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Commensality, Sustainability, and Restaurant Clustering in a Suburban Community

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Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

People enjoy eating together, and will often share food in the company of strangers. The common meal is as old as society, and emerges again and again as a central feature of urban life despite radical changes to urban form. The ability to eat together could be framed as a form of soft infrastructure or social capital, and could act as a draw to walkable clusters within an otherwise low-density suburban landscape. Understanding the endurance of the commensal meal sheds light on certain elements of urban form, such as the restaurant cluster or hub. Exploration of such a hub suggests that such structures are not randomly located within a conurbation, but are at least partially shaped by historical patterns and forces. In addition, this commensality must be understood as a limited interaction between strangers. In a restaurant or hub of restaurants, we likely will know the people sitting at the table with us, but often not the people at other tables, or on the street. The act of going out to eat with family or friends at a common location creates an urban space in which people eat separately, together. The need to be among others is satisfied, with little needed commitment or danger of long lasting involvement. In this paper commensality will be argued to be a component of social and environmental sustainability, as it plays a role of encouraging walkable communities within the suburban conurbation, and provides a site for social capital formation. Though it is important to note, this commensal bond extends to only some members of society.

A city is ultimately a marriage of society and built form, creating an experience of dwelling within space. Soja (1980) explores this experience as the socio-spatial dialectic; the urban experience can be thought of as the outcome of a conversation between society and morphology, at the micro and regional level. Further, this conversation is often most evident in third spaces such as streetscapes or in the quasi-public spaces of restaurants. Once concentrated in the downtown core, there is some evidence that these areas are now present elsewhere as well. The development of such hubs of walkable space has implications for urban sustainability, which is often discussed only in terms of the downtown core. Cities are expanding across whole regions, joining together to form large areas with multiple hubs and complex fringe regions, with significant sustainability implications. In recent work, Soja (2013) describes current activity on the urban fringe as an evolution towards the regional city, connected by a patchwork of densities, zonings and land uses. The question of interest in this study was to examine how commensality might work within the exurban city; where, in a sprawling conurbation, would people eat? Or would restaurants simply be sprinkled randomly amid the urban fabric? If people's desire to eat together shapes suburban form, how can this contribute to sustainability in general?

The question is of importance to the study of urban sustainability as many documented sustainability advantages of city living are not found within the suburban fringe. There is a vibrant literature on the mechanics of urban sustainability; Rees noted that density reduces footprint due to smaller living spaces, shared walls, and shorter travel distances (Rees and Wackernagel 1996). With more people in a smaller area, shorter pipelines, sewers, and transmission wires are required. The population densities of a traditional downtown and

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formation of neighbourhood clusters outside of this area have been suggested as a key to sustainable development (Kenworthy and Laube 1996), and advantages have been attributed to pedestrian friendliness (Appleyard 1981; Evans and Dawson 1993; Elliott 2008), walkability in general (Burden 1995; Southworth 2005), and human scaled development (Calthorpe et al. 2001). If fostering commensality can encourage behavior within the suburban landscape that could potentially overcome the social and environmental disadvantages of low-density development, the issue is worth close examination. Furthermore, if access to commensal spaces proves a sufficient draw to encourage people inhabit higher density suburban regions, there is also an argument for planning for commensality when designing suburban communities.

Automobile dependency is a major challenge to urban sustainability, particularly in cities that where significant development and expansion occurred in the 20th century (Newman and Kenworthy 1999). In Canada, low-density housing development began to expand rapidly following the Great Depression, fuelled by government initiatives to expand mortgage financing in an effort to both promote economic growth and to safeguard the stability of the state (Harris, 2004). Moreover, the private car became the most influential mode of transportation in shaping new urban development in North America in the post-war era (Newman and Kenworthy 1999). As such, the historic morphological development of a large number of Canadian cities poses significant barriers to walkability; this is particularly true in many of the suburbs in the case study region, Vancouver, Canada. Moreover, walkability has been increasingly associated with the idea of livability (Elliott 2008), and residents of urban and suburban areas have been found to favour living in areas that include green spaces and recreational amenities, and that foster contact with each other (Matsuoka and Kaplan 2008). In an attempt to reduce automobile dependency and to foster suburban sustainability, some municipal governments have undertaken projects to retrofit existing suburbs by changing morphological features and by adding amenities that contribute to walkability, by creating accessible both public spaces, and by encouraging forms of land development and commercial uses that foster connection with other people (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011). These coincide with wider attempts to foster public health and to create livable urban spaces by establishing pedestrian zones (Newman and Waldron 2012) and by introducing food vending into public spaces (Burnett and Newman 2014). As Southworth (1997) has found that suburban dwellers are willing to get into their cars and drive to other areas in order to find walkable neighbourhoods, public space, and opportunities to participate in urban life and to encounter other people, such land use changes do not only have implications for local residents, but also for residents of surrounding suburbs and exurbs.

Eating communally in the suburbs certainly occurs in mall food fairs and along highway corridors, but such spaces serve only one group of diners, those out for a quick meal. There is a real question as to where fine dining fits into the suburban landscape. This study demonstrates that the historic town cores embedded within the regional city can serve as sites for commensality. Such behavior represents a historical break; traditionally restaurant hubs have been located in the historical downtown cores (as noted by Spang 2000); this pattern goes right back to the early history of the restaurant, aside from the exception of provisioning opportunities located on the roads between places, for example. The metropolitan region surrounding Vancouver, contains five of the six largest cities in the Province of British Columbia, Canada. Roughly 2 million people live in the region, occupying many hubs surrounded by a very complex and shifting fringe region. The city has complex suburban areas where single-family residential zones blend in with high density, spoke and podium tower development. Though Vancouver proper can still be seen as the central hub of this sprawling region, it is unlikely that even the

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most dedicated gourmand will drive over an hour through traffic to regularly have dinner at the restaurants in the core. If restaurants cluster within this suburban landscape, it suggests clustering is an intrinsic property of how our society incorporates commensality into its habitus, particularly if people who do not live in the neighboring proximity choose to travel to a restaurant cluster rather than to dine closer to home. Such a result would suggest something about the nature of the commensal experience, and would support the argument that "edge cities might look like conventional suburbs, but they most certainly are not" (Dear and Dahmann 2011, 74). If suburbs begin to exhibit functioning commensal spaces, this suggests denser, more sustainable suburban patterns can emerge.

Commensality in the conurbation

Within a suburban conurbation it is reasonable to question whether traditional restaurant districts will disappear, remain centralized in the historic core, or appear in multiple clusters throughout the conurbation. This morphological approach, however, requires a bit of exploration as to why people might want to eat at common locations in the first place. Though restaurant clusters are widely acknowledged to exist (as explored further below), very little recent academic attention is given to the act of eating together in the same location. Historically, however, much more attention was paid to the breaking of common bread.

 The act of eating together is one of life's most basic bonding activities, and sharing food is a universal of human societies. Yet commensality, or the sharing of food, is under-explored in the modern context. Commensality literally means eating at the same table, but a wider definition proposed by Sobal and Nelson (2003) is that commensality is eating with other people. Our tendency to seek out company when eating was observed and written about rather extensively in antiquity; Aristotle, for example, wrote in the *Politics* (Book 7, Part 10), "As to common meals, there is a general agreement that a well ordered city should have them". Aristotle saw these meals as important elements of what we now might call urban soft infrastructure, a term used by Len Duhl at the University of California at Berkeley, which refers to community attributes that contribute to social well-being, including human services such as social services, recreation and culture. Soft infrastructure losses lead to less resilient communities (Dale and Newman,2009). Aristotle suggested that common meals should be open to all and paid for by the city. He drew on contemporary examples of such meals from around the region. Plato, in *Laws*, (Book 1) also studied the common meal, and argued that public discipline and citizenship could be encouraged through the common meal.

Taking meals in the company of others was also of interest to major early sociologists though as Fischler explains they were mainly interested in a religious, sacrificial, or ritualistic context (2011). In recent times a few works have demonstrated that commensality is still a major part of modern life; Albala and Eden describe this "habit of eating together" as critical for the strengthening of social bonds (2001). Fischler (2011, 529) calls commensality "one of the most striking manifestations of human sociality". Fischler discusses the preference to eat in company rather than alone as (also noted by Pliner and Bell 2009). Newman (2012) additionally discussed the ways in which urban public markets are shown to be places where people gather to be in the company of others. In the Canadian context examined in that particular study, this practice was noted as a mechanism for coping with the long Montreal winters; the market functioned as a heated town square where people would linger to see and be seen, but such behavior can be observed almost everywhere one finds food and public space. Newman and Burnett (2013), for

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example, show how Portland's food cart hubs facilitate group dining; groups of diners at the food cart hubs tend to go to different carts depending on preference, and then regroup to eat together.

It is tempting to suppose that in suburban environments commensality most often occurs in the home; indeed Sobal and Nelson (2003) observed that the family unit is often the key unit of commensality, and that social boundaries are enforced through the sharing of food. However cooking at home has long been on the decline in North American cities; Morrison (1996) documented this shift, and suggested that commensal behavior would likely evolve and appear elsewhere. Eating out is a growing component of the urban lifestyle (Fields 2002) and food consumption in public is a key element of identity (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). Certainly in general restaurant spaces have been on the rise in most cities, increasing in both number and variety (documented, for example, by Nash 2009 in the Canadian context). This study confirms these observations in the suburban context.

Commensality is inherently spatial, and thus of interest to geographers. In this paper, the phenomenon of restaurant clustering is addressed in terms of a form of commensality that allows individuals and family units to eat separately, together with their broader community. It is suggested through a single case study analyzed using mixed methodology that restaurant clusters do facilitate social interaction involving a meal. This sharing, however, is encompassed with controlled boundaries. Another important element of commensality is that it is not all inclusive; there is a limit to who we will share space with while eating. If commensality has something to lend to the fabric of a city, one must remember that sustainable urban form is not always equitably shared among neighborhoods (Dale and Newman 2009); Bell and Valentine (1997) note that communities are as much about exclusion as inclusion; food is one way that boundaries get drawn and insiders and outsiders distinguished. Fischler (2011) also noted that commensality can also exclude; commensal spaces often meld the public and the private, and are another area where spatial injustice can occur. Bell and Valentine (1997), for example, discuss how the village pub can be a critical site for determining the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, but exclusion can be subtler. This exclusion can be economic, either in terms of entrance fees to an area or as price point to individual meals. As noted in Dale and Newman (2009), many revitalized urban spaces subtly exclude the disadvantaged by altering the retail landscape or it can be spatial. Within the peri-urban landscape exclusion can and is achieved with limited public transportation. The population without a car is thus effectively uninvited to the feast. As Bell (2002, 15) notes, "we are who we eat with."

If commensality proves to be a desired social good within a built environment, its presence can be framed as an element of social sustainability. However, understanding how social sustainability interfaces with economic and ecological factors within a suburban environment is not easy; as early as 1997, Throsby noted that sustainability and culture have sat awkwardly together, and Lehtonen observed in 2004 that the social was the least discussed pillar, particularly with respect to the social/environmental interface. More recently Dillard et al. (2009) noted it is difficult to incorporate social sustainability into larger narratives, and the social dimension has been noted as particularly difficult to operationalize and realize (Bostrom 2012). This is also true in the case of food production and consumption, which sits on the interface between nature and culture. The role of food production as a social and a cultural element of sustainable development remains poorly understood. Psarikido and Szerszynski (2012) claim that the social dimension of sustainability in food and agriculture is particularly neglected; Feenstra noted the need for a healthy food system as a component of community sustainability in 2002, and one can extend this argument by contending that food security can be framed as a

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requirement for sustainable development, and that cuisine and foodways play a critical role in supporting social/cultural sustainable development. If sustainable development is framed as a dynamic process (Newman 2007), the evolution from an unsustainable suburban landscape to a sustainable one will involve the development for commensality to occur.

In turn, commensal spaces might encourage behavioral sustainability by residents, though actions such as fewer and shorter journeys (Williams and Dair 2007). As an element of social sustainability, commensal spaces would both have to exist, and be available to all. As hinted above, commensality can be exclusionary as well as inclusionary. Demsey et al. (2011) stress social equity or fairness of access as an element of social sustainability, and in Murphy's 2012 review of the social imperative of sustainability, he discusses the need for equity, public awareness, participation, and social cohesion.

The ability to practice commensality within a community can be seen as a form of social capital. Adger (2000) linked social sustainability to social capital, which has been defined differently by various scholars, sometimes as a function of different scales or an emphasis on actors. For example, Coleman (1990) and Portes (1998) explicitly conceptualized social capital as an asset held by individuals, whereas Putnam has explored the ways in which it operates on the collective level. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as ''social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'', and Portes (1998) describes social capital as ''The ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other structures.'' Bourdieu (1980) defines the concept as ''the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more of less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition'', which in a soft way might best describe the value of commensality to the social sustainability of a community.

Restaurant clustering and place

The spatiality of commensal behavior requires that to understand how a community can accommodate such activity, we have to understand restaurant geography. As Bell and Valentine note, restaurants have played a key role in the renaissance of cities as key sites of cultural capital (1997), or as Pillsbury (1990, 10-11) remarks, "the restaurant...has become a mirror of ourselves, our culture, and our new geography." Certain types of restaurants are known to cluster together rather than spreading evenly throughout an urban area. Bringing commensality into the spatial understanding of restaurant spaces helps to explain the interesting findings in studies on restaurant clustering. Porter (1998, 199) defines clustering as a "geographically proximate group of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities." Restaurants in a cluster might work together through a business improvement association to manage their shared urban space, but otherwise their coexistence is quite passive; they group, as noted originally by Nelson (1958), through a "principle of cumulative attraction". But not all restaurants cluster in this manner. In Pillsbury's study of Atlanta, he documented a sharp morphological difference between types of restaurants, specifically restaurants that catered to simply satisfying hunger and those that provided more of a cultural experience. He described this distinction as between restaurants that feed the body and those that feed the soul as well (Pillsbury 1987). He noted that not all restaurants clustered; those

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that are primarily for the fulfilling of biological hunger tend to spread out along arterials, creating what he calls "hamburger alleys". Higher end "event" restaurants did cluster, and he noted that these clusters evolve, changing with their surroundings, and draw on the entire conurbation for customers. They are destinations in themselves. Smith (1983) noted the same pattern in Kitchener-Waterloo, with a clear dispersal of low-end chain restaurants along linear arterials. From this we can conclude that not all restaurants cluster, and that those that do are not just places to buy food.

As restaurants began largely as an urban phenomenon, one could imagine that clustering is simply an artifact of a previous model of urban development. However, at least one study has documented more recent clustering within the urban fringe; in 2012, Leslie et al. found that in the Washington, DC region restaurants tend to cluster right across the urban area. Using nearest-neighbour analysis, they found wealthier areas tended to have more intensive clustering. Clusters of restaurants begin to act in concert; and they are not simply places of consumption; they evolve in a social-spatial dialectic as imagined by Soja (1980). Cho (2010, 14) also notes that restaurants are meeting places, and this aspect of the restaurant is perhaps the most critical driver of the cluster; people desire to spend time in spaces that are neither sites of their work nor their home. This third space is critical to the understanding of the cluster.

To understand a cluster one must explain the existence of the cluster on the one hand and its internal organization on the other. (Malmberg and Maskell 2002). Why do we cluster? The concept of third space (imagined differently by different authors) offers a good entrance to the understanding of culinary spaces. At its simplest, Oldenburg describes third space as a neutral environment that is neither home nor work, and allows people to come together socially. He frames such places under the ideal of the "great good place" (1998), where novelty and conversation and interaction occur. This idea of place as opposed to placelessness was best formulated by Relph's 1976 treatise. Relph argued we have a deep human need for associations with significant place (147). Oldenburg agrees, suggesting that community meeting places are the very heart of third space. Restaurants cluster, then, because eating out at a nice restaurant is not just an opportunity to fuel the body, it is an event. Soja (1980) goes further, describing third space as the area in which the social-spatial dialectic is transcribed. In terms of a sustainability dialogue, third space can be seen as one of the sites where social sustainability can occur.

The morphology of the cluster

The need to eat separately, together to achieve commensality would appear to face an insurmountable barrier within the classical suburban landscape; social life occurs within individual homes, or at best within the confines of a mall or power centre. However, there is a growing understanding that the age of strong urban/suburban separation has been ruptured. Dunham-Jones and Williamson (2009) note the evolution of many suburban areas into more urbane places. In their words, "revitalized small-town main streets are joining the edge cities as increasingly significant suburban activity centres" (2009, 9).

Remnant town centres provide ideal sites for clustering. As urban regions expand, they engulf historic town centres, creating interesting morphological deviations from the broad grid and curvilinear street patterns of the suburbs. Such remnant town centres in the first place can have a remnant cultural identity; cultural identity is strongly associated with the ways in which people interact with their landscapes and places become "time thickened" in their case studies, as history enriches space to create place (Stephenson 2008).

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Two studies hint at the importance of embedded historical remnants within a conurbation. Conzen (2009) noted the embedding of former fringes and nodes within a larger conurbation. His case studies showed such regions can serve as leisure sites, and provide variation within the landscape, though he notes further study is needed. Griffiths et al. (2010) studied the persistence of suburban centres in greater London and demonstrated that socio-spatial meaning creates a persistent presence on the landscape; likely pre-urban road networks play a large role.

This makes sense in the context of existing literature on block size; for example, it has been shown in the literature on urban morphology that block size shapes usage: Siksna (1997) conducted an extensive study showing that small blocks are preferred by residents, and that the optimal size is somewhere around 5,000 to 10,000 square meters, with pedestrian paths 100 meters apart. This small size is typical of historic town centres, and is rare in new development. Short of building from scratch, remnant town centres provide a rare chance for clusters of business to form within the peri-urban region. The structure above is also, fortunately, exactly the sort of structures that allow for the construction of walkable, energy saving communities; the extension being proposed is that such development can build social sustainability as they allow interaction with other residents, participation in collaborative community activities (Bramley amd Power 2009).

Salmonopolis: The evolution of Steveston

This ongoing study is examining the role of remnant historic town centres within the larger conurbation surrounding the city of Vancouver, Canada. To initiate this particular component of the study, Google mapping was used to see if restaurants clustered in the Greater Vancouver Regional District. In this study we identified clusters in the conurbation of Vancouver, Canada by using a blank field approach; we used a Google mapping tool for the region and then removed everything except the dots for the restaurants. Major clusters were then obvious to the naked eye. The major clusters in the suburb of Richmond included Steveston, and we chose Steveston as a first case randomly. We are now doing further work in other clusters, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Leslie et al. (2012) demonstrate the usefulness of nearest-neighbour analysis for identifying clusters, but in this case the clustering was very obvious even to simple visual inspection. Several restaurant clusters were identified in suburban districts, and a subset of these clusters aligned with historic town centres. The largest of these clusters is located in the historic town centre of Steveston, and we chose to study this cluster in depth. Methodology included a literature review, analysis of historic business patterns using available criss-cross directories, site visits, and mapping. Visits were conducted over 2012 and 2013, and included photo-documentation on site. The opening dates for individual restaurants were gathered from public records or by phone. To summarize the results presented, the cluster was mapped, the restaurants were categorized, opening years were determined for all of the restaurants, the current culinary landscape was then compared to historic restaurant activity using criss-cross directories, and then the area was documented on site visits to observe behavior of visitors to the area. Walkability scores were taken, and newly developing high-density suburban neighbourhoods were noted.

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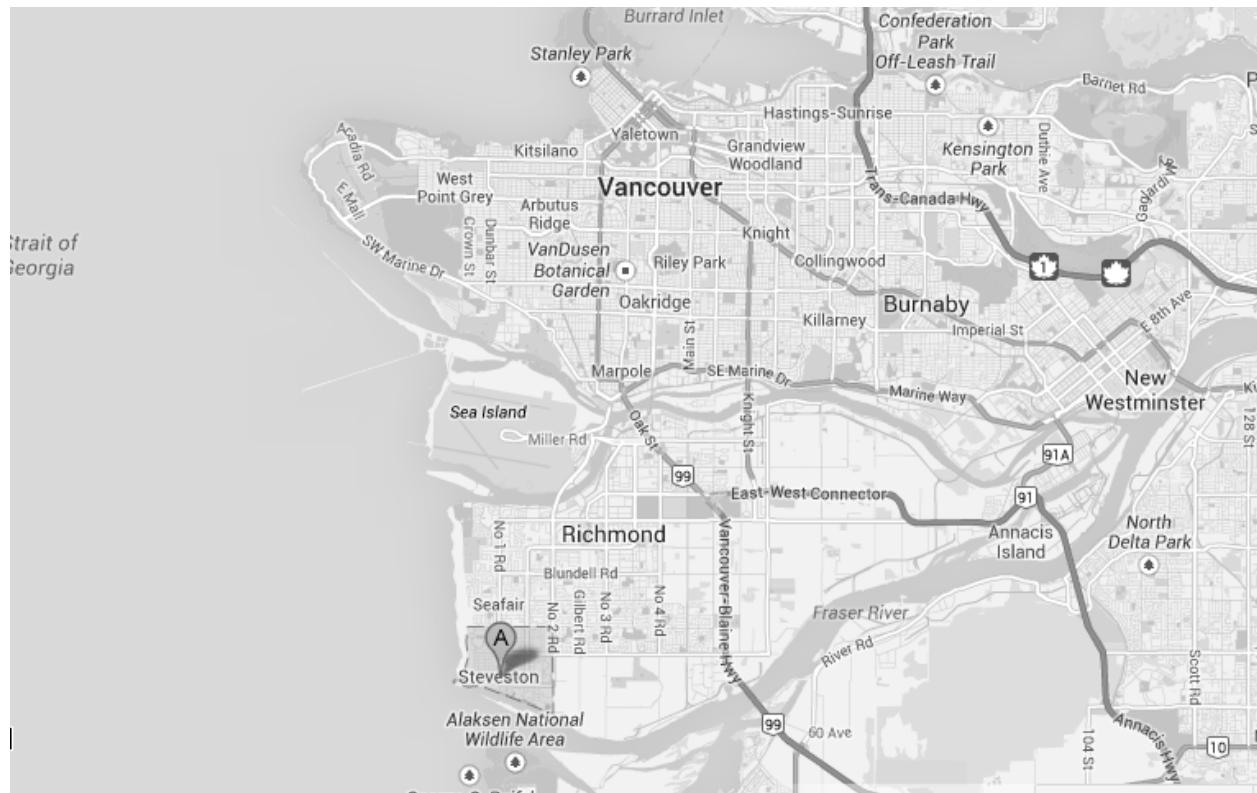
Figure 1. Steveston's location within the Greater Vancouver Area (©Google, 2013)

Steveston has a long history as a Salmon cannery town on Canada's Fraser River. The history of the community is well documented in monographs including Stacey & Stacy's work, *Salmonopolis: The Steveston Story* (1994), Yesaki's *A Historical Guide to the Steveston Waterfront* (2002) and Yesaki et al's *Steveston: Cannery Row* (2005), and the town's evolution resembles many such centres of production that underwent decline and resurgence as they were embedded in a larger suburban landscape. Located on Lulu Island in the Fraser River Delta 20 kilometers from downtown Vancouver, the Steveston townsite was occupied by an indigenous seasonal fishing camp before settler contact; the present day community sits on unceded Coast Salish territory. In 1880 William Steves platted the townsite in the hopes of creating a major port; he laid the town out in narrow blocks to maximize use of the waterfront, a feature that remains today.

After a boom period during which fifteen salmon canneries operated in the town and an interurban network linked Steveston to surrounding centres, the area fell into a long decline as fish stocks were depleted. After World War II, a highway bridge to Vancouver allowed the community of Richmond to begin to suburbanize Lulu Island (A process described by North and Hardwick 1992; Wynn 1992). Soon traditional residential suburbs built with curvilinear streets on super-blocks surrounded Steveston, which was formally absorbed by the suburb of Richmond, which occupies all of Lulu Island and nearby Sea Island.

After decades of general decline tourism began in the 1980's with fish sales to the public. The 1990's saw a huge increase in housing in the area; Richmond's population is currently more than 200,000 people (see Table 1). Though public transit to the area is impractical, there are several municipal parking lots and Steveston is easily reached from the major North/South

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freeway crossing Richmond. There is a floating fish market open year round, a seasonal farmer's market, and a National Historic Site at a restored cannery. However, the primary retail use in the village is restaurant-based.

Year	Population of Richmond	Population of Steveston
1956	25,978	
1966	50,460	
1971	62,120	
1976	80,034	
1981	96,154	
1986	108,490	
1991	126,624	
1996	148,867	
2001	175,537	
2006	182,652	24,105
2011	197,769	25,345
2013	**201,864**	

Table 1. Population growth in Richmond, BC (based on data from Statistics Canada)

Unfortunately data for Steveston itself is available for only two years, but the steep increase in Richmond's overall population is captured by the census. However this increase does not correlate with the increase in Steveston restaurants, which rises much more suddenly and steeply.

Results

The first result is that in this case Steveston is most certainly a restaurant hub within the larger area of Richmond, BC. There are currently sixty restaurants in Steveston, and as shown in the map below, they cluster tightly in the historic downtown core. These restaurants are all very near to one another, and very few are located outside of the historic core. Some dots represent multiple restaurants in the same building. Note that two of the restaurants, Pajos and the Crab King, are located on a floating wharf, leaving their dot out in the river. This concentration of restaurants is walkable from surrounding new urbanist suburbs, and is a short drive from other areas in Richmond.

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Figure 2. The Steveston restaurant cluster (©Google, 2013)

When Steveston first began developing a restaurant culture in the 1980's, it was seen as a place to go for fish and seafood. Restaurant diversity in Steveston is now high, as shown below. Restaurants from each category are spread randomly across the town core; there are no strong sub-clusters within the cluster. The one exception to this is a concentration of seafood restaurants along the water's edge, though it isn't absolute; there is variation even along that edge.

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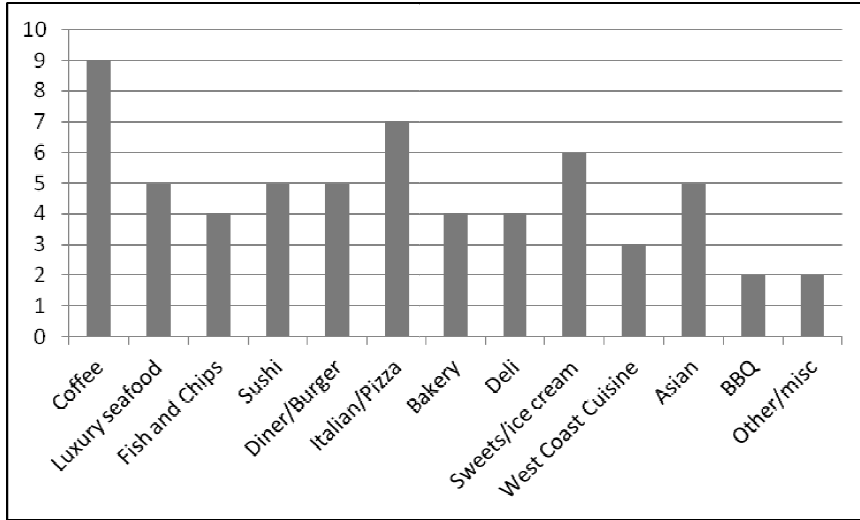
Figure 3. Restaurant diversity in Steveston as of 2013

The restaurant hub in Steveston has developed very quickly. A study of opening dates showed that of the current 60 restaurants operating a third have opened in the last three years and two thirds have opened in the last ten years. The total number of restaurants has changed very quickly, as shown below. This data was created by analyzing the businesses operating at each street address at different intervals in time, based on information available in the criss-cross directory. This rise mirrors a growing interest in eating out, and a large increase in the local population. Other factors include a concentrated revitalization effort during and following the World's Fair in Vancouver in 1986; since that time the Steveston Merchant's Association has actively promoted area revitalization. The rise in restaurants begins roughly in this period.
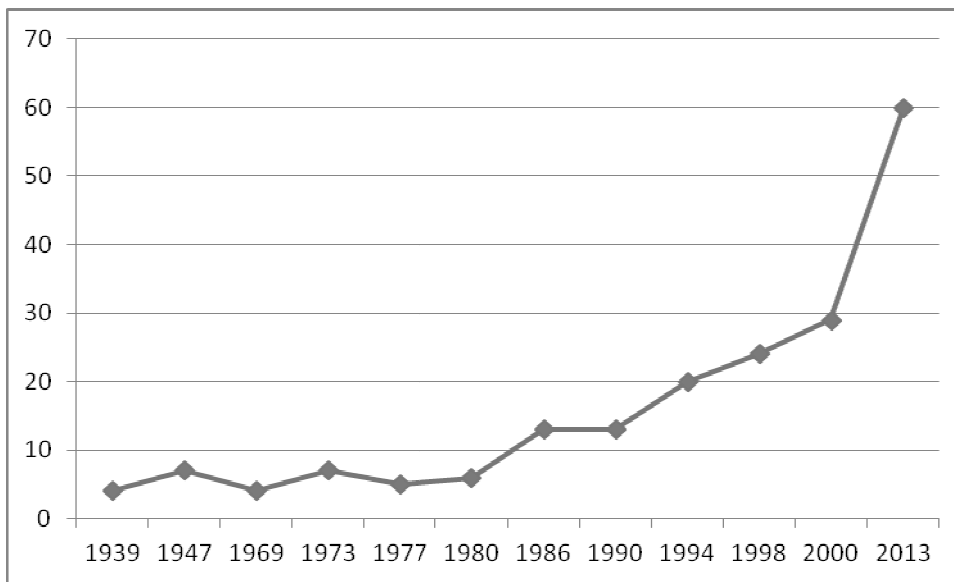
Figure 4. The number of restaurants in Steveston over time

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Finally, observation of Steveston suggests why people enjoy visiting a restaurant hub; a restaurant meal is often combined with a bit of window-shopping and a stroll. Steveston is quite scenic with a very interesting waterfront boardwalk, and the entire town is a pleasant place to stroll. The in town Walk Score™ is 100 at almost every point, but is a Walk Score™ utilitarian tool that doesn't include the pleasant nature of the urban space. Photos show people enjoying this thirdspace much in the way described by Oldenburg. Further research, including survey methodology, could give a more concrete understanding of why people enjoy the strollability of Steveston.

Figure 5. Lunchtime strollers on the Steveston boardwalk

Figure 6. The floating fish market

Discussion

The study of Steveston's historical usage shows a site of production, in this case canned seafood, that has shifted to what is a largely a site of consumption, a hub within the suburban landscape possessing a very high Walk Score™ and thus potentially a site of lower transportation footprints. The number of restaurants in Steveston has risen rapidly to sixty, representing a great variety of food. Notable is an almost complete absence of chain fast food; there is a Subway restaurant and a McDonalds slightly outside of the study area, but overwhelmingly the observations support the thesis that it is higher end dining restaurants that cluster. The idea that a historical town centre can act as a nucleus for restaurant clustering is also supported, though it is interesting to note that the development of the restaurant hub didn't begin until the cannery industry closed, perhaps as the noise and smell of canning isn't compatible with tourism. The public fish docks are very clean, and leave little odour in the area. In addition, the noted rise in eating out and the general interest in cuisine as a source of entertainment could also be a driver of the food hub. An emergence of a food elite was clear in western societies by the turn of the century (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000 for example); food has, as Zukin (1982) suggests, supplanted art as a sign of culture and sophistication. The diversity is representative of the larger cuisine in the area; Vancouver proper has a very diverse variety of restaurants.

The observation that many visitors take the time to stroll through the village was unanticipated, and deserves closer attention. Certainly walkability has been used previously as a measure of livability; for example, Elliott (2008) discusses the link between walkability and livability at length. Other authors also use walkability as a sub-component of livability

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(Southworth 2005; Newman et al. 2011). Other researchers (Carr et al. 2010; Vargo et al. 2012 for example) have shown that walkability correlates with objective measures of neighbourhood desirability such as density of services. Carr et al also noted that a higher Walk Score™ doesn't reflect the aesthetics of an area, and can be associated with higher crime. In the case of the first of these, we can observed that Steveston is also "strollable"; that is it has a very attractive, human scaled environment created both by the surrounding ocean and river and the tight street grid and historic building stock, "a walk can be understood as a cultural activity that is made distinctive and meaningful by the physical features and material textures of place" (Lorimer 2011, 20); Dear notes that historic sites can have what he calls "quaintspace" (Dear 2000, 142) a very clean and tidy version of a historical reality. As for crime, present day Steveston is known as a very safe neighbourhood, in part as property values are high, the community is quite isolated from the urban core, or even Richmond's core. Ironically present day Steveston is a much safer and cleaner community than it was in the historic periods that the current town tries to evoke. The cannery town was noisy, stinky, and known to be a rather dangerous (if interesting) place where young men from several nationalities coexisted uneasily. Steveston today inspires what was described by Tuan (1974) as topophilia; the love of place. He noted that people are drawn to the seashore, and love intimate, human-scale places. He also noted people love the myth of a simpler time when life was slower and when people interacted with the physical world. Thus the fishing docks support the myth of Steveston, where the canneries would not, except in the form of a museum. As Zukin (1998, 825) notes, "Attention to lifestyles has given rise to new, highly visible consumption spaces, such as *nouvelle cuisine* restaurants, boutiques, art galleries, and coffee bars." At the same time, authenticity is also commodified; new spaces of consumption move into historic working class or ethnic neighborhoods in a manner of what Zukin (2010, 4) calls "domestication by cappuccino, with wilder places getting an aesthetic upgrading by the opening of a Starbucks or another new coffee bar." However it is important to note the natural evolution at work; the cannery business wasn't forced from the area, it was closed as global forces shifted the site of production to other location. As Boyer (1994, 31) notes, a city's structure "constantly evolves, being deformed or forgotten, adopted to other purposes, or eradicated by different needs". Steveston serves as a consumption hub currently rather than a site of production.

The existence of the Steveston restaurant hub increases sustainability within the entire surrounding suburban area by providing a walkable environment nearby. In addition, the presence of a place where people can comfortably mingle encourages at least a soft social capital and sense of community. Further research is needed to determine whether the commensality present in Richmond could translate into deeper interaction and the creation of more substantial social capital, but this initial case demonstrates that a commensal hub can be a desirable trait of a suburban region, and such a hub can lead to recreation though walking or shorter car trips than might otherwise be used to reach a downtown core. The recent construction of significant dense housing stock in the area suggests that the draw of such an area might help encourage acceptance of higher density, this is another interesting possibility for future research. The research team is now conducting similar study in other remnant towns within the area, and in other cities, as this one case study suggests a correlation between social sustainability and the social capital that emerges from commensality, but cannot confirm it.

The question of access is also troubling; as socially similar people spend time the same places (Burt 1992), it is possible that such towns can become sustainable enclaves with a high price of entry. Steveston operates as a site of commensality where people can gather to eat a

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meal and then enjoy strolling an idealized village in the company of their peers, but as suggested above not everyone has equal access to this space. Steveston's restaurants are, on the whole, quite expensive, even the take-out stands. The town itself is difficult to access without a car, ensuring that this restaurant hub is very different than the restaurant hubs found in downtown Vancouver. As studied by Burnett (2014), some diners visiting Vancouver's Downtown Eastside engage in a sort of 'adventure dining' in which they travel to cutting edge restaurants located on some of the poorest areas in the country. Steveston is the polar opposite of such spaces; in our observations there were no signs of vandalism, graffiti, untended properties, or homelessness.

Conclusions

As at least some cities expand regionally to create conurbations with multiple hubs and very large areas of mixed suburban fringe, restaurant hubs forming in atypical locations can act as commensal hubs where social sustainability can be fostered in the form of soft social capital created when citizens have access to each other's company. These sites are dense, walkable, and thus promote lower energy and transport footprints, but also have the potential to allow for a community life that could encourage social capital formation. This study demonstrated that in the case of Steveston, British Columbia, a restaurant hub of sixty places to eat has developed over the last few decades, taking advantage of the historic building stock and tight street grid provided by the original town. Observation showed that people from the surrounding suburbs come to Steveston to eat, and also to stroll among others. Steveston's isolation from the historic downtown of Vancouver, however, limits the audience largely to those with cars, creating at least a partial space of exclusion. Steveston is an interstitial space; it is what the suburbanite might wish for in a downtown, and what a downtown dweller might wish for in a suburban landscape. It reflects a very tidy historic perspective that includes elements such as the fishing fleet and excludes the dirt, noise, conflict and smell that likely was the habitus of ten thousand cannery workers crushed into a dozen square blocks. It is not a typical example of the region's development; Steveston holds a mirror to the surrounding metropolis and suburbs, and demonstrates one version of what a regional city of the 21st century imagines commensality to be. As a third space along the lines of those imagined by Soja, Steveston is a site for the creation of a very certain social-spatial dielectic, and not all citizens are invited to take part. Looking forward, other potential suburban restaurant hubs are being studied, and in addition Steveston itself is worthy of further study, as it continues to change. Significant new housing stock, primarily condominium and loft development, is being added to the village. Salmonopolis turned culinary spectacle, in Steveston the social-spatial dielectic continues.

Social infrastructure both encourages sustainable development but can also be an end in itself. Spaces such as Steveston evolve to utilize embedded remnant town infrastructure, but there is no reason such spaces couldn't be replicated through retrofitting of suburban neighbourhoods to provide at least some elements of commensal space. This is an initial study, and further work is needed to examine the extent of the link between urban form, commensality, and social sustainability.

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