

In/formal Interface: An Exploration of Indigenous Planning and Informality

by

Kyle McStravick

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING

Faculty of Architecture, Department of City Planning

Winnipeg, MB

Copyright © 2014 by Kyle McStravick

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. Background.....	1
II. Bias and Limitations.....	4
III. Research Problem.....	6
IV. Statement of Purpose.....	6
V. Research Intention.....	9
VI. Significance of the Project.....	11
VII. Scope of Project.....	12
VIII. FRCN Project Introduction.....	12
IX. Organization of Thesis.....	14
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
I. Introduction.....	16
II. Indigenous Planning.....	17
III. Informality.....	36
IV. Further Intersections.....	48
3. FRCN STREET NAMING PROJECT.....	52
I. Background.....	52
II. Project Overview.....	54
III. Process.....	57
IV. Reporting.....	64
V. Learnings.....	66

4. METHODS AND ANALYSIS.....	69
I. Methods.....	69
II. Analysis.....	74
i. First Nations Interfaces.....	77
ii. Federal Influence.....	83
iii. Planning Relationships.....	87
iv. Formality and Informality.....	94
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	104
I. Discussion.....	104
II. Future Research Directions.....	112
III. Conclusions.....	113
REFERENCES.....	115
APPENDIX “A” – FOCUS GROUP PRIMER.....	122

Abstract

This thesis sets out to identify a possible linkage between the concept of informality and Indigenous planning¹, and explore a role for planners in that linkage. It takes as a jumping-off point a 2010 University of Manitoba Indigenous Planning Studio project in which two Master of City Planning (MCP) students assisted the Fisher River Cree Nation (FRCN) in developing street names and addresses for their reserve community, an exercise later determined to be an example of planners working with informality. The thesis goes on to examine ways in which planners may contribute to the fostering of more useful relationships between those entities most often characterized by their formality (Federal/Provincial governments in this case) and those on the other hand that are characterized more often by their relatively informal approaches (First Nations communities and governments).

Noting that First Nations are among the fastest-growing demographic groups in Canada, and that the literature on ‘informality’ identifies the global south (areas associated with urban informality) as the global areas which are also expected to see the largest amount of population growth in the foreseeable future, the thesis looks at the extent to which embracing urban informality and making it part of the standard discourse on planning could help make the planning more relevant and improve its usefulness at the intersection between formality and informality.

¹ This term will be explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review

By employing qualitative research through focus groups with people involved with Indigenous planning, the thesis assesses the role of informality in the work of planners engaging with Indigenous communities, and the applicability of that particular lens to professional planning practices. The evaluation and lessons drawn from this experience hold relevance for planners and others involved in the planning process in Canada, both with First Nations and other groups that may tend to operate outside of or be excluded from the traditionally formal and rigid planning processes.

Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis, it was my privilege to be supported by the sensitive and insightful mind of my supervisor, Professor Ian Skelton. Thank you, Ian, for your academic support, your encouragement and your patient oversight. Thank you also, Professors Janice Barry and Iain Davidson-Hunt, for your critiques and guidance – without which this thesis would assuredly be a lesser document.

The people of the Fisher River Cree Nation and my project partner Thania Moreno Palacios I thank for giving me the opportunity to work with them on the street naming and addressing project, which taught me so much and provided me with a way forward.

To my friends and my classmates at the University of Manitoba, I say thank you for teaching me so much. In particular, I thank my classmate and thesis buddy Mike Friesen. With apologies to the Bard: *when in disgrace with grad studies and supervisors' eyes/ we together bewept our outcast state/ and troubled deaf heaven with our bootless cries* – and then we got through it! Thanks Mike.

Finally, and with deepest gratitude. I thank my Mom and Dad, my brother Blake, and my partner Amanda. All of you have been so patient with me through this project, and it was your unwavering love and support that allowed me to complete it. I was grumpy and boring, while you were gracious and encouraging – thank you so much.

1. Introduction

I. BACKGROUND

One way to view the history of mainstream western planning is as a drive towards formalizing what was traditionally an organic and informal process – the development of human communities and settlements. This view is evident in some basic planning texts such as Hodge’s *Planning Canadian Communities*, which states, for example, that “[t]he need for community planning does not arise because of the formal structures we erect. It arises because people wish to improve their environment” (1991, p. 2) In contemporary more developed countries, there exist formalized systems of planning which preoccupy themselves with interacting with other formal systems (economic, political, and social systems, for example). However, in much of the majority world, and to a lesser extent within the developed world as well, what we think of as planning takes place in and through informal systems.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, various academics who have written on informality have arrived at different ideas of what is meant by the concept. This will be explored in greater depth in the Literature Review chapter, but in a planning context informality may be broadly defined as “spatial dynamics that are not shaped, controlled, or sanctioned by the state” (Yiftachel and Yakobi in Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010, p.122). Drilling down more specifically to informality in housing, Roy and AlSayyad (2004, p.1) offer as a description “the

manifestation of informal processes in the urban environment”. It is worth noting that Roy and AlSayyad’s use of the term *urban* in conjunction with informality is not unique. In fact, literature on informality frequently refers to *urban informality*, which speaks to the emphasis much of the literature places on urban contexts in the global south. Considerations of informality do extend beyond the *urban*, though, and the academic discourse on informality is certainly not limited to the global south (for example, Roy, 2005, p. 155). As this thesis will show, informality plays an important role in the global north as well.

For some, informality can be an inescapably politicized concept that does not only concern those living in explicitly informal settlements, but as “an organizing logic which emerges under a paradigm of liberalization” (AlSayyad, 2004, p. 26). This thesis will argue that informality as it exists in First Nations in Canada does not exist only within contexts of liberalization, but it is an “organizing logic” tied to colonialism, with implications for broader Canadian society and planning outside of Indigenous contexts. It will further argue that there is an important role for planners to play in negotiating the nexus between formality and informality.

First Nations in Canada exist within a majority settler culture that in many ways is very different from their own communities. One of the principle differences is that in mainstream Canadian contexts society tends to exhibit much more formality than many First Nations communities, in a variety of ways – from timelines and scheduling approaches to interpersonal relationships,

governance, and land tenure. Ted Jojola writes that “[t]oday Indigenous governments not only have to cope with the legacy of paternalism and outside imposition, but to meet the needs of their communities in a manner that is informed by and drives cultural identity,” (2013, p. xiv). This points to the outside-imposition of state-led processes that, in agreement with Yiftachel and Yakobi above, can be seen as an example of formality. This is unquestionably the case in Canada, where legislation such as the *Indian Act*, the *First Nations Land Management Act*, and so forth, provide a very proscriptive formal framework for operations in First Nations. The working with cultural identity though, which Jojola observes, can be thought of as informality – because it is non-state sanctioned or shaped. For some orally-focused First Nations, long form written planning documents such as Official Community Plans or zoning regulations can appear starkly out of step with traditional First Nations approaches to land use. Moreover, many First Nations are more focused on consensus, continuing evolution and negotiation than what is considered normal in a mainstream Canadian context.

The imbalance of power that currently exists between First Nations and other levels of government in Canada is a symptom of the ongoing history of colonialism and systemic suppression of Indigenous cultures in this country (Peters, 2002). One manifestation of this imbalance is that the provision of services and funding from the federal government to First Nations is often contingent (formally at least, if not always fulfilled) upon First Nations

conforming to western mainstream values and processes – such as the aforementioned long form planning documents (Christie and Rasmussen, 2010). In any context characterized by informal systems of land tenure and economics, etc., attempts at applying a mainstream western planning model will often lead to little more than frustration. While informal processes are not inherently more accessible or more inaccessible than formal ones, to people who happen to exist within communities involved principally in systems of informality, access to formal systems can be difficult and the potential benefits of more formalized structures unclear.

II. BIAS AND LIMITATIONS

This thesis is necessarily a product of, and imbued with, my worldview and life experience as a non-Indigenous Canadian who identifies as an ally of First Nations and a member of the majority settler culture.

Among other things, the shortcomings of ‘advocacy planning’ serve to remind us that it is ultimately not helpful for someone to use their privilege to simply attempt to speak for others who are perceived to be unable to do so for themselves (for example, Peattie (1968)). In writing this document, care has been taken to ensure that the ongoing reality of colonialism in Canada does not lead me to suppose that I am able to fully understand and/or represent the culture of even a single First Nation based on my limited work with the FRCN and any

other reading or research I did in the course of preparing this thesis. The work will take as its main point of inquiry the research question *How can I be sure I'm not passing-on colonialist relations in this work?* and goes from there in the hope that others will benefit from this work as much as I have in writing it.

While the thesis is unavoidably subjected to my personal biases and cultural leanings, I do not look at my status as a euro-Canadian as a limitation to the present work. Rather, as it is (for better or worse) mostly euro-Canadians that are engaged in the type of work described in this thesis, I would suggest that as a member of that group I am well equipped to understand the issues facing many planners in Canada trying to grapple with the difficult and fraught subjects of informality and Indigenous planning.

As explained in Chapter 4: Methods and Analysis, the empirical component of this study consists of a single focus group event held with two participants. This relatively small sample size should be borne in mind when considering the generalizability of the findings presented herein. Furthermore, readers should bear in mind that, although the author's primary experience with planning in a First Nations context is in Manitoba with a Cree Nation, focus group participants dealt primarily with First Nations from the West Coast of British Columbia.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The imposition of traditional western planning practices on First Nations cultures perpetuated a colonial relationship which is itself largely responsible for many of the dire problems and concerning conditions which exist in First Nations communities. Improving the capability of planners to be useful contributors to community building in First Nations is imperative, and is a challenge that hinges on the ability of the profession to adapt itself to aboriginal cultures and leave behind many of its colonial impulses. How planners can engage effectively with First Nations is a troubling question, and helping planners understand informality as an aspect of planning practice has the potential to be helpful in this regard.

IV. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The overall purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of how planners can engage with informality for better outcomes when working with communities and entities which do not identify with the formal processes and outcomes typically associated with traditional western urban planning, particularly First Nations, and to communicate this in an academic fashion so that the findings may be of use to the planning academy and profession in partial fulfilment of the graduation requirements for the Master of City Planning

Degree at the University of Manitoba. The following section outlines the various goals and objectives of this thesis.

GOALS

- 1. To work with planners and academics to create knowledge about informality in a planning context*

Engaging with, and embracing, informality is in some ways anathema to the history of professional planning in a western context. Urban informality is an area of planning expertise (and practice) that, in my experience, few planners are conversant in and which could potentially be of increasing importance in the future.

While we in mainstream planning and academic contexts often default to thinking of planning as a formal process by its very definition, the fact is that many of the goals of planning are achieved all the time through informal, organic means, and by being unaware of that we as planners are simply excluding ourselves. Therefore one goal of this thesis is to spread knowledge among planners and academics regarding informality, the ways it informs urbanism, and how we can engage with it.

2. To further the practice of Indigenous planning

Conditions for First Nations people in this country and the way they are treated by government have been referred to as “Canada’s national shame” (Sandercock and Attili, 2011). How to improve this grave situation continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing Canada today. The growing field of Indigenous planning aims to draw from Indigenous practices and cultures to reimagine and re-tool planning processes and make them stronger and more relevant for Indigenous people (Nilsen, 2005, p. 23). For planners in Canada, the field of Indigenous planning is something that we can look to in order to help us decolonize the profession and to improve the work we do with First Nations and other Canadians.

I regard at this as one of the most important areas of planning practice and philosophy, and it is a goal for this thesis to move forward, in some small way, the practice of Indigenous planning and the body of knowledge surrounding it.

3. To empower planners to engage with informality in a variety of contexts beyond the traditional land use planning many people associate them with, so that their skills and expertise may be brought to bear for the benefit of a greater number of people

Although this thesis is mostly concerned with applying an Indigenous planning lens, another objective of the work is to contribute to the idea that planners can work with informality in a variety of contexts, Indigenous or otherwise. It is hoped that by showing the applicability and the relevance of informality to planners, new avenues for practice might be made possible for planners who are exposed to the work.

V. RESEARCH INTENTION

This thesis sets out to explore ways that planners can help bridge the gap between what is being broadly termed ‘formality’ and ‘informality’, particularly where that gap occurs between First Nations and other governments, and make that relationship more useful for all parties. Three central research questions guide the thesis research:

1. How do planners with experience in Indigenous planning relate to informality?
2. To what extent are cultural gaps between planning and Indigenous communities impeding the relevancy of planning for such communities?
3. How are planners endeavouring to avoid the perpetuation of colonialist relations in their work with Indigenous communities?

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide a report on the FRCN studio project

A report on the Fisher River Cree Nation wayfinding project will be included in this thesis, as it provides the initial point of inquiry for the author's exploration of working in the informal/formal nexus between First Nations and other governments. The report will include a summary of the work, its aims, processes, and outcomes.

2. Draw lessons for general planning practice from the areas of Indigenous planning and urban informality

As a continually evolving profession with only a relatively short history, complicit in racist and colonialist practices in the past and present, "planning" has many lessons to draw from interaction with First Nations societies, and from contexts of informality in general. Applying this lens to the literature and the studio project being examined will be a chance to add to our knowledge of planning and possibilities for practice.

3. Explore the potential of a role for planners as negotiators between worlds of informality and formality, both in and outside of a FN context

This objective asks whether, how, and to what extent there is a role for planners to act as a bridge between First Nations and other levels of government in Canada. This discussion will be informed by the primary

research focus groups organised for this project, gathering thoughts on this from planners engaged in similar work with First Nations.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

The status quo of relations between First Nations and broader Canadian society is, generally speaking, not in a good place. Planners absolutely have a part to play in improving these relationships, but what exactly that role might be is not exactly clear, and is a matter of some debate. Nevertheless, people involved in the planning profession must believe in the relevance of their work and the privilege they possess in having received their training and educations, as well as the access to power and legitimacy they are granted as a result.

While the study of informality has tended to focus on the developing world, transnational interrogation (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004) suggests that we can use experience and knowledge gained in one place to ask questions about another place. In my reading and work with First Nations people in Canada I have come to believe that certain aspects of Indigenous planning align well with informality, and through exploring that intersection (by conducting focus groups with people involved in planning with Indigenous people in Canada) I intend to see if there is room for planners to work in this liminal space between the worlds of formality and informality, between the colonial state and the First Nations interfacing with it on terms not of their choosing.

The significance of this project, then, is in helping to identify a ‘way forward’ for planners who are interested in seeing that their profession continues to transition into a force for helping, rather than hindering, the progress and happiness of First Nations and other Indigenous groups in Canada.

VII. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

This thesis will make a small but important contribution to the literature on Indigenous planning and informality. It is important to acknowledge that the scope of this thesis does not extend to solving all (or even most) of the problems currently facing planners working with informality and in Indigenous contexts. But by building on the existing literature on Indigenous planning and urban informality, the thesis aims to help answer a troubling challenge in planning theory and practice, to add a few more questions to the ongoing discourse in the planning field, and to achieve this to a degree commensurate with the projects status as a Master’s-level investigation.

VIII. FISHER RIVER CREE NATION WAYFINDING PROJECT

Although this thesis is not *about* the FRCN project *per se*, the work my partner Thania Moreno Palacios and I completed with that community provided the inspiration, experiential underpinning, and initial point of inquiry for the ideas

explored in this thesis. A complete report on this studio project is provided in Chapter 3 of this thesis, but a brief outline of the work is provided here by way of introduction.

In the fall of 2010 the second year University of Manitoba City Planning studio project was centred on working with the Fisher River Cree Nation to explore possible implementation of certain aspects of their recently completed Community Plan. The band leadership had identified several pieces from the Community Plan which they were particularly interested in exploring further, and in groups the students selected from this list several project topics to work on with their classmates. Myself and my partner Thania were drawn to one of these project topics: coming up with a street naming and addressing system for the town on the Fisher River reserve.

This work was important to the community for a few reasons. Primarily, they were interested in signing up with the provincial 911 emergency system. Secondary reasons included convenience for members and off-reserve visitors, as well as the ability to obtain services from companies that require a formal street address (such as for cable or internet access). Up to this point, FRCN had depended on an informal “familiarity of area” wayfinding system, which was not compatible with those goals. The challenge for us was to find a way to achieve a street naming and addressing system that somehow reflected FRCN’s culture and the unique built-form and lot layouts in the community. Our objective was to attempt a harmonious connection between the informality of wayfinding in

FRCN with the demands of formalized wayfinding represented by the provincial government's 911 system.

IX. ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

1. Introduction

The present chapter has provided an overview of the project topic, its goals and objectives, the limitations and bias of the thesis, as well as the scope of the project.

2. Literature Review

The Literature Review chapter is designed to give the reader an overview of the two distinct bodies of literature which are being drawn on for this thesis: Indigenous planning and urban informality. It establishes the author's theoretical orientation in advance of the primary research in chapter four.

3. Fisher River Cree Nation Wayfinding Project

This chapter provides a detailed report of the University of Manitoba City Planning studio project that provided the genesis for the present work. By providing an account of that project, chapter three illustrates for the

reader the connections between the ideas of Indigenous planning and informality, and further sets the stage for investigation in chapter four.

4. Methods and Analysis

A focus group study has been conducted for this thesis to gauge planners' attitudes, comfort, and experience with informality in the context of planning with First Nations communities. This chapter provides an explanation of the research methods, the proceedings of the focus group, and a discussion of the results.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The concluding chapter of this thesis provides a final summation of the results of the study, indicates avenues for future research, and gives space for further reflections by the author.

2. Literature Review:

Indigenous Planning, Informality, and Starting Points for Understanding Difference

If formality operates through the fixing of value, including the mapping of spatial value, then informality operates through the constant negotiability of value and the unmapping of space. (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004, p. 5)

I. Introduction

This thesis is a contribution to the field of planning practice and theory known as Indigenous planning. The field has become broad in its concerns, ranging from theorization of Indigenous-western relations (for example, Porter and Barry (2013), Porter (2010), Sandercock (2004)) to accounts of planning experiences (for example, Hibbard (2006), Lane (2006)). The purpose of this review is to show that some strands of Indigenous planning can entwine in meaningful ways with contemporary work on informality (for example, Roy and AlSayyad, (2004)). The Indigenous planning literature and analyses of informality have shown how planning as a European artifact can relate to non-Western traditions. The review first covers concerns in Indigenous planning, then outlines

contributions to informality and finally draws the two together. It is worth mentioning that it is the author's decision to use the term Indigenous planning, as many others writing about planning in Indigenous contexts do not use this term.

II. Indigenous Planning

While it has been gaining currency in mainstream planning circles only in recent decades, parts of what is now called Indigenous planning had been happening for a very long time before people involved with the Western planning tradition took notice. Through colonization, deliberate efforts have been made in Canada and elsewhere to erase the traditions and knowledge of Indigenous people, including that knowledge which was used by pre-contact First Nations for planning their communities and other aspects of their societies.

Jojola notes this process ensured that, until relatively recently, what little recognition was granted to Indigenous planning was “relegated to the petty study of quaint traditions, [such that] Indigenous planning has been consigned to anonymity and obscurity” (2013, p. x), and what attention was turned to Indigenous populations by Western planners was, to state the case mildly, not helpful. As Skelton writes, “planning theory and practice have served Indigenous communities poorly” (2013, p. 7). More directly, planning has been a tool

created out of and used by the forces and relationships of colonialism to subjugate and dismantle Indigenous cultural practice and memory in the project of cultural genocide (Porter, 2010; Skelton, 2013). In discussing this, it is important to acknowledge the destructive impact that colonialism continues to have on all colonized peoples – settler or Indigenous – and specifically the role it plays in simultaneously stamping the memory of Indigenous people’s pre-contact societies as well as current efforts to continue traditions and practices remaining from that time:

The Indigenous planning paradigm is a not a new concept. Its principles are found in planning practices that have been used by ‘traditional’ communities for millennia. Before traditional authority had been suppressed or usurped by Euro-Western practices, tribal societies planned and managed their communities. And unlike Euro-western approaches they based their community development framework on sustainable practices. Key to this practice were their balanced relationships between people and the land. (Jojola, 2013, p. xi)

While many of the benefits of the development framework Jojola describes have been long overlooked by Western planners, elements of western society have come around to acknowledging the past achievements of Indigenous peoples in planning their communities, and the strengths of their varied approaches in a contemporary planning context.

The term *Indigenous planning* is itself somewhat problematic, and it may be used by different groups to express several distinct concepts. These different

usages of the term are not of equal relevance to the present discussion, nevertheless, for clarity, a brief exploration of terms is worthwhile. I would like to suggest three broad possibilities for interpreting the term Indigenous planning, and after listing them I will discuss each in turn in greater detail. So, variously, and among other things, Indigenous planning can mean:

1. *Planning conducted by Indigenous people*
2. *Planning conducted for Indigenous people by members of a dominant settler culture, and*
3. *Planning conducted by either Indigenous or non-Indigenous people (or both) which attempts to realign the values endemic/embedded in “Planning” to better reflect values of Indigenous culture, to be applied to planning Indigenous Communities or others.*

In offering these possibilities for discussion, it is not my intention to provide an exhaustive explanation of all of the different ways of approaching or conceptualizing Indigenous planning, but simply to provide groundwork for discussion in this thesis by highlighting some of the challenges involved in the terminology. Furthermore, rather than attempting to show a realignment, or a way for First Nations to be more in line with the dominant methodologies of western planning, this thesis is aimed at affecting the “planning” side of that particular set of relationships. Rather than prescribing a different way forward for Indigenous people – as a non-Indigenous person I am not equipped to do that – I am more interested in exploring how planning can grow into a more useful and

perhaps mature role in this context so that both “sides” can be mutually recognized in their points of contact.

1. Planning Conducted by Indigenous People

As mentioned above, Indigenous peoples have long engaged in practices to which we may now be tempted to apply a post hoc “planning” label. While the methods, goals and ethos may be unfamiliar to contemporary mainstream Western planners, the scope and effectiveness of planning undertaken by pre- and post-contact Indigenous peoples is evidenced by the richness and variety of Indigenous societies that sustained themselves for millennia before the arrival of European colonial powers. With respect to planning in the “vibrant Indigenous societies that sustained complex and transformative civilizations,” prior to European contact, Ted Jojola notes “[t]he body of work and accomplishments of Indigenous practitioners is enormous” and “[e]xamples can be found throughout the Americas – South, Meso and North. Throughout the generations, every part of these areas has been settled” (2013, x). Even after European contact and the beginning of colonialism there is ample evidence of Indigenous people engaging in planning activities. Porter and Barry (2013) write:

[t]he Gitanyow Huwilp [First Nation in northern British Columbia] have been laying the foundation for their own system of land use planning for some time, from the hand-drawn maps and ownership statements presented to Indian

Agents as early as 1910 to the detailed fieldwork, inventorying and mapping that began in the late 1970s. (p. 19)

From a certain point of view, any behavior or activity undertaken by Indigenous people (pre- or post-contact) which would roughly fit within the modern rubric of planning could be considered “Indigenous planning”, although it might be clearer to simply refer to “planning undertaken by Indigenous people”. Indeed, if Indigenous planning is simply defined by who practices it, rather than what or how it is they practice, there is a danger of essentializing Indigenous people as simply one more “other” to the dominant Western planning model (Porter, 2010).

The question of what distinguishes Indigenous planning from “planning undertaken by Indigenous people” highlights a problem with the conflation of these concepts. Namely, it traps Indigenous people into the twofold expectation that all of their actions will be taken as representative of all Indigenous people everywhere and that, under the colonial gaze, they must “perform” indigeneity – that their actions must conform to a settler’s idea of how an Indigenous person ought to act. One can point to many examples of Indigenous communities adopting a more “European model” (Skelton, 2013, p. 11) of planning and development, such as the Nisga’a First Nation in British Columbia taking steps to permit private ownership of their tribal land (CBC, 2013), without being able to claim that those communities have lost any of their indigeneity. If we cannot expect Indigenous people to act according to a certain set of assumptions

about essentialized or generic “Indigenous culture”, and we cannot, then the idea of Indigenous planning as simply planning work undertaken by Indigenous people does not substantially contribute to understanding the nature of this concept.

2. Planning Conducted for Indigenous People by Members of a Dominant Settler Culture

The second conceptualization of Indigenous planning I would like to explore is the idea of Indigenous planning as any planning that is conducted on behalf of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous members of a majority or settler culture. This is an idea that many people might be more familiar with under a different name: advocacy planning. Advocacy planning has been roundly rejected as a workable framework for giving voice to people who do not traditionally have a seat at the planning table, in part due to a lack of empowerment and transfer of knowledge and power from the planner to those for whom they purport to advocate (for example, Sandercock (1998) and Healey (2005)). The paternal nature of colonialism is such that – just as it attempts to remove from Indigenous people their rights and sovereignty and variously writes them out of existence (through such notions as the doctrine of terra nullius) (Porter and Barry, 2013) or infantilizes them and declares them unable to govern themselves (through such ‘nation building’ exercises as the Indian Act and

residential schools in Canada) – some well-meaning inheritors of settler culture see fit to deem themselves adequately situated to use their privileged voice to advocate for Indigenous people, to take up the aboriginal cause on behalf of aboriginal people who do not find themselves with a voice or a seat at the table, rather than aiming to diminish the structures that take away aboriginal voices so that they can find their own seat at the table. But as Jojola notes, “[a]s much as we might wish to focus on representing the interests of others in planning processes, we also have seen enough to know that advocating on behalf of others does not empower communities and therefore should not be the basis of our work” (2013, pp. 13-14). As in many cases where there is a dispossessed, or subaltern, voice and an impulse by an *other* to speak for it, people involved with Indigenous planning can tend towards an advocacy model. Marcus Lane (2006), for example, argues Indigenous groups being integrated into state planning activities is a positive development, rather than a continuation of colonialist relations, raising the specter of an advocacy model without giving name to it as such.

Why are Indigenous voices dispossessed in planning though? Of course there are many reasons, but in partial explanation Jojola (2013, x) notes that “[t]he worst aspect of colonialism was that Indigenous knowledge was devalued or destroyed in the name of conquest and domination”. It is indeed a tragedy that so much Indigenous knowledge was wiped out by colonialism, and that so much work was put into discrediting and devaluing what Indigenous knowledge

did remain. I would suggest that it is likely, however, even in a hypothetical scenario where Indigenous knowledge and practices around what we call planning did survive completely intact until the present day, Indigenous people would find that their knowledge is not valued to the same extent that academically privileged, “rational” Euro-western planning knowledge is. This is because planning itself is necessarily tied to culture (Porter, 2010), and the project of colonialism itself is largely preoccupied with displacing the legitimacy of one culture in favour of another. That is to say, the dominant culture of modern Canada – though influenced by the longstanding and deep involvement of First Nations in its creation (Saul, 2008) – largely takes a ‘so what?’ attitude to the contributions offered by First Nations cultures, and this must extend to the cultural foundation of planning.

Modern planning in Canada is not, as is popularly believed, simply an export from Britain: rather, “modern planning is constituted within colonialism itself, [...] the product of colonial relations” (Porter, 2010, p. 4). So, although Indigenous cultures continue to exist and progress within Canada and many other settler states, and although they carry with them significant traditional knowledge relating to planning – which doubtlessly aids their communities and guides their lives in significant and helpful ways – this knowledge tends to be shut out of the dominant planning discourse, and is at times ineffectual at navigating state systems, and satisfying the culturally-laden expectations of what constitutes planning in a modern context. Included in this are, for example,

“strong expectations about what kind of knowledge and information is appropriate” in planning, as well as “strong expectations or ‘norms’ around what is called a ‘planning issue’, with some issues off the agenda because they are not considered relevant” (Porter and Barry, 2013, p. 10). However, where “[m]uch of the work of colonialism [...] is to impose (often violently) a conceived space upon the lived spaces of Indigenous peoples” (Porter, 2010, p. 22), it is perhaps irrational to expect that a system of planning (or spatial ordering) developed within this colonial framework should easily evolve into one in which Indigenous people find that their traditional planning knowledge is an easy fit and seen as a respected voice. Porter continues:

Even when power relations are well theorized, and local histories and cultural nuances sensitively understood, to pretend that planning is the position from which the clamour of ‘difference’ in (post)colonial settings can be heard, translated and mediated is to forget that planning’s own genealogy is colonial and its work a fundamental activity to the ongoing colonial settlement of territory. Forgetting to theorise planning’s own cultural position can render the ‘inclusion’ of Indigenous people in land management decisions a new form of colonial oppression. (2010, p. 17)

In other words, planning is a cultural artifact and a non-neutral system which Indigenous people cannot simply be fit into without implicitly asking that they submit themselves to the colonial assumptions of that system.

Cultural differences are not the only factor inhibiting the capacity of Indigenous societies to participate in planning. As Lane observes, more straightforward factors are in play as well, including “language and cultural barriers; geographic isolation; a lack of resources; consultation fatigue; cynicism about whether consultative efforts are genuine and a lack of familiarity with mainstream planning and decision-making processes” (2006, p. 386). It is a combination these factors, various fruits of colonial circumstance, that “affect[s] how planning systems respond and shape the possibilities for Indigenous recognition” (Porter and Barry, 2013, p. 10) and that conspire to induce non-Indigenous planners to throw their hat into the planning ring on behalf of Indigenous people.

3. Planning Conducted by Either Indigenous or Non-Indigenous People, and which Attempts to Realign the Values Endemic/Embedded in Planning to Better Reflect the Values of Indigenous Cultures

[A]nother way is to use the tools of the planning system itself – the norms and expectations of that system – to broker new kinds of relationship and recognition.

(Porter and Barry, 2013, p. 53)

The third conceptualization of Indigenous planning that I will explore here is the idea that Indigenous planning can be described as planning conducted by either Indigenous people or non-Indigenous people which attempts to realign

the cultural values of planning to better reflect the values of Indigenous culture. I find this to be a particularly useful stance toward Indigenous planning, as it provides a productive way for the planning profession as a whole to grow into values, such as inclusiveness, typically associated with Indigenous cultures, to eschew compliance in the colonial project, and to move beyond “the claims of planners to scientific rationality” (Lane, 2006, p. 387).

Leonnie Sandercock notes that the apparent invisibility of Indigenous people in planning “raises the question of whether planning’s practices have ever been decolonized, in this supposedly postcolonial age” (2004, p. 119) – many people would agree that indeed they have not been. However, it is not the mere presence of Indigenous people in planning that will lead to its decolonization. Ted Jojola (2013) speaks of the “essence and challenge of Indigenous planning” as “the ability of the collective to renew their charge by bringing clarity and cohesion [in] community development” in line with the Seven Generations worldview (p. xiv). This is important as it stresses that it is not enough to simply have Indigenous people working in planning if they are unconsciously passing on colonial norms. The practice of planning in a settler state is fraught, and at every step people involved in Indigenous planning must be aware that, as Porter suggests, “the very practice of ‘implementing a land use plan’ has colonial roots that powerfully shape conceptions of and actions in place, whether performed by an Indigenous person or not” (2010, p. 18).

There is a question as to whether Indigenous people directing their efforts to planning within the established political system is the best way forward for Indigenous communities. For example, Sandercock (2004) suggests that the main issue facing Aboriginal people is not how they can participate more in planning or how it can be made more inclusive. Indeed, she argues that “[i]nclusive planning practices cannot ‘shift the effects of (post)colonial structures and relations of power on Indigenous nations without a fundamental recognition of rights’” (2004, p. 120). For Sandercock, the more pressing issues are rights and sovereignty, as participating in and working through a colonial system, even one that has been modified to be “more inclusive of Indigenous interests, knowledge, and aspirations” (p. 120) cannot emancipate any group from that system. Here I would like to borrow Audre Lorde’s famous writing on racism to illustrate this point in relation to colonialism and planning:

What does it mean when the tools of a [colonialist society] are used to examine the fruits of that same [colonialism]? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable. [...] For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change (1984, pp. 110, 114)

This view, known as known as insurgency planning, holds that state-based planning responses to oppression of Indigenous people and other minorities are unable to bring about satisfactory change and justice (as described in Lane,

2006, pp. 388).

Sandercock's notion that Indigenous rights and sovereignty are prerequisite to productive engagement with planning systems is shared by Porter and Barry (2013). Their work examines the intersection of planning with Indigenous culture in Victoria, Australia, and British Columbia, Canada, by outlining the formal recognition given to Indigenous territorial rights in the subject areas, as well as how that compares with specific political rights held by the Indigenous communities. It is a revealing study, as it clearly illuminates the degree to which an Indigenous community's ability to meaningfully participate in planning processes depends upon the degree of sovereignty they have attained within the colonial state. Porter and Barry's view broadly aligns with that of Sandercock: "[s]overeignty," she writes, "is of symbolic and practical importance, as a means of rebuilding community and culture and ameliorating the pernicious legacies of contact and dispossession," and while she sees a role for planning in helping secure sovereignty and rights, "it is a new kind of planning" that she is after, one which has somehow emancipated or extracted itself from the colonial milieu (2004, p. 120).

Their work is informed by Mary Louise Pratt's idea of planning 'contact zones', which they note she describes as "the social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, 1992, in Porter and

Barry, 2013, p, 9). In adopting this recognition of the clash of systems represented by Indigenous/non-Indigenous interactions around planning (and other contact such 'contact zones'), Porter and Barry acknowledge the double-edged nature of such relations, "that they are often simultaneously positive and negative, consensual and conflictual," in addition to being both "inevitable and necessary" (2013, p. 9). Porter and Barry also recognize that these planning 'conflict zones' to have the potential to be transformative for planning itself, or to be yet another conduit for ongoing colonial relations:

Planning contact zones are potentially spaces where Indigenous rights, title and governance systems are recognised and where existing ways of doing things are challenged and transformed. But they are also potentially spaces where colonial power relations of marginalisation and repression continue, for example when existing planning laws, policies and procedures are resistant to change and continue to erode Indigenous rights and interests. (2013, p. 9)

Because planning has been instrumental in the history of colonial oppression, in giving the settler state deterministic power over Indigenous cultures, one key aspect of an emancipated Indigenous planning must be that it helps Indigenous peoples reclaim their ability and right to self-determination and self-government. Porter and Barry speak to this at length in examining the distinctions between territorial rights and political rights. They argue that territorial rights (the ability to claim title to or use of a defined spatial territory) are essentially meaningless without accompanying political rights (to be self-

governing, to have a voice in shaping development and legislation affecting one's territory) (2013, p. 7). They argue that, without the combination of territorial rights and political rights, one or the other will "tend to be co-opted into a planning system, so that Indigenous voices become one of many other 'stakeholder interests' for western government systems to manage" rather than being the primary driver of an Indigenous planning process, as when Indigenous people possess both political and territorial rights "there is much greater potential for Indigenous nations to give full expression to their territorial rights and title" (Porter and Barry, 2013, p. 7).

One group in Canada that has achieved what might be called a full expression of their territorial and political rights is the Nisga'a First Nation in northwestern British Columbia, who signed the first modern treaty in Canada in 1999. The example of the Nisga'a shows, however, that while political and territorial rights should be seen as necessary conditions, the possession of those rights is not in and of itself a sufficient remedy for social challenges or for the extraction of planning from colonialism. Like other Indigenous peoples, the Nisga'a have always been self-governing other than the brief period during the last couple of centuries when they fell under colonial rule. They had "evolved management systems for fish and forest resources over hundreds of years" (King, 2004, p. 161) and even during the after European contact but before the recent treaty was signed, "Nisga'a Village Governments and Nisga'a Urban Locals were always involved in the decision making of the" nation (Niska'a

Nation Knowledge Network, 2009, p. 3). These management systems, and the traditional knowledge they are based on, are now central to the self-governance of the Nisga'a people. For example, respected Nisga'a elders, including Simgigat (Chiefs) and Sigidimhaanak' (Matriarchs) "provide guidance and interpretation of the Ayuuk [traditional laws and practices] to Nisga'a Government through the Council of Elders" (Niska'a Nation Knowledge Network, 2009, p. 4). Recognizing the power of political rights and the importance of maintaining sovereignty over their cultural assets, the Nisga'a now protect the sacredness and centrality of the traditional knowledge of the elders by keeping it in the realm of orality, such that their traditional laws "would not be codified for fear that our Ayuuk may some day be involved in litigation and ruled on by a non-Nisga'a judge" (Niska'a Nation Knowledge Network, 2009, p. 4).

The Nisga'a people, having secured self-government through their treaty with British Columbia, are now able to proceed down a path of their choosing with regard to future development. In the resource-rich but economically undifferentiated area that makes up the Nisga'a territory, an interesting question is raised as to which of various 'development' models proposed by Skelton (2013) the Nisga'a will see fit to pursue. Skelton writes:

That Indigenous groups have absorbed capitalist development attests to the resilience of their cultures [...]; nevertheless, it seems to me that there is an unanswered question of how development under this model can systematically and in a sustained way avoid key defining features of the European model, such

as the tendencies towards privatization, concentration of wealth, and increasing power inequalities. (p. 11)

As mentioned earlier, since completing the Final Agreement in 1999, the Nisga'a have already taken steps to permit private/market ownership of land within their territory. This is a departure from the typical reserve system set up under Canada's Indian Act in which all reserve lands are owned by the Federal Government and no individuals have free-hold possession of land on the reserve.

Capitalization of private land for economic development being a hallmark of the European model of development, it will be interesting to witness in the coming years how the robust tradition of mobilizing traditional knowledge for planning in the Nisga'a culture adapts to the new possibilities and challenges of this model, and to what extent that traditional knowledge, Indigenous Nisga'a values, and indeed colonialist relationships are passed on and modified by the Nisga'a. Having achieved a measure of the territorial and political rights and sovereignty described by Sandercock, Porter, and Barry, unfortunately does not immediately extract the Nisga'a from the colonial context, and as they remain situated within a broader capitalist nation state cultural environment (Canada) many outside pressures continue to act on the Nisga'a nation.

For non-Indigenous people working in an Indigenous planning context, the central question guiding our practice must be, 'how can I make sure that I am not passing on colonial relationships, if not actively dismantling them, in my

work?’ Because of the significant cultural baggage that planning necessarily carries with it, this question needs to be constantly and thoughtfully attended to, and there cannot be a neutral or passive stance for non-aboriginal people wishing to make a contribution in this area. Ongoing self-work stemming from an acknowledgement of one’s own need for de-colonization is probably one piece of this challenge. In acknowledging the power and privilege that one possesses as a “planner”, a crucial step is taken towards this goal. It does not suffice, of course, to simply recognize one’s privilege without acting on it, and acting to spread agency to others who do not have it. Power that has been used to oppress can also be used to help; privilege that has been granted can be dismantled or refused; knowledge and a voice can be shared. Planners can offer themselves to be availed-of by, rather than inflicted upon Indigenous people. As planning has been used as a tool of colonial oppression, so too can it be used as a “wedge” to open and create space within political systems for others:

In these and other ways, Indigenous nations are utilising the very systems, approaches and methods of planning, some of which are very narrowly conceived and have not historically brought justice to Indigenous people, to achieve fuller recognition or at least prise open a larger contact zone. There are many lessons to be learned from these approaches. (Porter and Barry, 2013, p. 54)

A way of planning that is predicated on avoiding the proliferation of colonial relationships, whose process reflects the values and culture of

Indigenous people, and which values and respects the traditional knowledge of Indigenous people, is described as Indigenous planning. It represents the best way forward for planners and anyone else interested in the work of improving circumstances for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, and who are concerned with rectifying what Sandercock and Attili (2011) describe as “Canada’s national shame”.

One situation we might think of when considering the inability of traditional planning processes to adequately address the needs of Indigenous communities could be that of a planning consultant working on behalf of a non-Indigenous community who is tasked with engaging a neighbouring First Nation to consult them on the development of a new community plan. In such a situation, a consultant would typically give to the community a cost estimate based on a projected number of billable hours for the work, and then set out to accomplish the task assigned to her within that pre-determined amount of time. This rigid approach to a timeline could well be problematic in a First Nations context, where the band might have a very open-ended and organic approach to such a consultation. Their desired contribution of the community plan might be ongoing throughout the entire plan-making process, it might be oriented around a seasonal hunting schedule that does not happen to coincide with the consultant’s ideas, or it might depend on some other cultural factor which neither the consultant nor the band themselves are able to predict or forecast. It almost certainly would not be satisfied by a pre-determined number of formal

meetings arranged at the convenience of the community or the consultant. In the situation described above, an inability to work with informality could lead an otherwise sound planning process down a path for unsatisfactory results or damaged relationships. This represents a gap in Indigenous planning knowledge, one which would be useful to fill.

III. Informality

Informality can be defined as “spatial dynamics that are not shaped, controlled, or sanctioned by the state” (Yiftachel and Yakobi in Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010, p. 122), and informality in housing is one “manifestation of informal processes in the urban environment” (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004, p. 1). While recognizing these important physical manifestations, it remains important to see informality as a much broader picture. Informality does not only concern the poor, or even just those living in explicitly informal settlements.

Like Indigenous planning, informality is a milieu of planning theory and practice that will continue to challenge planners throughout the coming century. It is a context in which planners are learning to contribute in ways that go beyond advocacy and perpetuating unjust imbalances of power. On the face of it, informality raises serious questions about the relevancy of contemporary planning as informed by traditional schools of planning thought from places like

the Chicago School of Urban Sociology and the Los Angeles School of Urban Geography (AISayyad, 2004). Questions posed by informality “cut across the usually separated domains of ‘international development’ and ‘community development’” (Roy, 2005, p. 150), and ask whether, going forward, ‘schools of planning thought’ should even be coming from schools at all. This question becomes particularly pressing when, as Nezar AISayyad claims, “the future lies in cities like Cairo, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, and Bombay, and can best be investigated by looking at them” (2004, p. 9). He is able to say this because of the explosive growth and vigorous dynamism exhibited by these so-called Third World cities.

In spite of their economic challenges, cities such as those AISayyad mentions are growing much faster than cities in Canada and the rest of “the West,” so, in a very real sense, they are where the future lies. But they are not the only places where informality is manifested in creating settlement space or in planning. To understand how informality in housing relates to the Canadian context, it is helpful to first explore what informality is and what some of the important issues surrounding it are. Informal housing is part of a broader category of informality that exists, not as separate from majority urban settlements, but as part of a continuum of formality. However, “even though the ‘informal sector’ embodies a broad set of activities and people without clearly identifiable characteristics, scholars [continue] to represent it by means of a dualistic framework” (AISayyad, 2004, p. 9), i.e. informal versus formal. But it is

clear that, far from being a sharply delineated binary, formality/informality is a continuum with many shades of grey.

Even for people not involved in planning or housing, typical examples of informal housing are easily brought to mind – one might picture a stereotypical “shantytown” in a Third World country, or perhaps a more specific place would come to mind such as the outskirts of Cairo. Such examples would fall toward the informal side of the continuum: extra-legal dwellings that are typically not serviced with water or electricity, and without formalized security of tenure or ownership. Somewhere a little further across the spectrum would fall a place like the Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro. It, like many favelas in Brazil, was once an area of completely informal housing but, through the “internationally acclaimed” Favela-Bairro program, gained a degree of formality in the form of sewage and water services, street improvements, and so forth (Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010, p. 126).

On the other end of the spectrum would be places like one would commonly see in suburban Canada: legally provided for in planning and regulation, fully serviced houses built to a specific code and with a registered title – likely with a mortgage to boot. But, bearing in mind that informality is not just about physicality, this is where the grey areas of the continuum appear: it is completely feasible that someone could be living illegally or informally in a house that is, in terms of built-form and regulations, perfectly “formalized” and acceptable. There could be roomers in a family house beyond what is allowed

for in a zoning bylaw, or there could be people squatting in a house that was left vacant by its legal owners. There could be people squatting in a non-residential building that is otherwise totally legal. These are all aspects of informality that can apply to formal housing, but because they are less visible than a shantytown they are easy for planners in Canada to forget about when considering informal housing. Indeed, there seems to be an emphasis in the informality literature on so-called Third World informality, which may lead people in countries like Canada to forget that the issue is relevant to us as well. This may be due to the primacy that Latin America has enjoyed in the early literature on informality but, regardless of why it is not prominent in the literature, urban informality is alive and well in Canada.

It occurs to me that, in certain key areas, the situation of First Nations people in Canada with respect to informality can serve as a microcosm for informality around the world. Just as large cities in the developing world are growing much faster than the developed world, populations of Canadian First Nations are growing extremely quickly compared to the rest of the country (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011). Furthermore, First Nations people in Canada face much higher levels of poverty than the rest of the country (CBC, 2006), and some have described conditions for First Nations as in the realm of Third World countries (Morgan, 2011; Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010). Similarly, just as traditional schools of planning thought are of limited applicability to informal housing situations in the developing world, mainstream

Canadian urban planning cannot be applied directly and unproblematically to First Nations communities and the particular circumstances that make up their experience. Finally, as Roy (2005) points out, “[t]here is an urgency for urban studies and planning to move beyond the dichotomy of First World ‘models’ and Third World ‘problems.’ One possible route is through policy approaches that seek to learn from Third World cities” (p.147). This concept, “transnational interrogation, which is the idea of using one context to ask questions of another” (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004, p. 3), has a great applicability to the relationship between Canada and First Nations in Canada – a relationship often defined in terms of ‘problems’ and a subjugated culture learning from the dominant. As Peter Ward puts it, “we can learn from less developed contexts about informality in our own backyard” (2004, p. 243).

Transnational interrogation is a useful concept and has a lot of currency in the literature on informal housing. Skelton and Ribeiro (2010) offer a good example of the way that informal housing issues from two very different countries (Brazil and Canada) can be compared to offer lessons for both. Although these countries have vastly different political and cultural realities, they are ultimately unified by the overarching neo-liberal politics that has recently defined informality. As AlSayyad notes,

none of the phenomena of urban informality can be understood outside the context of globalization and liberalization. [Liberalization] has left entire regions of the world at the mercy of the most vicious fears and hatreds, reinforcing

rather than challenging authoritarian, fascist, and fundamentalist regimes. (2004, p. 26)

Skelton and Ribeiro echo this, writing “markets have become vehicles for social Programming [...] setting aside the experience that processes of marginalization based on social differences have led to impoverishment and disadvantage for many social groups” (2010, p. 136). Even in the face of this unifying neo-liberal backdrop, however, the market, like planning, is itself a culturally and politically laden construct. Informality in general, like ‘the market’, has deep cultural roots, and is highly contextualized:

[T]he process of urban informality, at least in the housing sector, seemed quite distinct in [Latin America and the Middle East]. This was not merely due to the existence of different mechanisms of land-market operation, but also (and mainly) because the different contexts were marked by different cultural specificities (AlSayyad, 2004, p. 14).

The Gaza strip, which has been called the world’s “largest squatter settlement” (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004, p. 3) is a good example of how strongly contextualized informality in housing can be. The history of conflict and colonialism in this area is generations old, and it illustrates that informality can originate from the creation of formality. AlSayyad (2004, p. 25) argues that it was “the ‘new invention’ of formal markets in the nineteenth century” which “made social relations subservient to the economic system, instead of the other way around,” and in like manner, the Israeli declaration of independence in 1948

caused existing Arab settlements to become illegal (Yiftachel and Yakobi, 2004, p. 230). As a result of this and other historical factors, “informal land rights of settlers have been so intensely ethnicized that they are now a major hurdle to the prospects of peace” (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004, p. 3). The effects of this highly politicized situation can harmfully compound themselves as well. In Israel, where building permits cannot be issued in the absence of a local area municipal plan, most Arab settlements are located in areas without official plans, so building is illegal, “even in a settlement that has existed for centuries” (Yiftachel and Yakobi, 2004, p. 230). This situation self-compounding:

municipal status is denied, no plans can be approved, and all buildings are deemed ‘illegal.’ Policymakers then refrain from granting recognition and municipal status because this may be seen as ‘folding to criminal elements who violate state laws.’ This, in turn, only forces Arabs to continue to build illegally. (Yiftachel and Yakobi, 2004, p. 230)

This situation serves to illustrate the degree to which “informality must be understood not as the object of state regulation but rather as produced by the state itself” (Roy, 2005, p. 149). In other words, it is ultimately with the state, in its “planning and legal apparatus” (Roy, 2005, p. 149), that the power to decide who and what is informal lies. Although informal settlements that are not built with respect to the planning or building codes of the state pose a challenge in being ‘brought into the fold’ of formality and in the best cases it is “never as straightforward as simply converting informal documentation into formal titles”

(Roy, 2005, p. 152), there are examples of states providing temporary relaxations of or exemptions from certain regulations in order to make possible a transfer to formality. Roy discusses these “states of exception” that are sometimes useful when trying to improve the lot of people living in informal settlements, using the example of the colonias settlements in Texas (2005).

The colonias are “quasi-formal homestead subdivisions” (Ward, 2004, p. 243) in Texas, found frequently (but not exclusively) near the Mexican border, and they are populated mainly by poor Hispanic people – American citizens or landed immigrants (Ward, 2004). AlSayyad (2004, p. 23) explains, “low incomes and socioeconomic inequality, coupled with the reluctance of the state to provide alternative forms of affordable housing” leave many people in Texas with no choice but to settle in the colonias, which offer few, if any, formal services. Like the Arab settlements in Israel, colonias are highly mediated and influenced by local politics in a situation in which the colonias populations are racially differentiated from the majority population and power base just as the Arabs are in Jewish-majority Israel. Ward writes,

Texas policymakers appeared [...] to be caught in a time warp, regarding these settlements as rural, or as pathological aberrations visited upon urban areas. The settlements were seen as foci of vice, crime, indigence, and illegal-immigrant residence that above all presented a major public-health problem. Furthermore, the very name used to describe them, colonia (Spanish for ‘neighborhood’), underscored the view that they were Mexican in origin and

local to the border (something that has greatly retarded the capacity of policymakers to 'see' colonia-type development elsewhere in the state). (2004, p.247)

The "state of exception" in this case came into play when there were attempts made to service a colonia with water. Roy (2005), explaining Ward's research on colonias describes a situation in which an EPA grant was awarded to supply water and wastewater services to a colonia. The water mains were built, and brought to the colonia but were never hooked up to people's houses in the settlement, "[s]ince the housing was not code compliant, the county would not authorize individual hookups to the EPA infrastructure" (Roy, 2005, p. 155).

The inflexibility of the legal and political structure in this case has resulted in wasted funds spent on the infrastructure, and a colonia still without water. It is a painful missed opportunity to upgrade existing housing stock, as AISayyad points out, and "'illegal' informality in the United States might be more profitably viewed as a transitional stage for bringing affordable housing up to higher standards over time" (AISayyad, 2004, p. 23). Ward offers as a response to this situation the state of exception. By simply offering what might be called a 'code amnesty' for a period of five years, the infrastructure could be connected to the colonia houses, as the only thing preventing their hook-up was a failure to meet code (Roy, 2005, p. 153). As part of this 'code amnesty' Ward also suggests providing financing to the colonias residents, allowing them to be brought up to code, all of which "recognizes incrementalism but does not [risk becoming] a

generalized condition where those unable to afford formal housing are condemned to a second-tier set of standards and codes” (Roy, 2005, p. 153).

Another key issue in informal housing is security of tenure. Without formalized rights or claims to their housing, people living in informal housing have no legal protections on their tenure, making them vulnerable to losing their homes or land. This could happen, for example, when either the state or private interests decide to develop land that people are living on informally. Redevelopment of land used for informal housing by the state might happen under the rubric of slum-clearing, making way for highways or other infrastructure, or even to construct social housing – but, no matter the cause of their eviction, people living in informal housing have very little recourse against displacement in most situations. Like housing informality itself, “security of tenure is not an absolute condition but rather a continuum of rights and claims that can include the right to remain, the claim to services and credit, and the application of market values to property” (Roy, 2005, p. 154).

These last points, claims to credit and the application of market values to property, are the main thrusts of another author’s take on informal housing. Hernando de Soto is a relatively popular author, who is especially fond of deregulation as a way to improve the lot of the world’s poor (among which number are many people living in informal conditions). de Soto’s claim is that poor people all around the world would be much better off if the informal wealth they already possessed were to be formalized, so that they might gain access to

credit and thereby engage in entrepreneurship, allowing them a means to improve their financial situation (Bromley, 2004). Furthermore, he argues, the very act of formalizing ownership would raise property values and add even more wealth to the trillions he believes the world's poor have locked-up in unusable (informal) capital (Bromley, 2004).

de Soto's arguments do not seem to carry much weight with other contemporary authors, likely because of his emphasis on 'the market' as a means of elevating people out of poverty, rather than one of the root causes of poverty. He argues "that unnecessary and unjust laws, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, and corrupt law enforcement exclude many people and enterprises from legality, forcing them to live, own property, and do business extra-legally" as well as denying them the full potential benefit of participating in the market (Bromley, 2004, p. 273). As discussed earlier in this chapter with regard to the Nisga'a Nation, it should be noted that similar market-based arguments are employed in Canada regarding First Nations land and the reserve system (Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010). In addition to groups such as the Nisga'a who are capitalizing settlement lands within their sovereign political territory, there are First Nations, such as the Tseshaht on Vancouver Island, who have actively sought to purchase non-reserve land for business purposes, because it allows them to get mortgages (Catalyst Paper [corporate author], 2006). Countering de Soto's argument, though, Bromley reminds us that informality will exist even in places exhibiting advanced states of deregulation,

such as the United States and Canada, and deregulation alone cannot be said to necessarily lead to either formalization or reduction of poverty (Bromley, 2004, p. 279-280). Furthermore, so-called “self-help” approaches such as de Soto’s are somewhat outdated, and reminiscent of “the late 1960s[, when] it was argued that squatter communities were populated by those who were doomed by their own laziness and poverty to remain on the margins of life,” (AlSayyad, 2004, p. 18) which is surely not the majority opinion today.

Another aspect of security of tenure that is worth mentioning is that improving one’s security of tenure, moving along the continuum explained by Roy (2005) above, is not always a helpful or positive thing. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, “for the poorest segments of informal settlements, secure rights can be more insecure than informal claims” (Roy, 2005, p. 154). This is because with regularized tenure of property often comes regularized payment or rental or mortgage fees. Regular payment schedules can be problematic for people living in informal settlements because it is not uncommon for them to have informal employment arrangements that do not easily lend themselves to making monthly or weekly payments. This again speaks to the highly contextualized nature of informal housing and the need to deal with it on a locally sensitive level.

As sprawling and complex as the topic of informality in housing is, it is a topic of paramount importance for planners, not just in the developing world but in developed countries like Canada as well. Just as “urban informality does not simply consist of the activities of the poor, or a particular status of labor, or

marginality” (AlSayyad, 2004, p. 26) it does not consist of a particular type of country either. But more importantly, as it is in the sprawling metropolises of the developing world that much of the learning about informality is being done, it is crucial for planners in the developed world to embrace transnational interrogation as a tool to learn about the challenges we face. And in Canada particularly, where we have so much to learn from First Nations regarding the informality that was created by colonialism, a certain intra-national transnational interrogation will be of particular utility in “confronting how the apparatus of planning produces the unplanned and unplannable” (Roy, 2005, p. 156).

IV. Further Intersections and Ideas

Several instances of overlapping between the milieus of Indigenous planning and informality have been noted to this point. Porter (2010) asks how can we unsettle planning’s dominance, and I think that part of the answer to that question may lie in planning in the context of informality. Informality calls for research and a “mode” that focuses on the organic way that things and people have of sorting themselves out with traditions and traditional knowledge in the absence of, or in spite of, formalized systems; as a sort of “un-planning” then, informality could be cast as an antidote to the colonial grasp of classical Euro-western planning. However, the lens of Indigenous planning allows us to conceptualize a planning which is constructive for Indigenous people and

actively works to undo colonialism. Rather than being an antidote to this type of planning then, the capacity to plan with informality can be brought into the circle of values included in Indigenous planning, just as formality is one of the defining traits of non-Indigenous planning.

The dichotomy presented by the emphasis on orality and story telling in some First Nations cultures, compared with the dominant Euro-Canadian mode of the written word is an interesting point of comparison to illustrate the apparent overlap between informality and Indigenous planning. It was discussed earlier in this chapter that one of the methods of disempowering Indigenous populations for colonial purposes was (or, “is”) the devaluing of Indigenous knowledge and traditional planning capabilities, and the prioritizing of written knowledge over oral is one of the main vehicles by which this was enforced. If we can return to the concept of a continuum of in/formality, I would suggest – uncontroversially, I think – that the oral tradition falls toward the informal end of that continuum, while the written culture falls more toward formality. Similarly, the Euro-western emphasis on credential and academic training being a requirement for involvement in planning qualifies it as the more formal counterpart to the typically inclusive and consensus-based systems of Indigenous communities.

These differences and tendencies are well documented in the literature on Indigenous planning. Porter and Barry write about Indigenous Australians and First Nations in British Columbia reaching out to and retaining the services

of outside “expert” consultants whose formal training and credentials give them a voice where the Indigenous people’s tradition- and lived experience-derived local knowledge is unsatisfactory or unvalued by other governments, where legal frameworks de-legitimize Indigenous voices in planning processes (2013, p. 33). They further observe that where legitimacy is granted to Indigenous voices by the state, and where Indigenous knowledge is ‘taken at face value’ is often only regarding issues of cultural heritage (Porter and Barry, 2013, p. 33). Indeed, in my personal experience working with the Fisher River Cree Nation, a large part of my role and value to the community was to help the them present their own information and knowledge to outside government agencies in a format which was more easily recognized and accepted for its formality than the form in which I received it: informal stories.

For me this encapsulates very well one of the most useful roles for planners who are concerned with decolonization: working in the nexus between First Nations and other levels of government and helping to make a useful connection between informality and formality. If planners cannot fully extract themselves from the cultural roots of the profession, perhaps it is possible for them to position themselves in a liminal zone at the threshold of informality and try to work in both worlds. The FRCN street naming project was not aimed at developing new knowledge per se, nor was it ‘uncovering’ data in any sort of empirical sense. Rather, the project was concerned with building relationships with people possessed of knowledge and culture within the FRCN community

(elders and high school students) and working with them to translate that knowledge into a new form (mapping, street names) that was true to the lived reality of that community but useful to people operating in a world of formality at other levels of government and in communities outside of FRCN. Here the role of planners was elucidative rather than generative, and collative rather than didactic.

The consequence is that, perhaps paradoxically, planners' work with First Nations may stand to be legitimized to a degree by adding informality to the accepted conceptualization of Indigenous planning. If planners can adopt aspects of working in Indigenous contexts, perhaps including informality, into Indigenous planning, the result will be a profession that better reflects and responds to the people it serves – both in methods and results. In practical terms, planning in informality within a First Nations context can be accomplished through reasonably simple measures such as respecting and including traditional and oral knowledge – to a degree equal to or greater than that afforded to rational or scientific reporting by outside experts – by adopting more flexible and open-ended scheduling approaches geared towards a community's own practices, or by acknowledging that many processes that shape a community exist outside of or without regard for the planner's work. These examples of informality in Indigenous planning point to an approach that moves planning closer to Indigenous peoples needs, rather than the other way around. This is a crucial step in liberating the profession from its colonial roots.

3. Fisher River Cree Nation Wayfinding Project

I. BACKGROUND

Fisher River Cree Nation (FRCN) is a First Nation located approximately 200 kilometres north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. FRCN has two reserve holdings, IR44 and IR44A (Figure 1). As of 2008 there is a total of 3,197 FRCN members, of which 1,739 (54%) live on-reserve and 1,458 (46%) live off-reserve, with an average population growth rate of 1.75% per year over the ten year period ending in 2008 (HTFC, 2010, p. 15). Unlike many remote communities, FRCN has a relatively diversified economic base providing employment for on-reserve members in several areas including tourism, real estate development (recreational cottages on the lake), construction, resource extraction (including fishing), and a variety of commercial operations including a motel, gas station, mechanical services and other shops (HTFC, 2010).

In October of 2010, FRCN completed a Community Plan in collaboration with Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram Landscape Architecture & Planning (HTFC) and J.R. Cousins Consultants Ltd. – two private consulting firms in Winnipeg. The Community Plan was intended to “address the Community’s physical development needs for a 20-year time frame” (HTFC, 2010, p. 11). A partnership between the department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba and FRCN was subsequently struck, led by FRCN Band Councillor Dion McKay and Professor Ian Skelton at the university, which would see students in the City

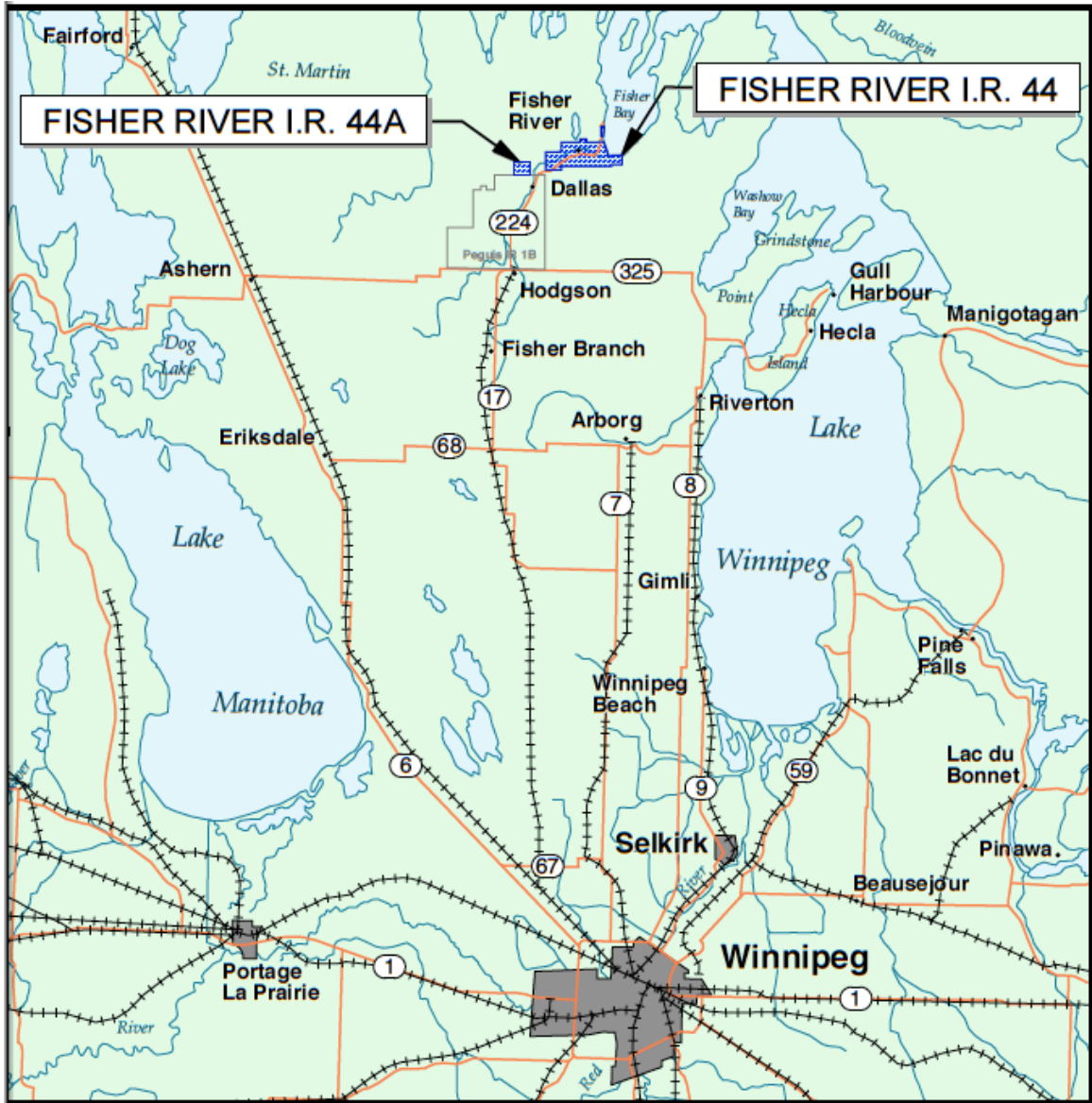


Figure 1: FRCN Regional Context (HTFC, 2010)

Planning Studio class complete a term project based on the community planning work done by FRCN and the consultants. The students were presented with a list of several ‘action items’ that the community had identified, pieces from the Community Plan, which they were particularly interested in investigating further for possible implementation. These items covered a wide range of issues that the community was faced with including, among others,

watershed conservation, collaboration with surrounding regional governments, economic development and the development of a formalised wayfinding system (street names and addresses) on reserve. Myself and my classmate Thania Moreno Palacios (on exchange from the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, Mexico) decided to work on the latter: finding a way to formalize and codify the wayfinding on reserve in a system of street names and addresses consistent with the Civic Addressing Standards for Manitoba.

It was my experience with this Studio project that led me to an awareness of the concept of informality in planning, as I later came to see this work as an example of (student) planners working in the nexus of the clashing systems of informality and formality. Like most planners, we approached the work without an awareness of informality or a clear idea of how to effectively relate to such situations. Over time I came to understand that informality could be a useful way to think about the project and others like it. This led me to seek out other planning experiences that could be brought to bear on the clash of systems, and to take the Studio project as a point of enquiry to explore how other planners are coping with and incorporating informality into their work with First Nations.

II. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Community Plan itself contains a section on *Street Naming and House Numbering* (HTFC, 2010, p. 158 ff.) and notes that “Chief and Council

requested that the community plan include an investigation into street naming and house numbering for the Fisher River Cree Nation Reserve lands” (HTFC, 2010, p. 158). The Community Plan notes the reasons FRCN thought a formalised street naming and addressing system was appropriate for their community included it being “important for emergency services and response, legibility and wayfinding for community members and visitors, and [a way to] reinforce a sense of place” (p. 158). Crucially, Chief and Council ultimately wanted FRCN to be served by the provincial 911 emergency system, which requires a reliable and standardised wayfinding system.

In the Community Plan, the system in place in FRCN is referred to as “familiarity of the area and understanding of the community”, and the Plan authors note that this type of system is common among many First Nations in Manitoba. This is contrasted with non-First Nations communities in Manitoba, where the Civic Addressing Standard for Manitoba is most often implemented. The Plan authors note some difficulties with the familiarity of area system employed by FRCN and others:

Most First Nation communities in Manitoba have no organized addressing system in place; they rely upon familiarity of the area and an understanding of the community. They do not follow the Civic Addressing Standard of Manitoba as most non-First Nation communities do. Familiarity of the area only works if emergency response teams are extremely familiar with the community.

The method has proven to be unreliable in the past. If emergency response teams are unfamiliar with a certain location or if the people in need of help are unable to accurately describe their current location, this method can create avoidable damage.

Some communities using this method have documented the names of each individual in a given house and plotted these houses on one or more maps. Problems arise when more than one community member shares a common name or when community members move from one home to another without updating the records. (HTFC, 2010, p. 158-159)

As we later learned in our dealings with the community, the familiarity of area system relies heavily on references to landmarks and the homes of prominent families, which might not be immediately evident to people who do not live in the community. It is important to note that, although they discuss the familiarity of the area system at some length in the Plan, HTFC does not explicitly recognize a formality/informality system clash in the need for FRCN to adopt a new wayfinding system to access provincial 911 services. This speaks to the gap in such knowledge on the part of planners who are otherwise well versed in planning in Indigenous contexts. In this case, upon reflection, I would suggest that the Civic Addressing Standard for Manitoba represents a formalised wayfinding system, while FRCN's familiarity of area system is an example of an informal system.

As students stepping in to attempt to work with the community on this, our challenges were twofold, and directly related to this work being an instance of planners helping to bridge the gap between informality (wayfinding in Fisher River) and formality (the need for a wayfinding system accessible to off-reserve emergency personnel for emergency response). First, we recognised that any set of street names that might be proposed to the community ran the risk of being ignored or forgotten by the community if they were not immediately recognizable as being specifically relevant to FRCN's culture. Our second challenge was finding a way to apply house numbers to the houses on reserve, which were irregularly spaced on shared family lots due to the traditional tenure system in place (described in *III. Process*, below). We were welcomed and introduced to the community by a *sweet* accompanied by drumming and singing, and after that it was time for us to get to work on figuring out how we could assist the community with this project.

III. PROCESS

The method for generating street names which Thania and I decided on was to hold two community engagement focus group events on reserve with the goal of trying to find out from people how they currently navigated the community and to use that knowledge to assign reasonably relevant street names. We tried, as outsiders without much familiarity with the area, to have the

community members share their familiarity with us. The first event was held in the FRCN community hall and involved a group of Elders. At this session we brought large-format maps of the community as well as large markers and we invited the Elders to share stories with us about how they got around the community, and we attempted to geographically locate these stories on the maps. We began the session by giving a brief introductory presentation to the group, in which we explained who we were, what we were trying to achieve, and – perhaps most importantly – that we had come with the personal recommendation of the band Chief and Council. We gathered around tables and set to our task soon after that.

As is common in such events, there was some initial awkwardness and reluctance and perhaps uncertainty around what was expected of the participants. Notably, it took some time and light coaching before all of the participants could orient themselves on the maps we brought. This was a notable blind spot on our part as organizers; we had taken for granted a level of familiarity or literacy with maps that was not warranted. Indeed, it seemed like it might have been the first time that a few participants had sat down in front of a map of their community, which speaks to the extent of informality around wayfinding in the community. This assumption of literacy on our part could have been a source of embarrassment for participants and organizers alike, but we were fortunate to have participants who were gracious enough to look past that particular naïveté of ours.

After some ice was broken, the Elders were very forthcoming with many stories and examples relating to how they got around the community. Stories about how, in the old days, men would walk all day down a certain road to get to the next community many kilometres away to sell the fish they had caught. Or about how they remember walking down this road with a grandmother or young siblings to collect sweet grass in a certain field, or down another road to work in the old rice paddy. The exercise was simple, but it would not have worked at all without the cooperation of these Elders and their apparent trust in Thania and myself based on the relationship we and our professor had with the Chief and Council. One of the first things we learned was that the Elders insisted that street names should be in Cree (where possible) and with English translations provided for the benefit of outsiders. By the end of this session we had derived a list of 'draft' names for the majority of the roads in the community – including Kinoséw Méskanaw (Fish Road), Maskosiy Méskanaw (Sweet Grass Road), and Rice Paddies Méskanaw (Rice Paddies Road).

The second engagement event was held at the community's high school the following day. The Elders had expressed to us that it was important for the youth to have a say in what the streets should be called, and so a number of roads which went un-named at the previous engagement were given names by a class of high school students.



Figure 2 After the first community engagement, a group of FRCN Elders (and one Council member) hold up a draft street name map. Source: Photo by the author.

This second event was structured much like the first, with the exception of us presenting the students with a list of unused names which the Elders had come-up with the previous day, and from which the students selected the names for FRCN's remaining streets. Like the Elders, the students shared with us examples of how they navigated their community, and we prompted them with targeted questions like:

- If you were giving someone from FRCN directions to your house, what would you say?
- If you were giving directions to your house to someone who is new to the community, how would you do that?



Figure 3 FRCN High school students (and project partner Thania, second from right) working with Cree dictionaries and a community map to come up with additional street names at the second engagement event. Source: Photo by the author

At the end of the two days of engagement events, Thania and I had a complete set of proposed names for all of the streets in FRCN to present to the Chief and Council, as well as a list of several second choices in case there was an objection to any of the names at the band leadership.

The second main aspect of the project was to find a way to give street addresses to the houses on reserve. This task was complicated by a couple of factors. First, the majority of lots in the community are laid out according to a “French river lot” system – long and relatively narrow lots designed to give river access to as many individual lots as possible. Furthermore, as per the *Indian Act*, there is no private ownership of land on reservations, so while the community was subdivided into these lots many years ago, nobody has exclusive formal rights to any of the land (with the exception of several war

veterans who had been granted certificates of possession to their land, giving them a more formalised tenure). Instead, lots tend to be held from generation to generation by families who have customary tenure of the land.

Over the years, as families have expanded, new houses have been built on the large lots for members of the families. The result is that, although each lot has a number assigned to it, many of these long river lots have several houses on them, built at uneven intervals from one another, which would require individual addresses in order to be reliably locatable by emergency service personnel from off-reserve. That these lots are traditionally possessed by families, rather than owned or formally assigned through certificates of possession indicates that, to a certain extent, people's tenure of the land is governed by consensus rather than a state-based means. This hearkens back to Yiftachel and Yakobi's idea of informality as "spatial dynamics that are not shaped, controlled, or sanctioned by the state" (in Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010, p. 122), and it means that the Civic Addressing Standard for Manitoba is not as easy of a fit as it would be in non-Indigenous communities with an adherence to formal land title.

This is challenging from an addressing perspective for a couple of reasons. While each individual lot had a number assigned to it, the houses on the lots would need to be individually identifiable. Perhaps the most obvious solution would be to number the houses sequentially from the road back, so that the first house was 1 (or "A"), and on from there. This was determined to be an

unsatisfactory response, however, as there was not necessarily and regularity to how the houses are built over the years. So, while houses could be numbered 1, 2, and 3 today, tomorrow another house might be built between houses number 2 and 3, necessitating a change of address for all other house farther back from the road. Ideally, an address should be relatively permanent, and so this was ruled out. The solution we eventually arrived at was to divide the lots into a series of address sectors spaced at even intervals from the road back. This way a house could be placed on any part of the lot in accordance with the wishes of the builder and its address could be easily found by consulting a map Thania and I created with the address sectors laid out on it for every lot. This proposal (Shown schematically in Figure 4) would allow the community to continue placing their houses according to whatever criteria they had used in the past and the addressing system would easily adapt.



Figure 4 Example of lots overlaid with sectors (1, 2, 3, etc.). Source: Studio Project Final Report

We held one other engagement event in the community hall during FRCN's "Addictions Week" event (Figure 5). This event was more focused on spreading awareness of our project with the band membership, and we were not seeking direct input on the street names. We prepared posters to explain why Chief and Council decided that this project was a priority for FRCN, and to explain to people how the proposed system would work. After concluding the focus group sessions and working out an appropriate proposal for how to assign addresses along the newly named (in draft form) streets, Thania and I set to work creating maps for the community and a final project report to illustrate the proposal to FRCN Chief and Council.

IV. REPORTING

At the conclusion of the term we presented our work to the band leadership along with our classmates. During our presentation to Chief and Council we advised them that, while feedback from members at the engagement events was generally very positive, at the Addictions Week event we did hear some concerns about the process from some members. These concerns centred on the fact that, for members who did not happen to be a part of our focus group events with the Elders and high school students, names had been assigned (albeit in draft form) to their streets without their personal input or consent. We were not able to resolve all conflicts with individual members who

sought individual consultation beyond the focus groups, and Chief and Council were informed of that during our presentation as well. This issue was also noted in our final project report, and in the report we considered, as a remedy for this challenge, the possibility of allowing everybody to ‘simply’ name the street they lived on:

Giving everybody the power to name their own streets would be empowering and create a sense of ownership of the whole street naming exercise, but there are a couple of draw-backs that must be kept in mind. First, it has the potential to be politically divisive. There are many streets that cross the lot line boundaries and have people from more than one family on them. In these situations, if a family wanted to name the road after themselves (as we heard many people say at the engagements) it would not work. Additionally, as there are a few family names that are relatively common in FRCN, there is a good chance that letting people name their own streets would lead to name duplication – creating confusion and making things hard for emergency workers. Finally, having the residents of each street choose their own name would take more time and probably more money. This might not be as important of a factor for FRCN, but it is worth noting. (Moreno Palacios and McStravick, 2010, p. 15)

Despite this unresolved challenge, we were happy to have the work favourably received by FRCN Chief and Council, who later to move ahead with implementation of the proposal. They were satisfied that by having a community-wide vote on final adoption of any set of street names the matter would be sufficiently settled.



Figure 5 FRCN members and City Planning classmates gathering around project posters during "Addictions Week". Source: Photo by the author

V. LEARNINGS

This project was an illuminating experience for Thania and me. It gave us both our first experience working directly with a First Nation in a planning context and provided me with an opportunity to consider Indigenous planning through a lens I had not considered before, that of informality. There were of course some fairly typical lessons for us which any planner would learn in organizing their first community engagement project – First Nations context or

otherwise. For example we were reminded how difficult it can be to secure enough participants for consultations. The assistance of FRCN Council in recruiting Elders to work with us was crucial in this regard. It was important for us to keep in mind too the differing cultural orientations to time, in that a 10:00 meeting start time does not mean that everyone will be in the building by 10:00.

It was also a good opportunity for us to check certain assumptions we had about working with a First Nations community. Already mentioned was the issue of map literacy. Another assumption of ours that was challenged was the idea of the primacy of Elders in speaking for or generating consensus in a community. Because of this, some FRCN members felt left out by the process, as we did not engage with people who were not members of our two target groups (Elders and high school students). We had thought that the support of the Elders and the eventual approval of Chief and Council would be enough to establish sufficient legitimacy for the project, and the band leadership did support us in this thinking, but we did learn from some individuals that they were not satisfied to be left out of direct participation in the street naming aspect of the project. While it would certainly have been beyond the scope of the project to consult directly with every FRCN member, if we had the chance to do the project again we would find a way to make sure that more people were given the chance to contribute if they wanted to do so.

From a personal standpoint, the most important takeaway from this wayfinding project was that it provided me with a chance to think about the way

that planners can act as intermediaries between the concurrent worlds of informality and formality that typified this process. The band had identified a need of theirs that could be served by the provincial government, and which necessitated them adapting their ways slightly. We worked to find a way to translate requirement for a formalized wayfinding system into a result that made sense for FRCN culturally and reflected their unique, informal land tenure and land development process. While the project design and execution was not without its flaws, it was nevertheless enlightening for us as planning students, and useful for the community.

4. Methods and Analysis

“planners are sometimes confronted with values incommensurable with modernist planning” (Sandercock, 2004b, 119)

I. Methods

As stated in Chapter 1, by employing qualitative focus group research methods with people involved with Indigenous planning, the thesis aims to assess the role of informality in the work of planners engaging with Indigenous communities, and the applicability of that particular lens to professional planning practice. What follows in this section is a detailed description of the deployment of the focus group methodology for this study, and the methods of analysis applied to that primary research.

Krueger (2009) writes that “[t]he purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better understand how people feel about an issue” (p. 2) But why a focus group rather than some other interview methodology? Focus groups work because the group setting means that, more so than other interview methodologies, they allow respondents to control the direction of the discussion rather than the interviewer. As Krueger notes, a non-directive approach allows subjects “ample opportunity to comment, to explain, and to share experiences and attitudes” (p. 3) without being hemmed-in by the interviewer’s pre-determined schedule. Krueger also writes that the

conversational group setting can create a feeling of ease and trust among group members, which can lead to more insightful sharing than one-to-one interviews (p. 4). As I anticipated my participants would be unfamiliar with the concept of informality as it applied to Indigenous planning, my intent was to have a freely flowing and wide-ranging guided conversation with participants with the expectation that insights could be revealed to allow me to answer the research questions I set out to investigate. The focus group I struck for this research was made up of two professional planners (i.e., holding the Member of the Canadian Institute of Planners, or MCIP, designation) who have extensive experience doing planning work with First Nations in Canada, and who are highly regarded as regional leaders and expert practitioners in this particular field. In accordance with the University of Manitoba's research ethics policies, focus group participants had read and signed a *letter of informed consent*, which fully apprised them of the intent of this project and some potential risks involved relating to confidentiality and ethics.

Despite a lengthy and concerted recruiting effort, the turnout for the focus group was lower than anticipated at the outset of the project, and lower than the range recommended by Krueger (2009). Multiple emails and phone calls were placed with approximately 20 individuals and organizations identified as potential participants (i.e., MCIP with experience working in First Nations contexts), but for a variety of reasons most of these candidate participants were unable to attend. Scheduling conflicts were the largest factor in preventing

people from attending (exacerbated by the timing of the event during summer when many people are away on holidays), while others cited privacy and confidentiality concerns relating to the sensitive nature of some of their work, and others suffered from an apparent lack of interest. Finally, the length of the recruiting period and the window of time within which the event could be held were both constrained by university graduation timelines, further impacting efforts. I was able to secure three participants whose schedules were able to align for the event, but unfortunately one was forced to cancel on the morning of the event, leaving me with a total of two participants for the session. I was fortunately able to meet my goal of having gender parity among participants, but I was unfortunately unable to achieve my goal of having at least one First Nations individual participate.

Krueger (2009) describes focus group study as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (p. 2). In this case, that shared area of interest was Indigenous planning, and the environment was a group study room at the University of Victoria library. The focus group session began with an acknowledgement that we were meeting on the traditional territory of the Coast and Straits Salish people, and on the site of a former Lekwungen village. Following this, I provided the participants with an introduction to this thesis project and a description of the work I was involved in with FRCN and how it relates to this project. Participants had also been provided with a “focus group

primer” document (attached as “Appendix A” to this thesis), which provided them with a brief written introduction to the ideas we would be discussing. As group participants were people with extensive experience in Indigenous planning, I left out any assessment of that field on my own part, rather leaving it up to them to tell me their own stories about what Indigenous planning is during the course of the discussions. Following this, participants took turns around the table introducing themselves and their personal history with planning in general, and planning in Indigenous contexts in particular.

From reflecting on my work on the FRCN project and the ideas presented in Chapter 2: Literature Review, I identified eight questions/prompts that I sequentially presented to the focus group for discussion. The questions vary in their specificity, some being intentionally broad and somewhat vague, but the intent was for them to provide starting points and prompts for discussion along the thematic lines they represent – all driving toward a central inquiry: what does the intersection between Informality and Indigenous planning look like, and what are the roles for planners in that space? The focus group discussion questions are as follows:

- 1. To begin with, would each participant please take a minute or so to introduce themselves to the group?*
- 2. Going around the group again, would each person give us an overview of the type of Indigenous planning work they have been involved in?*

3. *Would everyone please give me a sense from everyone of what their general impressions are of the present state of Indigenous planning.*
4. *What do you think some of the main strengths are of Indigenous planning?*
5. *And what are some of the challenges and drawbacks it faces?*
6. *In the Indigenous planning work that people here have been a part of, have you often felt that your skills and expertise were being utilised for the benefit of Indigenous communities?*
7. *I would like to hear to group talk about how well, in general, professional planners tend to be prepared to address Indigenous societies and cultures in their work.*
8. *Traditionally, mainstream Canadian planning has privileged and emphasized formality and the role of the credentialed expert. We have a group of such individuals here, and I would like to hear if you can talk about how informality might form part of your work, both with Indigenous communities and otherwise.*

9. *If anyone has had experiences working in Indigenous planning in both rural and urban settings, have any differences stood out to you in the way that your work needs to be carried-out in each of those settings? In my work and reading on what we call Indigenous planning, I have noticed that there is a thread of “informality” present, which is often noticeable in things like the emphasis on interpersonal relationship and trust building, orality, and traditional knowledge over formalized/written knowledge. I would like for the group to talk about this observation, and how accurate it may or may not be.*

In practice, once the focus group was underway, the topic of conversation varied quite widely and organically, and it happened more than once that a question I had prepared was pre-empted by the group discussion, and so it was not necessary to use all of my prepared questions in the end.

II. Analysis

With the intent of creating a useable and accessible document, I draw on the work of Jennifer Mason (1997) to inform my method of data analysis. I have engaged in a primarily literal reading of the data (the transcribed focus group proceedings) using non-cross sectional data organization, but elements of interpretive reading are present as well. Mason writes that a literal data reading

is “interested in [the] literal form, content, structure, [and] style [...]” of the data, and with a focus group transcript, the “words and language used, the sequence of interaction, the form and structure of the dialogue, and the literal content” are all informative aspects of the data to be considered (Mason, p. 109). This type of reading is useful as the focus group discussions contain many worthwhile anecdotal and factual observations from participants which can aid in answering my research questions in a “what is there” sense (p. 109). Beyond the literal aspect, an interpretive reading offers a chance to look deeper into the data, beyond the words of participants, to interpret meaning that is not present in the literal text (Mason, p. 109).

The data collected for this study, being a textual focus group transcript with a small sample size, is not entirely appropriate for a cross-sectional (‘coding’ or ‘indexing’) based analysis, and such an approach would not be likely to lead to meaningful results in this case. Regarding the suitability of coding quantitative data, Mason notes “it may be more useful for the categorization of texts with a standardized layout such as legal or administrative documents, and less useful for interview transcripts derived from semi structured conversations” such as the focus group methodology used in this study (p. 111). She further notes that coding is “unlikely to work very well” in texts that do not have a clear sequential makeup (p. 111). Rather, the method employed in this analysis is thematic, using what Mason calls non-cross-sectional data organization. She characterizes this approach as being “guided

by a search both for the *particular* rather than the common or consistent, and the *holistic* rather than the cross-sectional” (p. 128). One reason non-cross-sectional analysis is particularly well suited to this study is that it allows the organization of data “around themes [...] which do not appear cross-sectionally in [... the] data set because, for example they are too particular, specific, or idiosyncratic” (p. 129). I approached the data with an eye toward thematic organization broadly in line with the research instrument, that is the broad topic questions presented to focus group participants, performing a literal reading to establish the main themes that emerged from the data.

Thematic Analysis

The four themes I identified through my reading of the data are as follows, and each will be discussed in turn:

1. *First Nations interfaces*
2. *Federal Influence*
3. *Planning Profession's Relationship with First Nations*
4. *Formality and Informality*

1. First Nations Interfaces

The first major theme I will discuss is that of the interface and communication between First Nations and *others*. This was a broad theme that came up over and over in the focus group, and First Nations' relationship with a variety of 3rd parties, from the federal government, to municipal governments, consultants, planners, people involved in building and development (including bankers and developers), as well as other First Nations was discussed in various contexts. It was discussed that, for many First Nations, interfacing and communicating with other levels of government and NGOs consumes a large amount of their operational capacity. Said one participant:

Participant B: [... D]ealing with other levels of government, it's a huge [job], I don't think, you would know, but a lot of people don't realise just how much pressure there is on nations just to respond to other levels of government, and other agencies, and people asking questions, and it's this non-stop barrage every day of, you know, people sending in a letter, "can you do this? Can we have a meeting on this?". Somewhere like [redacted] First Nation is 350 people. So, there's only so many people that can actually physically be at that meeting. And that whole Nation could be at meetings every day, all day long, with some other government agency...

Another participant noted that many of the demands placed on First Nations time for interfacing with others centres around "non Nation-related issues" which may are not high up a Nation's list of priorities, and echoed that "it's

bonkers how much pressure there is on Nations” to participate in others’ processes. This sentiment brings to mind the idea of consultation fatigue, which came up in the focus group as well.

The ways that First Nations communicate with others is often culturally laden and imbued with expectations from both ends, but often look a lot like the First Nation adapting its ways to accommodate others’ systems, including by formalizing internal processes. For example, one participant noted that in a First Nation they have worked for, the Nation’s ad-hoc, informal method of response to frequent demands for external referrals from other agencies was resulting in mixed messages for all parties:

Participant A: With the referral process, what I’ve done is I’ve formalized it for the [...] Nation, and I get the Chief to sign off on it, I have the staff recommendation at the top, and we have a checklist that we go through. Because there’s been so many times that an agency says “well, I talked to somebody at the front desk and they said it was OK,” and I keep asking them, who was this somebody you were talking to, when did you call them? [... S]o, we’ve set it up now so that the province knows, and actually any agency we deal with that has to do external referrals, is they go through, it’s a four page checklist: how it’s going to impact the treaty issues, or whatever issues we’ve got on there. And, is it a positive, negative, or do we need more information? And get the Chief to sign-off, and in certain cases it’s the Chief and the Council, and that way they’d know, and we’ve got a paper trail of it.

The result is that an increased administrative burden on the First Nation in order for them to participate effectively in referral processes. Engaging with others' attempts to gain input from a Nation is potentially quite beneficial for the Nation, but it is notable that the Nation responded in this case by moving toward a more formal internal process.

Of course First Nations do not only find themselves responding to outsiders requests as described above. Focus group participants described several instances where a First Nation reached out to outsiders such as bankers, developers or builders in the pursuit of business dealings or on-reserve development. This too is an interesting point of interface. One such situation a participant described was quite revealing of attitudes that can exist and a prejudice that some First Nations must deal with in business dealings. When dealing with developers, "we have a lot of people still figure it's with 'wild wild west', if I can use that term, because they don't think that there are any rules or regulations". This attitude was mentioned a few times by participants. The participant continued, describing a meeting with contractors interested in bidding on an on-reserve housing development his employer was pursuing:

Participant A: I had five people come in to talk about building a house [...] when we started off with the meeting I just said "I'd like to introduce Robert [... a] Building Inspector for the Capital Regional District, and you're going to have to apply for a building permit through Robert, and he's going to inspect it as we go through this process." One of the five developers, or contractors, afterward he's

asking me “how come we’re going to have to go through the building permit process” I said, to him “I know you do good work, but there’s some contractors out there that, you know, they’re not that, they’re a little shady,” I said. And out of the five contractors that we had, because of the building inspection process, we only ended up with two bids, and that gentleman was not one of them.

This anecdote perhaps reflects a negative aspect of an expectation of informality – an expectation on the part of outsiders that business and other dealings with a First Nation can be done to a lower or relaxed standard in the absence of formal regulation. This may have been true at one point, according to the focus group participants, but it is increasingly less the case, as illustrated by the example above. Another focus group participant related a similar occurrence where an outside developer proposed to a First Nation that he would build a small retirement community on reserve, consisting of around 100 dwellings. The participant described explaining to the developer an estimate of what sewer and other servicing would cost, “and he said ‘no, no, it’s on reserve, so the servicing doesn’t cost anything!’ in what magical land of unicorns, you know, but that’s what he thought!” Relating to this, participants had an exchange in which they illustrated how having formal plans in place can act as a sort of buffer or protection against the sort of ‘bottom of the barrel’ approach that they find characterizing interfaces between First Nations and developers:

Participant B: Yeah, West Bank [First Nation] would be the other one that’s really pushed that planning agenda forward, so you see these good success stories,

of people who are saying, “what’s the plan? We know exactly what the plan is, because we have people who have put this together, we know what it costs to extend services, we know how many units are going to fit over here, we know this particular parcel is going to be commercial/light industrial. We know these things now.”

Participant A: Yeah, and “what do you mean you’re going to charge me DCCs? [Development cost charges]”.

Participant B: Yeah. Yeah. And so it’s a wild west, that’s a good term to use.

Other examples of participants discussing the interface between First Nations and outsiders include a doctor who visited a reserve to give a talk at a community meeting, and who felt that the feedback he received after the meeting was overly negative or perhaps towards himself and his department. The participant explained to the doctor that the communication should not be taken personally and “that [the members] were sharing information” in accordance with their cultural practice. That cultural practice clashed with the doctor’s, as he was accustomed to being applauded after giving his talks. Further highlighting the potential for offence to occur in the interface between a First Nation and outsiders, participants discussed a case wherein an NGO was persistently, over a relatively long period of time, requesting the presence of a particular First Nation at one of their regular bi-weekly meetings. Eventually the First Nation agreed to send a representative, along with one of the focus group participants (who was at that time employed by this Nation as a consultant).

Upon arriving at the meeting, the two representatives from the nation learned that Provincial officials were also in attendance, and they themselves were introduced by the NGO as being in attendance to show support for the NGO's project. In fact the representatives from the First Nation had simply come as a result of persistent "badgering" from the NGO wanting someone from the Nation to attend, "which is nice in a way, but [...] then just by showing up, it's implied that you're showing support, and that's not true" the participant explains, this was extremely offensive to the First Nation, "and so now, [the First Nation] will never show up again for one of those meetings". Assessing this situation, another focus group participant offered "[b]ecause that group was very disrespectful in the whole process, they burnt their bridges". I do not see this offence being taken as a consequence of the NGO failing to grasp some tricky aspect of the First Nation's culture – surely any non-First Nations group would have been similarly taken aback – but rather as an extremely careless taking for granted of the First Nation's goodwill and support.

Continuing with the theme of First Nations interfacing with others, one focus group participant described a program of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) which aims to foster relationships between municipal governments and the First Nations on whose traditional territory they are located, and whose reserves may neighbour the municipalities. UBCM provides funding for the meetings, and the focus group participant describing this, who is a permanent employee of a First Nation government, explains "I'm just so sick

and tired of those meetings.” It seems that the atmosphere tends to be “kind of tense” and not very productive in the experience of the focus group participant.

The last area explored on this theme in the focus group is interfaces between different First Nations. On this subject participants discussed a movement amongst Nations to share information about their planning activities to avoid the need to “reinvent the wheel”. As one participant put it, “if [one] First Nation has gone through it already, or we’ve gone through it, we’ll just share all the information that we’ve done”. This type of interface seems to presuppose, and likely would help to maintain positive Nation-to-Nation relations. The participant mentioned as well that more specific sub-groups from Nations sometimes have meetings among themselves, such as Land Managers from Nations that have adopted the Land Code model.

2. Federal Influence

I think it should not come as a surprise that the influence of the Federal Government was a continuing theme throughout the focus group discussion. The pervasive reach of federal law reaches far into many aspects of life and governance in First Nations communities, and it would be nigh impossible to discuss planning in a First Nations context without considering at least some of the various provisions of the *Indian Act* that affect planning and land use on reserve. Very early in the session, for example, one participant recalled that near

the beginning of their career they worked for a First Nation that was put in a tough position when the Federal Government was considering a new bill, C31. This bill was designed to shift responsibility for determining band membership from the Federal Government to individual Nations. As a result of this, the First Nation this participant was employed by, “they’re looking around and they figure ‘we’re going to end up with 1500 people’ that could be banging on their doorstep and there could be nowhere for them to live”. This possibility caused the Nation in that case to prepare, as well as they were able, for this anticipated influx of people.

The *Indian Act* is what gives First Nations legislative tools to govern themselves to varying degrees. These legislative tools and abilities are by their nature problematic, in that they proscribe a Nation’s ability to pass laws or govern itself in a manner purely of its people’s choosing or tradition. One participant gave a flavour of the attitude that exists towards the legislative regime: “[i]t was a Section 81 of the Indian Act [we were working with], that tool that has been provided is very rudimentary, and it’s really crappy in my opinion, because you still have to go back to the minister for the approval.” The idea that many functions on reserve must go to a minister for approval came up several times in the focus group, and is an important reminder of the essentially paternalistic oversight perpetuated by the *Indian Act*. Since the *First Nations Land Management Act* was passed in 1999, Nations have had the possibility of taking over a lot of authority over land use and resource management from the

Federal Government through the creation and use of Land Codes. Land Codes, which are roughly analogous to zoning bylaws, came up rather frequently in the focus group session as well – and in the experience of the focus group participants, Land Codes seem to be a positive development. Participants also discussed the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP), which is provided for in federal legislation, and its various challenges (most notably, and in keeping with practice in non-First Nations communities, the main problem participants described with CCPs is that there is no section or provision for implementation).

Beyond the problem of requiring ministerial approval for many decisions, participants noted that the tools provided simply are not comprehensive enough:

Participant A: The only other planning tool you really have is Section 81 of the Indian Act – 81G I think it is, for the Zoning Bylaw. But again, you still have to get the Minister to get that approved, and they got no implementation of it, so... And its very bare-bones, because you just can talk about the use and density, so there's no... you can't talk about development variance permits, can't do anything else. It doesn't talk about how you're going to change one zone to another, so it, you're zoned for that forever, because there's no way that you can amend your zoning bylaw, unless you put something into your zoning bylaw, but how many people have that expertise or knowledge to understand how to change a zoning bylaw?

Participants frequently compared the tools available to First Nations to those available to non-First Nations communities, which in British Columbia (where the research was conducted) are governed by the *Local Government Act*. In one instance a participant explained that, while the *Local Government Act* grants municipalities the power to issue tickets for bylaw infractions, First Nations do not have such capabilities at present. “But,” he continued, “we are working on it,” not through lobbying the Federal Government for a change in the legislation, but rather through testing the limits of the existing legislation. He explains:

Participant A: Section 22 of the First Nation Land Management Act allows the Nation to set up a ticketing system, so that’s one of the laws we’re working on now. Even though I’m told we don’t really have that authority, I said “well let’s push it and find if we really have it”, because it says “may”.

Another way in which First Nations are influenced by the Federal Government is that subdivision processes are overseen by Natural Resources Canada, although participants noted “there’s still a lot of ignorance from lack of understanding about what happens on the First Nation” and that there is an impression among many people that formal subdivision cannot occur in reserves. Subdivision is a good example of a process that in other, non-First Nations, communities is handled entirely at the local level (and the land titles office) but which must gain approval from the federal level in First Nations settings. Participants discussed that, for a subdivision to take place in a reserve

community, a Band Council Resolution must be passed expressing the band's intent or desire for a subdivision to occur, after which a Canada Land Surveyor will prepare drawings and work with Natural Resources Canada to deposit plans and register the subdivision with the First Nation Land Registry System – “The only thing that comes back to the Nation is ‘is this what you wanted?’ and you go ‘yes’” one participant noted. The main difficulty with this system, other than the aforementioned paternalistic relationship embedded in the power structure, is that there is no chance for band leadership to make provisions for access to lands beyond or access for works and services – fairly rudimentary considerations in most other settings.

3. Planning Profession's Relationship to First Nations

The third major theme that appeared in the focus group discussions was the relationship between the planning profession and First Nations – and how it has changed over time. Participants emphasized that they thought the planning profession had come a long way towards a more constructive relationship with First Nations, but that there remains more work to be done. Participants noted that formal planning, “I think for a lot of Nations it's still a fairly new idea” and that that past experiences with planning had made a poor impression on First Nations. It was noted that, in that past, “in a lot of instances [planners have] tried to take a regular planning process and just drop it into an Indigenous

community, and with not great success” and “it was ‘let’s have a public hearing’... ‘cause that’s what’s in the Local Government Act, right?”. Participants further noted that “in the old days” so-called planning processes were also frequently carried-out by engineering firms, which may or may not have had planners on staff.

This practice of applying identical planning processes to First Nations as what would be applied in non-First Nations communities is not the only failing of planning described by focus group participants. Participants also described numerous cases where “planners were taking a much more stock approach” to their work with First Nations, where they would find a process that worked for one nation, and then “just pull the cover off and [say] let’s just apply this to a new nation, apply this to a new nation, and there are people who made very good careers off of doing that.” Participants agreed that at one time this was a widespread practice:

Participant A: Yeah, and one of the plans that, you know, I first reviewed, for [one First Nation], there was a consultant in Saskatchewan who was doing the “cut and paste”, he was doing the circuit in Saskatchewan at the time, and in the plan that he had, it started off with [Nation A], and then along the way the wording [mistakenly] switched to [another group, Nation B], which was another band up the road, then it switched into [yet a third Nation C], and then there was also reference to [still a fourth Nation D]. And I don’t see that anymore.

As discussion continued participants mentioned that they thought attitudes have shifted enough over the past 20 years that such practices are probably no longer possible, and that for each community they work with now a planner will end up doing “a very tailored process.” One participant described a process she was involved in when helping a First Nation create a community plan, “[t]here was really no ‘public hearing’, really, [...] so we’d go door to door, we met people in their homes, so it was a completely different kind of process” than what they had done elsewhere. Because the population was relatively small, at about 350 people, they continued, “you could do it with that size of community [...] and in the end it took a long time, it was a non-traditional process, but it worked in that particular instance.” And, reflecting the shifted attitudes mentioned above, the participant cautioned that although the process was successful in that case “I would not in any way say you could then take that process and drop it into another community, that would be a big mistake.”

It came up in the discussion also that, even with a sound planning process individualised for a particular Nation, the relationship between a planner and a First Nation can be easily strained by unintentional cultural missteps. Aside from a perception that “[a] lot of planners don’t understand how to even approach a nation,” or “that planners don’t understand is that every nation is different,” it can be the case that a planner is simply ignorant of a particular Nation’s customs and expectations for behaviour. One participant gave an example of this, at a Tribal Council meeting they were involved in, “one of the

elders brought in his flute. And the [non-First Nations professional] that was leading the meeting, she decided that she was going to touch the flute, and you don't do that. And she was quite surprised when she got walloped across her hand quite harshly, because that would have been a huge insult." The expectation communicated by focus group participants is that this type of unintentional offence could be avoided by planners simply taking time to learn about the cultures they are dealing with ahead of time.

One participant wondered if part of the reason planners haven't appeared well equipped to address First Nations societies or cultures could be a lack of training, and they lamented that Canadian universities are not doing enough to prepare new planners for working with First Nations people, that "you don't [come away with] an understanding of how to do consultation with a First Nation, or even, you know, what does it look like". This was contradicted by another participant who reminded the group that there are a few planning programs in Canada that place a particular emphasis on Indigenous planning. All participants were hopeful that increasing the amount of training in such matters at the university level could improve the relationship between the planning profession and Indigenous communities. While it will not be possible for a planner to learn and adapt to every individuality of each First Nation they come to work with, one participant emphasized that just being open and respectful to what one acknowledges as unknown is an important stance for outsiders:

Participant B: I don't know all those back stories, but you know, just that's something *that* important, that I'm someone that's much better at proceeding carefully to find those back stories, and not get involved necessarily, but just be respectful. [...] It's finding that balance point.

Education itself, or capacity building, came up as another aspect of the relationship between the planning profession and First Nations, when one participant explained that they work with First Nations "to provide a level of professional and technical expertise and help a process move forward in whatever way it does," and that "hopefully there's some transfer of information from me to someone in the community [and] that they become that person and eventually I'm gone. Right, that is my goal, I'm not meant to be there forever." This participant recognized that a local who had the same amount of training or knowledge as himself or herself would theoretically be able to achieve things in the community that they themselves, as an outsider, could not. As an example, they offered their experience with one Nation where the participant was hired to assist in the creation of a community plan. This community had a longstanding ongoing dispute amongst its members regarding the title of Hereditary Chief, and who should hold that title. There were several members claiming that title, each with backing from different parts of the community. This situation posed a challenge to the planner, as it was recognised as important to solicit "the" Hereditary Chief's input, but no clear way to achieve this presented itself in light of the ongoing dispute. The planner decided to seek input from all them in the

end, remarking “it’s not for me to go solve the Hereditary Chief issue for [this First Nation]. That is none of my business, you know, and so stay out of it. And I have no opinion on it, because I shouldn’t.” It is possible that a member of that Nation could have dealt with the issue more directly, but in this case it was a clear boundary identified by the planner, and they kept a respectful distance from it.

With respect to this notion that the planning profession’s relationship with First Nations is evolving and perhaps maturing, participants also discussed the growing “Indigenous planning community”. As a group of people who engage in similar work throughout the country, but often in rural settings away from major centres, planners working in Indigenous contexts are, according to the focus group participants, working to strengthen their network and increase their availability to one another as “people that other people can lean on” including through online means such as Facebook. This sharing of knowledge was described by one participant as a “heavy reliance of everybody on everybody, they say ‘well how do you do this’ and ‘what did you do?’ and ‘how did you involve youth?’, and ‘what kind of elders event did you have?’” such organic information sharing seems to sidestep written academic channels (which can be “slow to respond to things that are changing” in the words of one participant) or other published sources, and could perhaps indicate a relatively rapid evolution of this part of the profession. One participant described a “huge thirst for knowledge” on the part of planners, and offered an example of a Planning

Institute of British Columbia (PIBC) Indigenous planning education event held at a local university which sold out “almost immediately” with “planners just [...] so desperate to be in attendance at it. Even within this growing and increasingly engaged Indigenous planning community though, some old attitudes can persist – the participant who described that PIBC Indigenous planning event noted that many in attendance seemed to be hoping they would come away with “the checklist” that would allow them to set out and ‘do Indigenous planning’ right away.

In a couple of instances, focus group participants noted some aspects of their work with Indigenous communities which would be equally at home in a non-Indigenous setting. Two beliefs which are fairly widely held in contemporary planning circles are the principle that planners don’t have all the answers, and that it is damaging to give people an impression that their opinion or input will be taken into account in situations where it will in fact not. Said one participant,

Participant B: [Planners] can’t waltz in as planners and say “well we know what’s right for you.” You know, “you should do this, this is all wrong, oh, this is messy over here, oh I don’t like the colour of that, oh that logo’s terrible, why do you have a fish?” you know, you can’t come in and... you can’t. Because that’s the side the community has to contribute, so for me that’s the whole art of it.”

Another participant agreed, “the community knows what’s best for themselves”. One participant also stressed the importance of managing expectations and carefully shaping an engagement so that the questions asked of members are

not condescending or simply uninteresting. This participant offered an analogy of a professional engineer offering a community the choice between using a 6” pipe or a 12” pipe for a utility connection. “For most people” they explained, “that is a nonsense question” and something that should be addressed entirely according to the engineer’s professional expertise. Asking meaningful questions in a planning setting is just as important, “[e]specially for nations that have gone through the treaty process, oh so here’s another meeting and let’s ask [*sarcastically*] ‘what would you like to see in the community?’”. The group agreed that it is incumbent upon a planner, as the outside expert and professional, to ensure that their questions to a community are relevant (and relevancy will be informed by culture), do not waste people’s time, and are not “size or pipe type questions”. Participants were generally in agreement that these principles are equally applicable in First Nations communities as they are elsewhere, “because people are the same no matter where you go,” but that the specific implementation will differ depending on local culture.

4. Formality and Informality

The last major theme that will be covered in this chapter is that of formality and informality. Although participants were given the “focus group primer” document ahead of time to help prepare them for this aspect of the discussion, overall they were not particularly forthcoming with discussion on the theme of informality and formality. In many cases, participants discussed

aspects of their work that fit within the theme of in/formality without giving name to it. Other times, such as in the case of formalising internal bureaucratic processes to interface more effectively with outside agencies as mentioned earlier, formality was named more particularly. Overall, participants seemed to acknowledge that informality was part of the status quo of operations in many First Nations, but felt that for a variety of reasons Nations see it as being in their best interest to move aspects of their communities towards a more formal stance.

Perhaps the area where formality came up the most was in discussing business dealings with outsiders, as touched on in the Interfaces section above. Even in cases where a majority of a Nation's reserve land is formally distributed through Certificates of Possession (and in many cases tenure is much more informally managed, as described, for example, in Chapter 3 of this thesis), a First Nation might find outsiders reluctant to deal with First Nations members as their land is not a provided for in the mainstream system of land titles, encumbrances and so on. One focus group participant described this reluctance as he experienced it in his work with a First Nation in BC, and how adopting a Land Code regime in their community moved them toward more formal internal processes, and let them create documentation similar to that seen in a municipal context, which greatly contributed to the peace of mind of a bank:

Participant A: One of the cases that I've done, is we, the nation ourselves we had a mortgage put on for construction of our new building, with VanCity [credit

union], they had some concerns that there was no way to identify that they had, what do you call it, an encumbrance, that they're going to get their money first, so I showed them our form that we have, which is very similar to what they have at the Land Title office, and they were quite excited about it. So that sped up that process quite quickly for us.

The participant stressed that “it’s not that [the First Nation] wants to be a good little municipality, it’s just that in order for us to participate in the local economy, the regional economy, we need to put something in there that bankers and developers understand”. Interestingly, on that note, de Soto’s work on formalizing land tenure to access “dead capital” and allow fuller participation in the capitalist market economy was brought up multiple times by participants. What I heard from participants in these instances is that there is a need on the part of many First Nations to “start generating revenue streams,” and “participat[ing] in the economy property, as a true partner,” and the way some are going about that is by formalizing land tenure on reserve to allow access to capital.

On the theme of informality, one participant did note that “First Nations planning is interesting because in fact all of it is informal [as ... t]here is no planning process that is required of Nations” as opposed to municipalities, which are required by provincial legislation to prepare Official Community Plans (or Municipal Development Plans, or similar documents) from time to time. This is a pretty broad reading of informality, but roughly fits Yiftachel and Yakobi’s

explanation, mentioned earlier, of “spatial dynamics that are not shaped, controlled, or sanctioned by the state” (in Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010, p.122). Participants also hit on the idea presented in Chapter 2: Literature Review, that “planning” has been happening in First Nations societies for many generations before the colonial era:

Participant B: I guess what I would say is, it’s still new, the idea is still new in a lot of communities, about working on formal planning processes. That, again, separating that informality, informality in planning – which has gone on from the beginning of time, people get together and plan in groups, and say “this is the plan”. And even though maybe it was never, maybe not everyone was involved, maybe it was not written down, it was not formalized in every way, but things happened because that was the plan.

Despite this, it seems that the experience of the focus group participants leads them to recognise distinct benefits for First Nations in moving towards increased formality. Aside from the economic drivers associated with freeing up de Soto’s famous “dead capital”, focus group participants observed again and again that the Land Code regime increased the availability to First Nations of various legislative tools that could help them achieve their goals. Often too, one participant noted, a First Nation’s goals are shared by other agencies, and so “if you’ve got a common goal, like [protecting a] stream, and everybody’s understanding how to protect it now, the tools never used to be on the First Nation’s side, under the Land Code those tools are there now.” Having access

to the same tools as a municipality, though, does not mean that a Nation will have the same operational capacity as one, nor does it mean that the Nation will begin to behave as one. Having the same tools is one thing, one participant noted, “but how you implement them, how you bring them in, there again you’ve got to listen to how the community wants to get things done.” Although Land Codes are roughly analogous to zoning bylaws in other contexts, and represent a means for a band government to enact more rules and formalize aspects of their community operations they wouldn’t have power to do under the *Indian Act*, this formalization can happen in a way that respects a Nation’s culture. Said one participant:

Participant A: [The Nation I work for is] moving away from the oral, and [they’re] moving into the written record. But we still have to listen to and acknowledge and work through the oral traditions as well. And it’s actually, even says in the Land Code that, even though it’s a very formal document, it makes reference in there that I can do certain things as the Lands Manager, but it has to be based upon certain criteria. And one of them in there is the oral traditions of the Nation

Continuing on the line of thinking that increasing informality might be desirable for some First Nations, participants offered that “expectations are going up” in First Nations with respect to what the results of building and development should look like, and also with respect to how people in power should conduct themselves. The idea of “how come it looks good over there, but it isn’t good over here?” is how one participant put it. Or in the words of

another, a lot more band members “have education, they have travelled, they know what’s happening in other places, they say ‘you know, well we’re not putting up with this kind of garbage of handshake deals –’” that might characterize some informal dealings. This part of the discussion was the first instance of focus group members using the idea of informality in a negative context, but it was not limited to informality in First Nations communities – one participant recalled “[in the ‘60s], you know you’d go into the Mayor’s office, shake the Mayor’s hand, in Nanaimo, and things just happened – a subdivision occurred”. Indeed, another adds, “Informality also exists at municipal levels, it’s just, it’s everywhere. It’s [up to] us as a profession, how do we get into it and bring it out – how do we deal with it properly?”

Participants offered examples of situations that arose in their own experience where they needed to grapple with informality. One participant described a situation where one Elder’s informal approach to time and communication left them unsure of how to proceed with the work:

Participant A: [W]hen we had a community meeting about [the project] the Elder stood up and said “we need to have a burn”. So I said “okay, well that’s fine”. So I just sat back, waiting for the burn. I just figured somebody else was going to do the burn. And so I finally approached the Elder, and I said to him “well that’s nice, um, thank you for bringing up that we’re going to have a burn – who’s going to do this burn, who’s going to set it all up?” and he looked at me and he said “you are.” Seeing a case like that, I don’t think that, you don’t bring

it up at the time, because when the Elder was speaking you'd just take that information, you'd back off and wait to see what's going to happen. And then if it hasn't happened in a while, you just move forward again and find out what's going on. Because thinking back on it, if I was a young planner, I would have started talking about the burn right then and there.

This informality with regards to timelines was manifested in another event related by a focus group participant who had experienced a consultant struggle to understand a consultation process that refused to conform to his expectations for scheduling. "So the consultation process," he explained, "it's not a never-ending process, it's just, it's not a defined process in the way that [the consultant] wanted it defined." The consultant was used to saying "'tell me the seven steps, and what day are we going to be done this' you know? 'We're done when we're done'" was the band's response, while the consultant "was thinking of the planning consultant perspective of 'how much of my time, how much money am I losing?'" I think this clearly illustrates the gulf that can exist when a planner is not prepared to adapt to informality. Another example offered by a different participant highlighted the importance of personal relationships when working with First Nations, and how developing such relationships can provide much more information than formal engagement strategies. In this case, the participant had offered a ride through the snow for a resident of a community they were consulting for, and the vehicle became stuck before they reached the city. They were stuck for quite a while before being towed, and "we just started talking about stuff, he had so much knowledge of everything that's

ever happened in the community, that was an incredible two and half hours of information sharing” which would not have been possible had there not been a trusting relationship between the planner and the community member.

I have one instructor at the University of Manitoba, Ian Wight, who often describes the role of planners as being “on tap” rather than “on top” – in other words, being available to people and of use to them, but not necessarily directing or instructing them. This is a thread that was picked up on by the focus group participants in terms of the role of planners in assisting people by translating local informal knowledge into usable policy. One such example was provided by a participant who described a project that they had worked on with a coastal First Nation in British Columbia. The task was to create a long-range community plan, and through the consultation process leading up to the writing of the plan, the band Chief and Council became aware of a sentiment in their community that they had not been previously aware of. The engagement revealed that the community was strongly opposed to tanker traffic in the Salish Sea (part of which the band’s traditional territory encompasses). Consequently, a statement to that effect was put into the community plan, and “if someone were to approach [the Nation] and say ‘well what’s your opinion on tanker traffic?’ now there is one,” and it came about and was formalized through this planning process. “In a community I go into,” one participant remarked, “I’m there because I have a level of professional expertise” which the Nation can utilize. They continue:

Participant B: The community is the expert of their community. And you [...] provide a level of technical expertise, and process expertise, that's what I feel like I contribute, but it's the community members who have the whole story. That know what's happening. And they're the experts of that story, and you have to honour and welcome that expertise.

The participant stressed, though, that this does not mean that everyone is a planner. On the contrary, they explained "I don't think people should be portraying themselves as planners if they're not a credentialed individual", emphasizing the importance of the formal credential, "[a]nd there are people who are practicing as planners who are not members of the accredited, and all those things are true, and I take issue with that," reflecting a common inclination in the majority culture.

The last thread I will touch on in this theme is the idea presented a few times by focus group participants that there might be something for non-First Nations communities and the planning profession to learn from informality. "[I]nformality in planning processes," one participant said, "it's something that we [planner] need to be looking at, not just for Indigenous communities." Again, the participants did acknowledge that informality is present to some degree in municipal governments. The 'handshake with the mayor' example given above, and also in the participants' personal experience, "often [...] with local government, too, I think in my experience at the [Regional District government] or the city, a lot of discussions you would have with a potential developer, [...]"

never get to Council” as a result of a process of informal screening at the staff level. But beyond that, participants wondered if there isn’t a way to improve the status quo formalized planning processes that dominate much of mainstream Canadian planning. “[W]hat can we learn from what is happening in First Nations communities [...], that could inform a formal process?” one participant asks, and another speculates about what this could be:

Participant B: [T]here’s a way to share information or having a better kind of process than – and I don’t know what it is. But it’s not the Public Hearing in the *Local Government Act*, but it’s not nothing either. It’s not some “oh, let’s not have any requirements”. We have to have something, you know?

What this informality-informed way forward will look like is not known, but it is telling and encouraging that planners are identifying the rigid formality of the current status quo as something lacking, and that they would consider less formal approaches as a potential remedy.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

“Engagement with informality is in many ways quite difficult for planners. Informal spaces seem to be the exception to planning, lying outside its realm of control.” (Roy, 2009, p. 155).

This final chapter will begin with a discussion of the results of the Analysis section of the previous chapter before moving into some possibilities for future research and final conclusions for the thesis.

I. Discussion

After having looked at the four main themes that emerged from the focus group research in Chapter 4: Methods and Analysis, we can now return to the three central research questions first posted in Chapter 1: Introduction, and take a look at what kind of answers the data supports for them. This discussion section also offers a chance for further reflection on the place of planners in informality and Indigenous contexts.

1. How do planners with experience in Indigenous planning relate to informality?

It seems that planners are unaccustomed to thinking of their work in terms of formality or informality, but that they nevertheless have extensive experience with both, and with working in the nexus between the two. In other words, to take an interpretive reading of the data rather than a literal one, participants were aware of the *condition* of informality, but not the *category* of informality. In the absence of a conscious awareness of or engagement with that particular aspect of a planning context, though, there is a risk of planners not grasping the importance of informality in making meaningful connections with First Nations communities. This was mentioned in the previous chapter, with examples given such a planner trying to apply a “stock” planning process from non-First Nations communities only to find that, say, a formal public hearing will not meet with much success in some Indigenous contexts. Bringing an awareness of informality more directly into planners’ consciousness will enhance their ability to engage effectively with First Nations.

One of the strongest impressions I was left with after analyzing the focus group results was that the focus group participants felt “people are the same no matter where you go,” whether they are Indigenous or otherwise, and that they all want the same things. This may be true in the very basic sense of physiology and safety (*a la* Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which was brought up by one participant) insofar as it relates to sanitation and transportation, etc., but the

cultural and social conditions people live within can be very different. Importantly, the “wants” for individuals belonging to a colonized people will tend to differ from the “wants” of the colonizers – consequently, the way that planners can go about helping people get what they want will be different. And indeed, one of the things that can differentiate one community from another is the orientation toward informality. The planners who were involved in the focus group research in this case seemed to relate to informality with relative ease, but it is clear from looking at past practice that this was not always the case. Signs that planners are engaging with traditional knowledge and oral culture are present in the data, as are numerous indications that the participants were used to working with informal timeframes and land tenures corresponding with various degrees of formality.

The concept of planners as helpers, alluded to above, is a somewhat problematic one, of course, given that it might convey an image of helplessness on the other party. In the case of planning with Indigenous people, there is a need for the helping on planners’ part too, as elements of the profession seek decolonization for themselves and their work. Australian artist/activist Lilla Watson’s words are succinct in this regard: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

2. To what extent are cultural gaps between planning and Indigenous communities impeding the relevancy of planning for such communities?

The special working groups of the planning associations, the informal associations of planners working in Indigenous contexts, and the increasing emphasis on Indigenous planning in some Canadian planning schools all point to a profession that is engaged with the task of improving its relevancy for Indigenous communities in spite of cultural differences. But it is not by *overcoming* cultural differences that planning will ultimately achieve its full potential of utility for First Nations. Rather it will be by shifting and realigning the culture and values of the profession itself to meet Indigenous communities on their own terms. This has yet to happen, but based on the results of the focus group data analysis I think it is true that progress is being made. The data supports an optimistic answer to this question: that the cultural barriers between the planning profession and the Indigenous communities it serves are continuing to lessen as the profession progresses on a path of decolonization.

Despite this optimistic outlook, it remains true that a colonialist mindset can block sensitivity to and respect for cultures. When focus group respondents talked about the maturing of the profession, and the evolution in Indigenous planning they had witnessed over the course of their careers, I do hear them talking about decolonization in some respects. Examples given in the data relating to consultants doing “copy-paste” jobs for various First Nations without even getting the names right, to me these speak to a complete lack of respect

that reflects a colonialist mindset – a lack of respect for the First Nations as well as for the worth of the planning work itself. That such practices are apparently not happening any longer is itself no more than a very baseline of progress away from colonialism, but it is not the only such step that has been taken.

3. How are planners endeavouring to avoid the perpetuation of colonialist relations in their work with Indigenous communities?

It is interesting to note that the term colonialism (or any variant of it) was not mentioned once during the entire focus group session. Whether intentionally or not, participants avoided any mention of this force that has had such a profound impact on Canadian society in general – and Indigenous people in particular – while discussing numerous issues that relate to colonialism. Much like informality, though, even without putting name to it planners working in First Nations contexts are clearly dealing with colonialism-related issues probably every day. It seems that planners are, though, in small but important ways, taking steps to avoid perpetuating colonialist relations in their work. Steps like, making a choice not to involve one's self with a Hereditary Chief dispute which one has no business in, or going door-to-door in a reserve to discuss a draft plan with individual members rather than holding a public hearing – these things are what it looks like when a planner working in an Indigenous context attempts to decolonize their work.

There is a concern that movements toward enabling market capitalist economies on reserve are an extension of the colonial relationship, however, and focus group participants showed a certain enthusiasm for this strategy, even mentioning Hernando de Soto by name. At least in this one way, the participants' observation (noted in Chapter 4) that academia can be slow to catch up to the reality on the ground may appear inaccurate, as there is not a consensus in the literature that do Soto's ideas are the best way forward (see, for example, Baxter and Trebilcock, 2009). Indeed, while it might be a stretch to say that *any* movement away from informality is a movement towards assimilation, in the case of federal initiatives to reform Indigenous land tenure into a market based approaches, I do not think it is too great a stretch. Baxter and Trebilcock (2009) note:

The creation of reserve communities was, however, intended only as a stepping-stone toward full assimilation into Anglo white society, and not necessarily as a lasting settlement and governance pattern for First Nations peoples. Instead, colonial policy-makers anticipated that reserve communities would gradually adopt systems of private property holdings—an idea that was advanced in the influential Bagot Commission on Indian Affairs in 1844. (71)

Certificates of Possession and Land Code provisions fall short of private ownership of band lands, but they are steps in that direction, and we have seen in the focus group data that the accessing “dead capital” is an incentive for formalizing land tenure. Whatever present economic advantages are

represented by such moves, it must be kept in mind by planners involved in that work that there is a nefarious history behind it.

Indian Reserves are under the control of the state, and ultimately they are administered by the state, and yet the mere fact of their state-led administration does not mean they should automatically be considered free from informal processes. Informality does persist, and a direct line can be drawn between Land Codes under the *First Nations Land Management Act* and steps down this path embarked upon in the 1800's such as the *Gradual Civilization Act (1857)*, which "was a direct attempt by the government of Upper Canada to dismantle the reserve system by granting private land holdings to First Nations individuals" (Baxter and Trebilcock, 2009, pp. 72).

Chapter 4 ended off with the notion that a mode of planning informed by informality could be a remedy for some of the acknowledged shortcomings of planning in Indigenous and non-Indigenous settings. Ananya Roy (2009) argues that informality constitutes a state of exception from the state, and one that the state itself produces (p. 155). When she wrote this she was not thinking of cultural informality as manifested in First Nations, but rather more urban forms of informality that cause people to be excluded from traditional planning processes. Roy describes these states of exception "unplanned and unplannable" (p. 156), and yet the experience of planning with First Nations shows that it is quite possible for planners to engage with informality by discarding old notions of what constitutes a planning process, and what aspects

of a community might benefit from planning. Planners engaging more consciously with informality might consider relaxing some elements of formal planning to make them more responsive to the people being served by the planning, whether Indigenous or otherwise. Such a shift could represent a true evolution of the profession, bringing it more in line with Indigenous contexts, and justifying use of the term “Indigenous planning” as explored in the third definition described in Chapter 2: Literature Review² There are of course barriers to this type of realignment (including the major challenge of “unlearning” a colonial mindset that puts formality beyond question and above the informal) and planners must recall that planning won’t become “the position from which the clamour of ‘difference’ in (post)colonial settings can be heard, translated and mediated” by beginning to better reflect Indigenous people’s needs (Porter, 2010, p. 17). Nor is that a goal for the profession. But it is a goal for the profession, and an important one, to move towards a decoupling from the colonial project, and by learning from Indigenous approaches to informality we can continue that gradual movement.

² “Planning Conducted by Either Indigenous or Non-Indigenous People, and which Attempts to Realign the Values Endemic/Embedded in Planning to Better Reflect the Values of Indigenous Cultures”, see page 26.

II. Future Research Possibilities

In working on this thesis project, a couple of ideas have stuck out to me as particularly interesting avenues for future research. The first centres on the question of how changes to planning legislation could enable planners to deal more effectively with informality in Canadian cities. Legislated requirements for staid and unchanging formal processes potentially hamper the profession's ability to reach people traditionally underrepresented in planning, including urban aboriginal and newcomer immigrant populations that might come from contexts of greater informality (such as those in the global south).

I would also suggest that there is a lot of work to be done investigating the role of planners in the ongoing push from some quarters to increase privatization of reserve lands. Wholesale adoption of European models of development by First Nations is a potentially troubling path, and one that Nations will either decide to pursue or not of their own volition. But the role of planners, developers, and others involved in the real estate development industry will be important to observe going forward, especially as it pertains to a grand colonialist assimilation agenda.

Finally I would like to observe that the present thesis is but a small contribution to the greater understanding of how planners negotiate informality and the space between seemingly incompatible systems. There is certainly much more to be written about this important topic, and it would be useful for

further research to be carried-out extending the number of participants involved in the present study.

III. Conclusion

This thesis set out to identify a possible linkage between the concept of urban informality and Indigenous planning, and explore a role for planners in that linkage. By engaging in qualitative research with members of the planning profession who have extensive experience doing planning work in the nexus between First Nations and other levels of government, the thesis gave an opportunity to reflect on planners' ability to work in contexts of informality. A review of the relevant contemporary literature on informality and Indigenous planning was offered along with a detailed report on the author's experience with informality in planning with Fisher River Cree Nation.

Through an analysis of the data gathered for this project, research questions around planner's relationship with colonialism, informality, and the cultural barriers between planners and First Nations have been answered, and opportunities for future research have been offered. Though the empirical research base of the thesis is small, it is clear from the research that some planners have developed a degree of comfort with many aspects of First Nations cultures, and with working with informality. However, it is not clear that planners have a strong awareness of informality as an issue and more work

remains to be done in introducing it to the constellation of lenses and theoretical approaches brought to bear in Indigenous planning circles as well as mainstream planning circles. It is hoped that this thesis has helped towards that end, and that readers will have found some valuable insights from the work.

References

- Acioly, C. Reviewing urban revitalization strategies in Rio de Janeiro: from urban project to urban management approaches. *Geoforum* 32, pp. 509-520, 2001.
- AlSayyad, Nezar (2004). Urban Informality as a “New” Way of Life. In A. Roy & N. AlSayyad (Eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (pp. 7-30). Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Baxter, J. and Trebilcock, M. (2009). “Formalizing” Land Tenure in First Nations: Evaluating the Case for Reserve Tenure Reform. *Indigenous Law Journal* 7(2), pp. 45-122.
- Bromley, Ray (2004). Power, Property, and Poverty: Why De Soto’s “Mystery of Capital” Cannot Be Solved. In A. Roy & N. AlSayyad (Eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (pp. 271-288). Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Catalyst Paper (2006, October 16). Tseshaht Nation Buys Surplus Port Alberni Land From Catalyst Paper. *Pulp and Paper Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.pulpandpaperonline.com/article.mvc/Tseshaht-Nation-Buys-Surplus-Port-Alberni-Lan-0001>

CBC (2006, November 24). Aboriginal children are poorest in country: report. *Canadian Broadcast Corporation News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2006/11/24/child-poverty.html>

CBC (2013, November 4). B.C.'s Nisga'a becomes only First Nation to privatize land. *Canadian Broadcast Corporation News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-s-nisga-a-becomes-only-first-nation-to-privatize-land-1.2355794>

Christie, R. and Rasmussen, E. (2010, November). Introduction to INAC Planning Processes. City Planning Studio. Lecture conducted from University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

Healey, Patsy (1997). *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Hibbard, Michael (2006). Tribal Sovereignty, the White Problem, and Reservation Planning. *Journal of Planning History*. 5(2), pp. 87-105.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2011). *Canadians in Context – Population Size and Growth*. Retrieved from <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=35>

Jojola, Ted (2013). Forward. In I. Skelton and O. Ixtacuy López (Eds.), *Models of Indigenous Development* (pp. x–xiv). Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.

- King, L. (2004). Competing Knowledge Systems in the Management of Fish and Forests in the Pacific Northwest. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* , 4, 161-177.
- Krueger, R., Casey, M (2009). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, 4th Ed.*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Lane, Marcus (2006). The Role of Planning in Achieving Indigenous Land Justice and Community Goals. *Land Use Policy*. (23), pp. 385-394.
- Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110 – 114. Retrieved at:
<http://www.muhenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/campuslife/SDP%20Reading%20Lorde.pdf>
- Mason, Jennifer (1996). *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, Laura (2011, March). First Nations children growing up in Third World conditions. *Packet & Times*. Retrieved from
<http://www.orilliapacket.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2995647>
- Nilsen, E. (2005). Rethinking Place in Planning: Opportunities in Northern and Aboriginal Planning in Nunavut, Canada. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 14(1) (supplement), pp. 22-37.

Niska'a Nation Knowledge Network. (2009). *Nisga'a Final Agreement Fact Sheet April 21, 2009*. Retrieved November 27, 2010, from Niska'a Nation Knowledge Network: http://nnkn.ca/files/u28/Nisga_fact_sheet_2__1_.pdf

Peattie, L. (1968). Reflections on Advocacy Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 34(2), pp. 80-88.

Peters, E. (2002). "Our City Indians": Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975. *Historical Geography*, 30, pp. 75-92.

Porter, L. (2010). *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*. Surrey, UK: Ashgate.

Porter, L. and Barry, J. (2013). Planning with Indigenous Customary Land Rights: An investigation of shifts in planning law and governance in British Columbia, Canada and Victoria, Australia. Retrived from https://www.academia.edu/5994666/Planning_with_Indigenous_Customary_Land_Rights_An_investigation_of_shifts_in_planning_law_and_governance_in_British_Columbia_Canada_and_Victoria_Australia

Pratt, M.L. (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York: Routledge.

- Roy, A. & AlSayyad, N. (2004). Urban Informality: Crossing Borders. In A. Roy & N. AlSayyad (Eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (pp. 1-6). Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Roy, A. (2005). Urban informality: Towards a new epistemology of planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), pp. 147-158.
- Sandercock, Leonie (2004). Commentary: Indigenous Planning and the Burden of Colonialism. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 5(1), pp. 118-124.
- Sandercock, L. and Attili, G (2010). *Finding Our Way* (documentary film). Vancouver: Moving Images.
- Sandercock, L (1998). *Towards Cosmopolis: planning for multicultural cities*. London: John Wiley.
- Sanyal, Romola. Squatting in Camps: Building and Insurgency in Spaces of Refuge. *Urban Studies*, 48, pp. 877-890.
- Saul, John Ralston (2008). *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*. Toronto: Viking Canada.

Skelton, Ian (2013). Indigenous Development and Planning: Experiences at the University of Manitoba. In I. Skelton and O. Ixtacuy López (Eds.), *Models of Indigenous Development* (pp. 7-22). Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.

Skelton, I. and Ribeiro, V. (2010). Marginalized populations and property markets: analyzing experiences in Brazil and Canada. *Interfaces Brasil/Canada*, 11, pp. 121-142.

Student Collective (2013). Epilogue: Statements on Indigenous Planning. In I. Skelton and O. Ixtacuy López (Eds.), *Models of Indigenous Development* (pp. 111–114). Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.

Peter M. Ward, Flavio de Souza, and Cecilia Giusti 'Colonia' Land and Housing Market Performance and the Impact of Lot Title Regularisation in Texas Urban Studies December 2004 41: 2621-2646.

Ward, M. (2004). Informality of Housing Production at the Urban-Rural Interface: The “Not So Strange Case” of the Texas *Colonias*. In A. Roy & N. AlSayyad (Eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (pp. 243-270). Lanham: Lexington Books.

Watson, V. (2009). Seeing from the South: Refocusing urban planning on the globe's central urban issues. *Urban Studies*, 46(11), pp. 2259-2275.

Yiftachel, O. and Yakobi, H (2004). Control, Resistance, and Informality: Urban Ethnocracy in Beer-Sheva, Israel. In A. Roy & N. AlSayyad (Eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (pp. 209-239). Lanham: Lexington Books.

[Appendix “A” – Focus Group Primer]

Focus Group Primer: Informality

Kyle McStravick, University of Manitoba, July 2014

Purpose

This is a brief introduction to the concept of ‘informality’ in urban studies, meant to be a primer for a focus group you have agreed to participate in as part of my thesis research. The overall purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of how planners can engage with informality for better outcomes when working with communities and entities which do not identify with the formal processes and outcomes typically associated with traditional western urban planning, and to communicate this in an academic fashion so that the findings may be of use to the planning academy and profession in partial fulfilment of the graduation requirements for the Master of City Planning Degree at the University of Manitoba.

Context

First Nations in Canada exist within a majority settler culture that in many ways is very different from their own cultures. One of the principle differences is that mainstream Canadian culture tends to exhibit much more formality than many First Nations contexts in a variety of ways – from timelines and scheduling approaches to interpersonal relationships, governance, and land tenure. As First Nations cultures tend to be more orally focused, long form written planning documents such as Official Community Plans or zoning regulations can appear starkly out of step with traditional First Nations approaches to land use. Moreover, many oral cultures are more focused on consensus, continuing evolution and negotiation than what is considered normal in a mainstream Canadian context.

Canada’s ongoing history of colonialism and suppression of Indigenous cultures leads to many manifestations of the imbalance of power that currently exists between First Nations and other levels of government in the country. One such manifestation is the provision of services and funding from the federal

[Appendix “A” – Focus Group Primer (con’t)]

government to First Nations often being contingent upon the aboriginal groups conforming to western mainstream values and processes such as the aforementioned long form planning documents.

Informality

In a planning context informality may be broadly defined as “spatial dynamics that are not shaped, controlled, or sanctioned by the state” (Yiftachel and Yakobi in Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010, p.122). There is a body of planning research on ‘informality’, which deals with a continuum ranging from highly rigid and state-driven process (‘formal’) to more fluid and organic, often extra-legal, ways of organizing communities and people (‘informal’). Informality is a “mode” that focuses on the organic way that things and people have of sorting themselves out with traditions and traditional knowledge in the absence of, or in spite of, formalized systems. This does not imply ‘disorganization’, and the terms ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ are used without an implication a judgement of value or worth. The concept is applied to a variety of subjects: housing, administration, land tenure, and relationships just to name a few.

The academic literature on informality often focuses on the global south and the developing world – places like Cairo, Rio de Janeiro, and Mumbai, where massive informal settlements exist outside of formal state control, governance, and services. In these well-known cases of informal settlement we can easily discern the continuum of in/formality at work. A purely informal settlement such as those that exist on the outskirts of Cairo – extra-legal dwellings that are typically not serviced with water or electricity, and without formalized security of tenure or ownership – would fall at one extreme end of the continuum. Somewhere a little further across the spectrum would fall a place like the Rocinha *favela* in Rio de Janeiro. It, like many *favelas* in Brazil, was once an area of completely informal housing but, through the “internationally acclaimed” Favela-Bairro program, gained a degree of formality in the form of sewage and water services, street improvements, and so forth.

On the other end of the spectrum would be places like one would commonly see in suburban Canada: fully serviced houses built to a specific code and with a registered title, legally provided for in state planning and regulation (and likely with a highly regulated mortgage to boot). But, bearing in mind that informality is not just about physicality, this is where the grey areas of

[Appendix “A” – Focus Group Primer (con’t)]

the continuum appear: it is completely feasible that someone could be living illegally or informally in a house that is, in terms of built-form and regulations, perfectly “formalized” and acceptable. There could be roomers in a family house beyond what is allowed for in a zoning bylaw, or there could be people squatting in a house that was left vacant by its legal owners. There could be people squatting in a non-residential building that is otherwise totally legal.

These are all aspects of informality that can apply to ‘formal’ housing, but because they are less visible than a shantytown they are easy for planners in Canada to forget about when considering informality. Indeed, the emphasis in the informality literature on so-called Third World informality may lead people in countries like Canada to forget that the issue is relevant to us as well. And beyond that informality which comes about as a forced consequence from one’s lack of means to obtain formalised housing or to participate in the state-led economic and planning apparatuses, there exist other reasons and avenues for informality.

The formality of mainstream western society is culturally imbued. The emphasis on the written word over the oral, the faith and trust placed in formal credentials over relationships, and the emphasis on centralized top-down authority models over more decentralised or grass-roots decision making are all examples of the Euro-western cultural tendency toward formality which are not always shared by other cultures.

First Nations, Informality, and ‘Transnational Interrogation’

It occurs to me that First Nations in Canada share several characteristics with the places thought of as centres of urban informality around the world, and that First Nations themselves display aspects of informality in their communities.

Just as large cities in the developing world are growing much faster than the developed world, populations of Canadian First Nations are growing quite rapidly compared to the rest of the country. Furthermore, First Nations people in Canada face much higher levels of poverty than the rest of the country, and some have described conditions for First Nations as in the realm of Third World countries (Morgan, 2011; Skelton and Ribeiro, 2010). Similarly, just as traditional

[Appendix “A” – Focus Group Primer (con’t)]

schools of planning thought are of limited applicability to informal housing situations in the developing world, mainstream Canadian urban planning cannot be applied directly and unproblematically to First Nations communities and the particular circumstances that make up their experience. Finally, First Nations, like the large developing world cities thought of as centres of informal urbanism, come from a cultural tradition other than the European-based one that makes up the de-facto mainstream culture of the west.

As academic Ananya Roy (2005) points out, “[t]here is an urgency for urban studies and planning to move beyond the dichotomy of First World ‘models’ and Third World ‘problems.’ One possible route is through policy approaches that seek to learn from Third World cities” (p.147). This concept, “‘transnational interrogation’, which is the idea of using one context to ask questions of another” (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004, p. 3) has a great applicability to the relationship between Canada and First Nations in Canada – a relationship often defined in terms of ‘problems’ and a subjugated culture learning from the dominant. As Peter Ward puts it, “we can learn from less developed contexts about informality in our own backyard” (2004, p. 243).

And so...

This has been a brief introduction to the topic. At the focus group session, I will give an overview of some of my own work with a First Nation in Canada where I experienced working as a planner navigating the cultural gap of informality between a provincial government and the First Nation. I am looking forward to hearing from you and the other participants about the work you have done and whether you have any similar experiences or thoughts on this type of work.

References

Morgan, Laura (2011, March). First Nations children growing up in Third World conditions. *Packet & Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.orilliapacket.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2995647>

[Appendix “A” – Focus Group Primer (con’t)]

Roy, A. & AlSayyad, N. (2004). Urban Informality: Crossing Borders. In A. Roy & N. AlSayyad (Eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (pp. 1-6). Lanham: Lexington Books.

Roy, A. (2005). Urban informality: Towards a new epistemology of planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), pp. 147-158.

Skelton, I. and Ribeiro, V. (2010). Marginalized populations and property markets: analyzing experiences in Brazil and Canada. *Interfaces Brasil/Canada*, 11, pp. 121-142.