Self Help Resources Association, and the Civic Youth Strategy, all of which shared a commitment to youth citizenship. Members of these organizations were inspired to work together to apply community mapping to a youth context after learning about this approach during a workshop facilitated by Tammie Tupechka, the coordinator of a community mapping project situated in Vancouver's Grandview-Woodland neighbourhood (this project is discussed further in chapter three). According to YCAMI's founding documentation, community mapping was defined at this time as:

...a participatory and engaging tool that provides an inclusive and graphic framework for diverse people to affirm and pool their experiences and knowledge about the community. Community mapping is a 'youth-friendly' engagement tool – one used to engage youth in the identification of their strengths, the articulation of their views and opinions, and in identifying solutions to community needs. (YCAMI, 2001)

Specifically, YCAMI founders believed that mapping could be an effective tool to support the development of leadership, research and community development skills amongst youth. From this point, YCAMI began to work with groups of young people to create resource maps on topics ranging from the youth-friendliness of local parks to the availability of services for Latin American youth in the Grandview Woodlands area. After two years of operating in this collaborative, project-to-project basis, YCAMI was taken under primary stewardship of the EYA. It was at this point when I joined the team.

Although my responsibilities evolved over the time I spent with the EYA, I was initially contracted to create a conceptual framework for the practice of community mapping that the organization was then still experimenting with. The EYA wanted to legitimize its use of mapping as an approach to engage young people in local development and planning to reach policy, research, and funding audiences. They felt that a literature review on community mapping would act as the first step towards that goal. During my first few months with the organization, I struggled to meaningfully situate community mapping within studies on youth and community. However, all of the writing I did felt hollow and abstract. The EYA then hired a consultant to produce a manual on community mapping with youth. We figured that perhaps an outside professional could illuminate the philosophy behind our practice, and help us create a resource that we could use to promote mapping to others in the field—however even the ‘experts’ struggled to complete the project. In the end, we wound up with neither a literature review nor a community mapping manual, and only now do I realize why: we didn’t engage the youth.

Failing in our attempts to theorize community mapping practice we instead turned our energies towards program development, specifically working to integrate YCAMI within EYA’s Skills Link program. This program, funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRSDC), provides youth with ‘barriers to employment’ the opportunity to participate in a six-month, waged training program. Subsequently, YCAMI began to facilitate community mapping training for youth, which it continued to offer over the next two years, helping youth tackle such topics as resources for immigrant and refugee young women, resources for homeless youth and safe spaces for queer youth.

It was working within this model that I was re-inspired to inquire into our practice of community mapping, now specifically in the context of a labour market training program for youth.

### **iii. Skills Link and Canada's Youth Employment Strategy**

The Youth Employment Strategy (YES) is Canada's national policy, carried out by HRSDC, to help young people between the ages of 15 and 30 gain work experience and job skills that will support their successful transition into the workplace (<http://www.sdc.gc.ca>). YES is composed of three funding programs designed to motivate public, private and non-profit organizations to hire specific youth populations: the Career Focus program funds organizations in Canada and internationally to hire post-secondary graduates; the Summer Work Experience program subsidizes Canadian organizations to employ secondary and post-secondary students; and the Skills Link program funds organizations within Canada to hire youth facing 'barriers to employment'. These barriers are specifically defined as:

...challenges faced by recent immigrant youth, youth with disabilities, lone parent youth, youth who have not completed high school, Aboriginal youth, and those youth living in rural or remote areas. (<http://www.sdc.gc.ca>)

The Skills Link program is based on the rationale that young people facing one or more of these barriers require additional support to access the labour market. As such, HRSDC requires host organizations to offer a blend of occupational skills workshops, community service opportunities, and work experience opportunities. In fulfilling these criteria, the EYA program is structured around the following employability skills objectives:

- Youth will learn communication and conflict resolution skills.
- Youth will develop a responsible and reliable work ethic.
- Youth will engage in the larger community and work world through mentorship with community partners and professional mentors.

- Youth will create concrete community outcomes that build youth skill, confidence, sense of accomplishment, and are of service to the community.
- Youth will establish and advance a career plan that will lead to youth employment, further career training, or self employment. (EYA, 2005)

Under this umbrella, YCAMI offers a subset of skills that will be discussed more in chapter four.

#### **iv. My Role**

I approached this inquiry from my position as an EYA staff member and graduate student researcher. As a staff member, I was responsible for the design and implementation of the YCAMI program—although there were two other junior staff members also involved in carrying out daily activities. My role involved organizing training, work experience and community service opportunities for the youth, as well as providing day-to-day support to ensure that they achieved the employability preparedness objectives stipulated above. I was also engaged as a researcher in fulfillment of a Master of Arts degree in the faculty of education. This required that I document my own experience in the program as well as the experience of the youth—which would not have happened had I been acting solely in the role of staff member and thus been focused on programming duties. Specifically, as the researcher, I organized and tape-recorded focus group reflections and interviews with the youth. As well, I was conscious of collecting and preserving data created during the regular course of the project—being mindful to ensure the youth's consent.

#### **Thesis overview**

In the following chapter, I frame my investigation into community mapping by outlining the conceptual terrain against which this study is set: the socio-construction of youth. By looking into the economical and political history of the 'youth' category, I

show how this construction has led to a situation in which being young is equated with powerlessness. I then invoke the notion of youth citizenship to bring attention to recent challenges to what has long been accepted as the ‘truth’ about youth. However, despite such positive work in redefining youth, I conclude this chapter by outlining the shifting landscape of globalization which further threatens to marginalize youth in deeper, ambiguous, and more harmful ways.

In chapter three I provide an overview of action research, the methodology informing this study, as well as a brief orientation to the field of community mapping. I then introduce the youth researchers involved in this study and the methods both they and I undertook as part of this project. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of major research limitations.

The actual mapmaking journey and its relation to youth citizenship is mapped out next, complete with photographs, maps, and narratives. In chapter four, I apply an action-research centered notion of knowing to illuminate the ways in which the youth did, and did not, come to understand themselves and the world around them through the various phases involved in their mapmaking process. I also consider the employability framework to discuss the skills gained by the youth through their participation in the program.

In the final chapter, I revisit the original research questions: ‘How does community mapping foster youth citizenship?’ and ‘What is the place of youth in the city?’ Again, I invoke the notion of citizenship to demonstrate that, whilst community mapping supports youth in engaging in key rights and responsibilities, serious challenges remain in promoting meaningful roles for youth in a system of governance bowing to

neo-liberal pressures. Subsequently, I conclude this chapter by offering recommendations to government and universities in regards to youth employment policy and youth citizenship research, as well as practical insights to practitioners of action research and community mapping.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I briefly outline the field of youth studies before moving on to focus on current theorizing and research about youth and employment. I begin by exploring the construction of 'youth' as a category of industrial capitalism. I then introduce the notion of youth citizenship as a more recent elaboration, situating it in our current era of globalization. I do so by drawing specific attention to labour market conditions for youth internationally and in Canada, the policy framework designed to address those conditions, and the implications of this situation for our young people.

### **Situating 'youth'**

Youth, both as an experience and status in modern society (if only temporary), was most strongly shaped through the ideological framework of industrial capitalism (Ruddick, 2003, p.337). The logic of this combined economic system and social structure was based on hierarchy and privilege. Generally speaking, individuals 'place' in the world—their access to resources and social status—was determined by class background. Youth thus, emerged as a convenient transition period, acting as the spatial and temporal space to prepare young people for their 'place' in the world (Valentine, Skelton, & Chambers, 1998).

The experience of youth, within this context, was primarily mediated through the physicality of the school. On the one hand, school was perceived by the poor, working class as a the route through which their children could achieve greater social status, whereas amongst the ranks of society's most privileged, schools were viewed as means to

ensure the obedience of the 'unruly' multitudes (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). Accordingly, this perspective claimed that:

Left to themselves, the common folk were ignorant and vicious men who contaminate children of the better sort and disobeyed laws and endangered the state...Education would uphold law and order, and protect the government. (Main, 1965, p.251, quoted in Carnoy & Levin, 1985)

A brief look at the two major schools of thought on the place of formal education in society, functionalists and progressives, articulates these contradictory viewpoints.

Functionalists claimed that school should prepare students for the workplace through both an industry-relevant curriculum and factory-like (militaristic in origin) student and teacher relations. The progressive school, on the other hand, including scholars such as John Dewey, claimed that the role of school is to shape young democratic minds that will in turn shape a more equitable society. The point of tension from which both schools build from is what Carnoy and Levin (1985) term the 'inherent conflict' between capitalism and democracy: as citizens of a democratic society, schools are expected to prepare students by teaching them their rights of freedom, participation, and security. However, this is incompatible with the demands of a hierarchical capitalist structure in which workers must accept their place and conform to authority. Education, thus presents the contradictory promises of social mobility to employees and obedient workers to employers.

It is not surprising that the dominant paradigm of education has traditionally privileged economic rather than political priorities, thus passing on the values of a hierarchical system of production. As explained by Carnoy and Levin (1985), through both the everyday activities of teachers, as well as broader educational policies, schools act as arena of ideological struggle which ultimately functions to reproduce class

divisions amongst students. Schools thus reinforce social inequality rather than challenging it. Ruddick (2003) explains the necessity of this function:

For the middle class, the rise of industrial capitalism required a shift in strategies of social production towards an increasingly educated (male) progeny, as the path into clerical and managerial work was directed increasingly through the class room and away from the 'shop floor'. (p.336)

Formalized education lead youth to assume specific positions within the workplace—the 'shop floor' or the corner office. Adolescence was thus positioned as a period of "prolonged economic dependency ...whilst adulthood was positioned as the resolution of this phase," marked by successful entry into the workforce (Ruddick, 2003, p.336).

The notion of youth delinquency emerged simultaneously with this narrative, necessarily branding youth resistance as deviancy and failure. Only through the work of a few pioneering educational scholars in the late 1970s was the role of youth in actively negotiating power relations within the school context examined, thus challenging the deficiency-frame to illuminate a much more complex process of critical analysis. Willis (1977) is often named as the first of such scholars in his study on British working-class boys, which describes their 'rebellious behavior' as a rejection of the myth of social mobility. Specifically, he outlines the complex understanding underpinning their rejection of school and academic credentials, drawing attention to their awareness that such credentials would prove irrelevant in their probable futures as low skilled labour. The broader 'truth' these youth were problematizing through their defiance, was that, although a few of their peers may earn the credentials to help them secure middle class jobs, the class as an entirety would never, *could never*, follow.

Fuller's (1980) study of young British women of west-Indian descent and their opposition to school authority figures broadened the discussion of youth resistance

beyond dominant racial and gendered frames. Essentially, her analysis showed that these women, aware of the oppression they faced as black women in a patriarchal, Anglo environment challenged their place in society through subversive attitudes towards teachers. By bringing attention and analysis to the voices of some of its most marginalized and excluded members, the work of Willis (1977), Fuller (1980) and others like them illuminated, for the first time, some of the social, economic, and racial power relations that young people had to negotiate in order to achieve any kind of status in society.

Youth participation in the economy, both as consumers and producers marked the next major pressure to shape the experience of being youth. This relationship emerged as a result of various economic conditions in the late 1970s, including increased labour flexibility so that more jobs were available to youth and the rise of materialist culture fueling youth's desire to participate in the labour market (Ruddick, 2003, p.338). As Ruddick explains, during "the postwar period...the increase in participation in the labour force rose from less than 4% for sixteen year olds in school to almost 30% by 1970" (2003, p.338). With more youth working and more youth buying, young people's relationship to the marketplace, and their sense of selves as central to that participation, was further entrenched.

Young people, particularly those from low income and non-white backgrounds, thus came to constitute a powerless class—a class of workers-to-be and consumers. As Cote and Allahar explain:

Young people are ... disenfranchised economically, politically and socially. However, in order to mask this disenfranchisement and to ensure that young people do not mobilize as a reaction against their exploitation, it has been necessary for the state to impose a long period of indoctrination into...acceptance

of existing power structures as normal, natural, good and benign. The state does this in capitalist societies because it directly serves the interest of capital and those who control it. (1994, p.25)

In this way, the experience of being youth has been more about accepting and transitioning into a place in the labour market pre-determined by social class, rather than about participation in society--a point which I shall now explore in terms of citizenship.

### **Citizenship**

Citizenship is one of those terms that is forever being debated and analyzed.

Amongst the many scholars engaged in this discussion, Faulks (2002) provides a comprehensive, modern framework, defining citizenship in terms of ones participation and access to civil rights, political rights, and social rights:

Civil rights include freedom of speech and worship, and the right to property...providing a legal framework for expression, association and communication between citizens...Political rights bestow voting and participation rights in the polity and therefore form the basis for popular sovereignty so central to democratic governance...Social rights...include publicly funded health care, social security, and education. (p.74)

Thus, it is through active participation in civil society and political life that individuals exercise rights and the responsibilities they engender—the foundations of citizenship.

However, like all things, these rights are not exercised equally but change according to broader paradigm shifts in governance.

Looking back on past debates on citizenship, the changing nature of this concept becomes evident. One of the earliest, and most well-known scholars in this field, is T.H. Marshall, whose book *on Citizenship and Social Class* defines citizenship as “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (1950, p28).

His prescription called for social rights and political rights to be highlighted above civil

rights (particularly in regard to property), which accordingly reflected the expansion of welfare rights taking place in the post-war period he resided in. More recently, with the rise of neo-liberalism, we see the rights and responsibilities of citizenship configured quite differently than in Marshall's time. This paradigm views citizenship primarily as a form of economic individualism, as articulated by one of the most well-known neo-liberal politicians:

The sense of being self-reliant, of playing a role within the family, of owning one's property, of paying one's own way are all part of the spiritual ballast which maintains responsible citizenship and a solid foundation from which people look around to see what they can do for others and for themselves. (Thatcher, 1977, p.97, quoted in France, 1998)

Citizens have a responsibility to participate in community and political affairs, whilst their rights have been whittled down to those of property. Thus, civil rights have been prioritized at the almost complete exclusion of political and social rights—the emphasis being on competitiveness, self-interest and personal responsibility as the means for individuals to take care of themselves and their communities, rather than through the state's provision of social services.

This shift represents a rethinking of citizenship as an active, engaged form of membership, as opposed to what is termed the passive form of citizenship promoted by Marshall, one in which various rights were bestowed on them. Subsequently, one of the biggest questions circulating the citizenship debate is how to foster 'active citizenship' amongst society's citizens-in-the-making, young people:

Contemporary political and policy discussion is for the most part much less concerned to critically interrogate the concept of active citizenship, than it is to debate how such a thing might be achieved—in particular how such a principle might be instilled in, and elicited from, young people. (Hall, Williamson, & Coffey, 2000, p.464)

I now turn to examine recent developments in how youth are positioned in society to outline the parameters of current discourse on youth citizenship.

### **Youth citizenship**

The rights and responsibilities associated with being a young person have, since the time of industrial capitalism, been defined in terms of the labour market. Only recently has the notion of youth citizenship been drawn into public debate, thus challenging youth participation beyond the economic realm. As described above, this shift is partially the result of neo-liberal ideology calling for the public to assume responsibility for the services the state once provided, thus demanding that individuals, including youth, assume a more 'active' role in their communities. In contrast to this view, there is a growing body of scholarship on youth citizenship which sees this concept as a tool to promote the values of social inclusion and social welfare rather than economic efficiency (Beauvais et al., 2001). This perspective seeks to engage youth in community and political life as a means to promote the well-being of young people and strengthen society in general,

Youth citizenship encompasses three analytical dimensions: 1) rights and responsibilities, 2) access and 3) feelings of belonging...It means actively seeking to engage so as to realize one's rights, exercise one's responsibilities, have access to political institutions, be empowered, and share a sense of belonging to the community...being a full citizens means having the resources and opportunity to participate in different areas of life. (Beauvais et al., 2001, p.2)

This notion builds from such concepts as agency and inclusion, to situate youth citizenship within a discourse that has traditionally been reserved for adults. Specifically, Faulks' concepts of political and social rights are invoked as the basis of a citizenship for youth that challenges the current paradigm of neo-liberal ideology. Rather than citizenship as economic individualism, this view recognizes that "active citizenship

requires a material base for all citizens...and assumes that we are citizens first and consumers and producers second” (Faulks, 2002, p.83). Thus, in this definition are enshrined certain rights and responsibilities: the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to be recognized as capable members of the community, and thus the responsibility to participate in the social, cultural, political, and economic affairs of their locality.

Despite support for this more active role for young people in society, the conditions currently facing youth have begun to shift in such a way as to erode young people’s ability to access full citizenship, particularly those youth from marginalized backgrounds. Community identity, access to political participation and access to stable income—are now being dramatically challenged by the social and economic landscape of late modernity, under what we call globalization. Globalization is defined as “the growth and acceleration of economic and cultural networks which operate on a worldwide scale” (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, & Fiske, 1994, p.130). Whilst this term represents a huge range of phenomenon, what I am concerned with here are changes in education and work environment for youth. Specifically, the disintegration of meaningful and stable work for youth, and the divesture in education, job training and job creation in western nations (Katz, 1998, p.134).

Katz argues that it is these shifts that are responsible for—at a very fundamental level—exposing youth to a whole new series of risks whilst undermining the system of supports available to past generations, and therein “disrupting the ways in which young people receive the knowledge and skills they need to prepare themselves for the world

they are to coming of age in” (Katz, 1998, p.134). The situation is best articulated through Beck’s concept of the risk society:

In late modernity the world is perceived as a dangerous place in which we are constantly confronted with risk...as people are progressively freed from the social networks and constraints of the old order they are forced to negotiate a new set of hazards which impinge on all aspects of their day-to-day lives. (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p.3)

These risks—such as job insecurity, or unemployment—are not distributed equally across society. Individuals with access to resources, such as education or social capital, are better protected than those without.

Yet, despite the reality of more deeply entrenched structural inequities Beck claims that youth are less aware of the barriers they face. Anthony Giddens describes this ‘individualization’, or the internalization of differentiation, choice, exclusion and marginalization occurring at the societal level:

In the risk society, individual subjectivity becomes an important force, a force which is often more significant than class positions...the self is reflexively created as people are forced to interpret a diversity of experiences in a ways which helps them establishing a coherent biography. (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p.5)

Ultimately, the message is that whatever you are or become, is the result of the choices that you, as an individual have made.

The central critique Giddens poses with his ‘individualization’ is that this process has the effect of simultaneously masking the broader social and economic policies which are in fact at the root of the problem, while at the same time dissolving the uniting and empowering force of class consciousness. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) illustrate the implications for youth through a poignant transportation metaphor: consider industrialization as a train, a stable, commonly shared journey for youth, with a definite

final destination. Then imagine globalization as a car, youth are separated and given a false sense of control to navigate risk and choice. Ultimately, individual subjectivity and the accompanying potential for self-blame and doubt, replace the structural rationalism of the past. Faced with this situation, 'underprivileged' youth continue to be excluded from access to certain resources while being blamed for their exclusion.

The challenges young people face in constructing their lives and identities in the risk society are most acutely seen in their struggle to successfully transition from school to work and thus, adulthood, "access to quality employment is identified by many authors as the "key" that unlocks the door to independence, thereby serving as a major prerequisite to full citizenship" (Beauvais et al., 2001, p.7). Young people's ability to access adequate employment not only affects their sense of themselves as competent individuals, but also the resources they have available to them--both of which impact ones ability to take on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Faulks, 2002). It is for these reasons that labour market conditions for youth, both their physical and psychological implications, are central to a discussion on youth citizenship. In the next section, I examine such conditions at the international and national level, the political framework shaping them, and their ramifications for our young people.

## **Youth employment**

### **i. Labour market conditions for youth**

As I have already touched on, the labour market is currently one of the central arenas in which youth negotiate their survival in the risk society. On a global scale, young people face increased challenges to entering the labour market based not only on their age, but also their ethnic and economic background. According to the OECD

secretariat, youth from non-white North American backgrounds are “at risk of lacking appropriate skills, qualifications, attitudes or motivation required by the labour market” (Bowers, Sonnet, & Bardone, 2005, p. 8). In addition, those youth that are unable to access university education, which is often tied to economic or social barriers, now face greater insecurity and risk in the labour market than in previous generations,

As completion of upper secondary education – at almost 75% in the OECD as a whole – has become more the norm in many OECD countries, young persons who fail to complete this level can find themselves particularly penalised in the labour market. (Bowers et al., 2005, p.11)

The prediction for youth’s employment success in either situation is grim, described by the OECD secretariat in such terms as “persistent or intermittent joblessness” and “a cycle of joblessness interspersed with unstable jobs” (Bowers et al., 2005, p.12).

These barriers to access are combined with general bleak employment conditions for all youth, both in terms of earnings and employment rates:

Youth labour force participation and employment rates fell across a large number of OECD countries [over the past two decades]...and the earnings of young workers declined relative to those of older workers in most countries. (Bowers et al., 2005, p.14)

At the same time that youth are earning less and finding fewer jobs, those ‘opportunities’ that are still available to them can only be described as precarious: temporary, casual or part-time work (Bowers et al., 2005).

A glance through Canadian youth employment reports confirms that the same labour market conditions experienced by youth internationally are also manifesting within our national context--including unemployment, uncertainty, low wages and part-time, temporary work, “through much of the 1990s the youth unemployment rate was about 1.8 times higher than was that of adults..[and] the average earnings of youths fell

by about 20%” (Wong & McBride, 2003, p.231). Coupled with the particular manifestations of neo-liberal policy within Canada, such as cuts to public services like daycare and cuts to social safety net programs such as Employment Insurance and the Canadian Pension Plan, youth face an exceedingly difficult labour market transition (Rehnby & McBride, 1997, p.6). These barriers and lack of supports translate into increased risks which are, as Beck describes, unequally distributed according to age, gender, race, and ethnicity. For example, in Canada:

Women are overrepresented in part-time and temporary work field: 52% of young men between ages of 15 – 24 were employed in this market in 1994, compared to 64% of young women. (Wong & McBride, 2003, p.13)

The situation is similar in terms of wage earnings: in 1995, women earned 73.1 % as a percentage of men’s earnings (Rehnby & McBride, 1997, p.15). Youth from low-income backgrounds and visible minority families face even more barriers accessing employment, according to a “BC survey of 1993 graduates, two years after leaving school 40.6 % of visible minority students reported difficulties, compared with 33.1 % of non-visible minorities” (Rehnby & McBride, 1997, p.14). A large portion of young people nationally and internationally face structural barriers as they negotiate the labour market.

## **ii. Youth employment policy**

The structural causes for this situation can be found in neo-liberal economic policy. Of note is the *OECD Jobs Study*, an international policy framework designed to address the ‘youth employment problem’, released in 1994 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. This study recommends two general strategies for job creation: Plan A and Plan B (Marquardt, 1998). Plan A calls for governments to

promote the growth of high-waged employment by supporting education and training institutions, research, and technology. Plan B calls for government to support the expansion of low-wage employment by lowering employment costs and thereby stimulating job creation (Marquardt, 1998). Governments are urged to lower minimum wage and cut taxes on employment like EI benefits and social assistance. The rationale being that there will not be enough high wage work to employ everyone and so there will need to be low-paid jobs to accommodate those that are 'left out.' The ultimate goal of the OECD employment strategy is clearly based on the notion of a neo liberal-welfare estate:

Whereas the aim of the original designers of the welfare estate was to decommodify labour by insulating citizens from the insecurity inherent in the fluctuations of the labour market, the neo-liberal estate achieves the opposite in its goal to create flexible workers that respond to the dictates of the market. (Marquardt, 1998, p.110)

This policy strategy encourages government to invest in those individuals that can make it to the top—thus promoting the nations productivity overall, whilst whomever is 'left over' is supposedly 'motivated' to adapt to poor job security and wages through the stripping away of government support.

The youth employment strategy promoted by the Jobs Study first emerged in Canada during the 1980s, when the government began invoking plan A discourse under the label of the 'competitiveness agenda'. The initial measures taken by the government in this area may have appeared promising at first: the government promised to promote high levels of skills in areas 'needed' by economy (math, science, literacy); and bridge the gap in the school/labour market transitions through co-ops, internships, and youth apprentice programs (Marquardt, 1998). For example, in the 1990s the BC's NDP

government introduced “a Guarantee for Youth”, which included a freeze on post-secondary tuition, twelve thousand jobs and training positions for youth (Marquardt, 1998, p.135). Federally, the government’s Youth Skills Canada provided work experience and self employment opportunities to five thousand youth aged 18 – 25 years, at a cost of \$50 million in 1997 and \$100 million in 1998 (Marquardt, 1998, p.132). However, since the 1990s, the Canadian government has steadily been shifting emphasis towards the Plan B side of the equation, what critics call a race to the bottom. Not only have job creation and labour standards been eroded, but the government is now actively pursuing a labour market training approach.

Labour market training is a “term for special government programs for people experiencing difficulties in entering the labour market” (Marquardt, 1998, p.129). These programs—despite rhetoric claiming otherwise—perpetuate the gap between good jobs and bad jobs. In terms of training objectives, such programs generally focus on preparing youth for entry in low-wage jobs. As a result:

Labour market training programs produce differentiated outcomes along class, gender and racial stratifications: quality training programs are reserved for those with credentials, whilst minorities receive training in sectors with lower chances of post-training employment. (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p.35)

As well, studies have shown that even those programs that offer good ‘skills training’ contribute little towards the long-term employment and income of participants. The problem is that, at a fundamental level, the supply side orientation they represent can not address the lack of stable work opportunities. Thus, far from fostering high skilled, secure, well-paid youth employment opportunities amongst youth, this approach only further entrenches youth’s experience in the labour market along familiar lines of inequity (Wong & McBride, 2003).

The situation is made worse for youth facing difficulty entering the job market as they are lead to internalize the situation according to the underlying message of the skills training framework. According to the rationale of labour market training programs, unemployment is a temporary phenomena caused by individuals' failure to develop the skills and knowledge required by the market (Wong & McBride, 2003, p.13).

Government's message is that it's your fault you are unemployed because you lack the skills or willingness to work. However, a key factor in the problem of youth unemployment which is not acknowledged is the lack of adequately-paid jobs and underemployment in those jobs that exist. Thus, whereas previously unemployment was perceived as a failure of the market place, "current explanations for unemployment tend to blame the victim and so lead to the increasing marginalizing of the un- and under-employed" (Rehnby & McBride, 1997, p.18).

The consequence of the current array of risks plaguing the youth labour market is the exclusion of young people, particularly those from social, racially, or economically marginalized backgrounds, from citizenship. For the majority of young people, the world is indeed a risky place, one defined by prolonged economic dependency and insecure and insufficient employment. To top it all off, youth are expected to accept that it is their personal deficit that is to blame. This situation not only undermines young people's sense of personal capability and confidence but also erodes the material resources they require to participate in community and political life, ultimately limiting their ability to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Ross, 2001, p.3). In this way, the political, social and economic landscape of globalization translates into an elitist access to what has only recently emerged as the ideal of youth citizenship.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I described how young people have, since the era of capitalist industrialism, been positioned primarily in relationship to the labour market. Whilst a more comprehensive, inclusive, and meaningful role for youth in society has begun to enter public discourse, one which recognizes their roles beyond economic production and consumption, their capacity to take on full citizenship is now being undermined by changes affecting employment transitions for youth. I then outlined the ways in which such changes, wrought by globalization, have led to lower wages, fewer opportunities, and eroded job security. At the same time, the structural causes of this situation are blamed on individual shortcomings by government. I concluded by drawing attention to the ways in which youth, particularly women and people of color, are psychologically and financially disenfranchised from political participation and community involvement—both key conditions of citizenship (Wong & McBride, 2003). In the next chapter I outline the methodology I adopted in exploring youth citizenship in the context of this study: action research.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I introduce my research methodology, action research (AR), looking at its history and conceptual framework. I then situate community mapping by providing a brief survey of its history before positioning it within the umbrella of AR. The remainder of this chapter describes how AR and community mapping were actually applied in this study. I introduce the participants and outline the specific methods that the youth and I engaged in. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of what I perceive as the main limitations of this study.

### **Action Research**

#### **i. Background**

AR formed both the subject and methodology of this inquiry. The youth engaged as researchers in the community, leading their own action research process, which I, in turn, examined as the focus of my study on the experience of community mapping with youth. In order to illustrate how and why both layers of inquiry were shaped, I first outline the background and philosophy of AR.

AR emerged during the 1970s out of the need to address real problems facing communities. Responding to what they were seeing and hearing, practitioners in such fields as education, sociology, anthropology and theology recognized the need to challenge the usual way of doing science:

The spread of capitalism and universal modernization...were destroying the cultural and biophysical texture of rich and diverse social structures...This seemed to require radical critique and reorientation of social theory and practice. Our conceptions of Cartesian rationality, dualism and 'normal science' were challenged as we could not find answers or supports from universities and other institutions which had formed us professionally. (Fals Borda, 2001, p.27)

Such realizations concerning the failings of positivist science to address the real needs of peoples in impoverished communities were linked to the emergence of the post-modern paradigm. Post-modernism critiqued positivist science as an institution of power: Western scientists produced 'legitimate' knowledge through a Western paradigm based on objectivity, rationality, linearity, which unsurprisingly served male, upper-class, Western interests. The post-modern analysis of power relations underpinning an oppressive science formed one of the central premises of AR.

Drawing further from the post-modern paradigm, AR sees research as a pluralist and relativist process of coming to understand the world, a "search for subjective meanings...in the world of lived experience" (Smith, Williams, & Johnson, 1997, p.180). This perspective thus, contends that all understandings are relative. Everyone has a perspective that is legitimate and through sharing those perspectives we can create authentic knowledge. However, AR practitioners are quick to emphasize the limits of the postmodern perspective at this juncture:

While it helps us immensely in seeing through the myth of the modernist world, post moderns/post structuralism does not help us move beyond the problems it has produced...if all we can do is circle round various forms of relativist construction: any sense of a world in which we are grounded disappears. The deconstructive postmodern sentiment will exacerbate, rather than heal the modern experience of rootednessless and meaninglessness. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.6)

This caution points to the initial emancipatory intent of AR and the call to employ the social sciences to create better conditions in the world.

Rather than ascribing to or wholly rejecting both the positivist and post structural/postmodern paradigms, AR is situated within an emergent worldview described most fundamentally as participatory: "Our world does not consist of separate things but of

relationships which we co-author” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.6). The participatory world view holds to the positivist notion that there is ‘real’ reality—such as hunger or poverty--but acknowledges that as soon as we humans attempt to examine, reflect upon, or express this experience, “we enter a world of human language and cultural expression... [and] any account of the given cosmos in the spoken or written world is [thus] culturally framed” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.6). Yet, by this same approach, if we approach our inquiry through a systemic, experiential, holistic, and relational frame, we may illuminate some aspect of our reality (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). In this way, the participatory world view perceives science as a reflexive process of knowledge making which questions both the purpose of the inquiry (whose interests does this serve?) and nature of the inquiry itself (how is this process being shaped?) without falling into the paralysis of relativity.

## **ii. More than methodology**

AR represents a new paradigm of understanding, being and acting in the world. It is an approach to research that grew out of a deep commitment to improve the lives of people and, thus, demands a more compassionate way of working in the social sciences,

AR was about a complex of attitudes and values that would give meaning to [social science] praxis in the field...AR had to be seen not only as a research methodology but also as a philosophy of life that would convert its practitioners into ‘thinking-feeling persons’. (Fals Borda, 2001, p.31)

The theoretical context outlined above describes the epistemological shift this new ‘thinking-feeling’ science required. However, describing what this actually means as a practice of inquiry and community development is challenging, as, in examining the scholarship on this topic, one comes across many different ways of describing AR—a multiplicity in the very spirit of AR itself. Subsequently, in the section that follows, I

will outline the main contours of AR as a methodology, a philosophy, and a political movement, bringing attention to the contributions of feminism and Freire's popular education, which were most informative in my own practice of AR.

### *Inquiry as action*

AR recognizes action as both inherent to the process of knowledge making and integral to emancipatory inquiry. Action refers to the dynamic relationship between doing and reflecting which is at the heart of investigation: "AR develops a repetitive transforming rhythm of reflection-action, action-reflection in which... thoughtful reflection on reality corresponds with informed action" (Smith et al., 1997, p.187). Thus research is not segregated and segmented into linear phases of data collection, data analysis and the development of theory, but recognized as a cyclical interactive process. Knowledge creation is thus embedded within the concept of action.

The concept of action also carries a normative, rather than descriptive dimension, referring to action as the transformation of research participants and their transformation of the world. Freire's notion of praxis, "a process of women and men acting and reflecting upon the world in order to change it", proves useful here (Freire, 1970, p.79). Through praxis, individuals come to see existing power inequities, social contradictions and economic exploitation so that they can take action to address unjust relations. In doing so "they achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (Freire, 1970, p.93). Thus, the message is that inquiry *should* lead to action, to some kind of change in both the internal and external world of participants. This sentiment is best articulated in the

following quote: “the point is to change the world, not only to study it” (Maguire, 2001, p.60).

*The nature of knowing*

Within AR, knowing is a verb, as opposed to a noun (knowledge). This points to a perception on the nature of knowing which draws from feminist theory. In the traditional sciences, knowledge is understood as a thing extracted through the dissection and deconstruction of the world and reality. However, “women’s ways of knowing...starts with an empathetic, receptive eye, entering the spirit of what is offered and seeking to understand from within” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.9). AR seeks to understand the world through both the empirical and the intimate. This means being open to the expertise of the every person and being receptive of the multiple and subtle ways of their expression. For example, radically expanding methods to include the use “of non-canonical approaches, such as art, photography, video, theatre, oral history, storytelling, music, dance and other expressive media” (Park, 2001, p.82). In doing so, the research process seeks to engage the diversity and depth of meaning making in participants’ everyday experience.

Knowing ‘from within’ also includes locating the researcher’s way of being in the world and in the inquiry. Again, this draws from the field of feminist inquiry and its call to make visible the process of knowledge production, “through reflexivity, feminist grounded action researchers critique and challenge their own practices, disclose biases, feelings, choices, and multiple identities” (Maguire, 2001, p.65). The internal world of the researcher is also brought into the inquiry process to understand how her/his way of

being is influencing the research. In this way, all participants in the research are engaged as knowing, feeling, subjects in the world.

### *Power*

The practices of AR are explicitly political, designed to challenge traditional power arrangements—those within the research and in society generally. AR's objective to democratize knowledge production beyond 'experts' to include 'marginalized' voices signifies its commitment to social justice work. As Reason and Bradbury describe:

Participation is as much a political statement, as it is a theory of knowledge...It asserts peoples' right to participate and have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them. (2001, p.9)

Through an AR frame, inquiry is thus a powerful tool to name and challenge social, economic, political oppression. In this way, AR draws from the work of feminist theory to examine how individuals' experiences are perceived through gendered, ethnic, or economic frames:

Feminist grounded action research posits that women and men, given multiple locations, often experience their struggles, oppressions and strengths differently—which affects how people name the world and their experience of it. (Maguire, 2001, p.61)

Working with members of diverse communities to investigate and challenge locations of oppression, AR is a political undertaking.

Within the practice of AR as methodology, power relations are also challenged.

The relationship between researchers and researched is the central challenge to AR practitioners. Their goal is to help foster democratic, rather than hierarchical relationships within the inquiry process:

To have 'subject-subject' relationships...is to have egalitarian, authentic participation among those involved. To participate... means to influence how

decisions are made... and how information is produced. (Smith et al., 1997, p.178)

Redressing power relations demands that researchers not only work to create inclusive spaces for the 'powerless' but also examine how they themselves, as the privileged 'knower' or 'expert' knowingly and unknowingly use their voices to silence others. As described by Reason and Bradbury, researchers must be prepared to turn the same critical lens they apply to society through AR unto themselves, "we need to learn more about how to exercise power and the position legitimately in the service of participative relationship" (2001, p.10). Abandoning the comfort of 'neutrality', action researchers examine the decisions they make, the values they bring, and the questions they pose. In this way, as compassionate, reflective, and open researchers.

#### *Relationship*

As opposed to the rationalized and instrumental framework of traditional science, AR is about building and coming into human relationships. This difference represents a fundamental recognition within AR (and feminist methodologies) that meaning making happens when people come together. Freire describes this point,

Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (1970, p.72)

AR is about people, collective decision-making, sharing stories and experiences, and coming to understand the world through dialogue. It is through this way of science—as relationship rather than operation—that people generate knowledge and engage in personal change (Maguire, 2001).

## *Purpose*

AR is a liberatory inquiry situated within what Reason and Bradbury (2001) describe as an emergent participatory worldview. Research is, within this framework, conceptualized as a shared, compassionate process of coming to know the world in order to improve the lives of those that are suffering within it. This journey is about engaging the strengths of the people to challenge their own limits, as well as broader social structures of oppression, “one overall goal of AR is to achieve states of being in which people are more aware, connected, heard, capable and productive” (Smith et al., 1997, p.193). Thus, AR represents an entire new approach to science and inquiry, one that seeks to nurture the human spirit rather than to “discover” ‘Truths’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

As I have attempted to make explicit through his discussion, it is these core beliefs informing AR—a participatory, compassionate, committed, transparent, reflexive, change-making science--that positioned this approach as an appropriate and meaningful methodology, as well as a philosophy and political movement, to engage youth in researching their own experience. Youth are a marginalized group in society. Rarely are they engaged as sources of expertise in research processes. In the case of this study, by involving a group of young people with barriers to employment (as defined by HRSDC in chapter one) in an AR process, I hoped each of them would gain skills and critical awareness, as well as build confidence in the strengths they already did possess. This explicit empowerment focus speaks to the second layer of this context: the organizational philosophy of the EYA and YCAMI specifically. YCAMI, as described in chapter one, engages youth in community mapping in very much the same vein as AR, to promote

their development and that of the community generally. To unpack exactly how the two overlap, I will sketch out a brief background of community mapping in the following section.

## **Community mapping**

### **i. Background**

Community mapping is a community development and research process that takes on many forms. Like AR, it can not be reduced to any set of methods but instead represents a radical shift in a field entrenched in the exercise of power and knowledge-making: cartography. Cartography, the practice and study of maps, is a discipline based on the supposed objectivity of 'measurement' and 'standardization' which "claimed that beyond these rules there was a 'not cartography' land where lurked an army of inaccurate, heretical, subjective...and distorted images" (Harley, 2001, p.155). Mapmaking was the exclusive arena of (white, male, upper class) experts, wherein the logic of cartography led to the production of 'Truth'. The concept of the instrumental, scientific map thus served a hegemonic function, legitimating the worldviews of those in power. We need only to examine how maps were used in the history of colonialism to see the persuasive power of maps:

The colonial powers used maps as an intellectual tool for legitimizing territorial conquest, economic exploitation, and cultural imperialism. Maps made it easy for European states to carve up Africa and other 'heathen lands', to lay claim to land and resources, and to ignore existing social and political structures. (Monmonier, 1996, p.90)

As a discipline of study and knowledge production, cartography historically framed certain ways of seeing the world which were thus passed off as reality, obfuscating the underlying power interests at play.

Set against this tradition, community mapping is about the re-appropriation of mapping as a participatory form of knowledge production. This new kind of mapping emerged and took shape in the context of various fields sharing a common drive to challenge existing power structures, including environmentalism, native land claims, international development and community planning. From professionals concerned with eco-system management, a particularly popular stream of mapping emerged, which is known as bioregional mapping. Bioregional mapping involves identifying and mapping out natural resources in to order create a holistic understanding of the local landscape and foster social and ecological stewardship (Harrington, 1999). Maps within this field often combine artwork, storytelling as well as spatial data through Geographic Information Systems software to create maps that are as much community art as they are a collective knowledge resource—thus fostering relationships between people and between people and the natural world.

Indigenous communities have also taken up community mapmaking to re-claim their ancestral land. Particularly in BC, native communities have used inventory mapping to represent the oral knowledge of elders to both preserve histories and assert their land-rights:

First Nations mapping is growing and becoming a cornerstone of land rights, cultural, political, and resource management development. Traditional ecological and community knowledge is overlaid with modern technical knowledge. Together they are wielding considerable transformative power as they directly challenge the colonial maps and legal processes of the colonial rulers. (Lydon, 2000, p.13)

Although in most cases indigenous groups did not have traditions of written mapmaking, the taking up of this tool has helped one of the most marginalized communities recover political and economic power (Lydon, 2000).

From the field of international development, community mapping has similarly also emerged as a part of the movement to challenge exploitive power relations between the north and south. Specifically, community mapping, or participatory mapping, is a key method in Participatory Rural Appraisal, a methodology to plan local development that prioritizes the knowledge of local peoples over academics and development agencies (Chambers, 1997). Participatory mapping engages villagers to identify local resources, needs, and design projects democratically:

With participatory mapping, villages draw not one, but several maps which become successively more detailed and useful, or which present new and complementary information. Everyone can see what is being 'said' because it is being 'shown'... The map is then used as reference for other planning, and is retained by villagers for their own monitoring and evaluation. (Chambers, 1997, p.136)

Mapping does not discriminate between the literate and non-literate, does not require external technology, and is a collective form of knowledge production that fosters horizontal rather than hierarchal distinctions (Chambers, 1997). Subsequently, this method seeks to enable villagers to participate in deciding the future of their community.

Participatory urban planning represents another front wherein community mapping is invoked to promote the involvement of citizens in defining how they want their neighbourhoods to develop. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), in *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, describe community mapping as an assets-based approach to local planning and development. According to these authors, mapping local social, economic and ecological assets in the community is an effective way to mobilize local residents in internally driven community development projects (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Whilst their work has led to many applications of community mapping within urban planning, recent projects in this field have pushed the 'assets-

based' approach to argue for the need to address power relations in mapping processes.

For example, in her analysis of a community mapping project in Vancouver's Grandview Woodland neighborhood, Tupechka highlights the importance of mapmaking as a form of praxis:

Alternative mapping, through bringing people together during map production, can facilitate an acceptance of difference and...reveals the various layers of political, economic, social control exerted within a given environment and the means by which individuals resist or are influenced by that control...which has the potential of creating political action. (Tupechka, 2001, p.31)

In this way, the community mapping seen in urban planning has brought attention to the value of maps as a tool to recognize and build from community assets, whilst also demonstrating the power of maps to examine and challenge the social, economic and political relationships that also shape the local landscape.

In the field of community youth development, community mapping initiatives most frequently draw from the asset-mapping of participatory urban planning and bioregional mapping of resource and environmental management. For example, in terms of asset mapping, the Centre for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Education Development, based out of Washington DC, currently runs a community mapping program which engages youth in creating a computer based inventory of community assets. As described on the organizations website:

Teams of youth survey selected parts of a neighbourhood or city to determine what facilities and services are available for them. Using pencil and paper, computers, and Maptitude (a Geographic Information Software), communities can create maps of services and facilities for youth. These then become accessible via the Web, in public kiosks, through brochures, and other means to both youth and city planners. ([www.communityyouthmapping.org](http://www.communityyouthmapping.org))

The goal of this process is to mobilize youth involvement in the community and provide data to help guide policy makers in meeting youth service needs.

Borrowing from the field of bioregional mapping, youth are also getting involved in resource stewardship through green mapping. This process builds from the tradition of bioregional mapping in its approach to create inventory maps to capture the complexity and interrelationship of the natural environment. However, it has also expanded this approach to include both cultural and natural resources deemed important by the mapmaker. One of the leaders in this movement is the Green Map System, based out of New York, which offers communities access to a database of international map icons with which they can create maps of their community, and then share these maps on one centralized website—with a special subset of 50 icons to help youth decide what to include on their maps and a subsection of youth-made maps ([www.greenmap.org](http://www.greenmap.org)). Whilst both streams of mapping are valuable in their inclusion of youth in community research and development, what is noticeably absent, and shall be discussed in the next section, is the inclusion of praxis in the mapmaking process.

## **ii. EYA and community mapping**

The EYA's practice of community mapping builds from this interdisciplinary space to shape its own unique contribution to the field of community mapping. As described above, the concept of community mapping brings together notions of rights and responsibilities over land stewardship, democratic ideals of participation in planning and development, the call to nurture relationships with the physical and social environment, and streams of praxis and conscientization into a critical, participatory, visual-based, and emancipatory inquiry process. The EYA's practice touches upon all of these, while placing explicit emphasis on the learning and skills development experience of youth. Specifically, youth lead community research projects that examine physical and social

resources in the urban environment, as well as social and physical barriers, all of which are defined by youth. They are in charge of deciding what data collection methods will be used, on carrying out data collection, analyzing the data and then producing some kind of map to represent the data. Thus, not only do they engage in critical discussions on how and why things are, they also develop research and community development skills—learning how to use, for example, Geographic Information Systems software, survey methods, and graphic design programs. The final map products are then distributed to youth as resources to help them navigate the city or to decision-makers to help them better understand the needs and perspectives of youth. In this way, the EYA's community mapping approach brings the action research principles of participation, community development, and critical inquiry into the field of youth development to form its own approach to community mapping with youth—which looks a little different with every new group of youth researchers. In the section that follows, I will describe what community mapping looked like in the example of this study.

## **Research methods**

### **i. Youth researchers**

Under the umbrella of this study, three youth from 'marginalized' backgrounds, were employed as community mappers at the EYA—whom I shall refer to as Maria, Mike, and Kate (these are not their real names). These youth represented a range of ages between 18 – 22, and a range of experiences and backgrounds categorized as 'barriers to employment' according to HRSDC, including recent immigrant status, queer, First-

Nation's ancestry, and high school non-completion<sup>1</sup>. Maria, Mike and Kate found their way to the EYA internship through the recommendation of a youth employment centre, the YWCA career zone, as well as through the recommendations of past participants. Their internships with the EYA ran from March to August, 2006.

During their initial interviews at the EYA, attended by myself and a senior EYA staff member, I outlined the structure of the community mapping program and introduced each young person to the possibility of their participation in my thesis study—being careful to point out their eligibility for the program would not be affected by their decision to participate or abstain from this study. I explained that their role in the program would be to work in a team setting to conduct a community mapping inquiry into the place of youth in the city. I also described my objective as a graduate student researcher to examine what they learned or gained from this experience, and outlined some of the activities we might participate in to achieve this objective. In this way, each young person had an understanding of what kinds of activities they would be engaging in as part of the EYA program, and what activities they might engage in as part of my research study.

Once the three members had officially agreed to participate in the EYA program as well as my research study, we worked together to define the kinds of research activities they would engage in as community researchers and as participants in my study. The youth-led data collection methods agreed upon included interviews, memory mapping, peer surveys, and focus groups. This data was analyzed and presented in the

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<sup>1</sup> I have purposefully provided limited details about each of the participants in order to protect their anonymity. However, I recognize that I cannot guarantee complete anonymity as a result of having named both the organization and time period in which this study is situated.

production of a set of youth maps, printed and distributed as *Follow Us: a youth guide to Vancouver*.

As the graduate student, the research activities I undertook were designed to enhance my own and the group's reflection on the actual process of community mapping. Again, whilst it was I who offered the range of activities possible, it was up to the youth to decide if they felt comfortable with the activities. The methods we agreed upon included focus groups and interviews. I also incorporated participant observation into the study, and drew from primary source documentation. Each of these activities and data sources are described in the following section.

## **ii. Youth-led data collection**

### *Interviews*

A set of interviews was carried out by the youth, on each other, at the beginning of the program. The group (the three youth participants and myself) was divided into pairs and each pair given a set of questions on community mapping and an audio recorder (see appendix II for questions). The intention of this activity was to draw out their thoughts in a participatory, non-threatening format, thus simultaneously gathering data and setting the frame for the kind of research that I hoped to undertake with them.

### *Photos and oral stories: memory maps*

The photos and accompanying narratives represent data that was generated for the the AR project and then included in this study after the fact--which differs from other data (such as my field notes) which was collected expressly for my study. I have attempted to preserve the integrity of the memory maps by presenting them as they were created by the youth, followed separately by my analysis. This analysis is informed by

not only what is present on these pages, but also information that was shared during subsequent focus group discussions.

#### *Peer surveys*

The youth team created a survey of good and bad places in Vancouver, as identified by the youth through the memory maps (see appendix III for survey). The surveys were distributed to youth on the street, friends, youth at a queer dance, fellow EYA interns, and youth at Covenant House's Rights of Passage program.

#### *Focus groups*

The youth organized and led two focus groups at the Gathering Place community centre, located in downtown Vancouver. These sessions were targeted to engage street-involved youth, and were attended by approximately 20 youth in total. My role in these sessions was to explain to the youth participants (all of whom were 19 years of age or older) the research projects that the session would inform—both the community maps and my thesis study—in order to secure informed consent. I also documented the session through my notes and distributed honoraria.

#### *Community maps: youth guide to Vancouver*

The final set of seven maps created by the project participants represents a second source of supplementary data included in this inquiry. I examine these maps as visual representations of space, place, and power—or “sites of signification” (Tupechka, 2001, p.42). However, the bulk of my analysis regarding the maps addresses the process of making the maps rather than the maps as final products.

### **iii. Graduate student-led data collection**

#### *Participant observation*

As an EYA staff member I not only experienced the full range of program activities during the six month program under study, but I was also able to draw on my experience coordinating past program cohorts to inform my perspective. I recorded these reflections, observations, feelings, and ideas in a daily journal. This data served as an essential source of insights and analysis following the program's completion. In addition, the process of writing and reflecting on the day's events informed and improved my daily practice.

#### *Focus groups*

The experience of action research within the group context was primarily documented through focus groups, which formed the action/reflection cycle described above. These focus groups—eleven in total--were held bi-weekly, or following major events. The structure of these discussions varied. For example, in attempting to generate a set of principles informing our practice, I guided the team through a set of pre-determined questions. However, when reflecting on their experience of recent field work, the discussions were generally open-ended. These discussions also ranged in terms of who was participating, usually all three youth researchers were present: Mike, Maria, and Kate. On one occasion, junior YCAMI staff members (Angela and Jorge—both of whom were past Skills Link participants themselves) participated in a group discussion. In all cases, I would audio record the session as well as collect any flip chart notes.

### *Interviews*

During the final week of the program, I interviewed the youth researchers to hear their reflections on community mapping and EYA in general. I interviewed Mike on a one-on-one basis, and interviewed Kate and Maria on a one-on-two basis. At this point in the program, we had established ourselves as colleagues and so I expected the youth would feel comfortable and confident to share their final reflections in this format.

### *Environmental Youth Alliance primary documentation*

I drew upon EYA documents, such as reports and website material to inform my description of the organization's history and program structure.

### **Use of data**

In order to distinguish between direct quotes from the youth and my own field notes, I present the latter in italicized font in the following chapter on data analysis. While I sought to represent these interactions as close to 'reality' as possible, I recognize that my own lens may have influenced or colored the narratives I constructed and thus feel the need to draw attention to this distinction as a result. All other data was drawn from audio or visual recording devices and so presents the words or images of the youth in their original form.

### **Limitations of the research**

There are several aspects of my methodology which I now draw attention to as potential limiting factors in my study. To begin, my status as a both researcher and project coordinator threatened to bias the input of the youth researchers/participants. In my status as their 'superior', I was conscious that the youth may have censored or modified their input according to what they thought I wanted to hear. As a practitioner of

community development, I attempted to avoid hierarchal power relations by structuring activities so that the youth were in leadership and decision-making roles. I hoped this would also relieve the tension of my dual roles as researcher and coordinator. However, I was reminded of the reality of power relations when I heard Mike referring to me as his 'boss' midway during the program. Nonetheless, I continued to work towards a supportive and open environment through respectful language and appreciative attitude. In this way, I attempted to address the threat posed to data validity by developing authentic relationships with the youth.

The small size of my sample presents limitations to the generalizability of my study. I engaged only three young people in the core activities of this inquiry (with only marginal input by two other youth working as junior staff members). The reason for this size was due to circumstance external to the program: another project emerged that unexpectedly required youth participation and so several young people were redirected accordingly. The question that naturally follows, then, is how applicable my results are to 'youth' in general? While I can't answer this question definitively, I can say that what I lacked in breadth, I attempted to make up in depth.

There is also the familiar concern of research bias to be taken note of. As in all studies involving people there is bias. For example, I can remember one moment when I was suddenly conscious of my own middle-class suburban background during this study: it was at a focus group with street youth when a woman described how unsafe Granville Street is for homeless youth. Her comment made me think of all the times I'd been on Granville Street to go shopping. That was, in my youth, my image of Granville street. Whilst I'm sure that my own conceptions of what is and what ought to be colored my role

as research facilitator and researcher, I attempted to be mindful of such ideas and assumptions throughout the process of this inquiry by creating space for the youth to voice their perspectives first—as ultimately this inquiry was about their experiences.

The final limitation I bring attention to relates to the level of youth participation in the planning and direction of this study. The reality is that, despite the call for community involvement at all stages of the process that is often noted in AR literature, it was I, the graduate student researcher, who initiated this study. I identified the question that the youth were to follow: ‘What is the place of youth in the city?’ And it was I, the graduate student researcher, who structured their inquiry as an action research-informed community mapping project. Whilst it would be intriguing to participate in a community mapping or AR inquiry of any sorts that truly emerges from the ‘grass roots’, I have yet to see these happen. Rather, it is often community organizations such as the EYA that play the part of intermediaries: based in the community but not necessarily of the community, and bringing together different groups to achieve tangible project goals. Given this reality, this study instead focused on building the youth’s participation in guiding the research direction following the initial planning phases.

On the topic of participation, another point articulated in AR literature is the importance of involving the community in the analysis of results, flipping the traditional process of researcher collecting data from the community, producing and thus monopolizing knowledge. Whilst the youth controlled the analysis of the data they gathered in terms of responding to the question on youth and their place in the city, they were not involved in the analysis presented in the pages you are now reading. I did not share my daily journal notes with them and did not engage them in analyzing their

interviews or focus group transcripts. That challenge was beyond the time and resources available to me.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have focused on establishing a methodological framework for this study. By introducing the worldview represented in action research, I discussed its relevancy to EYA's approach to youth development and specifically their practice of community mapping. I then introduced my co-researchers, the youth, in this project—what they did and who they were, as well as what I did as the graduate researcher. Finally, I acknowledged some of the study's limitations, some of which specifically relate to the participatory methodology discussed throughout this chapter. In the next chapter, I take this discussion one step further, moving from what we did and why, to share what it was we found.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

### Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the youth's experience in the community mapping program in terms of their dual roles as action researchers and training program participants. I begin by illustrating the research activities that youth undertook in mapping the urban environment. This included: memory mapping, to locate their own experiences; surveys and focus groups, to include the voices of other youth in the project; and finally the actual production of the maps, the visual representation of their analysis. Throughout the course of these activities the group also reflected on the concepts informing their practice of community mapping, which I also sketch out.

I analyze the mapping process, both the content gathered and the methodology itself, through a theory of knowledge that seeks to illuminate the 'empowerment' dimension of action research. As Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, and Jackson explain:

We live in an era in which we tend to equate research with only one kind of knowledge, that which is associated with the natural sciences...The social and political significance of action research, however, does not lie only in the production of narrowly technical knowledge for the control of the physical and social realities. (1993 p.4)

Whilst action research seeks to produce practical knowledge about the world, following the tradition of the natural sciences, it also seeks to "strengthen community ties and to heighten transformative potential through critical consciousness" (Park, 2001, p.83).

Thus, in my analysis of the learning outcomes experienced by the youth researchers involved with this study, I attempt to not only describe the 'practical skills' they gained, but apply the three concepts offered by Park to name the kinds of knowing they engaged in as action researchers: reflective, representational and relational knowing. Reflective

knowing refers to the development of normative stances in the social, economic, and political realms. This kind of understanding develops through questioning social realities and uncovering structural causes of injustices, thus leading participants to develop “practical moral criteria” to evaluate the nature of problems and what should be done to address them (Park, 2001, p.90).

Secondly, representational knowing refers to understanding developed through the interpretation of meaning. This form of meaning making:

...requires the knower come as close to the to-be-known as possible. This means taking into account the backgrounds, intentions and feelings involved both in understanding human affairs and textual and other kinds of artifacts that are human creations. (Park, 2001, p.85)

Representational knowing involves the integration of many pieces of information, which brought together, produce a meaningful whole—as opposed to a reductive, analytic approach to understanding the world (Park, 2001).

Finally, relational knowing refers to the development of an emphatic understanding that connects individuals and builds community, “[it] comes from connecting and leads to further connecting...and grows from interactions” (Park, 2001, p.89). The dialogue and sharing of personal stories which fueled the women’s movement and the construction of a feminist epistemology attests to the power of relational knowing (Park et al., 1993). Together these three ways of knowing provide a way of conceptualizing the youth’s learning experience in action research, offering insights into the relationship between community mapping and youth citizenship.

Taking care not to overlook the development of ‘practical skills’ mentioned above, I next examine the community mapping program from within the labour market training framework to identify what ‘skills’ were promoted within the community

mapping program, based on the specific criteria set out the by HRSDC. In drawing attention to these skills ‘achievements’, I explore their implications from a social and economic perspective—both at an individual and class level—ultimately questioning whether these skills do or do not support youth to become active citizens. I conclude the chapter by offering a short narrative of an incident which occurred during the last few days of the program, one which offers an interesting perspective on the concept of youth citizenship explored in this study.

### **Background**

As mentioned in chapter one, EYA’s community mapping program works with participants to create maps that promote the well-being of Vancouver youth, thus building participants’ skill-sets and serving the community. The specific foci of the youth maps changes depending on the program participants as well as the evolving needs of the community. I set the initial frame for the group by asking them to map out ‘good’ and ‘bad’ spaces for youth in Vancouver, according to their own interpretations of these terms. This was quite a broad starting point, and so we eventually were able limit our focus to include only the downtown core—the youth’s common ground—and to focus on the perspective of economically marginalized youth—the youth’s common experience. Our mission then was to create a set of maps that would help youth from this population navigate the city, to avoid risks and locate supports. These maps would be printed as a youth guide to Vancouver and distributed to community centres and other spaces where youth gather.

## **Examining the data**

### **i. Memory tour: What does the city mean to me?**

The first phase of the program focused on engaging the participants in a critical inquiry of their place in the physical and social environment. We began by exploring the stories of the three youth involved in this program, Kate, Maria, and Mike, in downtown Vancouver. Armed with an audio recorder, digital camera, and a wooden frame, the four of us began what Riaño-Alcalá (2006) describes as memory mapping:

Stories told by local youth dwell in parks, bars, and corner stores; they circulate through streets and avenues and are organized in reference to key mnemonic landmarks such as billboards, [and] buildings. (p.65)

We walked through the streets and stopped at key sites identified by the group members. At each site, the storyteller would share their experience with the group (speaking into the audio recorder) and then direct one of the other members to frame the point of interest—using an actual wooden frame--within the camera's scope. The use of the frame draws from Driskell's "city as a living museum activity" in which the addition of the frame helps to call attention to a particular feature in the environment (2002, p.157).

We began our journey in front of Victory Square at West Pender Street and Hamilton Street and finished the next day at the bottom of Davie Street, where pavement turns to sand at English Bay. Although at first reluctant, shy or perhaps just unsure (I can't know for certain), within a short amount of time each member took a turn mapping their past and present lived experiences in the urban environment. These are their stories...

## Mike



4.1 Covenant House

I live on the fourth floor of this building. This location of Covenant House Vancouver consists of the Transitions and Rights of Passage transitional living programs. This is one of the only places that youth that need some extra support can go to. There are other programs like the Youth Participation Strategy and Learning for Immediate and Future Enrichment. The Youth Participation Strategy department has the Downtown Street Voice Youth Advisory Committee.



4.2 Dufferin Hotel

Dufferin Hotel & Pub is the dirtiest, grungiest, grossest hotel and gay bar in the city. There is a very active drug circuit that goes through the Dufferin, and there is prostitution. It's where the boys that work the street go their daddies buy them drinks there. I go there because its one of the only gay bars in the city that doesn't charge cover. And there are good things about it, its part of gay culture; it's the oldest gay bar in the city.



4.3 Metropolitan Towers

Metropolitan Towers is the home for the rich and famous, snooty people that look down on everyone. A bachelor's suite is like \$2000 for 38 square feet. People that live here think they are better than everyone else.



4.4 Gathering Place

Gathering Place Community Centre is an education centre, and I go to school here. There is a library here and they don't charge fines. And you can return another book in place of one if you lose it. They have a gym, washroom, laundry, shower room, a room with a pool table. They have a place where they will give you clothes if you are going to job interview. Union gospel Mission serves hot meals every night to street youth but you have to listen to them speak their religion.



4.5 BC Persons With AIDS Society

British Columbia Person's With AIDS Society: This is good support place for people with aids. But if you are still working its hard to access services because they are only open during working hours.



4.6 Covenant House Shelter

Youth that don't have families or anywhere to go, they can go to the Covenant House Youth Crisis Shelter.

## Maria



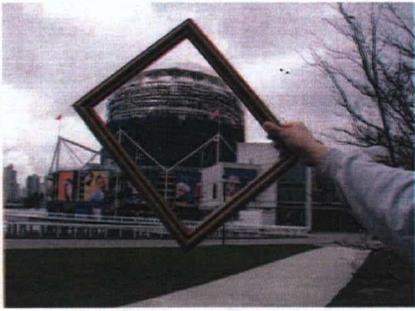
4.7 Pizza

The first week I was in Vancouver, as newcomers we only had a little money from the government. We were walking around downtown and pizza was the first thing we bought in Vancouver—because it was so cheap that my dad said OK we could have it



4.8 Immigrant Services Society

This is the room I lived in at Immigrant Services Society. It has a lot of memories for me because this is the first place I came to when I came to Vancouver. I lived here for a week. It brings good memories, like a new start for me. They have kitchen, three bedrooms, and there is a playground on the second floor.



4.9 Science World

I like science world, I like how the structure looks but I don't like going in because it's for children and not for people my age. When I don't have money to spend I just come here with some food and sit on the chair and watch the people go by.



4.10 Starbucks

Starbucks doesn't pay a fair amount to the ones that grow coffee in Colombia and Guatemala. Starbucks is becoming rich meanwhile the ones that are really working hard are becoming more poor.

### Kate



4.11 Victory Square

When I first visited Vancouver when I was 13 my parents took me for an evening drive along Hastings Street. I remember scary, intimidating people in Victory Square and being told by my parents that they wanted me to stay in school so I didn't become one of those people. And in this park, at night there are all these scary people that I wouldn't want to walk on the same side of the street with.



4.12 Granville Street

Granville Street: When I was 13 I was dropped off downtown by my parents, it my first landmark in Vancouver. Now, Granville is really a changing street, during the daytime there will be people that will ask you for change or say weird things, then at night buses don't run and you got to chill on the street—that can be really scary, especially when you are new to the city. It's dead on the street in the night time.



4.13 Davie Street

Davie Street is a very gay oriented place, but it's a very open too, there are gay people and straight people, very open, nicely dressed people, diverse styled grungy punky people. It's so comfortable for gay people. Like when I was in Prince George and was coming out, the only thing we had were a few gay dances where old men would go to pick up other old men, not a cool place to be for a young lesbian. I feel safe here. This is like my home base, this is where a lot of my friends are.



4.14 Extra West

*Extra West* is one of the only ways for the gay community to communicate with each other.



4.15 Denny's

This is called 'gay Denny's' or 'after the bar Denny's'. The waitresses are really friendly, they will ask me how my school is going and they play the juke box really loud. It's a familiar thing. When you are from a small town its good to see something you are familiar with, and there is one in Prince George so that another reason why I like this Denny's and I come here.



4.16 Park

When I was 17, I hitchhiked here with a friend for pride. The only thing I was somewhat familiar with was downtown because that's where my parents used to take me. And so when we got there we went downtown and blew all our money so then we had to sleep on the street for a week. So we slept at this park, it's a doggie park. But a lot of other people slept there. So the whole week we were there we didn't realize there was a place called dusk to dawn right across the street which is open to youth, they feed you during the night and give blankets.



4.17 Gab

I used to go to Gab at the centre for drop-ins. When you are underage and can't go to the bar it's hard to meet people when you are not from here. I met a lot of friends there and I see them on them on the streets and it's like "Hi, how you doing". And they have lots of info on events like Pride.



4.18 Little Sister's

Little Sister's: In the entrance they have a billboard for people looking for roommates and events coming up and there is a section with pamphlets for traveling to gay places like San Francisco. And it has gay newspapers like *Extra West*. I have never bought a book for myself here—just presents for people. It's a nice place to stop in and look.



4.19 English Bay

English bay: there are always lots of people hanging out here, if we don't want to go spend money, play hackey sack on the grass.

### *Analysis*

In the memory mapping activity, the youth located their sense of place in the urban environment by articulating their relationships to that space:

Places constitute physical, social, and sensorial realms...for our memories and imaginations as well. Place-making is a cultural activity that all of us "do" in

order to locate ourselves meaningfully in the environment. (Riaño-Alcalá, 2006, p.67)

The images and words they shared ultimately map out sites of inclusion and exclusion in the city. Mike's memory map tells a powerful story of dealing with homelessness, AIDS, prostitution, poverty and economic discrimination. Maria's memory map tells of her experience coming to Vancouver with her family—with little resources and having to rely on government support. She also shares her appreciation of the city she has now grown to know, as well as her critiques of corporations like Starbucks and their exploitive economic relationship with her native country of Colombia. Kate's memory map tells of her journey coming to know the city over a ten year span: being scared and threatened by its nocturnal inhabitants as a child, coming back as a teenager and finding some support, and then finally creating her own sense of place and connection to the queer community as a young adult. Kate shows how important the city (specifically the west-end neighborhood) is to her a sense of identity and security. Evidently, each young person shared vastly different experiences navigating the urban landscape, characterized by a myriad of economic, cultural, sexual, and health barriers and supports. By mapping out this out, we claimed these experiences as our own data.

Through the next step--analyzing this data--we recognized the shared experience of the group as 'youth'. This analysis meant generating categories of 'good' and 'bad' places for youth based on the memory map data, categories which would direct what spaces and places in the city the youth would map. The 'good stuff' category included: youth in crisis resources, cheap and free food, community entertainment, free spaces (spaces youth could access with little or no fee), gay night life, free educational resources, AIDS resources, immigrant and refugee resources, city landmarks, and

communication channels. The 'bad stuff' category included: scary people and places, unaffordable housing, and high end/chain businesses. In developing these findings, the youth pooled their individual experiences towards a collective knowledge-making process.

In deciding who would take responsibility of each category for the follow-up mapmaking steps, the youth claimed their own status as subject 'experts.' Each member committed to collect data on the particular categories that were meaningful to them—data which would define the good and bad spaces for youth in downtown Vancouver at a much broader scale than through their experiences alone. For example, Maria took on free spaces and immigrant and refugee resources, Mike took on youth in crisis resources and AIDS resources, and Kate took on cheap and free food and communication channels. In this way, the youth assumed leadership roles in the knowledge making process, taking the first step towards both reflective and representational knowing, to be developed over the course of inquiry.

The process and analysis of the memory making activity, at a broader level, engaged the youth in beginning to understand the local space in relation to themselves and their peers—a process which is of particular relevance to youth:

Locality is central to identity...Questions of identity and locale is [thus] questions about shared identity and possibly 'community'. To be from somewhere is to be implicated in certain indexiality – a body of understandings and assumptions premised on sharing of the same (cultural and physical) space. These issues of belongingness and shared identity are ones that young people find themselves having to negotiate for themselves as they approach adulthood. (Hall, et al., 1999, p.509)

By talking about their relationships with the downtown environment, the youth were in effect articulating their sense of belonging to the physical space and their shared identity,

their common signification of streets, buildings and neighbourhoods. The exploration of space and relationship to space offered them the opportunity to articulate their sense of belonging to the city and independence from their families, thus speaking to the importance of space and community in their individual and collective experiences of transitioning to independence and to 'citizens', a point which shall be further explored in the final chapter.

## **ii. Focus groups and surveys: What does the city mean to youth?**

After exploring their internal maps of the city, we next turned to explore the experience of other economically marginalized youth. The group's challenge now was to find out which places this population defines as good or bad in downtown Vancouver, specifically—but not exclusively—focusing on the categories they had come up with through the memory mapping. As everyone was free to design data collection methods they felt comfortable with, the overall process wound up being a combination of surveying and focus groups, carried out sometimes by individuals, in partnerships, or with the entire group. In the following section, I describe some of what happened and then offer an analysis of how that experience contributed to the youth's process of coming to know.

*June 8, 2006*

*I am at the Gathering Place, a community centre just off Granville street, for a focus group with street-youth. Kate, Maria, and Mike are all busy organizing the space. Soon after I arrive other youth trail in. There are two teen mothers, a few friends of Mike from Covenant house, and four other youth that were hanging out in the library downstairs. Everyone grabs a slice of pizza and finds a seat around the rectangular*

table. I do the same. When my watch reads 3:19, Maria calls us to attention. She explains what we are going to do and why: "Today, we are going to ask you guys what parts of downtown are uncomfortable or unsafe for you, and why. We are going to map your opinions and experiences of the city." Then Kate takes over facilitation and walks us through the consent process, handing out forms for each participant to sign. Now we are ready to get started. Mike opens up the space by asking the room what parts of downtown people feel unsafe in. The dialogue that follows is messy, but lively. People are talking over top of each other, sometimes responding to what someone else has said and sometimes introducing a new topic entirely. I listen, scribbling down their comments. One woman, particularly dominates this part of the conversation,

*"Downtown, disenfranchised youth hanging out on Granville [Street] get kicked out by cops—thanks to the Safe Streets Act. Granville Street is dangerous, cops will harass you if you are a homeless person. Yet, at the same time, all the resources are concentrated here. You can get food, clean socks all walking up and down Granville [Street] between places. The Safe Streets Act and the Downtown Business Improvement Association target youth hanging out downtown. There is no sleeping, they lock dumpsters, block off parkades, they don't allow sitting or busking on Granville [Street]," she says.*

Mike throws out another question: "Where do you guys feel uncomfortable?" This time, it is the comments of one young man that catch my attention,

*"Robson Street and the business district, people don't have time for youth there, they are stuck up, there are too many suits, too many attitudes. They assume that just because of the way we look we are going to ask for change. We feel uncomfortable about them just like they probably feel uncomfortable around us."*

Now Maria takes over again and shifts the group into the mapping segment of the session, asking everyone to locate their experiences and opinions on the map. Slowly, people get off their chairs and take a place around the map, writing down key words from their stories on top of city streets. The room is much quieter now.

## *Analysis*

During the focus group, youth shared many experiences of feeling threatened, surveyed, or controlled within discrete areas in the urban landscape, voicing some of the same themes that emerged through the memory mapping and introducing some that were beyond the experiences of the core research group. For example, Kate's discomfort around men at night and Mike's sense of being looked down upon by 'rich snobs' were echoed in the focus group participants' comments about feeling unsafe in the downtown eastside and unwelcome in the financial district. Having engaged youth with histories of street involvement, the perspectives they shared spoke of a kind of harassment and violence new to the mental maps of the research team.

Hearing the stories of other youth, those similar to and different from their own, offered openings for certain mapping team members to see how their personal experiences connected to the experiences of youth generally. In her reflections on the focus group, Maria described gaining a greater understanding of the discrimination facing marginalized youth in the city, as well as seeing subtle parallels of this discrimination in her own life:

For me I got to seeing how other young people views the city. Like on Robson Street I don't feel uncomfortable to be there, but I don't feel like it's my place either. I learned how other young people feel discriminated against there that opened my eyes—I never thought about that. One of the reasons that I don't go to Yaletown is that it's very expensive and I have seen that there are very many cocky people there but I never made the connection that it's their attitudes that also makes me feel uncomfortable there—doing the maps I realized that.

Through the process, she recognized people's negative attitudes towards 'poor' youth, or street youth as kind of social exclusion that also affected her—if only in a minor way. In her empathy Maria engages in relational knowing.

However, not all members of the group interpreted the stories in the same way. Mike actually refuted the experiences of discrimination voiced by the youth in the follow-up analysis, claiming he found certain incidents described by the focus group participants as “hard to believe because [he] had never seen that happen.” Quite simply, because the experiences of the youth did not correspond with his own experiences, Mike was either unable or unwilling to authenticate those experiences. Perhaps if I had invited Mike to interrogate the possible meanings or implications of the youth’s stories with me, his comments could have acted as an opening for him to engage in the relational or representational knowing I myself saw potential for. However, I did not and so neither did he. What his reaction thus reveals is that whilst community mapping can provide the space for different ways of knowing to flourish, it remains the responsibility of its practitioners to be aware and mindful of when and how to guide individuals towards the reflective engagement which is truly at the heart of this practice.

*May 20, 2006*

*Kate arrives at the office on a Monday morning, smiling. She hands me a stack off completed surveys, surveys that she and the other team members created to collect information on places youth like in downtown Vancouver. All of the questions are based on the categories the group developed during the memory mapping activity. “I got these filled out over the weekend,” she says.*

*“That’s great. Who did you get to fill them out?”*

*“Some kids hanging out on Granville.”*

*“Friends of yours?”*

*“No, I just met them.”*

*“What do you mean? Describe what you did.”*

*“Oh, well you know I just sat down with these kids on the curb, I think they were like squeegee kids. So I was chillin with them for a little while and then I was like, hey, you guys wanna fill out a survey and I’ll give you a pack of gum and they were like totally into it. I did that and I talked to some other kids that were chillin on the street. It was pretty cool—got to meet some people and hear what they have to say.”*

*“Have you talked to street youth before like that?”*

*“No, not really. I mean I see them around but that’s about it.”*

### *Analysis*

Youth reaching out and listening to other youth, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds they might not otherwise interact with fosters new relationships and new ways of perceiving the ‘other’. In distributing surveys, Kate interacts with street youth for the first time. A few months later, following the additional experience of the Gathering place focus group, she reveals a strong sense of connection with this population, “With the focus group the youth were really expressing themselves, I think they were into it and felt included because it was our story—including my story.” In seeing her own story within theirs, Kate connects with the experiences street-involved youth in a very personal and intimate way, thus engaging in a relational knowing.

Again, I am pressed to emphasize that youth collecting data from youth, does not necessarily equate to ‘reaching out and listening’ to them. As Mike’s experience, described in the following text, reveals.

*May 21, 2006*

*It’s a rainy Sunday afternoon at the Gathering Place community centre. At 5:00 p.m. Mike arrives with a small group of youth following behind him. Several others wander in a few minutes later—they nod at him as they enter the room. Nine show up in*

*total. They wear scruffy clothes and have a certain rough look that makes me think they are all living or have lived on the street. Mike starts off the discussion, posing questions to the semi-circle of youth about what they feel are positive places in the city: Where do you go to get a free meal?; Where do you go to get help if you need it?; Where do you go to get cheap or free clothes?; and Where is a good place to hang out? The participants describe a perspective grounded in the reality of living on the street—which I know Mike himself has not experienced despite living at Covenant House. As we are cleaning up the room at the end of the session, Mike tells me he is happy that people showed up, but thinks that the session was a waste of time because the group didn't tell him anything new.*

Mike seemed to be consistently challenging the community mapping process as a whole—inadvertently suggesting that the experience could not, would not, offer him any new insights. This position is not only evident in the excerpt above, but was also expressed in a comment he made during our final interview, “The mapping didn't really change my perspective; I was quite familiar with the downtown area before so basically it was more of reinforcing what I knew.” Yet, the real barrier for Mike was the kind of knowing the project was gravitating towards—initially focusing on relational and reflective knowing. Rather, drawing from the nature of his criticisms, what appeared to be more significant to him was engagement in representational knowing, interpreting data in such a way to address power inequities (and thus integrating reflective knowing). He already felt connected to the youth community we were researching and aware of the notions of power we were exploring. Thus, to more fully engage Mike, we would have

been more effective as a collective if we had been able to integrate representational inquiry into the project throughout—a point which I explore later in this chapter.

### **iii. Group reflection: What is the place of youth?**

The following transcript documents a focus group held with the youth researchers, as well as two 'youth' EYA staff members, Jorge and Angela (both of whom were previous program participants). In this discussion, I attempted to engage the youth in a discussion on the place of youth in society, drawing both from the data they had gathered as well as their own experiences as young people.

Jackie: What does citizenship mean?

Jorge: I think citizenship means being involved, present in community spaces. The disengaged youth goes to the mall and plays video games, they have no direction and don't know or care what's going on in the community.

Kate: Yeah, they don't know about the news, city, and election.

Maria: But some people only know home and Metrotown, those people hang out there, and it's their community.

Angela: What do you do at the mall though? For me I just go to stores. But, I know through our research that the first place that immigrant and refugee youth go to is the mall, that's where they spend their time. But they do it alone and they don't have money to spend. But I guess if they go there to play games with their friends maybe it counts.

Jorge: So then the mall can be part of your community.

Kate: That's Davie Street for me.

Angela: But that's different, because Davie Street has stores that are for that community, in metro town the stores are so generic.

Jorge: But malls are private spaces, when I think of involvement I think of public spaces.

Angela: I think citizenship means whatever it means to you.

Jorge: I think it's being involved in community centres, doing some volunteering for the community at large.

Kate: I think its volunteering and being aware of what's going on and doing something about it.

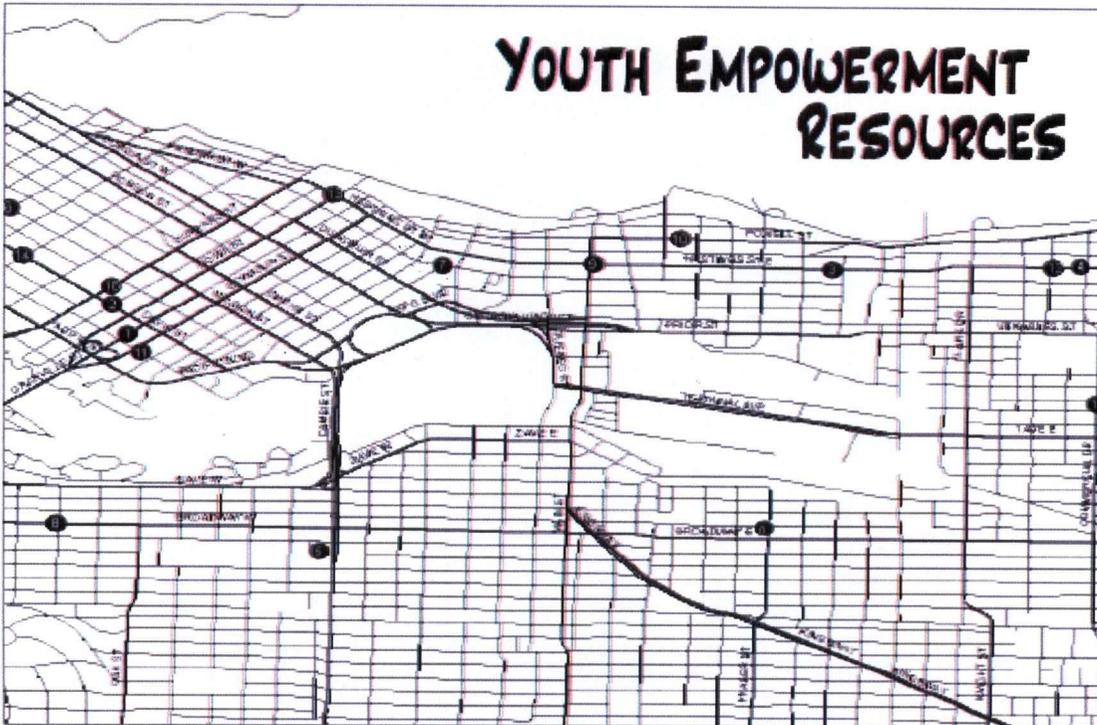
### *Analysis*

This discussion offers key insights into the connection between space, community and citizenship for youth, within the urban environment. The group draws clear connections between the 'youth' need to occupy and congregate in public and private/commercial spaces as means of experiencing a sense of belonging and social participation. Kate brings up the example of Davie Street and the gay-oriented businesses concentrated there as providing a sense of community to her. This is contrasted with Jorge's comment that being involved in a community requires being present in the physical space of a community centre—a publicly funded site providing social and recreational services for local residents. Their discussion thus situates sites of consumption as sites of community identity, whereas institutionalized, public spaces are seen as sites of citizenship. These conclusions offer an interesting elucidation on the notion of cultural and physical space in relation to identity mentioned in the previously (memory mapping) section. In analyzing their own and their peers' relationship with the urban space, the youth describe the role of private spaces in providing them with certain, if tenuous, senses of belonging. In addition, they identify the importance of public spaces in connection with their roles as active citizens, a notion which they then problematize in their following reflections on the maps as products.

### **iii. Mapping the physical and social urban landscape**

The final set of maps created by the youth are included in the following pages, their meaning will be explored in the analysis that follows.

# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT RESOURCES



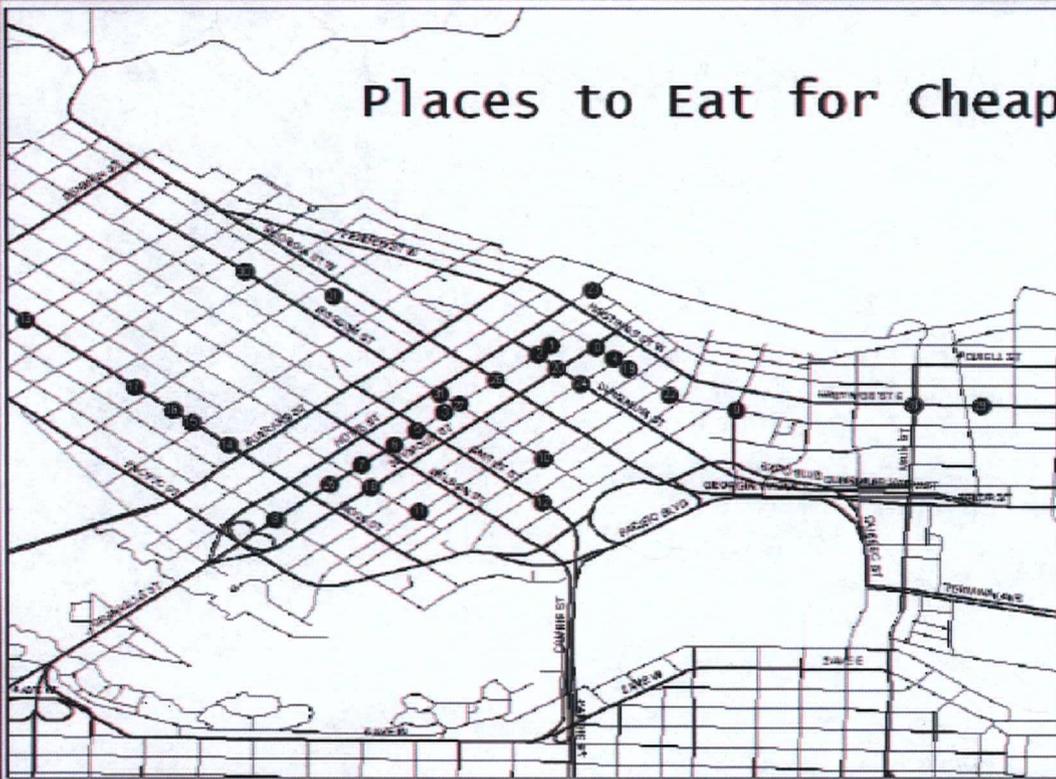
## WHAT ARE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ORGANIZATIONS?

THESE ARE SOME OF THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT VANCOUVER YOUTH SAID HELPED THEM LEARN SKILLS TO MAKE CHANGES IN THEIR LIVES AND IN THE WORLD.

### LEGEND

0 BROADWAY YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE	604 709-5720
1 YWCA CAREERZONE	604 605-4666
2 YOUTHCO AIDS SOCIETY	604 688-1441
3 WATARI RESEARCH ASSOCIATION	604 254-6995
4 URBAN NATIVE YOUTH ASSOCIATION	604 254-7752
5 CITY OF VANCOUVER, YOUTH OUTREACH TEAM	604 871-6136
6 GORDON HOUSE	604 683-2554
7 ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH ALLIANCE	604 689-4463
7 REDWIRE NATIVE YOUTH MEDIA	604 602-7226
8 KINEX YOUTH INITIATIVE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION OF BC	604 733-6186
9 SOCIETY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH OF BC	604 433-4180
9 CHECK YOUR HEAD	604 685-6631
10 FILIPINO-CANADIAN YOUTH ALLIANCE	604 215-1103
11 IMMIGRANT SERVICES SOCIETY OF BC: MY CIRCLE PROGRAM	604 525-9144
12 KNOWLEDGEABLE ABORIGINAL YOUTH ASSOCIATION	604 254-5513
13 CHILD AND YOUTH OFFICER OF BC	1-800-663-1441
14 GAB @ THE CENTRE	604 684-4901
15 YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA	778 230-0020
15 YOUTH EDUCATORS LISTENING PEOPLE	778 230-0020
16 DIRECTIONS YOUTH SERVICES CENTRE	604 688-0399
16 STREET YOUTH SERVICES OUTREACH	604 633-1472

## Places to Eat for Cheap



### LEGEND

- |                          |                 |                                |                              |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 0 F-M CLASSIC PIZZA      | 8 SEVEN ELEVEN  | 16 KFC                         | 24 411 SENIOR CENTRE         |
| 1 SUBWAY                 | 9 SEVEN ELEVEN  | 17 HOLOS                       | 25 PIE BY NIGHT              |
| 2 TACO DEL MAR           | 10 SEVEN ELEVEN | 18 GATHERING PLACE CAFETERIA   | 26 STREET HOT DOG STAND      |
| 3 FALAFEL HOUSE          | 11 SEVEN ELEVEN | 19 SMILE DINER                 | 27 LOVE AT FIRST BITE        |
| 4 FALAFEL HOUSE          | 12 SEVEN ELEVEN | 20 TIM HORTON'S                | 28 CARNEGIE COMMUNITY CENTER |
| 5 TACO TIME CANTINA      | 13 SEVEN ELEVEN | 21 TIM HORTON'S                | 29 FLOWERS CAFE              |
| 6 JOHNNY'S PIZZA FACTORY | 14 SUBWAY       | 22 VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE | 30 HON'S NOODLE              |
| 7 JUMBO PIZZA            | 15 SUSHI TO GO  | 23 PRIME TIME CHICKEN          | 31 PITA WRAP CAFE            |

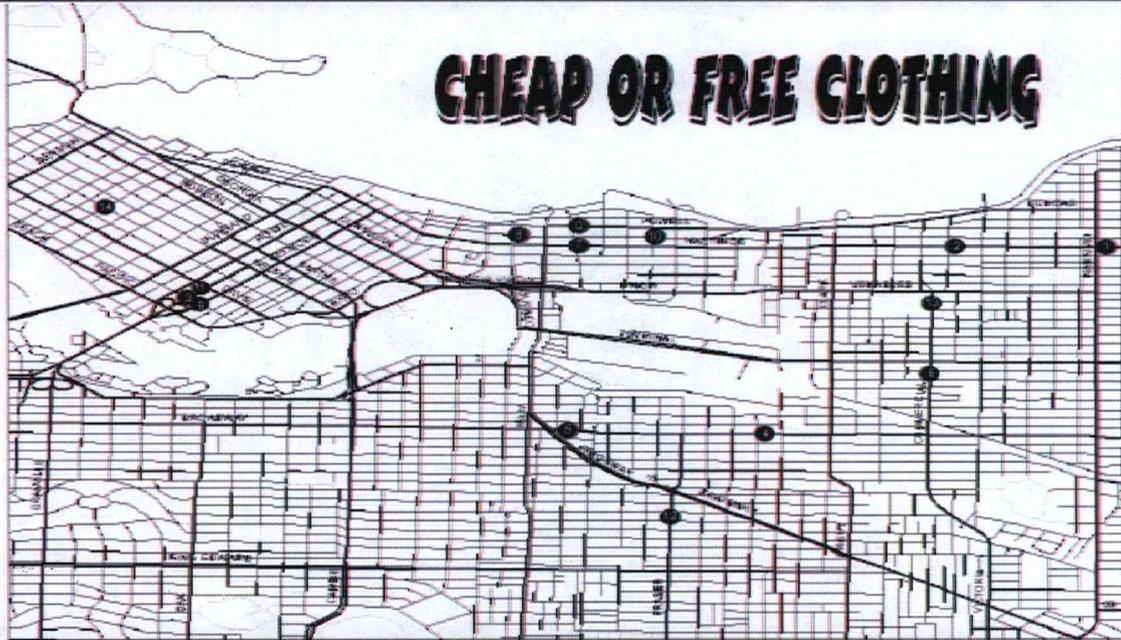
### CHEAP FOOD!

CHEAP MEANS YOU CAN GET A DECENT SIZED MEAL FOR UNDER \$5. THE KIND OF FOOD YOU WILL FIND AT MOST OF THESE PLACES IS STUFF LIKE HOT DOGS AND PIZZA, BUT A FEW OF THEM OFFER MORE HEALTHY FOOD (411 SENIOR CENTRE, GATHERING PLACE, GORDAN NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE, VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE).

OF COURSE, THE FAVORITE KIND OF PLACE WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE WE SURVEYED LIKE TO EAT FOR CHEAP IN VANCOUVER IS 99 CENT PIZZA.

4.21 Place to eat for cheap

# CHEAP OR FREE CLOTHING



## WHAT DOES FREE CLOTHING MEAN?

THE ORGANIZATIONS ON THE MAP OFFER FREE USED CLOTHING TO YOUTH USING THEIR SERVICES OR TO YOUTH IN CRISIS. CAREER ZONE HAS SOME CLOTHING TO GIVE YOUTH FOR JOB INTERVIEWS, AND COVENANT HOUSE HAS SOME CLOTHING FOR YOUTH RECEIVING SERVICES FROM ANY OF THEIR PROGRAMS.

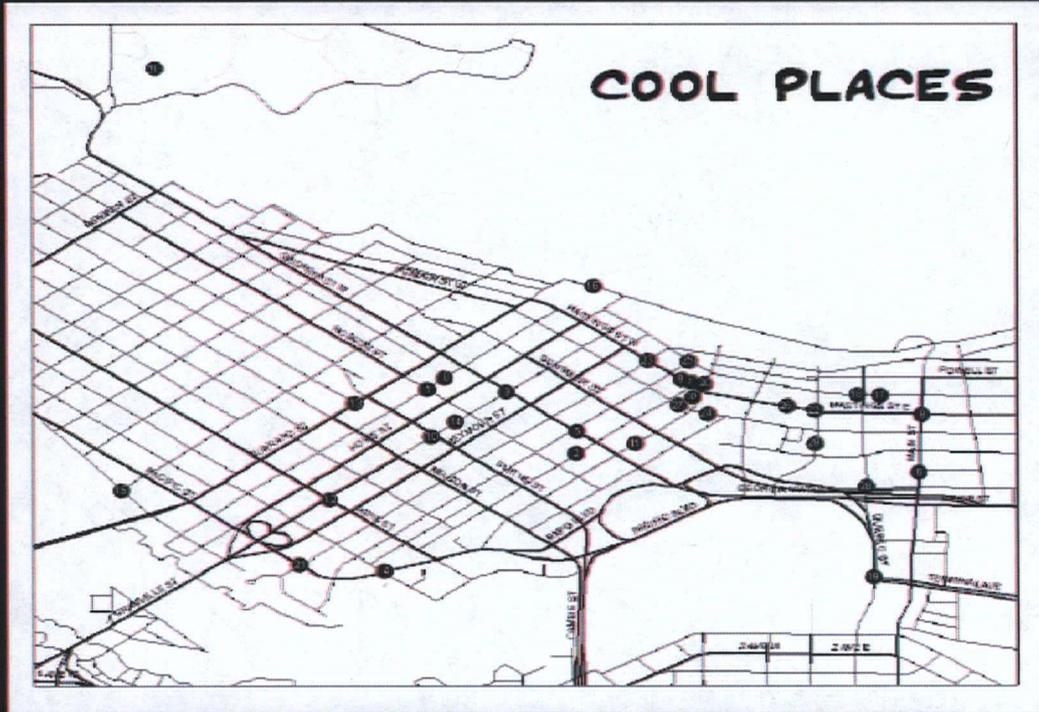
## WHAT DOES CHEAP CLOTHING MEAN?

YOU CAN FIND SECOND HAND CLOTHING FOR A VERY LOW PRICE AT THESE PLACES (BELIEVE IT OR NOT YOU CAN GET AMAZING STUFF). WE'VE ALSO BEEN TOLD THAT THE DUMPSTERS AROUND DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER ARE A POTENTIALLY GOOD PLACE TO FIND CLOTHING. (WARNING: YOU MIGHT ALSO FIND THINGS YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO FIND)

## LEGEND

- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0 ST. JAMES COMMUNITY THRIFT SHOP | 8 ANGELO LIGHT              |
| 1 SALVATION ARMY THRIFT           | 9 COVENANT HOUSE            |
| 2 VILLE VILLAGE                   | 10 UNION GOSPEL MISSION     |
| 3 THE WILD LIFE THRIFT STORE      | 11 YWCA CAREER ZONE         |
| 4 LIBERTY THRIFT                  | 12 LIFELINE OUTREACH        |
| 5 JUNIOR LEAGUE THRIFT SHOP       | 13 MY SISTER'S CLOSET       |
| 6 KING UPS THRIFT STORES          | 14 THE ATTIC CLOTHING STORE |
| 7 FIRST UNITED CHURCH             |                             |

4.23 Cheap or free clothing



## LEGEND

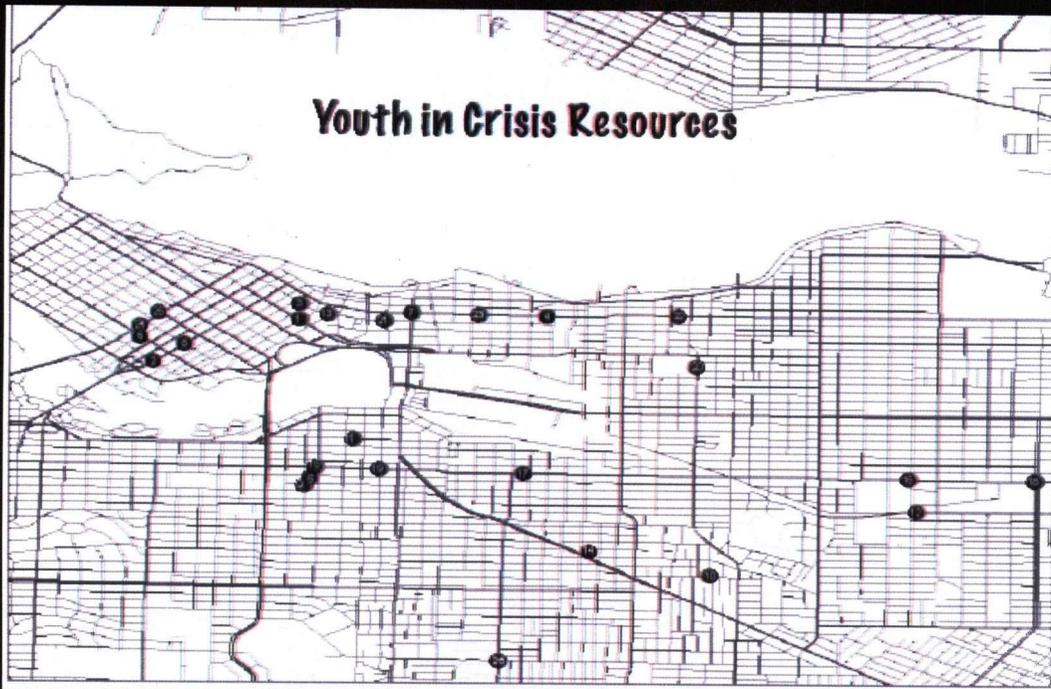
- |                               |                                  |                                    |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 0 VANCOUVER ART GALLERY STEPS | 11 VANCOUVER PLAYGROUND          | 22 GRAFFITI MURALS                 |
| 1 RAINSON SCULPTURE           | 12 PEPPAN TEA HOUSE              | 23 GRAFFITI MURALS                 |
| 2 CFC RADIO STUDIO CONCERT    | 13 YMCA                          | 24 GRAFFITI MURALS                 |
| 3 FOOD SAMPLES STAND          | 14 COMMODORE POOL AND BILLARDS   | 25 GRAFFITI MURALS                 |
| 4 PLAZA OF NATIONS            | 15 VANCOUVER AQUATIC CENTRE      | 26 GRAFFITI MURALS                 |
| 5 VANCOUVER LIBRARY STEPS     | 16 CANADA PLACE                  | 27 VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE     |
| 6 BIKINI YOGA AND EATERY      | 17 KENYA ART GALLERY/BLUESHERBUT | 28 SKATE PLAZA                     |
| 7 AMSTERDAM CAFE              | 18 GALLERY GAZNET                | 29 DR. SUN YAT-SEN CHINESE GARDENS |
| 8 COMEDIE COMMUNITY CENTRE    | 19 SCIENCE WORLD                 | 30 VICTORY SQUARE PARK             |
| 9 SPARTANUS SOUVS             | 20 GRAFFITI MURALS               | 31 STANLEY PARK                    |
| 10 MOVIELAND ARCADE           | 21 GRAFFITI MURALS               |                                    |

WHERE CAN YOU GO TO CHILL OR CHECK OUT SOME URBAN CULTURE IN DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER? HERE'S A LIST OF CHEAP AND YOUTH FRIENDLY PLACES (SEE THE NEXT COUPLE PAGES FOR A DESCRIPTION OF EACH).

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### 4.24 Cool places

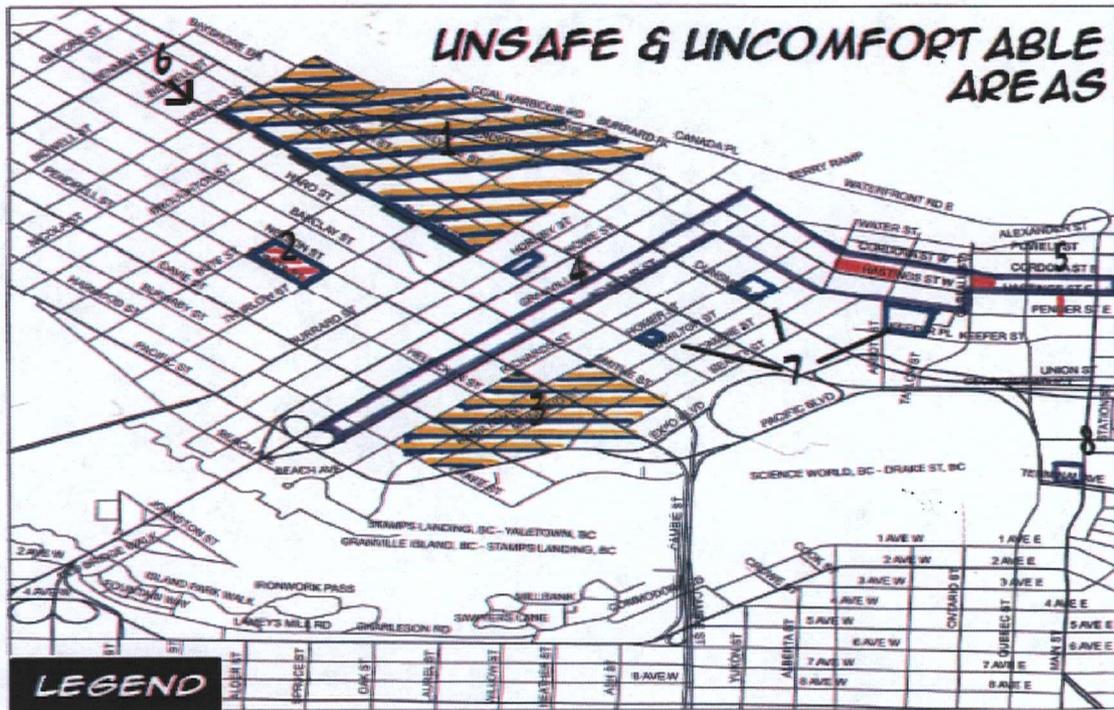


### **LEGEND**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 0 ODYSSEY II                           | 13 PROSTITUTION ALTERNATIVES COUNSELLING & EDUCATION SOCIETY      |
| 1 NEXUS                                | 14 PROVIDING RESOURCES & INDEPENDENCE FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES |
| 2 COVENANT HOUSE, SHELTER & CSS        | 15 VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES SOCIETY           |
| 3 COVENANT HOUSE, RIGHTS OF PASSAGE    | 16 WESTCOAST FAMILY RESOURCE SOCIETY                              |
| 4 KWATWEN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION         | 17 CRISIS INTERVENTION & SUICIDE PREVENTION CENTRE OF BC          |
| 5 KWATWEN YOUTH DAY TREATMENT PROGRAM  | 18 LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF VANCOUVER                 |
| 6 CRYSTAL CLEAR                        | 19 HEALING OUR SPIRIT BC ABORIGINAL, NW/NDS SOCIETY               |
| 6 BOYS'US                              | 20 YOUTHQUEST!  |
| 7 PATHWAYS                             | 21 TRADEWORKS   |
| 8 UNION GOSPEL MISSION                 | 22 URSAN NATIVE YOUTH ASSOCIATION                                 |
| 9 DUAL DIAGNOSIS PROGRAM               | 23 SHELBY   |
| 10 PACIFIC LEGAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION | 24 STREET YOUTH JOB ACTION  |
| 11 BC ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING | 25 HOBBIT HOUSE   |
| 12 PACIFIC COMMUNITY RESOURCES         | 26 SOUTH VANCOUVER YOUTH CENTRE                                   |

THERE ARE LOTS OF DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS OFFERING SERVICES TO HELP VANCOUVER YOUTH IN CRISIS. EVERYTHING FROM ADDICTIONS COUNSELING TO FREE MEALS TO JOB PLACEMENTS. WE HAVE INCLUDED A RANGE OF THOSE ON THIS MAP, BUT THERE ARE MANY MANY MORE... (SEE THE NEXT COUPLE PAGES FOR DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTACT INFO.)

#### 4.25 Youth in crisis resources



- UNPREDICTABLE, SKETCHY PEOPLE
- CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE
- SNOBS, STUCK-UP PEOPLE
- EMPTY SPACES AT NIGHT
- THEFT, VIOLENCE & CRIME

DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER CAN BE AS MUCH A SCARY AND INTIMIDATING PLACE AS IT CAN BE A FUN PLACE TO CHILL WITH FRIENDS AND GRAB SOME CHEAP EATS. THIS MAP SHOWS SOME OF THE MAJOR UN-FRIENDLY SPOTS, ACCORDING TO THE YOUTH EXPERTS THAT WE TALKED TO.

1. **THE BUSINESS DISTRICT:** THIS IS AN AREA WHERE A LOT OF YOUTH SAID PEOPLE ACT SNOBBY AND STUCK-UP TOWARDS THEM. AT NIGHT, THIS IS ALSO DESCRIBED AS AN ISOLATED AREA BECAUSE AFTER BUSINESS HOURS THERE IS NO ONE AROUND AND NOTHING MUCH ELSE GOES ON.
2. **NELSON PARK:** A LOT OF PEOPLE SLEEP IN THIS PARK (AND GET THE BOOT BY EARLY MORNING PATROLS). IT'S A NICE FRIENDLY DOG PARK IN THE DAY, BUT AT NIGHT YOU MIGHT NOT WANT TO GO THERE ALONE.
3. **YALETOWN:** THIS IS AN UPSCALE SHOPPING AND LIVING NEIGHBORHOOD THAT YOUTH SAID GIVES THEM A COLD VIBE. AT NIGHT, THERE ARE SOME DARK AND EMPTY STREETS TO BE AVOIDED.
4. **GRANVILLE STREET:** ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR STREETS FOR YOUTH, GRANVILLE STREET IS ALSO WHERE YOU WILL MEET UNPREDICTABLE AND SKETCHY PEOPLE. TO BE CLEAR, YOUTH DON'T SAY THEY FELT THREATENED THERE, JUST UNCOMFORTABLE.
5. **THE GRANVILLE EASTSIDE:** THE MAJOR CONCERN WE HEARD FROM YOUTH ABOUT THIS NEIGHBORHOOD IS THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF UNPREDICTABLE PEOPLE HANGING OUT THERE. THERE IS A LOT OF FIGHTING AND YELLING THAT TAKES PLACE IN CERTAIN ALLEYS (WHICH ARE MARKED ON THE MAP IN RED).
6. **ROBSON STREET:** ALTHOUGH KNOWN AS A POPULAR SHOPPING SPOT IN VANCOUVER, YOUTH SAID THEY GET SNOBBY LOOKS AND ATTITUDE FROM PEOPLE SHOPPING THERE. THEY ALSO COMPLAINED ABOUT PANHANDLERS AND BUSKERS GETTING THE BOOT FROM POLICE AND WATCH-DOG GROUPS.
7. **VICTORY SQUARE, PARKS AND PLAZAS:** IN THESE SPACES YOUTH SAID THEY WERE TARGETED BY SECURITY GUARDS BECAUSE OF THE CLOTHES THEY WEAR AND THE WAY THEY LOOK.
8. **MAIN AND TERMINAL:** AT NIGHT YOUTH SAID THIS CAN BE A PRETTY EMPTY PART OF THE CITY WHERE INTIMIDATING PEOPLE HANG OUT.

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#### 4.26 Unsafe and uncomfortable areas

##### Analysis

These maps were the result of compiling survey and focus group findings on good places and bad places for youth in downtown Vancouver. As mentioned earlier, the

categories of good places emerged through the experiences of the youth researchers (though they did evolve and change in the process of data collection). The final maps of good places included cheap food, internet access, cheap and free clothing, youth empowerment resources, and cool places for youth (public spaces where youth can hang out for free as well as some businesses, like arcades, which youth can access with minimal costs). The final category of bad places was generalized as unsafe and uncomfortable areas for youth.

The final maps represent both a resource for youth and the team's research results, a visual description of young people's relationship to the social and physical landscape of downtown Vancouver. Explaining in their own words what the maps mean, the mapmakers reveal a complex analysis of the ways in which the city includes and excludes youth. Maria describes the diversity and availability of public spaces as an attraction for youth:

Downtown is the only place where there are some places that you can sit and not pay—the gallery steps, the library. Not other parts of the city have these places that lots of youth go to...and they feel safe and comfortable downtown because there are so many different kinds of people—like I was talking to a young Latina who lives in Surrey and she was saying how she doesn't feel like it's her place. Everyone is so cold and doesn't talk to anyone. She was saying that downtown she feels happy and safe.

Kate echoes the sentiment of inclusiveness:

You know you won't get harassed because of what you wear or how you act. I forgot about that, but when I first came here that's what totally blew me away—I used to always brag about that.

The youth also point to the pressures of exclusion that characterize the urban landscape; wherein youth are paradoxically being pushed out of 'free' spaces. Maria explains this dynamic:

Youth are harassed because of the way they look...I think this is why young people concentrate in certain areas in the city—Granville street, the art gallery steps. You don't see young people in certain parts of the city, like Robson Street, unless they have money. Young people know where to be and where not to be.

Their reflections frame the social space of the city in terms of Young's 'politics of difference', a community of strangers living together separately in "unassimilated otherness" (1990, p.319). On top of this is overlaid the segregation of physical space, notably those spaces that are supposedly 'for the people', along economic lines. Thus, in their analysis emerges the very real tension "between young people's need for a space of their own - 'somewhere to go' - and the ambiguities inherent in society's attempts to provide for this" (Hall et al., 1999, p.509). Despite their own professed need to access private (commercial) and public spaces to feel a sense of belonging and participation, there is a blatant force of exclusion suffered by certain, economically marginalized groups of youth. This image of the urban environment, based on their interpretation of data gathered through focus groups, surveys, and personal narratives, thus reveals their engagement in a representational knowing.

### *Analysis*

As important as what the youth came to understand about the city, were the beliefs they formed regarding how the city ought to be. In this arena, the team members drew unique conclusions. For Kate, the emphasis was on social inclusion through community. She described the need for more services and resources to help connect youth new to the city:

If I am new to the city I think a map telling me to be aware of certain areas would be totally useful; and where I can go to get services or meet other people like me, I would have wanted one when I first came to the city.

She also articulated the need for stronger community:

I think groups should run a community mapping project because they will benefit...they will be like wow we really are a community. I think this is what is missing for youth in the city.

Kate situates community ties as central to her vision of how the world ought to be.

Maria pinpoints youth discrimination as the problem, voicing her concern of youth victimization by authorities such as the police and business owners:

There is a lot of discrimination, harassment—against youth because of the way they look... [like] that girl that says just because of the way she dresses that she gets harassed by the police. That's not right and something should be done.

In these reflections, Maria demands for equitable treatment of youth, particularly those facing severe economic marginalization.

Finally, Mike's critique reveals his more fundamental challenge to the process and product of mapping:

I don't think there is a lot of power in the hands of youth... I think the maps we created are misrepresentative of the place of youth in the city...because [the maps] take a very youth-powerful perspective. Instead of looking at what services are there for youth we should have identified where youth are delivering those services.

On reflecting on his experience in the mapmaking process, Mike came to see how the maps could have been used to address power inequities. Thus, describing how the process of collecting, analyzing and representing data could be applied in future projects to critique power relations—in this way integrating the representational and reflective knowing he seemed to feel was not adequately addressed within the project at hand. Kate and Maria, on the other hand, seemed to have gained significant insight into the place of youth, both as the situation currently exists and how it 'ought' to exist, through their participation in the project at hand. Ultimately, the differing experiences between Mike

and Kate and Maria speak to the challenge of engaging individuals in reflective knowing, given that individuals each come from such different places and spaces.

#### **v. Methodological inquiry**

In addition to reflecting on data, the team reflected on the actual process of community mapping through periodic group discussions on the concepts informing our practice. This second stream of action/reflection cycles thus challenged the youth to interpret and draw meaning from the experience of research. In drawing together the content of these discussions, the progressive depth of their understanding becomes apparent: the team shifts from a very traditional notion of 'research' to adopt the language of action research, and finally articulates what they believe are key dimensions of community mapping. In doing so, not only did the youth seem to gain a grounded understanding of AR, but they also defined a practice of community mapping that was all their own.

I began the process of action and reflection by introducing the youth to the approach of AR, which I broke down into three basic questions: What is research?; Who does research?; and Why do people do research? Their responses provided us with a place to start imagining and contrasting how AR might be different than traditional research. Specifically, they answered the following:

- Research is computers, Internet searches, telephone surveys, going to the library, and interviewing people.
- Research is done by universities, organizations, Statistics Canada, scientists, and market research companies.
- People do research for customer retention, to support hypothesis, or to learn information about where you are going (on a trip).

From here, I summarized back to them the major ideas informing their notions of research: researcher as practiced by a few, elite 'experts', for the purposes of financial or

intellectual gain, and conducted through very strict and rigid methods. I then contrasted AR as a form of researcher that is led by the community, for the interests of the community, and can take on many different kinds of creative, fun, and new approaches in gathering data. This discussion was key in establishing the central ideas that would inform our practice. Although this was the only time we discussed AR, it was interesting to note, as is described in the following paragraphs that as the project carried on the ideas of AR re-emerged from the youth and seemed to shape how they understood their practice of community mapping.

Our second discussion on methodology focused on what the group knew or thought about mapping. The five points that the team agreed upon through this session described mapping as a visual or geographical research technique to identify community assets and deficits for the purpose of development. In their words, community mapping is:

- Researching resources and creating reference manual;
- Plotting community landmarks;
- Getting info from community resources to share what they have to offer others;
- A way to make community grow;
- To show what resources and gaps exist to facilitate change.

This perspective situates maps within the domain of the spatial, ultimately describing community mapping as a process to inventory what is 'out there' in the physical world.

Our next session, which took place after two months of hands-on experience in the program, focused on developing a set of community mapping principles and objectives. The principles the team described bring attention to what they perceived as important at that stage in their inquiry, largely reflecting the language of action research

that I introduced the team to in the second week of the program. These principles are as following:

- Community involvement: projects are run by/with people from the population or people that have experience with the issue. Other community members can help by giving advice, feedback.
- Community accountability: show the outcomes of the project to participants, if we don't it's like doing nothing.
- Creativity and fun are part of the process.
- Be respectful: don't objectify the community and be careful how you present them.
- Value the knowledge of the community.

The focus represented in these principles, all of which speak to some aspect of the research process, reveal the youth team's new sense of awareness on the ethics of how research is actually done. Part of this awareness, in terms of issues around safety and respect in presenting results, was likely linked to a concern raised by a youth participant during the second street-youth focus group, wanting to know how the information he shared would be used and who would see it. During our follow-up to that session, Mike reminded us of the incident, "We need to take into consideration some pretty serious concerns that were brought up by the workshop participants." When trying to imagine what kind of danger their maps might be pose, Kate commented:

If we were to put on the map this area along Davie street where there is lots of male prostitution I think that would not be a good thing to map out, I wouldn't want to draw attention to individual people's lives.

In the end, the group decided to not include information on the map that was so specific as to pinpoint exact sites of risky or criminal behavior, but chose instead to generalize by street and neighbourhoods (as seen on the map of unsafe and uncomfortable places).

Through grappling with the real-life examples of ethics in research, the group took care

to incorporate such notions as community accountability and respectful research into conceptualizing their practice.

We also worked to identify community mapping objectives during this discussion. These objectives mainly centered on internally and externally-driven community development. In terms of the latter, the understanding seemed to be that that community maps could be used to identify local needs and advocate for those needs to be addressed by policymakers. For example, the team agreed that two objectives of community mapping are: “to find out community development priorities; and to give a voice to communities that a lot of the time don’t have one.” Thus, mapping can be a way to identify and advocate for local needs. The group also articulated a series of objectives that situate mapping as an internal process of cohesion building. Specifically, the team stated the following mapping outcomes:

To find out what the community knows (and what they don’t know) about their environment; to promote awareness about supports for people that may otherwise be excluded such as immigrants or low-income youth; to inform a community about services, places to socialize, to be included and integrated; and to create a resource for the community and by the community.

While the link between mapping and development is evident in the initial group discussion, what is new here is the focus on relationship building within the community as a key outcome of the process. In this way, the group begins to take-up the notion of social inclusion as key to their framework.

Following the production of the community maps, we came together again to delve further into our practice of community mapping. With the maps in hand we were able to compare and contrast what we had produced with other more traditional, spatially-based maps. Working in this way, we first touched upon the narrative dimension of

community maps, “our maps describe what is ‘out there’ in the physical environment and the specific, unique perspective of any individual or community.” Similarly, we touched on the importance of voice in the act of story telling: “our maps put the voice of the mapmaker front and centre. Who made the map is part of the story that the map tells.” On the social, we stated that “our maps are about space, place and relationships, the places where people come together.” This discussion shows the youth delving deeper into the concepts of subjectivity and social space touched upon during the previous month, both concepts which are not only absent from the original conception of mapping but in fact challenge the notions of ‘physical’ space and ‘objectivity’ informing that viewpoint. Specifically, in emphasizing the importance of community voice the group positions subjectivity as a valued and defining aspect of the maps. As well, the notion of social space is recognized as important and real as the physical environment in their bringing together the terms ‘place’ and ‘relationships’. Thus, our practice of community mapping shifted away from the realm of geographical, traditional mapping and instead towards a storied, human practice of knowledge and place-making.

During the last week of the program, I again sat down with the youth researchers to hear their final thoughts on community mapping. Their responses further emphasized the centrality of the social within both the process and outcome of community mapping. As Maria explained, for her, what is key is including the social landscape in any description of the physical landscape:

Community mapping is studying the services available for the community and the *perspectives of the people*. It’s studying a community and all the components of the community—the physical *and the social*.

Kate expands further on the notion of social in mapping, “community mapping is inclusion for excluded people.” The depth that we seemed to have achieved in conceptualizing the practice of community mapping seems to have crystallized in these last two statements. That is, they named the intimate, human heart of community mapping—in place of their perceptions of mapping as grounded in the physical, atomized world and in place of their perceptions of research an instrumental, objective form of inquiry. Thus, by interrogating their methodology, the youth engaged in a representational knowing—interpreting and reframing their perspectives on community mapping, a reflective knowing—defining what community mapping *ought to* achieve, and relational knowing—situating mapping within nurturing and caring discourse of community.

In examining the youth’s experience in the community mapping program, both their inquiry into the place of youth in the urban environment and into the process of community mapping, in terms of the kinds of knowing fostered, we enter into a discussion with the youth themselves. We see them as thinking, acting, feeling human beings, rather than program participants that gained 34.5% units of confidence, for example. However, the discussion could not be complete without exploring another defining dimension of the community mapping program, wherein they are situated as program participants rather than researchers. I now turn to examine the outcomes of the youth through the framework of employability training.

## **Job Skills Development: Mapping as employability training**

### **i. Introduction**

According to HRSDC, the overall objectives of the Skills Link program is to provide ‘employability and occupational skills’ to youth facing ‘barriers to employment’ in order to help them gain access to and maintain stable employment. These skills objectives are broken down in very broad terms to include: group-based employability skills; employability skills through community service; and employability skills through work experience ([www.sdc.gc.ca](http://www.sdc.gc.ca)). The EYA, in their 2006 program application to the Skills Link program, thus sets out the following skills outcomes:

- **Team work:** Participants will gain extensive group experience in a team based environment and will learn critical skills in group work environments.
- **Personal development:** Youth will increase self confidence, increase self awareness, be more reliable and responsible, will develop problem solving skills, conflict resolution, communication skills, and literacy/numeracy skills.
- **Project management:** Participants will be able to plan and manage time and work tasks.
- **Communication:** Participants will be able to communicate ideas, feelings, issues with peers, supervisors, and project partners.
- **Community development:** Participants will be able to work with community members to facilitate their goals for community development through tools such as community mapping.
- **Computer skills:** Participants will be able to use basic programs such as word, excel, and have knowledge of programs such as InDesign and QuarkXpress
- **Employment, Education & Career Plan:** Youth will have a concrete plan by project completion that will be implemented within a reasonable timeframe.

In the following section I explore how these skills were experienced in the context of the mapping project through the narration of key incidents and events.

### **ii. Teamwork, communication, and personal development**

*I brought the group together to facilitate a discussion on community mapping this afternoon, planning that we would first spend some time reviewing recent activities*

before coming up with some mapping principles and objectives. However, just as we started talking, Mike interrupted,

*"This is totally pointless. I don't want to do this. I want to work on something else."*

*"This won't take long, and what we say today will be very helpful for us in the next few weeks," I said.*

*But, despite my efforts, he refused to cooperate--effectively blocking all discussion. The air was heavy with tension and it was evident that no one felt comfortable offering up any more ideas. Finally, Mike left to attend a doctor's appointment. As soon as he had gone, Kate and Maria said that they were finding it difficult to work with him and that they felt he was being disrespectful to everyone on the team. When he returned in the afternoon, I pulled him aside to speak with him privately. He admitted that he was frustrated in spending so much time on process rather than action. He also told me about a serious medical condition that was making his life very difficult. When I told him what the group had said he agreed to talk with the others about his behavior. Upon entering the room, Maria was the first to speak,*

*"Mike, you have been very selfish and uncooperative these past few weeks. And you are being rude. We like to work with you, but you can't be like this," she said.*

*"Yeah, we think you are hella' cool as a person, you know. Otherwise we wouldn't be bothering to tell you this. But, yeah, like you gotta stop interrupting and talking over top of us. And saying that everything is lame. Because we are really working hard here. When you just start playing on the computer in the middle of a meeting it's like impossible for me to concentrate," said Kate.*

*"I see, I had no idea my behavior was so bad like this. Some things have been happening in my life that have been pretty upsetting for me, but that's no reason for me to take it out on you guys. I'm sorry," said Mike.*

The conflict—unexpected and uncomfortable in the moment—provided us with a valuable learning opportunity in regards to personal development, team work, and communication. It had taken Kate and Maria a long time to feel ready and confident enough to voice their frustrations. But they did, and were able to convey their discomfort through non-threatening, clear communication by showing Mike how his actions were making them feel and suggesting how he could alter his behavior. Mike, for his part, actually listened to their criticisms and became more aware of how his attitude and actions were affecting the others—which I think was a major step in personal development for him. As a group, this one incident was the most critical for them in learning how to manage teamwork. This was evident in the commitment and cooperation that followed the incident, if only for the last two months before the program completion

### **iii. Community development, project management**

*On one of the first days of the program, I divided the team (myself included) into two groups so that we could ask each other about our perspectives on community mapping. Each group was equipped with audio recorders so we could report back to the group on what was said. I partnered up with Kate, who was obviously nervous and having trouble answering my questions. Finally I stopped the recorder and asked her if she was okay. She immediately confessed to feeling intimidated by the program,*

*“I’m used to no brainer jobs where all I have to do is follow orders and make coffee or whatever ...here I’m expected to be aware all the time and listen and think, and that’s hard and strange and scary for me,” she said.*

*“But good?” I said.*

*“Yeah, good but hard,” she said.*

*At the end of the program, Kate and Maria and I sat down again—this time to reflect on what had happened over the course of the program. I asked them if there were any skills they felt they had developed, and if so, what those were. Kate's comments this time were much different.*

*"Definitely, this was a totally different setting, I have never done anything research wise before. At first I was really unsure about what was going on but then I was making decisions instead of just asking 'How do I do that?' all the time... Six months later we had a hella cool youth guide that we made for and with other youth, it's the coolest thing I have ever done. I am proud of that."*

Kate's reflections would seem to offer positive evidence of her development of project management and community development skills. Her shift from the role of passive and bewildered participant to a confident and active decision-maker indicates her own progress—thus her sense of self and her confidence were also developed. As well, her description of how the team worked together to develop a resource suggests the group's ability to work with each other and the community to coordinate a substantial research project.

#### **iv. Computer skills**

As presented earlier in this chapter, the group created seven maps using Arc 9.1 Geographic Information Systems software. None of the group members had any previous experience with this complex, extremely detail-oriented software, yet by the end of the program, they professed to having loved learning it. As Kate described, "My favorite part was learning the GIS, that was cool, I really want to learn it more." The final youth guide that they put together, also required them to learn various design programs, including PageMaker, InDesign, and Illustrator. Again, this was entirely new. As Maria stated, "The most important thing for me was to learn computer skills, I think absolutely I

am going to use them in future jobs.” In both cases, whether learning GIS or design programs, the youth were motivated to learn—and so they did.

#### **v. Employment, education and career planning**

The ultimate goal of the EYA community mapping program, within the employability training context, is that: “youth will establish and advance a career plan that will lead to youth employment, further career training, or self employment” (EYA, 2006). So, where are they now? Mike secured a position working as a career research assistant at the office of the Youth-in-Care network during the second to last month of the program. Kate stayed to the end of program and then was hired as a manager at a restaurant chain, while Maria continued to work part-time at EYA in graphic design before starting full-time studies at a local community college. Looking at where the youth wound up, it is tempting to draw linkages between the skills they learned at EYA and the employment and education situations they found themselves in afterwards: Kate, who developed team and project management skills in a management role; Maria applying her computer skills in design and layout; and Mike applying his project management and community development skills in the context of a community research position. However, that would be too easy. Moreover, that would overlook a much broader question that has not yet been addressed: do employability skills really help ‘barriered youth’ find stable, meaningful employment?

The assumption behind labour market training programs is that, with these skills under their belts, program graduates will be able to successfully navigate the job market frontier. Yet this premise obscures the fact that not all youth are treated equally in the job market. For example, one of the other ‘skill’ outcomes cited by Maria was language

improvement, "I think I have improved my English skills. This kind of programs helps us to improve our English skills because we are here eight hours only speaking English."

The question of whether her accent will pose as a barrier to getting the 'good jobs' has yet to be answered. Or Mike, whose medical condition will continue to affect his work life, said this:

I think the reason that this program was good for me at this point in my life had nothing to do with employability skills, it had to do with going through a difficult time and needing some time to be able sort through that and support myself— knowing that I am not going to get fired if I don't show up for work.

For these youth, it is likely that they will be penalized by the market-place on account of these barriers. And although skills they acquired through the program may look good on their resumes, there is little evidence to prove they will help them secure employment. It is this reality that the discourse around labour market training programs obfuscates, thus, ultimately supporting the 'youth as deficit' frame. Subsequently, the community mapping program framed through a skills development framework does not seem to promote young people's ability to achieve economic independence and thus, citizenship.

Instead, what is more meaningful to foster youth citizenship is that which cannot be 'counted' as a 'tangible' and 'practical' outcomes, is the attitudes and ways of being that engage youth as full human be(com)ings. This is the approach of action research. Indeed, the computer skills, team skills are useful to youth in the short term, but it is their strength as reflective, relational, and representational knowing-- that seeks to strengthen individual's capacity to understand how things are, supports individuals to vision how things ought to be, and nurtures their relationship with the world around them that will better equip them to both challenge their position and the position of their peers within the labour market and society in general. This call is exceedingly important given the

current situation of precarious employment, the reduction of government support, and processes of individuation that place the individual as responsible for these external changes. Thus, rather than training youth to accept this situation and simply work to compete against their peers, the action research curriculum underpinning community mapping contributes to the kind of 'youth citizens,' citizens that "realize...rights, responsibilities, access political institutions... and share a sense of belonging to the community" (Beauvais et al., 2001, p.vi).

### **Epilogue**

As I have argued, community mapping contributes to youth citizenship as a process of engaging youth in different ways of knowing, and thus, acting in the world. I offer the following story as an interesting endnote illustrating the youth mapping team in what can only be described as an exercise of civil rights.

*It all started after we attended a roundtable on youth engagement and the World Urban Forum (WUF)—a United Nation sponsored event. As people were pouring out of the event, a crowd started to gather around one youth holding a protest sign. He was calling for action in solidarity with a Brazilian doctor that had been removed from the site for selling anti-US tee-shirts. Several of the youth from EYA got involved, and as United Nations security guards (which we found out were brought in from the New York headquarters to staff the forum) surrounded them and the room grew tense the group decided to relocate outside. However, later that evening when two of the EYA youth tried to reenter the conference they were harassed by the United Nations security guards just for having the tee-shirts in their bags. They refused to give up the shirts and, after being threatened with jail, decided to occupy the space. Other youth mapping members showed*

*up and joined in. Only when one of the guards attempted to drag one the females outdoors by her hair did the occupation end. Of course, everyone was totally angry now and so they released a press statement the following day demanding an apology from the United Nations. Eventually through a process of mediation, the youth were given their apology and invited to help design the youth engagement policy for the next WUF in China in two years.*

### **Summary**

In this chapter I wove together the community mapping story that unfolded through the actions of the youth research team, Mike, Maria, Kate, and myself, the coordinator/ researcher. I describe how the members begin by examining their personal relationships to the urban environment, through photography and oral storytelling, and then moved to examine the experiences of their peers through surveys and focus groups. Following this, the team drew upon their experiences to reflect, from a methodological perspective, on what community mapping meant to them, before producing their own set of community maps—simultaneously analyzing the data and the process of gathering the data. Along the way, some of the members reveal small, but important shifts in the way they see the people and places of downtown Vancouver, whilst others chose to engage more cautiously and critically. Similarly, I described how some members were enthusiastic about the new experiences they have had, whilst others challenged the value of their experience in the EYA program. This range of reactions shows that whilst community mapmaking can engage youth in challenging their limits and assumptions, it is ultimately up to the youth participants to decide whether or not they are ready and willing.

A second part of the community mapping story that I also discuss here, is the employability skills training objectives. Again, I offer a few snapshots of the youth's experiences as they participated in such things as 'teamwork', 'communication' and 'project management'. However, when it comes to finding and securing a job, I conclude that, given the reality of labour market discrimination, these skills will likely prove insufficient. I conclude by sharing a story of a protest led by the youth researchers, offering a glimpse of their engagement in an act of citizenship that may or may not represent their future roles as citizens. In the following chapter I outline the broad policy changes and research directions that I feel this story suggests, as well as discussing important considerations for community practitioners.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### **Community mapping and youth citizenship**

In this study, I explored two central questions. With the youth as co-researchers, we asked “What is the place of youth in the city—specifically downtown Vancouver?” and examining the experience of the youth as researchers, I asked “How does community mapping contribute to youth citizenship?” In this chapter, I first answer these questions and then suggest future directions for youth employment policy, youth citizenship initiatives, youth action research and community mapping.

To describe how youth situate themselves in the urban environment, it is useful to imagine a map—an appropriate metaphor for a discussion on community mapmaking. We begin with a street grid of downtown Vancouver. Overlaid, the first layer of meaning illustrates youth’s connection to the physical and cultural space of downtown Vancouver, a space in which they are able to experience both independence and belonging. Hall et al. (1999) describe the centrality of these dimensions to youth citizenship:

For young people...their sense of themselves as individuals, and their understanding of where they are from and what that means, are...central to the move into adulthood, broadly defined, and the aspects of personal and social identity at stake here—growing confidences in oneself as an independent person and awareness of what ones shares with others – resonate with current notions of citizenship. Emergent identities require spaces of their own in which to assert themselves, and are also grounded in (if not tied to) the specificities of particular locations. (p.505)

Through their choices of which commercial and public spaces they access, youth shape their identities, as seen in Kate’s strong affinity for gay businesses like Little Sisters, and Mike’s similar sentiment in regard to services for street-involved youth. For youth in general, particularly those facing some form of exclusion, the anonymity of downtown offers a kind of acceptance. Even if they not feel connected to particular sites as strongly

as was expressed by the youth research team, these youth may at least be able to experience a sense of independence and belonging when they 'hang out' downtown.

The second layer on the map shows the contradictory forces of exclusion, particularly facing economically marginalized youth, which dictate who is left alone and who is targeted by authorities. This reality was made explicit in the stories of street-involved youth, whom described the harassment and negative, closed attitudes which make them feel unwelcome in particular public and private spaces. Thus, while the downtown environment offers inclusion to youth, on the one hand, the terms of inclusion are deeply segregated according to haves and have-nots.

From the findings of this question, we can then begin to examine how community mapping, as a process of action research, contributes to youth citizenship. To reiterate, the definition of youth citizenship I am working from is one which prioritizes social and political rights and responsibilities above civil rights and responsibilities, and also takes special care to position community belonging as an equally important component of this framework:

Youth citizenship encompasses of three analytical dimensions: 1) rights and responsibilities, 2) access and 3) feelings of belonging...It means actively seeking to engage so as to realize one's rights, exercise one's responsibilities, have access to political institutions, be empowered, and share a sense of belonging to the community...being a full citizen means having the resources and opportunity to participate in different areas of life. (Beauvais et al., 2001, p.2)

Throughout the course of this study, I have invoked the concepts of reflective, relational, and representational knowing to illuminate the ways in which the youth engaged in expanding their awareness of themselves and the social, political, and economic environmental within which they live. It is through this process of coming to understand the world, that community mapping supports youth to engage in social and political rights

and responsibilities: critical knowing to identify power relations and understand the necessity to defend social rights; relational knowing to connect with one another and the people around them and thus feel the obligation to defend these rights on behalf of the collective; and analytical knowing to understand the relevance and significance of political rights. As Hall et al. explain, “Young people are not empty vessels into which new responsibilities can be poured; their sense of both rights and responsibilities has to be negotiated, debated, and interrogated” (Hall et al., 2000, p.470). Through the process of mapmaking youth work towards uncovering the layers of power affecting their own lives, and the lives of the people around them, which may then in turn encourage them to begin defining and redefining their roles in society.

Whilst necessary if we are to fulfill the conditions of citizenship as described above, this awareness alone may not be sufficient in the long run. For starters, what of criteria number three, ‘feelings of belonging’? It is useful here to revisit the notion of community which has taken shape over the course of this study. Although we began from a notion of community as a group of people connected in nurturing and intimate relationships, when speaking in the real terms of their lives, the youth pointed to the downtown as their place of community—a space characterized far more by anonymity and transience than stability and intimacy. On the one hand, the youth team described the downtown as community of strangers in shared spaces, respecting but not engaging in one another’s difference: “unassimilated otherness over an impossible communal association” (Young, 1990, p.319). On the other hand, speaking of their connections to people in the downtown, as embodied in their identification of support agencies, the youth revealed the temporary nature of these relationships, which is itself a function of

service-oriented relationships. Thus, whilst the process of community mapping seemed to have contributed to the youth researchers expressing and recognizing their membership to the 'downtown youth community', it is clear that this community is bound together by invisible and shifting ties. This, in turn, has serious implications for citizenship, suggesting that in the long term these youth, and youth in general, would feel a very tenuous sense of responsibility to this kind of 'community' (France, 1999, p.104). Whilst community mapping definitely foster sense of belonging, the particular context of this mapping inquiry limits the deepening of community roots.

The third, and perhaps most challenging criteria to fulfill, is number two: 'access', access to the benefits promised under the heading of social rights. For youth, one of the most pressing challenges they are faced with is finding and securing adequate employment. From this perspective, community mapping set within an employability framework—which supports youth to achieve transferable job skills—can potentially help youth gain economic security. Economic security is, of course, one of the basic requirements of citizenship, as an individual can not be expected to volunteer their time and energy if barely meet their own survival needs, "poverty undermines people's ability to undertake obligations" (France, 1999, p106). As well, access to gainful employment is especially relevant to youth citizenship in terms of their long term participation in all areas of life. For example, in his study of British youth, France (1999) concludes that:

Young people's labour market experiences...have a major impact on their feelings of responsibility. Shit schemes, poor quality 'proper jobs'; and periods of unemployment have undermined the positive ambitions which these young people had on leaving school. (p.108)

Thus, those youth that are not able to experience success in the labour market are less likely to participate in other areas of society (France, 1999). In the context of the youth

in this study, I have no way yet of knowing what their labour market participation will look like over the next few years. Nonetheless, it is useful to take note of what is at stake when we are talking about helping youth 'succeed' in the workplace.

Altogether, the results of this study situate youth within a precarious situation in society, characterized by unequal access to the physical and cultural spaces of the city, as well as unequal access to economic participation; all of which infringes on their political and social rights as well as their more general sense of inclusion. Community mapping is one tool that can support their ability in assuming roles as full citizens—but can not operate in isolation. In the following section, I outline specific recommendations for the EYA, as well as broad social shifts to enhance the potential of community mapping for youth citizenship.

### **Recommendations for EYA**

The EYA, and the community mapping program it offers, is a fairly unique organization, occupying a marginal position in the field of labour market training for youth. Few other organizations, at least in BC, attempt to provide this kind of employability training and transformative education curriculum--on the one hand training youth to gain labour market skills, and on the other hand challenging them beyond their roles as economic 'producers' to become active, participating, and potentially critiquing citizens. As a result, EYA's program occupies a somewhat contradictory position: encouraging youth to both adapt to and critique the capitalist democracy they live within. This, I believe, is a very generative place to be—a place sometimes fraught with frustration and confusion, but also a place fostering creativity and new ways of thinking and being in the world. Thus, whilst I encourage the EYA to continue to maintain this

tension, I do see the need for this tension to be more formally recognized and articulated within the organization. Youth participating and graduating in EYA programs should be invited to discuss and interrogate this tension throughout their internships with the EYA, so that they can be supported to explore its meaning and significance in terms of their program experiences and their lives in general. For example, after spending six months working in a team capacity often the first step youth participants take in transitioning out of the program is to compete against these same peers for particular, desirable jobs—a very contradictory shift to have to suddenly make. In making such contradictions explicitly, EYA's youth graduates would have the opportunity to become more comfortable with the difficult choices they will undoubtedly face, choices that will force them to choose between their roles as citizens (with critical voices) and consumer/producers. Ultimately, introducing this dialogue into EYA's program would, in turn, foster young people's sense of empowerment rather than powerless in the world. I next turn to challenge this tension in terms of the policy environment in which it is rooted, specifically the HRSDC and the ideology of capitalist democracy it is informed by.

### **Recommendations for HRSDC**

It is fairly evident in Canada current system of governance, one based on capitalist democracy and leaning ever more towards neo-liberal ideology, that economic principles underpin many decisions regarding the administration of government services and programs. What if, instead, government adopted a citizen-centered approach to governance, one which “assumed we are citizens first and consumers and producers second (Blakely et al, 2001, p.83)? What if HRSDC framed their Skills Link program in

youth citizenship terms instead of strictly employability and occupational training skills? This would mean broadening their outcomes language to embrace the language of the participatory world view, one which addresses power structures, acknowledges multiple ways of knowing, sees processes in terms of human relationship, and is dedicated towards emancipation and equality in purpose. In this framework, I imagine youth designing their own action research project, implementing program evaluation processes themselves, and having time to reflect on their experiences throughout the course of the program. This would create a supportive space to engage youth as thinking, feeling, human beings (Fals Borda, 2001). Ultimately, this citizen-centered vision would require the availability of more employment training programs like that of the EYA's as well as the creation of wholly different ones, all seeking to engage youth in social, political and civic participation.

Despite the revolutionary sound of these ideas, none of them are new. Participatory youth employment strategies have existed through the support of the Canadian government in the past decades. For example, in the 1970s the Canadian government supported youth groups and individuals to create their own community service initiatives which carried out "socially useful tasks, everything from environmental clean-ups to theater" (Marquardt, 1998p.132). However, this kind of funding is nowhere to be seen today. Why not? Indeed, the broader question my proposal begs is whether our government is actually committed to fostering youth citizenship. The outlook is doubtful. The current neo-liberal youth agenda seems to be more about training youth to accommodate the needs of the market place than nurturing them as human beings. After all, with globalization's further exclusion of the 'disadvantaged',

we certainly wouldn't want to create a critical citizenry. Hopes of government moving to reinstate or reinvent labour market training for youth along emancipatory lines are decidedly dismal with the recent Conservative government's decision to cut existing programs like the Young Professionals Initiative, which also falls under the banner of the Youth Employment Strategy. As the Canadian government pulls back in the area of labour market training, which at least provides an opening for fostering youth citizenship; it is disappointing that what must instead be called for is the provision of basic social rights. Youth, particularly marginalized youth, need access to services such as economic insurance, training programs, and job opportunities that provide them with economic security. It is in this reality that Ruddick's (2003) challenge takes on frightening relevance to our national context:

In the current era we are witnessing the demise [of youth and childhood] and their rupturing and restructuring, as young people and young adults are being prepared for their inclusion into or exclusion from the new possibilities of global economy... Through the social spaces and infrastructures we develop, we must answer the question of what kind of youth we imagine for ourselves and what of globalization that we will tolerate. (p.357)

If we can not count on government to support youth through the provision of meaningful, transformative employment training programs, then where can community practitioners seek support to engage in the youth citizenship work that this study is grounded in?

Taking cue from the path forged by early practitioners of action research, which is appropriate given the centrality of action research to this study, I next turn to investigate the university as a possible ally in this pursuit.

## **Implications for research and community practice**

### **i. Youth citizenship**

In their recent Trek 2010 statement, the University of British Columbia commits to:

..aspiring to be one of the world's best universities, [to] prepare students to become exceptional global citizens, [to] promote the values of a civil and sustainable society, and [to] conduct outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada, and the world. (UBC, 2005, p.1)

Subsequently, UBC currently hosts a number of programs, such as YouLead and the Learning Exchange which provide students with community service learning opportunities. Whilst a positive step in strengthening community/university collaborations, the problem with this approach is that it only targets UBC students, thus, perpetuating citizenship as an elitist experience. Fortunately, there are many areas of research that academic institutions such as UBC could undertake in support of a more inclusive concept of youth citizenship.

Speaking broadly, the question that academic researchers have yet to explore—particularly outside of traditional school contexts and in relation to marginalized youth populations—is what kinds of environments support youth citizenship? Interestingly, researchers with the Canadian Policy Research Network have recently begun to look into what knowledge, skills, and aptitudes young people need to be active and engaged citizens ([www.cprm.org](http://www.cprm.org)). However, whilst it has yet to be released, their study would seem to adopt an individual-centered focus, thus assuming that youth citizenship should be examined from a personal rather than structural basis. Rather, what I suggest is that research integrates structural and individual perspectives to also examine what kind of spaces and resources we can offer to better support youth citizenship amongst our most

excluded youth populations. Specifically, I see the need for research to identify the defining characteristics of successful community-based practices—both in organizational contexts such as EYA, as well as the initiatives youth themselves are undertaking, defining youth citizenship along their own terms in the process. This stream of inquiry, which I challenge universities like UBC to undertake, could lead to the development of practical youth-friendly resources on action research, as well as methods of participatory program evaluation.

In addition, further research needs to be conducted to examine the long-term impacts of existing ‘youth citizenship’ environments. Again, EYA provides a ready example. Where are youth participants ten years after graduating from EYA’s training programs? What kind of change, if any, do they feel this experience had on their lives? This kind of data could help such organizations demonstrate the social benefits of their programs, thus enabling them to better defend themselves from the future cutback in government funding for youth that seems to be looming on the horizon.

## **ii. Action research**

Only within the last few decades, has action research been picked up by community organizations interested in improving on the conditions of local peoples. As such, there is still a great deal of experimentation and reflection taking place—particularly in relation to engaging marginalized youth. For myself, having approached this study as both a graduate student and community practitioner, the central question I had was how to I *do* action research with these youth? In the paragraphs that follow, I share some of the major challenges I faced and how I dealt with them. I hope they will

provide insights to other action researchers working with youth and in community contexts such as the one presented here.

One of the questions I pondered throughout the course of this study was how to foster critical reflection amongst the youth. For example, when debriefing the youth focus groups with Mike, his first reaction was to dismiss the data he had gathered as meaningless. In the moment, I was taken aback by his reaction and did not attempt to explore or even recognize his perspective. Yet, I know see that it is key moments like these that offer the doorways into ‘transformative’ learning, learning that calls attention to and challenges our assumptions. Although I was careful to organize group reflections on a regular basis, the reality of field work showed me that not all of the potential ‘ahah’ moments were contained within those prescribed windows. To future youth action research practitioners, I recommend being attentive to when these opportunities present themselves, and being ready to pose challenging questions in those moments—as I see myself having not done on several occasions.

Introducing the theory and concepts of action research to the youth researchers also presented a challenging task. I first tried to engage the youth through ‘traditional’ curriculum material, such as research articles and other written materials. However, this approach was obviously not working: the group discussion was dry, the room tense. Instead, we wound up jumping into ‘doing’ research and then reflecting on what had been done afterwards. This proved to be a more effective and meaningful way for the youth to understand the theoretical concepts informing their work than the classroom style of reading and discussion that I myself was used to.

As I discovered, working with marginalized youth also required dealing with a lot of unexpected crises. Sometimes that meant going to the bank with one of the youth to help them cash a check, and sometimes it meant simply understanding that someone could not participate in the program that day, and not trying to penalize them for that. At times, the line was blurry as to what was acceptable behavior—particularly given my own lack of experience in what they were going through. However, the most meaningful feedback I received in this regard came from Mike when he thanked me for being as accommodating as I had been, “Most people would have just given up on me, but you didn’t and that really means a lot.” It was a surprising and touching moment of appreciation from someone who I had often felt was trying to push me away. Although frustrating and exhausting at times, the best way of dealing with the ‘situations’ that unexpectedly emerge in the lives of youth, was to remember that it was ultimately the well-being of the youth, rather than the project, that was most important.

Although I managed to work through the points of confusion described in the preceding paragraphs, rarely did I include those in my field notes. Rather than paying attention on my own challenges in the field, my focus was on *the youth*, and observing how *they* were experiencing the process. I’m certain that countless other community practitioners navigating an academic world new to them have wrestled with these same questions, and similarly depended on their intuition to find direction. I would recommend that future action research in community contexts such as the one presented here take particularly care to include the internal experience of the action researcher in the presentation of findings, such as why they made the decisions they did; how they felt in the process; how their perspectives changed; and what they felt they learned. This

kind of transparency of research would be invaluable to beginner action researchers, such as myself.

### **iii. Community Mapping**

Through the course of this inquiry, I have shown that community mapping is a valuable tool to promote youth and community development. Even in an area like downtown Vancouver, which I wouldn't have imagined as a space of community before participating in this study, the mapping process revealed that it does indeed offer youth connection, support, and acceptance—as well as exclusion and discrimination. The map products that were created express that social and physical landscape to help youth navigate that environment. However, what about the other places youth inhabit? Whilst I myself was one of the youth that ventured into downtown Vancouver for fun and independence, I didn't live or work there. I lived in the suburbs. It is in these outlying areas that future community mapping projects with youth need to take *place*. These are the areas in which youth often have few real spaces to develop independence and belonging, where youth are led instead into the roles of consumers rather than leaders. Youth-led mapping projects that inquire in to the strengths and gaps of suburban neighborhoods would benefit both the youth by engaging them in authentic citizenship activities, as well as the community by revealing to them future youth-friendly directions in planning services and programs, and land-use development.

Whilst this inquiry has reaffirmed my belief in the value of community mapping and the place-based approach to action research it embodies, it has also revealed to me various weaknesses in my own practice of mapmaking that I offer here to guide future mapmakers.

- On the creativity of mapmaking: How can photography and visual imagery be incorporated into not only the mapmaking process but also the final map products?
- On the reflexivity of mapmaking: What kinds of questions can we pose to community mapmakers so that they are challenged to take risks and move out of their comfort zone?
- On the spatiality of mapmaking: Is mapmaking necessarily tied to physical space? How else might maps be employed to explore our world?
- On participation in mapmaking: How else might a community mapping project engage the participation of the 'community'? How could a project be more democratic in the initial planning and framing of questions?

Although there can be no perfect community mapping project, one that embodies every one of these aspects, it is useful to choose which priorities a particular mapping project will embody.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I addressed the two questions informing this study and end with a host of new ones. In mapping their place in the city, the youth invoke a contradictory set of adjectives describing the physical and social environment: inclusive, diverse, exclusive and fragmented. From these findings, I next examined my main question: How does community mapping foster youth citizenship? I suggested that by mapping out their experiences of place and the place of their peers, the youth engage in a deep and complex inquiry that influences their analyses and sense of agency in social and political realms. However, whilst community mapping, thus, positions youth in the domain of citizenship,

I brought attention to the fragmented notion of community and barriers to secure employment that ultimately threaten the stability of citizenship for these youth and others like them.

Where does this leave us? I next turned to outline how the lessons offered by the EYA's community mapping program provide insight into the kinds of changes that are required if our society is to truly support the notion of youth citizenship. For starters, I challenged the government's youth employment policy, imagining a citizen-centered approach that would engage youth in participatory, meaningful, and socially responsible waged-training opportunities. At the very minimum, I argued for the maintenance of current employment programs and services for youth—both of which are threatened under the current direction taken by the federal government. Universities also have a key role to play: promoting youth citizenship through research on community organizations, such as the EYA, to look at the different approaches they offer in facilitating transformative learning, to examine the long-term consequences for the youth they engage, and thus ultimately broadening their influence and presence in society.

At a community level, I hope that my reflections may prove useful to other community/researchers interested in promoting positive youth development. Specifically, I outlined a few of the major challenges I faced in facilitating action research, in terms of introducing the youth to new concepts and new ways of looking at the world, as well as the challenges I faced in trying to understand where they were coming from. The single most important recommendation I offered is for greater inclusion and awareness of the internal world of the primary researcher in the inquiry, both in the collection and presentation of results. Having felt that I was stumbling in the

dark for so much of my study, such honest and intimate sharing would prove invaluable to light the way for future inquirers.

In the field of community mapping specifically, this study has shown the value of this approach in articulating and promoting community belonging—both to the good and bad spaces that characterize every environment. I suggested that, within the Canadian context, community mapping projects are most needed within suburban settings, where youth often have the fewest opportunities to engage in citizenship-based programs and services. To mapmakers interested in taking up this challenge, and any other community mapping undertaking, I offered a set of questions to enrich the creativity, critical analysis, and inclusivity of their practice.

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Appendix I

UBC Research Ethics Board Certificates of Approval

## Appendix II

### Schedule of Interview Questions

1. What does community mean to you?
2. What do you think community mapping is?
3. What do you think is the purpose of community mapping?
4. Who participates?
5. What do you think would be the benefits of community mapping for the mapmakers?
6. What do you think would be the benefits for the community?
7. What do you think would be the benefits for youth?
8. What do you think would be the benefits for policy makers/decision makers?

Appendix III

Youth Survey

**Downtown Vancouver Youth Survey for Environmental Youth Alliance**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Name five places to eat in downtown Vancouver for under \$5, and where are they located (address, intersections)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Name 5 resource/crisis/support centers for youth? (include shelters, support groups)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name five places that you would access the internet in downtown Vancouver and where they are.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How else do you find out what is going on around town (events)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Name your five favorite clothing stores in Vancouver, and what styles they are.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Name five inexpensive clothing stores in Vancouver, and what styles they are.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Name your five favorite fun and free places to go in Vancouver.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Name five organizations that empower youth in Vancouver.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for filling out our survey. If you have any questions or comments, you can phone Jackie with EYA (the Environmental Youth Alliance) at (604) 801-5731.**