Commercial Drive: Lessons in Video as Product, Sustainable Urban Form, Convivial Consumption, and Neighbourhood Identity

by

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Abstract

Through a single experimental and exploratory case study on the Commercial Drive neighbourhood retail district, using principles of basic, applied, formative, and action research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the elements, history, context, and threats to a successful neighbourhood retail district, and its role in sustainable planning have all been explored in an innovative 33 minute advocacy documentary titled “Neighbourhood Identity: The Stories of Commercial Drive”. The movie covers the neighbourhood context and history as well as highlighting the issues the district is currently facing. This paper, “Commercial Drive: Lessons in Video as Product, Sustainable Urban Form, Convivial Consumption, and Neighbourhood Identity” is meant as a supplementary document to the movie and covers the research problem, questions, methodology, methods, context, and findings of the thesis and movie.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

As my graduate thesis in the School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) I wrote, directed, and produced a documentary about the neighbourhood retail district known as Commercial Drive. I examined The Drive, as it is known locally, under the lens of walkable neighbourhood retail districts and how these can play a vital role in the larger scheme of sustainability. Through a single experimental and exploratory case study on the Commercial Drive neighbourhood retail district, using principles of basic, applied, formative, and action research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, I explored the elements, history, context, and threats to a successful neighbourhood retail district, and its role in sustainable planning, all in an innovative 33 minute advocacy documentary.

In the following paper, the contexts of the research will be examined. This paper is not meant as a stand-alone statement but rather a supplementary piece to the movie. Watch the movie before you read further.
2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Whether it is referred to as a neighbourhood commercial node, high street or Main Street, the retail district of any neighbourhood is its centre. Neighbourhoods often have parks, community centres, attractions, and events that its citizens identify with, but nothing characterizes a neighbourhood to its citizens and the outside world so much as what kind of businesses it has; i.e. if it has a well-known coffee shop, taco shack or even antique store. This is a de facto distinction simply due to the high visibility of the retail district. It is this identification of the retail district as the neighbourhood centre that can also lead to the perceived success or failure of a neighbourhood. A successful commercial node provides a centre for its citizens; it is the grocer, butcher, dentist and meeting place. It is the place of unplanned neighbourhood sociability.

2.1 Research Questions

Cities regularly spend money on beautification projects as methods to improve or revitalize neighbourhood retail districts, but what are the elements of a successful neighbourhood retail district? Why is it important to have successful neighbourhood retail districts in the larger scope of sustainability? What is the role of video as product as a tool for education, engagement, and advocacy in planning? This thesis and movie focuses on the retail district as the heart of a neighbourhood and its role in the larger scope of planning for sustainability.
3.0 CONTEXT

In doing preliminary analysis of a variety of Vancouver neighbourhood retail districts, Commercial Drive continued to return to the forefront of my studies. Through talking to many residents of Commercial Drive and noticing some aggressive marketing of the identity of the neighbourhood it became apparent that the Drive was having some kind of growing pains. The BIA had been established in 2001 and by many accounts has been very successful (Cramer, 2006). Business on the Drive is thriving, there are very rarely vacancies and people often spill out of the coffee shops and cafes and claim the street as their public space for spontaneous celebrations. Restaurant patios are almost always overflowing and people are regularly out, enjoying their neighbourhood.

After conducting a cognitive mapping project on Commercial Drive, it became noticeable that many residents of the area don’t like the change the neighbourhood is going through, and they certainly do not like the marketing efforts of the BIA (Beresky, 2006). While some indicators of gentrification are noticeable (Strathcona, 2005), it seems a bit more complex than the usual gentrification. It does not matter whether someone has been in the neighbourhood for 2 weeks or 40 years, upon finishing complaining about something, often the gentrification, they would usually list everything that is great about the neighbourhood (Beresky, 2006). I felt a need to explore Commercial Drive more deeply and discover why it has come to be, the threats it is facing, and how neighbourhood districts can play an essential role in making a sustainable city.
3.1 Neighbourhood Unit

The neighbourhood unit, whether defined in those terms or not has been around from the dawn of civilization. "Neighbourhoods are a 'fact of nature' and come into existence whenever a group of people share a place." (Gordon, 1946) While they have existed for millennia, it was not until Perry that Planners began to deconstruct the neighbourhood unit into the ideal size, boundaries, number and kinds of shops, open spaces, schools, and so on, all in an effort to understand them better. (Perry, 1939)

The natural evolution of the neighbourhood unit and its retail district was such that the district became the focal point life. The district was the "home not only of stores and offices, but also of imposing churches, theatres, banks, hotels, ... war memorials, libraries, and other banners of community well-being." (Leibs, 1995) The street as the focal point of neighbourhood life was threatened by Garden City and Modernist planners such as Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier, both who sought to eliminate the pedestrian from the street, restricting the use of the street for the exclusive use of the automobile. (Scott, 1998) It was also during this period that the attempt to bring order to the city in the form of zoning and the separation of uses and the advent of the suburban shopping mall brought further threat to the neighbourhood retail district. (Houstoun, 1997; Scott, 1998)

The more recent trends of urban villages, transit oriented development, and New Urbanism, as well as the "third place" concept have led to a renewed focus on the neighbourhood retail district. (Oldenburg, 1989) This focus has again led to an effort to deconstruct and better understand the neighbourhood retail district. Scott developed a set of principles of a good neighbourhood retail district. The principles are meant to have
common characteristics throughout and include “accessibility, comfort, sociability, sense of place, adaptability, beauty, and diversity.” (Scott, 1998) Even as Scott’s principles are more emotive and less scientific than the deconstruction of Perry, the effort to understand the complex neighbourhood unit continues in this thesis as well.

3.2 Business Improvement Areas

One of the major tools the City of Vancouver has in shaping these neighbourhood retail districts is Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). Modern BIAs first appeared in Toronto in the mid 70s and quickly spread to thousands of neighbourhoods throughout North America. While the actual laws that enable and govern them vary depending on country, province or state, and municipality “what they have in common is that properties and/or businesses within a legally constituted district pay a special tax or assessment to cover the cost of providing facilities or services for which the district has a particular need”(Houstoun, 1997). Vancouver caught the BIA craze in the late 80’s and today there are 18 throughout the city (Vancouver, 2006). BIAs have been organized in almost every noticeable neighbourhood retail district in the city.

Along with BIAs come their supporters and detractors. BIAs allow locally owned, mom and pop stores to organize and collectively compete against privately owned suburban shopping malls and megastores. They undertake every local neighbourhood issue from street beautification projects to community festivals (Houstoun, 1997). BIAs are also not representative of a neighbourhood, only business and property owners can be members. They promote the privatization of public goods by hiring private security to patrol the public sidewalks and parks of their domains (Briffault, 1999; Ellickson, 1996). They brand their neighbourhoods and market that identity, real or made up, by affixing
banners to street poles and advertising their brand throughout the city and region, often leading to gentrification and the marginalization of populations (Sussman, 1998). While the literature on BIAs is varied as to their overall effects to the neighbourhood retail district, the concept of BIAs remain relevant to this thesis and movie simply due to the fact that they remain a staple tool of local governments in neighbourhood retail districts and the Commercial Drive Business Society, as the local BIA is called, plays a significant role on the Drive.

3.3 Technology and Video in Planning

Planners have continually looked to emerging technologies and multimedia to help inform and engage (Sales, 2006). A quick search of “planning” at archives.org reveals a host of historical films dealing with planning themes. The films range from utopian visions of urban life, such as the 1928 film “The City”, narrated by the author, Lewis Mumford, to pleas for the prevention of urban decay in the animated 1955 classic “Man of Action”, where the devil leads the main character through the creation of a slum. More recently, film and video has been used more as process than product with participatory video’s attempts to give voice to marginalized populations by allowing them to become both subjects and creators of film and video projects (Cossever, 2006; Odutola, 2003).

Documentary film has the ability to be more accessible than a traditional thesis. With advancements in digital technologies it has become possible for almost anyone to attempt movie making. Combine this with advancement in Internet technologies (proliferation of websites such as youtube.com and blogs) it has become possible for anyone to see, and be affected by any documentary made.
3.4 Why a Movie?

In traditional documentary, most film makers have two clear purposes: “to witness and to affect (Rosenthal 1988).” With a bachelor’s degree in history, I have grown accustomed to the “witness” purpose. To examine a historical phenomenon through archival research is to “witness” the event. I came to SCARP, like most students, to learn how to save the world through sustainable planning. That is, to “affect”, to “cause emotional, political, and social change (Rosenthal 1988).” This quest to “affect” demonstrates the need to move beyond basic research and into more action oriented research. “Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging the people in the program or organization in studying their own problems (Patton, 2002).” A traditional planning thesis may have these same attainable goals but due to their limited availability, most likely not more than a couple of academics and family members will ever read a thesis.

3.4.1 Two Audiences

While numerous genres of documentary film exist, a majority of filmmakers focus on “intention, purpose, and audience” with an emphasis on “the social and education goals of documentary (Rosenthal 1988).” With an intention to “affect” I made this movie with two audiences in mind. The first audience is the residents and business owners of the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. The last neighbourhood plan for the area was completed in the early 80’s. In 2007, City of Vancouver planners will once again visit the Commercial Drive area to create a new policy plan. My goal has been to make a visual neighbourhood profile and to allow the voice of Commercial Drive to be heard; its issues have been raised. In a continuation of the dialogue present in the movie, discussion can
be created from the movie through screenings at many community meetings and events that will be surrounding the upcoming visioning process.

The second audience for the movie is residents and planners in cities and neighbourhoods across North America. The movie portrays a successful neighbourhood retail district, explores reasons why it is successful, why it is important to have strong neighbourhood retail districts, and some of the threats and issues it is currently facing. By watching the documentary, it is possible for residents and planners to engage and question the development patterns in their own communities. Advocacy planning has traditionally aimed to give a voice to the voiceless and align itself on the social side of the equation (Davidoff, 1965), “Neighbourhood Identity” advocates for all sides of sustainability through the promotion of walkable and dynamic neighbourhood retail districts.

3.4.2 Intentions

There is another sense in which history has power, of a more experiential kind, where history meets geography, and that is the power of place. Planning seeks to exert some control over society's spatial arrangements. But spaces are also places, and places have histories. And people are usually attached to places precisely because of these histories. One very powerful critique of planning practice that has emerged from citizens in recent decades is the argument that planners are ignorant about, or show little respect for, local histories and local attachments.

-Leonie Sandercock, 1998

I will begin with an explanation of some of my implied intentions in the movie itself. Ever since my bachelor's degree in history, it seems I have been exploring how a place IS in the present by looking at where it has been. Although a history of Commercial Drive is presented in the movie, by no means is this intended to be official or universal. There are as many histories of Commercial Drive as there are people that have ever lived
on the Drive or even just played bongo drums in Grandview Park. No single history of Commercial Drive could possibly cover the dynamic neighbourhood. The history I chose to show was one that may help explain the evolution of the built form of Commercial Drive and the populations that chose to locate there. As filmmaker, editor, producer, interviewer, lighting tech, animator and so on, it is clear that I had an unusual amount of control over what stories were told, who told them, and the treatment given to them. I did not intend for this piece to cover every story of Commercial Drive, exactly the way it happened. It would have been futile and debasing, for myself and the community, for me to only “witness” these stories as in the cinema verite, or non interventionist style (Winston, 1978), and pretend my influence was only evident when my finger hit the record button.

Sandercock acknowledges a need for multiple knowledges in planning (Sandercock, 1998). She suggests moving beyond a simple “art or science” debate, which is how it is often framed. The paradigm is shifting but it still has another corner or two to turn. In today’s newspapers and media, quantitative studies often trump qualitative evidence. Hard facts and strict science garner respect, other knowledges and any alternative, arts based approaches often get labelled as something other than fact. It was my intention to attempt to marry art and science in this movie. While my voice is clear in dealing the science side of the equation, such as demographics, land use inventory, and neighbourhood location, it was absent in the rest of the film. I conducted strictly audio interviews on the sidewalks of Commercial Drive in an attempt to capture the voices of the street. It was my feeling that the only way to recreate, or capture the spirit of Commercial Drive was to listen and replay the voices. It was my intention to marry
histories and geography and discover the Place, and to marry art and science and explore the neighbourhood’s character.

Beyond the intentions of the movie itself, my rationale for choosing to make a movie rather than writing a traditional thesis was to “affect”. I want to move beyond the static nature of simply being a “witness” and try and get some people talking about neighbourhood commercial retail districts. Participatory video would have served this purpose (perhaps a better fit in the upcoming community visioning process) although solely at a local level. While product is an obvious component of any participatory research, it is not the main focus and can feel incomplete without knowledge of the process. Having previously participated in participatory research, I felt that a stand-alone final product was something that I needed to accomplish with my thesis. Product creativity lies with the product. The creative process may have a variety of iterations and fully involve many, but the focus is still on the finished product, on what gets left behind, not the creative process that led to it (Sawyer, 2000). It is this final product that will ultimately “affect”.
4.0 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Methodology, Briefly

Through a single experimental and exploratory case study on the Commercial Drive neighbourhood retail district, using principles of basic, applied, formative, and action research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, I explored the elements, history, context, threats to a successful neighbourhood retail district, and its role in sustainable planning. The final product is an innovative 33 minute advocacy documentary. Patton defines the principles underlying four styles of research: basic, applied, formative, and action. Basic research is knowledge as and end in itself, to discover truth. The purpose of applied research is to understand the nature and sources of human and societal problems. Formative evaluation is research done to improve an institution, such as a program, policy, organization, or product, while action research’s purpose is to solve a specific problem (Patton, 2002). Yin characterizes case studies as the preferred strategy when “why” questions are asked. Case studies can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive (Yin, 1994).

4.2 Methods

Although an innovative, video-as-product thesis varies significantly from a traditional written thesis in form and function, the research methods used are similar to those used in a traditional thesis. Five methods were used to compile the needed information for the movie. These five methods were literature and document review, both formal and informal interviews, land use inventory and demographic research, historical and archival research, and personal observations which included cognitive mapping and supplementary video.
4.2.1 Literature and Document Review

Literature reviews covering Business Improvement Areas, documentary and the use of video and technology in planning, and the concept and history of the neighbourhood unit was conducted. Beyond the theoretical framework reviewed, detailed reviews of policy documents were carry out. These documents include the Greater Vancouver Regional District’s Livable Region Strategic Plan, the City of Vancouver’s guiding document City Plan, the Grandview-Woodlands Area Policy Plan, the British Columbia Provincial Business Improvement Area Charter, and the mandate of the Commercial Drive Business Society, as well as numerous retail impact studies and marketing reports produced for the City of Vancouver.

4.2.2 Interviews

Thirteen formal interviews were conducted for the movie. These formal interviews were all captured on video for use in the movie and included major stakeholders and officials with relevant knowledge. City Planners, Commercial Drive Business Society members and staff, local business owners, long time residents, and local and academic historians were all interviewed with the intent of contributing to the movie. Due to the wide range of people interviewed, questions asked and topics explored varied greatly from interview to interview.

As well as the thirteen formal interviews, upwards of 50 informal interviews took place across the neighbourhood. These informal interviews often came from pedestrians, business owners, and residents inquiring of my actions when I was filming or photographing the Drive. The informal interviews usually lasted for less than five minutes and offered anecdotal observations of what people liked and disliked about their
neighbourhood. Roughly half of the informal interviews were audio recorded, portions of
a majority of these were included in the final movie.

4.2.3 Land Use Inventory and Demographic Research
The use of the combination of the land use inventory and demographics was a
snapshot of the Drive and surrounding neighbourhood taken during the making of the
movie. The purpose was to show what, who, how many, and where. What kinds of
business exist, what is their mix, how many people live in the area, their age/sex
breakdown, and what languages are spoken as well as locating Commercial Drive in the
universe answered these questions.

A detailed land use inventory was conducted during the second week of July
2006. The inventory focused exclusively on ground floor businesses fronting Commercial
Drive from Grandview Highway in the South to the lane just North of Venebles.

Demographic research came from three sources, StatsCanada, the Grandview-Woodlands
Community Web pages on the city of Vancouver website, and from a neighbourhood
profile in a report on homelessness on Commercial Drive and the West-end.

4.2.4 Historical and Archival Research
The main focus of the historical and archival research was to locate newspaper
articles, photographs, songs, poetry, and video about or related to the Drive area.

Searches were conducted at the City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver Public Libraries,
University of British Columbia Libraries, and online archives such as www.archives.org.
4.2.5 Personal Observations

Activity patterns and the human/street interaction were noticed through personal observations that were conducted throughout the research phase. Most interviews were performed in the public environment on or near Commercial Drive. Many brainstorming sessions and document and literature review were conducted in the coffee shops of Commercial Drive. I conducted a cognitive mapping exercise in the same cafes and coffee shops. 25 local residents were asked to draw a map of their neighbourhood, highlighting prominent spots, sacred areas, and important businesses. The purpose of the exercise was to understand the boundaries that people construct of the neighbourhood as well as highlighting the important and sacred places.
5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Elements of a Successful Neighbourhood Retail District

Highlighted by interviews, pictures, maps, and statistics throughout the movie, the elements of the successful neighbourhood retail district are as follows:

- **Social Capital** – This is the most significant element of a successful Commercial Drive, yet it is the least tangible. It is the interconnectedness of the lives of the residents of Commercial Drive linked through common convivial consumption patterns (i.e. discussions at coffee shops, running into friends on the street). Gordon Price states in the movie that you know a neighbourhood is successful when people make an attachment to it. The attachment made is noticed when people become vocal about their surroundings. This is evident on the Drive.

- **Ties to History** – Commercial Drive is a place whose history is worn on its sleeve. With murals highlighting the streetcar development, war memorials in Grandview Park, and countless flags and businesses from around the world, anchored mainly by Italian businesses, it is clear that the ties to history are an element of a successful Commercial Drive.

- **No Drastic Changes** – A recurring theme throughout the research was that Commercial Drive is always changing yet is more or less the same as it has been for generations. Any monumental or drastic changes might have upset the balance and taken the neighbourhood in a different direction (examples of drastic changes that didn’t take place would have been the proposed widening of the street to allow for more traffic and the proposed freeway along Venable, both would have taken place in the 70’s). Fortunately all changes seem to continually take place with a gradual and incremental adaptability.
• **Urban Design Elements** – A number of elements of the successful Commercial Drive can be attributed to elements of urban design. The current traditional street width, narrow frontages allowing for many small, affordable businesses, mixed use development allowing for eyes on the street and affordable residential opportunities on the street, a minimum level of density (In “Neighbourhood Identity” Gordon Price states it is around 40 dwellings per hectare, Commercial Drive has traditionally had around 32 dwellings per hectare (Vancouver, 2005)), and pedestrian priority along the street. It is the concepts listed here that are important, not the specific prescriptive details of exactly what is located on the Drive.

5.2 **Sustainability**

*Sustainability provides colleges and universities an opportunity to confront their core values, their practices, their entrenched pedagogies, the way they program for student learning, the way they think about resources and allocate these resources and their relationships with the broader community.*

- Arjen E. J. Wals and Bob Jickling

As shown in “Neighbourhood Identity” strong, pedestrian oriented retail districts are an important component for sustainable planning. William Rees defines sustainability as “a state of being characterized by relative permanence. Something is sustainable if it is functioning in a way that ensures it will be (or at least could be) around for a very long period of time (Rees, 2002).” When broken down to its most base meaning and applied to a planning school it becomes clear that the students of SCARP yearn to make the world function “in a way that ensures it will be (or at least could be) around for a very long period of time.” Why is it important to have successful neighbourhood retail districts in the larger scope of sustainability? The role that transportation plays in creating an unsustainable, sprawling urban form is astonishing. Transportation alone contributes 40 to 50% of a community’s total energy use (Friedman, 2004). The effects of transportation
are having a devastating effect on the planet, making sustainable planning a necessity. The literature and spotlight of transit planners tends to shine on getting people to and from work in an efficient manner, but what about the rest of the trips people take? Nearly 80% of all auto trips taken are not to or from work (Nelson, 2000). These trips are the everyday errands of a household and can include grocery shopping, dropping off clothing at the dry cleaners, getting take-out for dinner etc. Commercial Drive is an example of urban form where the everyday needs of an entire neighbourhood are all within walking distance of a majority of its residents. Peter Vaisbord, Business Improvement Area Coordinator for the City of Vancouver, states in the movie that it is part of the sustainability mandate of the city to have strong, local serving business districts (Beresky, 2006). The underlying theme of the purpose of CityPlan, and its quest for a “City of Neighbourhoods” is one of sustainability. With strong neighbourhood retail districts and everyday needs all within walking distance, residents will need to drive significantly less.

5.3 Video as Product

What is the role of video as product as a tool for education, engagement, and advocacy in planning? To answer this question one must look to the audiences and intent of the movie. The efficacy of the intent to “affect” lies entirely with people seeing it. Just because the technology exists that makes it possible for anybody with access to a computer to see it, doesn’t mean they will see it. In order to “affect” I need to get the movie into the community meetings of Commercial Drive and on planning discussion websites. It can only “affect” if people see it.

Preliminary viewings of the movie and the feedback garnered from them indicate that “Neighbourhood Identity” is a powerful discussion piece that serves as a valuable
education, advocacy, and engagement tool. Overall, though, the data is inconclusive at this point as only a limited number of people have seen it. To further understand the role of video as product in planning, I plan on taking steps to promote the movie, both within the city of Vancouver and beyond. I will then be able to evaluate the response and understand the worth of video as product in advocacy planning, only then will my action research goals be fulfilled.

5.4 Threats and Obstacles

Successful neighbourhood retail districts are prominent and thriving in most neighbourhoods in Vancouver, which is a testament to the city planners and the history of streetcar neighbourhoods. It seems that many of these districts, though, are under threat, Commercial Drive included. As shown in the movie, Commercial Drive is facing the loss of affordability and is undergoing changes. These are possibly effects of gentrification. Often with gentrification comes a decrease in density and a population that typically drives more and walks less, threatening the viability of small, local serving businesses.

Another threat comes from BIAs, which are the most prominent tool the city has in shaping these neighbourhood retail districts. With increases in business as a result of the increase in marketing of a neighbourhood, businesses morph into the highest and best use for their properties, such as higher-end clothing stores and restaurants. Robson Street, South Granville, and Kitsilano’s 4th Avenue all demonstrate the trend of aggressive BIA marketing attracting higher-end businesses, threatening the viability of staple goods businesses.

From a purely economic standpoint, increased business is good on every level, but examined under the lens of sustainability, the picture changes. If the staple goods
businesses of a neighbourhood are no longer viable due to increases in rents and taxes, the entire paradigm of a sustainable neighbourhood retail district is lost. For example, if the local grocer becomes a restaurant, the tailor sells out to a major yoga-wear chain, and the barbershop becomes an exclusive day spa, residents will once again be forced to drive across town to get their groceries, clothes mended, and hair cut instead of walking through their own neighbourhood.

While the threat to neighbourhood retail districts in Vancouver comes from their own successes, the threats in many parts of North America are more complicated. Beyond the almost inexplicable social capital component, the basic elements of successful neighbourhood retail districts are ties to history, gradual changes, narrow streets, small frontages, mixed-use development, and a certain level of density. Not only are all of these components absent from most North American suburbs and cities built post World War II, but all too often mixed use and density are either feared or made illegal through restrictive zoning regulations. An accessible advocacy piece like “Neighbourhood Identity” can have the biggest impact in situations such as these. Discussions can be built around neighbourhood form and sustainability, allowing residents to draw their own conclusions about the way they would like their communities to be shaped.
5.5 Further Inquiry Needed

Often the further a phenomenon is examined the more complex it becomes. While “Neighbourhood Identity” explores the elements of a successful neighbourhood retail district and why it is important for the world, further research is needed. BIAs have become widespread and an accepted practice, yet no research has been conducted that examines their actual efficacy. How often is increased business offset by the increase in taxes and rent paid by the business? Is there a disconnect between the goals of BIAs and the ideals of the residents that live, work, and shop in the domain of the BIA? Do BIAs aid the process of gentrification? Do they promote community building and neighbourhood identity? Knowing some of the issues surrounding BIAs, a comparative study of neighbourhood retail districts with and without BIAs is needed to understand their full worth or harm to their neighbourhoods.

The demographic changes taking place in the neighbourhood surrounding Commercial Drive also need to be examined more in depth. Some indicators of gentrification are evident (Strathcona, 2005). A study needs to be conducted that examines why these changes are taking place and how they are affecting the neighbourhood character, level of community activism, and business mix along Commercial Drive. My hope is that this thesis and movie will spur further research along these lines, as well as animate more insightful public conversation betweens residents, retailers and planners.
5.6 **Reflections on Challenges**

The two most significant challenges to making product oriented planning documentaries are time and money. While significant advancements have been made in technologies allowing for almost anybody to pursue documentary filmmaking, the start up costs (camera, tri-pod, mini dv tapes, computer, storage space, editing software etc) are significant. If it were not for the availability of the resources of the Cosmopolis Laboratory "Neighbourhood Identity" would not have been possible.

The second significant challenge is that of time. One of the most significant time commitments was spent in editing. While this is an area that will improve with practice and experience, a more significant time challenge comes from the contact, coordination, and scheduling of formal interviews. In short, people are busy and often have very full schedules. Each interview appearing in "Neighbourhood Identity" was scheduled through countless emails and phone calls and sometimes as far as a month in advance, making numerous, extensive, and formal interviews very time restrictive to efficient video production.

A third challenge yet to be faced is that of distribution and viewing. With the success of the Cosmopolis Laboratory, SCARP students are increasingly producing multimedia work, yet there is no avenue for common distribution or viewing. A database of SCARP multimedia projects needs to be built on the Cosmopolis network or SCARP website allowing for easing viewing by students, faculty, staff, and beyond.
5.7 Reflections on Limitations and Strengths

The most significant limitations to making video as product lie in the surface treatment given to a topic. Documentary movie making does not lend itself to an in depth exploration of topics. Conversely they are perfect for discussion builders about a topic. Documentary should never be treated as an end-all, out-right authority on a subject but simply as a discussion generator. A limit also exists on what types of subjects lend themselves to dynamic movie making. Given the audio and visual scope of a documentary, only subjects that lend themselves to good visuals (dynamic speakers, stories, photographs, and video) should be considered as topics. Documentary is wholly more accessible than most mediums. This is the centre of the strength of video as product, its accessibility, and its ability for almost anybody to see and discuss the topic at hand, making it a powerful tool in advocacy planning.
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