

The City and its People: Civic Engagement Strategies for Residents

Brenna Keatinge

Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies,
University of Toronto

Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance

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Central Question:

What can a legal consciousness approach tell us about civic engagement?

Overview

1. Civic Engagement
2. Residents Associations in Toronto
3. The Case of Mickey's
4. Explain and Apply the Framework
5. Conclusions and Final Observations
6. Next Steps

Civic Engagement

Focus:

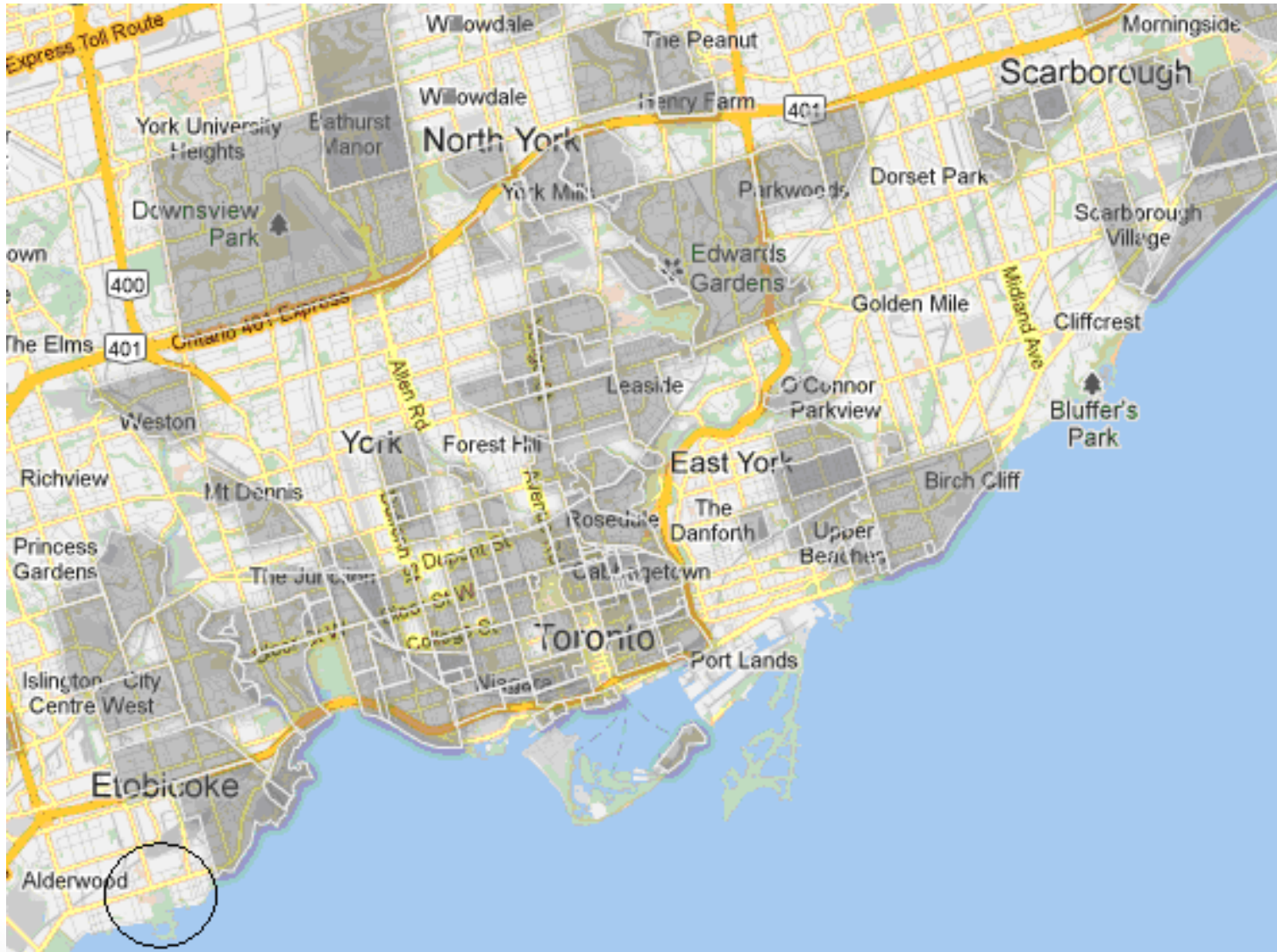
- Engagement with neighbourhood spaces
 - Moving against, or moving towards
 - Distinct from other kinds of engagement
- Residents Associations: “A civic association oriented toward maintaining or improving the quality of life in a geographical setting”
(Logan and Rabrenovic 1990)

Residents Associations

Local Political Economy (LPE) (Moore 2013)

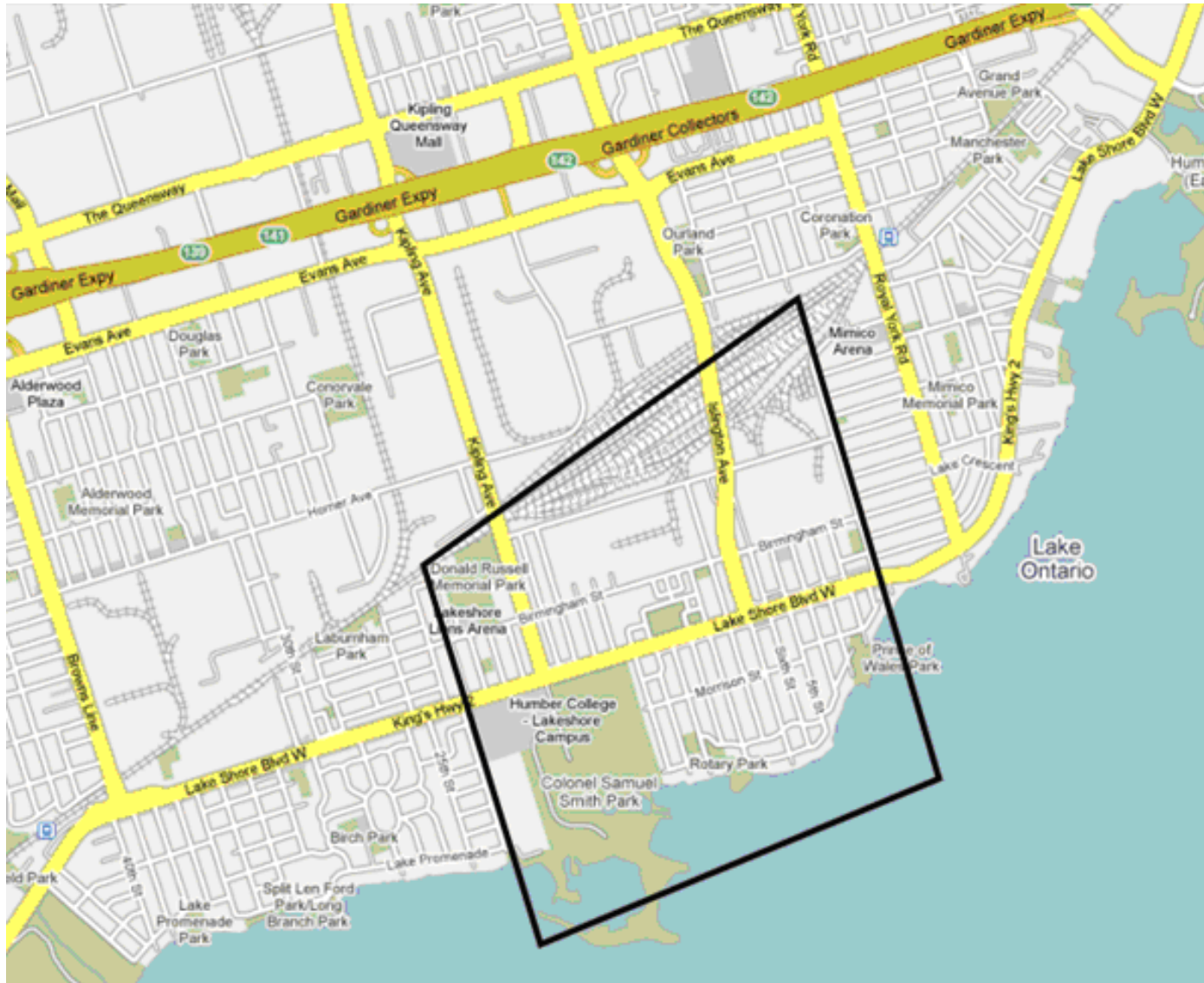
- One of the most influential approaches to studying urban politics in North America
- Traditionally no emphasis on residents in cities
- Focus on triad of developers, politicians, municipal boards
- Disagreement over interests of residents
- LPE too simplistic, RAs “agents against change”

Residents Associations in Toronto



(Photo Credit: David Topping, j.mp/torontoresidents)

The Case: Mickey's of New Toronto



“Mickey’s Gentlemen’s Club”



Methods

- Events took place in 2008, research carried out in 2009
- Various qualitative observational methods
 - Media analysis
 - Content analysis of organizational and court documents
 - Semi-structure interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders

Resident Strategies

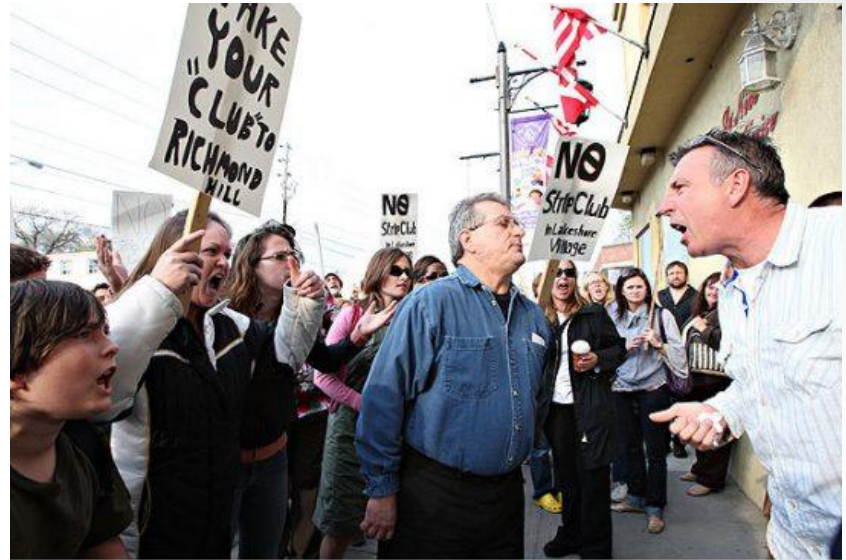
Legal and non-legal strategies by residents to shut down Mickey's

- Investigate zoning bylaw
- Contact Ward 5 councillor, Mark Grimes
- Online petition
- Public meeting
- Protest
- Investigation into AEP license – Toronto Licensing Tribunal
- Use/overuse (?) of bylaw complaints system
- Borrowing Michael Ignatieff's lawyer

Strategies by residents to revitalize neighbourhood

- Local events focused on business district
- Rebranding campaign

The Protest May 5, 2008



What is Legal Consciousness?

- In this case, a theoretical framework – way of seeing
- Let's us see motivations, interests in law use
- How people think about and experience law in ways that are both legal and non-legal –
Silbey's analogy of an iceberg
 - Eg. driving on the right side of the road
- Law use and identity are related
 - Eg. citizenship ceremonies

New Toronto's Local Legal Ideology

- Patterns of law use are entrenched in local identities that influence symbolic ideas about law (Greenhouse 1989)
- The construction of difference
 - Insiders versus Outsiders
 - Future versus Past
 - Harmony versus Disorder

Insiders versus Outsiders

“If you look at the neighbourhood, it’s young. There’s a change happening. There’s young families. People are investing in their homes.” (Sheila Paxton, Executive Assistant to Mark Grimes, age 52)

“...When a guy walks out of the bar and he’s had a few to drink and he’s all turned on because he’s been watching a naked woman for an hour and there’s a woman walking by because she’s gone to work or she’s gone to get a jug of milk, and he makes a snide remark at her... *These types of establishments bring people to it that are going to be involved in drugs, bikers, possibly gangs, and the related activities that go with it coming into your neighbourhood.*” (Brenda, local resident and core group member, age 47)

Future versus Past

“This is an established community that is trying to move forward. There’s a history that’s embedded in this area at play, too, and the demographics of the people... This was an area that was booming and flourishing and then terribly depressed, you know, when all the bigger companies left. And it really became a tough area. *And then all of a sudden you have this rebirth happening...and then this Mickey’s which was a flash from the past. So there was this friction caused from where we want to go to where we’ve been before.*” (Robert, long time resident, age 59)

“We always felt there was a gem here and what it needed was positive exposure. It’s had its share of negative exposure. This was another one of those negative exposures that really set that fire saying ‘*no, this isn’t where we want to go.*’ *If this if allowed when will the next one pop up? When will it be a row of them?*” (Kyle, local resident, age 42)

Harmony versus Disorder

“...A lot of us have really regretted for a number of years what’s happened to the business district. I’m old enough to remember movie theatres...I remember a Chevrolet dealer and a Pontiac dealer on the Lakeshore...and a fancy dress shop and imagine a furrier on the Lakeshore selling mink coats...This was a vibrant business district. And for a variety of reasons...[it]...really declined to the point where it was either empty stores or dollar storescash money stores...A lot of people, myself included, worked for many years to see some positive change. *And a strip club was the complete antithesis of what we were working for in our neighbourhood.*” (Robert, long time resident, age 59)

New Toronto's Local Legal Ideology Cont'

- Local legal ideology of New Toronto is entrenched in identity of neighbourhood
- Mickey's is at the crux of the construction of difference
- Result: residents engage in activities encouraging investment that can potentially protect their neighbourhood from establishments like Mickey's

Legal Consciousness Cont.

How can legal consciousness explain this case?

- Effectively accounts for interests of residents in New Toronto
- Assists in identifying both legal and non-legal strategies as part of project of neighbourhood governance and development
- Helps us see entire set of events as an effect of the collective identity of the residents

Conclusions

- Strategies for the governance and development of city spaces are:
 - Local;
 - Both legal and non-legal;
 - Affected by collective identities and emotion.
- Legal consciousness provides a broader understanding of what governance and city building mean – bottom up!
- Case adds to both governance and legal consciousness literature

Final Observations

- “Governance” is a process, both bottom up and top down, both legal and non-legal
- Discretion and power of municipal legal actors ensures that the landscape of the city isn’t predictable despite bylaws
- “The fourth wall” may result in more engagement at the local level; increased importance of studying engagement in neighbourhoods

Next Steps

- Choosing case studies –
 - Eg. Kensington Market’s “No Loblaws” campaign
 - Boston study in Fall 2013
- Searching for a diversity of neighbourhoods, resources, types or forms of associations
 - Impact local identities and thus strategies, forms of engagement

Thank you!

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