

# Vancouver's Downtown Eastside:

*An Authentic, Accepting and Alternative Tourist Destination*



A Cross-Cultural  
Communications  
Perspective on the  
Downtown Eastside

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Top Image from Multithreading Blog (<http://www.baroti.com/2011/08/26/vancouver-city-hall-and-carnegie-library-1920>)

Bottom Image from Tighearnan Marsh's Blog (<http://blogs.ubc.ca/tighearnanmarsh/2012/11/15/is-save-on-meats-the-first-of-many-for-the-downtown-eastside/>)

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## **Purpose and Procedure**

The purpose of our research is to explore issues relating to the potential for tourism in the Downtown Eastside. We have proceeded to answer this question by observing and documenting the places of interest and special events evident in the DTES that would attract visitors. We have identified obstacles to tourism and suggest strategies to accurately advertise the strengths of the community without dismissing the obvious weaknesses. We wish to provide an alternative perspective to the negative stereotype associated with the DTES, and highlight the strengths of culture, history, and community. Our research objectives include:

- 1 To gain a greater understanding of the perceived identity of the DTES and its relation to tourism.
- 2 To accurately and equally portray the strengths and weaknesses of the DTES.
- 3 To determine the places of interest, special events, and culture that could attract people to the DTES.
- 4 To suggest that a new way of advertising the DTES will increase tourism and community pride.

## **Is the Downtown Eastside a Tourist Destination?**

A Vancouverite's Perspective

*Christoph Sanz*

As a kid growing up on the west side of Vancouver, I always had the distinct impression that the Downtown Eastside was the one part of town to avoid. Though it was never directly expressed, I developed a childhood impression of the DTES as a land of scary bogeymen. As I grew up, those bogeymen transformed into their more grown up equivalents: addicts, drug dealers, and prostitutes--all seen through the lens of a tinted car window. I went to high school on the eastside of Vancouver just west of Boundary. Our morning drive took us first through the affluence of Yaletown, around the stadiums, down Abbot St., and then on to Cordova. I distinctly remember nervously checking the car door locks as we passed through, as if the pedestrians would somehow lunge at our moving minivan. Up until a few years ago, I would almost gleefully tell my out-of-town friends about Vancouver's dark underbelly: "Can you believe we have such a ghetto in the middle of such an affluent city?"

Lately, I have been undergoing a re-education by actually spending time in the Downtown Eastside. What I have found has intrigued me and drawn me in. Is it anything like the Kitsilano avenues of my upbringing? No, not at all. But what I found was a neighborhood that felt surprisingly safe. I found one of the friendliest neighborhoods I have experienced in Vancouver. I found a historical treasure trove of old streets and buildings. And I found a community of people who consider themselves to be integral and active members of this great city, creating authentic community and culture.

The disparity between the perceived image of the Downtown Eastside and its actuality is constantly being reinforced in the rhetoric surrounding the area. National newspapers have labeled it "Canada's slum",<sup>i</sup> while international news outlets have brandied phrases such as "a netherworld of open-air drug-dealing, makeshift sidewalk shelters, public drunkenness and prostitution",<sup>ii</sup> "a clump of rundown hotels and liquor stores,"<sup>iii</sup> and the oft-toted phrase "the poorest postal code in Canada."<sup>iv</sup> The leap from "poorest postal code in Canada" to "worst neighborhood in Canada" is one we are unfortunately quick to make, doing not only a disservice to the residents of the Downtown Eastside, but also to ourselves as we rob ourselves of some of Vancouver's most culturally intriguing city blocks.

We do not want to be naïve; much of what we, as a group of researchers, saw and heard on the Downtown Eastside was tragic and troubling. As we talked to residents, we were continually faced by the reality of drug addiction, abusive pasts, the debilitating power of mental illness, and the daily struggle to improve conditions. What we do want to draw into question is a view of the Downtown Eastside that consistently focuses on the "problems" of the neighborhood,

without recognizing its abundant strengths. Joji Kumagai, Executive Director of the Strathcona Business Improvement Association, comes to a similar conclusion in his report on the Downtown Eastside:

For far too many years, the Downtown Eastside has been viewed more as Vancouver's Emergency Ward than as a community. As a result, virtually all government, bureaucratic, service and media attention has concentrated on "fixing" those at highest risk. This triage approach to community development has effectively marginalized and ignored the most stable aspects of the neighbourhood.<sup>v</sup>

We would like to argue that the Downtown Eastside is a viable tourist option, both for international travelers and locals looking to see a new side of their hometown. There is more to Vancouver than Stanley Park and the Olympic torch, and in the following pages we want to highlight some of the off-beat alternatives to the usual west side tourist route. Section I goes through a number of areas of interest, showing some of what the Downtown Eastside has to offer and discussing issues faced within that area. Section II discusses tourism strategies for the Downtown Eastside, focusing on ways of increasing communication between community members, the Vancouver Tourism Board, and tourists. The report closes with a number of suggestions and possible initiatives.

We are a group of researchers poised to offer a variety of perspectives. We include overseas students, national students from other provinces and around BC, and Vancouver born-and-raised locals. This diversity of backgrounds allows us to have both an outsider's and insider's perspective. Ultimately, we want to affirm that the Downtown Eastside is a neighbourhood Vancouver can be proud of, brimming with culture, history, and rich experiences worth sharing with others.

In 2010 former Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan said in an interview regarding the Downtown Eastside, "What's most visible is not what this place is about. Behind the visible people who clearly have a lot of troubles, there's a community. Some very intelligent people say this is the cultural heart of the city."<sup>vi</sup> Two years later it remains that cultural heart. For tourists willing to walk a little further east than the Robson chain boutiques, the Downtown Eastside offers a juxtaposition of history and contemporary culture within genuine Vancouver community.

## **Entertainment in the Downtown Eastside**

When people come to Vancouver, even from places as close as Langley, Abbotsford or New Westminster, they are always told one thing: “Avoid the Downtown Eastside.” Maps for tourists often have big borders surrounding this area advising them to stay as far away as possible. Because of this overwhelming and highly-publicized fear of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, many tourists are avoiding one of the biggest cultural hubs of Vancouver. This is unfortunate for both the residents of the Downtown Eastside—who are proud of their neighborhood and the visitors who are missing one of the most authentic parts of this diverse city.

### **Music**

*Emily Friesen*

A hallmark of a great city is a thriving local arts scene. The local arts scene in the Downtown Eastside exemplifies the creative identity of Vancouver with its high concentration of artists, art spaces and venues. Vancouver is reported to have the highest concentration of artists in Canada, and the DTES has the second highest concentration of artists in the city. The arts created and performed in the downtown Eastside have the potential to draw outsiders into the area and promote a new cultural identity. The DTES’ do-it-yourself style creates an authentic Vancouver experience where people can interact with artists on a personal level. The local talent, small venues and community festivals inspire a close-knit community where artists can afford to practice their art. This attitude has made the DTES a hub of entertainment for those who desire an alternative to the mainstream arts scene and a genuine expression of human creativity.

The styles of music found in the DTES are as diverse as the people living there and reflect the history of Vancouver’s founding neighborhood. People from varying ethnic backgrounds live in close proximity in the DTES. Moving from street to street, one can experience First Nations, Chinese, Japanese, and many other cultures. The DTES’ ethnic diversity brings together a wide variety of sounds, making the musical landscape an exciting experience. Two significant populations represented in the DTES are the Chinese and First Nations. Traditional Chinese music can be heard on warm summer nights in Historic Chinatown’s open air night market during the months of May to August. Live music entertainment features Chinese Opera, sing-along evenings, youth talent show, and special groups playing traditional Chinese instruments.<sup>vii</sup> The sights, tastes, and sounds of the charming historic neighborhood are easily accessible to any resident or traveler seeking an escape into an Asian subculture.

First Nations art is proudly displayed throughout Vancouver. Many First Nations artists call the DTES home. Wood Carving, beaded regalia, and visual art are displayed in galleries around the DTES. The musical and performances of

indigenous culture should not be forgotten. Native drumming, dancing, and singing are integral parts of First Nations. Full Circle, a First Nations performance art collective, hosts an annual festival entitled Talking Stick Festival (February 16th to March 3rd 2012) with many performances in the DTES.<sup>viii</sup> During this festival First Nations music, dance, and spoken word provide a voice for emerging First Nations artists. Vancouver is the birthplace of a new expression of First Nations culture. Aboriginal Hip Hop is a synthesis of traditional Native teachings and symbols fused with the beats, spray paint, and breakdancing. The Aboriginal hip-hop scene was significantly featured in the February-June 2012 exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery entitled, "Beat Nation".<sup>ix</sup> Events featuring Aboriginal hip hop can still be found in the DTES at W2 Community Media Arts Cafe located in the newly renovated Woodward building.<sup>x</sup>

The Heart of the City is another festival that features a diversity of artists in the DTES. The Heart of the City is in its ninth year and offers twelve days of music, poetry, films, theatre, dance, workshops, gallery exhibits and art talks throughout the DTES. The goal of the festival is to provide the DTES with a voice, to share "the wisdom and power of the community and the challenges it faces". The festival celebrates the neighborhoods indigenous stories, the community's history as the founding neighborhood of Vancouver, and the resilience of its members.<sup>xi</sup> The festival coordinators work hard to present an array of performances that reflect the many artists that find sanctuary in the area. Participating artists include professionals as well as low-income residents and children. The focus of the festival is to redefine the identity of the DTES and give the residents pride in their creative abilities.

Community art initiatives help sustain a healthy, urban cultural experience and bring attention to the value of human potential in overlooked places like the DTES. The Saint James Music Academy is a unique organization that draws together people of varying socioeconomic statuses and backgrounds to create space for music education and expression. The Saint James Music Academy is an after-school program run out of the Saint James Anglican Church in the heart of the DTES. This academy has been running for six years and aims to provide an accessible music program to children and families with financial barriers. Through learning and performing music in social settings their hope is to inspire "social transformation through the power and love of music."<sup>xii</sup> The music program provides opportunity, education and inspiration to all Vancouverites who seek to build bridges between the various spheres of society. Well known music groups, such as Hey Ocean, Bedouin Soundclash and Said the Whale, have fundraised and shared the stage with the youth in several performances. The program is developing trained musicians who will be future leaders and artists. The Saint James Music Academy continues to change the cultural identity of the DTES by hosting recitals, playing for block parties, and performing with alternative music bands.

The DTES has a reputation for being open to alternative lifestyles and this can be seen in the desire for non-mainstream music. A healthy amount of underground or counterculture music can be found in the DTES which includes a range of music including alternative rock, punk, post-punk, progressive folk and alternative rock. Unique to the DTES are independent bands who offer inexpensive shows brimming with creativity. Independent bands are groups that are not signed to major labels; therefore they produce, book shows, record and promote themselves. David Mattatal, owner of Zoo Zhop, a record store on the corner of Main Street and Powell Street, explained that the independent scene is the most “musically interesting genre in the city because it hasn’t sold out to commercialism found elsewhere in the city.”<sup>xiii</sup> Local musicians describe Vancouver as a brewing spot for creativity due to its isolation. Bands cannot tour south or east without high costs, thus they stay in the city to experiment with new styles.

The live venues of the DTES include Cobalt, Ivanhoe Pub, Rickshaw, Waldorf, Astoria, Electric Owl and Fortune Sound Club. People from all walks of life can be found at these venues. The average show costs \$15 for audience members, offering live shows, deejays and dance music throughout the week. These spaces are versatile and are often used for other kinds of events. For those with an aversion to the typical lounge or club, these spaces provide creative and interesting music.

The greatest obstacles to live entertainment in the DTES are licensing and venue space. For the independent musician, the venues listed above are expensive to rent and usually have a line up for months. A lack of performance space for smaller bands has increased their need to go underground. Industrial spaces, shops, houses and parking garages are transformed into concert spaces for people to play loud and late. As these events are not advertised, information about them travels by word of mouth or Facebook.

Space for live music is essential for maintaining the music industry in the DTES. In 2010, a documentary entitled “No Fun City” was created by Melissa James and Kate Kroll which explored Vancouver’s underground music scene. The documentary displayed the struggle of venues in the DTES, specifically the Cobalt, to legitimize themselves as live event venues. James and Kroll capture the grungy spaces and the affection people have for them, and reveal that if the venues close down they will not stop meeting in other places. One interviewee explained “there are people making art and music in the area [DTES], they are just not doing it with a permit”.<sup>xiv</sup> In an interview with the Vancouver Sun, James explained, “the film is really about is the lack of spaces for young musicians or loud bands or whomever to play and to be heard”.<sup>xv</sup>

This attitude resonates from underground venue owners to musicians in the Eastside. One underground venue boasts of having 20 live local bands play in the last month. When asked why he (the un-licensed venue operator) ran a venue for local artists, he explained that all the

venues in the area closed down and he saw many eager but struggling musicians who needed a place to play. “Local bands can’t afford the larger licensed venues, and if venues [make a mistake] once, the city shuts ‘em down”.<sup>xvi</sup>

Vancouver has a history of instability amongst live venues in the DTES due to regulations and licensing issues. Rickshaw Theatre owner David Duprey expresses his frustrations with the municipal and provincial governments in the Vancouver Sun article, “Are we fun yet?”<sup>xvii</sup> According to Duprey, although the city has made improvements to liquor licenses for live events, they have seemed to “stall on efforts to officially change the raft of outdated regulations.” Live venues rely on income from liquor to subsidize the high operating costs of a live performance venue. Obtaining a liquor-primary license is extremely expensive and rigorous. It is time consuming and there is no guarantee that an establishment will be approved. Regulations not only include management of liquor, but also the type of entertainment offered by the space. These micromanaging rules make it difficult for new establishments to open or maintain their business. Venues in the Granville area are more successful in business because they are owned by corporate groups, running multiple locations of nightlife. Kenneth Chan, columnist for Vancouver Buzz notes, “Excessive regulation and the favoring of monopoly owned and operated establishments only leads to the creation of homogeneous and predictable environments, where even difference is controlled.”<sup>xviii</sup> These highly commercialized venues lack the creativity and unique atmosphere found in the venues of the DTES. The lack of venue space limits the access to diverse forms of entertainment and “restricts the organic growth of Vancouver’s culture and nightlife.”<sup>xix</sup>

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside is an artistically vibrant community. The musical tastes of the DTES residents, reflect their high regard for sincerity, intimacy, and freedom of creative expression, in opposition to the highly commercialized mainstream music scene. The music scene also reflects social issues of poverty, isolation, and marginalization. What is evident is that the DTES is a unique subculture within Vancouver as a whole, and that it also has subcultures within itself. In both cases, people of varying economic, ethnic, and value systems are living side by side, sharing the same spaces, yet not interacting with one another. Music creates a space of common ground, where people without agency can share their stories.

Two recommendations to increase tourism in the DTES are the development of sustainable venues and community arts programs. First, working with the municipal and provincial government to ease liquor regulations, will allow live venues to maintain legitimate licenses. Easing of regulations on live venues, will provide more spaces for creative local bands to play music. The indirect effect of strict liquor laws, are more underground shows that involve

dangerous behavior and unregulated drinking. Partnering with initiatives like Safe Amplification Society,<sup>xx</sup> would also increase venue spaces for local projects. Safe Amplification society seeks to establish a permanent all-ages space in the DTES that would improve the venue space and accessibility of independent music.

Second, a commitment to the sustainability of community programs and Festivals is paramount to increasing traffic of outsiders to the DTES. Festivals and community programs show case the resiliency of many DTES residents. Heart of the City, Eastside Cultural Crawl, and Talking Stick Festivals are three festivals that display the creative potential, build community identity and pride, and lead to positive community dialogue. These festivals are invitations to people living outside the community to engage with musicians of alternative lifestyles, First Nations, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **Shows**

*Ashley Kilian*

When most people think of the Downtown Eastside, they imagine drugs, disparity and sadness. A quick search on Google brings up a plethora of statistics about drug-use, and claims about it being the “poorest postal code in Canada.” And while these things are certainly aspects of the lives of some of the Downtown Eastside’s residents (with the exception of the “poorest postal code accusation”),<sup>xxi</sup> it isn’t all the DTES has to offer. Many visitors to the Downtown Eastside, once they’ve given the area a chance, find that they really like it. Those who like the DTES the most, often have something in common with many of the residents—they feel a little different. The Downtown Eastside is accepting of all people, from all walks of life. This acceptance manifests itself most noticeably in the types of shows and events offered at many local establishments.

The Downtown Eastside isn’t for everybody; some of the events can be described as “weird,” or “out there,” but they are what make the DTES’ culture especially unique. While Vancouver already has an established LGBT scene—on places like Davie St. and Commercial Drive—the Eastside of Vancouver is a significant addition. Venues like The Cobalt, a landmark on the DTES, hold LGBT-friendly events like *Apocolypstic*: a monthly drag show, and *Man-Up*: another monthly drag show, this time featuring gender-bending drag kings. The Georgia Straight notes in June 2012, “Man Up's audience has expanded to include men, women, gay, straight, and all those in between, selling out every single monthly show they have put on since January 2011.”<sup>xxii</sup> Other popular bars feature events like burlesque shows or karaoke. The Ivanhoe Pub features weekly open microphone- jam nights . Additionally, places like The Rickshaw have concerts that include less widely-accepted music genres like “death metal,” and “rockabilly.” These types of events cater to those willing to take risks for new

forms of entertainment, and are exactly the types of people currently willing to visit the Downtown Eastside.

Tourism Vancouver is doing itself, and its tourists, a disservice if it leaves the Downtown Eastside out of its advertisements. It is an important part of Vancouver's culture and is also a big piece of its heritage, as many of the neighborhoods that are classified as the "Downtown Eastside," are the oldest neighborhoods in Vancouver; to ignore it, or brush past it, would be a shame. Many people visiting Vancouver don't come to see the highly publicized parts of the city like Robson St. or Stanley Park. Though those parts are beautiful, and interesting, they don't get at the heart of the residents of Vancouver, and the real culture of the city.

The culture of the Downtown Eastside's nightlife often isn't for the faint of heart, but it is a big part of the city's culture. For Vancouver to be presented as it often is now, with ne'er a mention of the Downtown Eastside--except to warn visitors to stay away--is a travesty.

## **Art**

*David McComber and Colton Martin*

The visual arts encourage self expression for the alternative lifestyles found the DTES. This culture of accepting the outcast, which is prevalent within the Downtown Eastside, manifests itself within the fairly high concentration of artists in the Eastside - the second largest concentration in the city.<sup>xxiii</sup> Grassroots movements such as the Cultural Crawl, which had 364 artists participating in 2011, accompanied by festivals like the Heart of the City Festival, have the potential to shift the public focus in the Downtown Eastside from the "place one should avoid" to a place of creativity and expression.<sup>xxiv</sup> However, in order to propagate this image shift, there must be a broader exposure of DTES art culture within the Metro Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver has made several efforts to highlight the Downtown Eastside as an artistic culture through implementing several projects. Well-known programs such as the Downtown Eastside's "Heart of the City Festival" focus on developing the artists, history and people of the area.<sup>xxv</sup> One festival highlighted a Footprints Community Art project, which consisted of 31 mosaics set into the sidewalk. These mosaics portray images that are of historical and cultural significance, although many do not realize their significance.<sup>xxvi</sup>

There has also been organizations such as North Sky Consulting Ltd., which consult with the City of Vancouver in implementing art development programs locally.<sup>xxvii</sup> This views the development of arts and culture in the Downtown Eastside as pivotal to developing the economy.<sup>xxviii</sup> Though these types of programs touch on the importance of art within the community, these organizations and programs are supported by outside forces, and do not sprout

from local initiatives. There is a substantial difference between the art that comes from organized programs and the art that sprouts from local initiatives.

As well as outside sponsored programs and organizations, native DTES initiatives are necessary to the development of community identity. Top-down initiatives are seen as lacking integrity, because many people feel that outside forces want to change the culture of the DTES instead of accept it. Some existing localized DTES initiatives include the Culture Crawl (and potentially the integration of performance art) into the art culture of the Downtown Eastside.

The Culture Crawl began with four artists opening Paneficio Studios to the public as a fundraiser. This event, as previously stated, has grown to a community of 364 artists participating in the Crawl as of last year.<sup>xxix</sup> The general sentiment within the Crawl is a willingness and enjoyment of allowing the rest of the Lower Mainland to come and see the talent within the Downtown Eastside. However, the Culture Crawl experienced a lack of exposure in the districts such as Langley, Surrey, and Abbotsford which became problematic. If this grassroots initiative has any chance of shifting the image of the DTES and the greater Vancouver area, it must draw people from across the Lower Mainland.

Performance art, as a much different medium than typical paint-on-canvas art, challenges the conventional way of viewing and interacting with art - something that may be appealing to the Downtown Eastside community. An example of this form of expression can be found in "Backwards Rider," who makes his artform a lifestyle rather than a singular presentation. The following will express the interaction that Colton Martin, a Trinity Western University student, had with Backwards Rider:

It was in the Safari Cafe on Main St. where I met the Backwards Rider, Lesley Slowley, or "Rider," as he introduced himself. He wore a bright purple v-neck and a black blazer, and was applying copious amounts makeup all over his face, creating designs and patterns. Talking to him, we discovered that he performs a type of public art, and that he is, in a sense, a piece of art himself. He dresses brightly, paints his face, and pedals his bike backwards through the city. People who watch him and enjoy his tricks will often donate towards his cause.

The DTES views its art in a different light. Rider explained it well: He said that in the DTES, he rarely received monetary donations for his art. What he did receive, however, was warm praise and conversation for his work. Passersby would recommend good places and areas of town for him to cycle to receive money donations. He said he received more smiles from people in the DTES, whereas pedaling through the west of Vancouver yielded fewer results. Rider grew up in

Toronto, and he said that the public response to his work was a night and day difference between Toronto and Vancouver.<sup>xxx</sup>

This experience of Backwards Rider in Vancouver shows an acceptance of performance art within the Downtown Eastside community. Facilitating this form of expression into the DTES community can result in something very interesting and captivating to the public. However, education and promotion of what performance art is will be necessary to any influx of performance based artists on the streets. This education is for the artists as well as the public in order to discourage interpretation that this artistic expression is the outcome of drug use.

## **Cultural Places and Events in the Downtown Eastside**

Rich historical culture is another trademark of a great city. The Downtown Eastside contains a plethora of historical sites that tell the tourist what the Downtown Eastside has been in the past; but more importantly, these sites now provide an opportunity to learn about the current expression of Vancouver's diverse culture. For over two thousand years, the First Nations have lived in British Columbia and their community is still strong. The Downtown Eastside is home to a variety of ethnic groups that host many community festivals-- especially those of the Chinese and First Nations' communities. Each of the festivals reflect a distinct culture and inspire a close knit community. Cultural events connect people within and outside the area and the historical sites create an interest in the ethnic community.

### **First Nations Places and Events**

*Kristina Reznick*

The streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside are splashed with individuals representing a variety of ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds. One prominent group is, of course, the First Nations (also referred to as Aboriginal).<sup>xxxix</sup> For over two thousand years, First Nations tribes have lived in British Columbia, and they continue to rightfully inhabit the area, including the Downtown Eastside. According to recent demographic analyses, First Nations heritage is reflected in 10% of the people living in the Downtown Eastside.<sup>xxxix</sup> With such a high statistic in comparison to being only 2% of Vancouver's entire population, one would assume to find a strong First Nations community existing in the Downtown Eastside.<sup>xxxix</sup> As expected, the First Nations background emerges through art, music, community centers, museums and various organizations. Visitors to the Downtown Eastside would highly benefit from experiencing the culture of First Nations by attending events, supporting artists and musicians, appreciating historical sites, and most importantly engaging in dialogue with those in the First Nations community. Their community reflects a distinct culture within the Downtown Eastside and the best way to appreciate this culture is to interact directly with First Nations individuals and groups.

Guests in the Downtown Eastside have, at their fingertips, a variety of means for positive interaction with First Nations community. For example, the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center Society (VAFCS) provides an easily accessible hub of communication with First Nations community. This charitable organization has been reaching out to First Nations groups, meeting their needs through an array of services and providing open doors to dialogue since 1963.<sup>xxxix</sup> The ways in which they support First Nations people groups include: offering family support services, youth events, kids camps, day care centers, provision of education, health care support, housing needs, human rights

information, recreational activities, and events throughout the year. Because the VAFCS “strives to provide holistic and cultural services to all of its community members,” visitors to the Downtown Eastside can observe Vancouver’s urban First Nations community in action.<sup>xxxv</sup> In addition, visitors can learn a great deal from those involved with VAFCS due to their long-term commitment and support for First Nations communities. The best way for tourists to appreciate the First Nations culture is to engage with it directly. The VAFCS provides resources and means to do so, and their website offers information as to which events are open to the public. Additionally, stopping by to engage in conversation with those at the Friendship Center on East Hastings would open doors of communication and show appreciation for the First Nations community in urban Vancouver.

The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center also houses the Cedar Root Gallery--a well-stocked, culturally-rich gift shop and gallery open to guests Monday through Saturday.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The gallery, located directly inside the center, is brimming with First Nations art, jewelry, masks, dreamcatchers, cedar talking sticks, and many more traditional items. Because the gallery is First Nations-owned and operated, guests will be pleased to find competitive prices and an intriguing selection of items. Many of the items come directly from First Nations artists in British Columbia and reflect the history and culture of the Northwest, though their stock also includes items from across Canada. Hand-carved silver jewelry, locally crafted cedar art and high quality wall plaques, all at exceptional prices set this shop apart from others in the Vancouver area. In the midst of appreciating the items in the gallery, visitors can benefit even more by talking with the sales representatives in the shop, to receive first-hand cultural interaction. The entire experience of visiting the Cedar Root Gallery will surely not be disappointing.

Another prominent organization reaching out to First Nations communities in the Downtown Eastside is the Aboriginal Front Door Society. Their mission includes fostering support towards First Nations people “to walk through life with love, honor, respect, and compassion for all things in creation, including themselves.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> In addition, they develop and operate as a safe haven for First Nations people in the Downtown Eastside. Through providing services such as Healing Circles, Elder teachings, medicine gatherings and medicine wheel teaching, the society reaches out to First Nations people on mental, physical, emotional and spiritual areas of life. Regular cultural activities include drumming, singing, food, Sweatlodge ceremonies, Moonlodge teachings, Sundance teachings, family healing, traditional medicines and gatherings. Monday through Friday drop-in hours provide a means of community to further develop and invest in each others lives. This welcoming environment serves to provide visitors to the Downtown Eastside a place to learn about First Nations culture and community while engaging in direct dialogue. With an emphasis on facilitating a caring and accepting environment, the Aboriginal Front Door

Society is a safe place both for First Nations people, as well as those desiring to learn and interact with First Nations culture.

As visitors to the First Nations community in the Downtown Eastside, tourists should be encouraged to maintain an open mind while genuinely listening to First Nations through dialogue. This can evoke a sense of admiration for the First Nations history, perspective and demonstration of community. The ways in which First Nations groups reflect creativity through art and music, empowerment through various social programs, and compassion through supportive community involvement, provides wide-scale levels of appreciation which guests to the Downtown Eastside can participate.

## **Other Significant Cultural Places and Events**

*Lindsay Halliday and Cam Sorenson*

The Downtown Eastside contains a variety of fascinating cultural locations which create interest in the area and there are many annual festivals which connect people from both within the DTES, and from outside. These locations, like the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, the Vancouver Police Museum, and the popular Chinese spring festival, provide a glimpse into the richly diverse culture of the Downtown Eastside.

The Classical Chinese Garden is in Chinatown, near the corner of Keefer Street and Carrall Street, approximately three blocks away from the “Stadium-Chinatown” Skytrain Station. The garden, built in 1986, was created as a representation of the Chinese gardens during the Ming Dynasty, in order to promote Chinese culture and to “enhance the bridge of understanding between Chinese and Western cultures.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Attention to detail and authenticity is one of the garden’s main drawing points. The garden was built by Chinese artisans with materials from China in order to make a more authentically Chinese centre. Guided tours of this skillfully designed garden occur daily, allowing tourists the opportunity to experience Chinese culture. The garden is very peaceful, complete with pagodas and ample plant life; it is authentically Chinese and offers tourists the chance to escape the busy atmosphere of downtown Vancouver, and learn more about Vancouver’s diverse population.

The Vancouver Police Museum is an excellent location for tourists and locals alike. The museum, located on Cordova Street, right near the busy centre of the Downtown Eastside, allows visitors the opportunity to participate in fun and engaging activities. The museum, which was once the city morgue and Coroner’s Courtroom, offers guided tours. Additionally, visitors may participate in the investigation of a fictional crime scene scenario, educating them about forensic science and the nature of police investigation. Such programs are typically offered for children and teenage students, yet all ages are welcome. For those who do not speak English well, English as a Second Language (ESL) tours

and programs are provided. A number of historical items such as weapons, antique police uniforms and other authentic artifacts are displayed at the museum. These exhibits demonstrate the history of law enforcement in Vancouver and provide a space for communication between police and visitors.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The Downtown Eastside not only offers a variety of centres where tourists can experience the city's cultures but, also offers annual festivals and events. Apart from the Heart of the City Festival, which is an important cultural event within the Downtown Eastside, the TD (Toronto Dominion) Vancouver Chinatown Festival demonstrates the vibrant culture of the Downtown Eastside. Each year, thousands of people gather at this festival to celebrate Chinese culture and community talent. Youth are encouraged to participate in the "Talent Showdown," which showcases the creativity and talent of young people in the community.<sup>xl</sup> Markets, activities for children, and cultural displays make this event appealing to various ages. In the evening, the Streetfest takes place. This event is complete with deejays, contests and numerous other activities.<sup>xli</sup> Here, Chinatown comes to life and proudly displays Chinese culture as well as the community life of the Downtown Eastside.

In the spring, the Chinese Benevolent Association (established 1906) hosts a New Year's parade as part of the Vancouver Chinatown Spring Festival. It is one of the three largest non-commercial annual parades in Vancouver and is free to attend. The Chinese New Year Parade celebrates the new year of the Chinese lunar calendar and is a fun-filled event for everyone to enjoy. This signature event of Vancouver's Chinatown often features multicultural dance troupes representing the diverse segments of the Canadian cultural heritage, the Vancouver Police Department Motorcycle Drill Team, marching bands, martial arts performances and much more. Further performances are hosted as part of the Spring Festival Cultural Fair in the Sun Yat-Sen Plaza. The parade draws over 50,000 spectators along the route each year plus many more seeing it through TV coverage.<sup>xlii</sup> Year after year, the Chinatown parade proves to be a very popular annual cultural event.

The cultural centres, museums, and annual events add to the richly diverse community of the Downtown Eastside. They provide places in which visitors can ask questions about the community, learn more about the diverse cultures and history of Vancouver and experience the positive aspects of the Downtown Eastside for themselves.

Historical sites are an important part of the cultural expression of Vancouver and many of these are located in the Downtown Eastside. There is a rich history, but there is potential for an even greater diverse and thriving community to be expressed through the ethnic festivals at these cultural places. Through raising awareness and interest, outsiders will be drawn to Downtown Eastside.

## **Leisure Activities in the Downtown Eastside**

The Downtown Eastside's authenticity seeps into everything it has to offer, including the types of leisure activities available for residents and visitors. From shopping, to local eateries, to sports, the Downtown Eastside's activities appeal to a wide variety of people. This vibrant community offers shopping for people of all backgrounds and interests, reflecting the diversity of the DTES, its residents and its visitors. The restaurants on the Downtown Eastside serve a dual purpose, representing the various cultures and people groups that live on, and visit this neighborhood, as well as bring a community together through something as universal as food.

### **Food and Dining**

*Amanda Teo*

Food draws people together. It is one of the major commercial factors in establishing an effervescent residential neighborhood. No matter the ethnic background or cultural differences that set people apart, there is a power that lies within food that establishes a sense of community. The Downtown Eastside is a vibrant area that draws people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Specifically, it attracts those who are particularly interested in stepping out of their comfort zone. Food is one of the many ways to create better community between the residents of the Downtown Eastside and locals in the neighborhood. A Downtown Eastside restaurant owner says, "[food] creates a space that includes all of community".<sup>xliii</sup> For those who enjoy cuisine variety, the Downtown Eastside is one of the most diverse places to visit. With a high availability in food choices, the Downtown Eastside is a combination of unique ethnic specialty foods and imported goods from countries such as China and Germany. A few of the many restaurants that make up the diverse food atmosphere in the area will be highlighted.

Phnom Penh serves scrumptious servings of Vietnamese and Cambodian food. This restaurant, tucked away in the busy streets of Chinatown, invites their customers into an eclectic ambiance of bright colors and loud conversations represented by people of various ethnicities. A line-up is expected before being seated because the food is so good it is worth waiting for. Famous dishes include lemon salt and pepper fried chicken wings, butter beef, Vietnamese beef noodles and Bo Tai Chanh beef carpaccio. Order a cup of Vietnamese coffee made with a small metal French drip filter and appreciate the dense and dark liquid but very smooth-on-the-palate beverage. Phnom Penh is a place that should be enjoyed in its entirety. The combination of anticipation, the food and the ambiance comes together into a memorable experience.

Another eatery to visit is Oyster Express. This seafood restaurant is located in the heart of Chinatown in the Downtown Eastside. Fresh oysters are

available at any time of the day for \$1.50 each; this is the place to go. Some specialties include fat and juicy steamed mussels bathed in broth and sensuous oyster soup. With a pint of beer or a glass of wine, this simple meal will be sure to satisfy the taste buds.

Cartems Donuterie is setting a new trend in the Downtown Eastside with their creative flavorful donuts. Their handmade donuts, prepared with fresh quality ingredients, are light and fluffy. They offer a wide range of options including vegan, gluten-free and baked donuts to provide a healthier approach to fit almost every customer's diet. With the incorporation of coconut oil in the production process, these moist donuts simply stand out. Famous innovative donuts include Maker's bourbon donuts, Earl Grey, Mexican mole, and triple chocolate threat. This quaint shop on the corner of Carrall and Hastings is a gem among those who live and serve in the Downtown Eastside.

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is open for business, paying homage to the diversity that makes up this inimitable neighborhood. In order to get a full experience, one must taste and see what the community has to offer. Other restaurants to visit include Save On Meats, Au Petit Chavignol and Nelson the Seagull. The restaurants in the Downtown Eastside are invested in the community and are one of the key factors in a comprehensive tourism plan for the City of Vancouver.

## **Sport**

*Caitlin Haines*

One of the great aspects of sports is the power in which it has to unite people and bring communities together. According to Nelson Mandela

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.”<sup>xliv</sup>

To find an example of this, look no further than the Vancouver Canucks. Through this team, an entire city has become unified as it shares a common passion and support for the team. On a game night, no matter where one is, conversations are created, high-fives are exchanged and excitement fills the atmosphere.

The DTES is located right next to Vancouver's two main sports arenas: Canada Place and Rogers arena. These two venues are home to not only the Canucks, but the Whitecaps and the BC Lions. On the day of home games, people are flooding into this area to attend the game or to go to a local restaurant and

watch the event on television. The proximity of these arenas to the DTES gives a lot of potential for the economy to benefit from the sports fans. The alternative experience offered in the DTES needs to be effectively communicated to sports fans and visitors alike.

In many respects, the DTES has already incorporated different facilities and leagues where the community can come together for recreation through sports such as baseball, basketball, soccer and skateboarding. One example which stands out among the others is the Vancouver International Soccer Festival (VISF) which takes place at the Andy Livingston Park. The organization *One Team United Soccer Society* has established the VISF for three years now and the tournament itself is sanctioned by BC Soccer Association. As of last year 64 teams including local, international, homeless and multi-ethnic teams competed over a three-day tournament. This tournament is a great event for everyone, as it is a weekend full of soccer, live performances, bands, food and entertainment. Accommodations are available for international and out of town guests through dorms and private rooms which are available for a relatively cheap price.<sup>xlv</sup> Essentially this VISF imitates the World-cup style, but applies it with a community based purpose to unite people. As a result, VISF is promoting social change through inclusion, equality and respect by allowing the language of soccer to speak volumes, because for any type of positive growth to be seen in the DTES, there needs to be an atmosphere where everyone is on the same team.

## **Shopping**

*Amanda Yeo*

The Downtown Eastside has always been brimming with history of Vancouver and its people. As the city grew, so did the number of stores around the area-- especially antique furniture stores. Walking down the streets of the DTES, there is plenty of opportunity to stop in one of these unique stores to reclaim a piece of furniture that will stand out amongst the rest of one's home decor. Antique stores showcase many old and vintage items that are given a second chance in this distinct marketplace. Antiques tell the history of the time period they are from. The stores of the Downtown Eastside offer the chance for a closer look at this history within their walls. These antiques stores which are climbing in popularity have been displaying, selling and buying a wide variety of antiques for many years now. The Downtown Eastside is slowly ridding itself of the ill reputation that was bestowed upon it years ago, however, with the new age, more and more people are seeing this area of Vancouver as a cultural hub, full of attractions and history.

One of the history-rich antique home decor store is the Peking Lounge. Opened in February 2003 by Michael Bennett and Daniel Poulin, the Peking Lounge created an elegant open space that allows potential customers to explore the various antique pieces in the store. Each piece has carefully detailed carvings

that Chinese antiquities are well-known for. Their collection has been accrued through connections, demolition sites, estate sales as well as purchases from furniture stores in China.<sup>xlvi</sup> Perhaps one fact to note about the owners of the Peking Lounge is that they truly immerse themselves in the culture of their antiques in order to educate themselves and their customers.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Another store attracts attention is the Vancouver Architectural Antiques Ltd. While the Peking Lounge consists of old style Chinese furniture, the VAA gives vintage furniture a modern twist to better fit a more modern home. VAA was started in Ottawa and moved west to Vancouver in 1994. This store specializes in antique lighting including items from the early Victorian era to the Art Deco periods. It brings forth hints of vintage style but still keeps the decor modern. The proprietor, Eric Cohen, has an eye for details and unusual items. This often keeps his customers guessing about the latest furnishing they could find in his store. This store also doubles as a restoration place. Having an on-site antique lighting professional, VAA is able to assess the condition of the piece, restore it to its originality and prepare it to be installed.<sup>xlviii</sup>

These two stores are just about as opposite in styles as one can get. The Peking Lounge focuses on Chinese period furniture while the VAA restores antique pieces to their original lustre with modern twist. The history that is contained within these stores and their pieces is what adds attraction to shopping in the Downtown Eastside.

When it comes to finding one of a kind clothing pieces the Downtown Eastside again delivers a plethora of unique options at a wide range of prices. Shoppers can find everything along Hastings Street. The rich and diverse history of the area translates into a variety of clothing styles and prices. These finds range from cheap vintage pieces to exclusive designer gowns and handbags.

One such store is Community Thrift and Vintage: The Frock Shoppe. This is the Downtown Eastside's most talked-about addition to the shopping scene. Found at 331 Carrall Street, this vintage store contains clothing, accessories and shoes at reasonable prices. In this quaint location, one can find stylish and quality clothes from unique brands for a fraction of the price. Customers rave about the service, selection and affordability of this shoppe. Those employed by the Frock Shoppe echo diversity, counting among them recovered addicts from the area who now work full time. Another spectacular vintage find is Deluxe Junk Company, located at 310 West Cordova.<sup>xlix</sup> This is an establishment with over thirty years standing. This second-hand store offers a wide, though less carefully selected, range of antique and vintage finds. These range from clothing to cowboy boots to toys.

On the other end of the retail spectrum lies designer stores like Stussy which can be found at 49 Powell Street.<sup>l</sup> This store is an exclusive men's line found only at this location in the Lower Mainland. This brand features upscale shoes, t-shirts and hats. Another higher end store located in this area is Charlie & Lee Located at 223 Union Street. This store carries a large range of designers like

A.P.C., Rag & Bone, Black & 5th and Sydney Hale Co. These brands are higher end, trendy and largely unknown. These stores carry high quality clothing and are less likely to be seen elsewhere.

Another option available to the Downtown Eastside shopper includes local shopping events like the annual Community Christmas Craft Fair held this year at Woodward's Atrium on 126 West Hastings Street.<sup>li</sup> This particular event gives proceeds to women who live in the area and attempts to create "community" and "empowerment" through the event. The vendors live locally, the merchandise is reasonably priced, and the shopping offers a variety of crafts, clothing and décor.

Shopping in Vancouver is increasingly about exclusivity and not about big chain department stores. One-of-a-kind articles are more favorable for the residents and the tourists of the area and beyond. As stores in the Downtown Eastside increase in shopping traffic, the profits will increase and economic development in the DTES will improve. Stores and events like these bring a young and fashionable crowd to the area. They offer unique pieces and a wide range of styles that is hard to find in generic chain. With such a large spectrum of price ranges these retail locations are likely to suit anyone's shopping needs.

## **Strategies and Recommendations**

*Erin Blackaby, Benjamin Birkenstock, and Cameron Sorenson*

Advertisement of the Downtown Eastside is a challenging task. There are various interesting and historical venues, artists and attractions; however, certain highly publicized aspects of the DTES have hindered tourism—such as poverty and drug addiction among many of its residents. The challenge for any tourism agency is to promote the DTES authentically and honestly, highlighting its draws without hiding the socio-economic problems. In order to accomplish this task, the DTES must be portrayed accurately, and any harmful misconceptions should be eliminated wherever possible.

One of the primary factors that prevent visitors from approaching the DTES, is a concern for safety. Many people associate homelessness and drug addiction with crimes such as assault or murder, which leads them to associate East Hastings, and the rest of the Downtown Eastside, with danger. Given that East Hastings is in such close proximity to popular tourist destinations, such as Gastown, the Downtown Eastside's poor reputation may negatively affect tourism within other parts of Vancouver.

The DTES' reputation for danger is, however, largely inaccurate. The consistent testimonies of students from the research group indicate that the DTES is not nearly as dangerous as they had previously believed. Indeed, drug addiction is a very prevalent reality in the DTES, particularly in East Hastings; however, many people within the Downtown Eastside are friendly, and the students from the research group did not feel threatened in their encounters with homeless people or drug users. Furthermore, as was surprising to some students, locals were not quick to beg for money; instead, many residents simply greeted them. The friendliness of the locals does not negate the overwhelming fact that a number of people within this geographically defined area endure suffering and poverty daily. To pretend that poverty and drug addiction are hardly present in the DTES is to make an entire community of people invisible.

People in the DTES do not want to be misunderstood or swept under the rug. A new understanding of the DTES must be promulgated—one which does not regard the area as dangerous and violent, or attempt to hide away the poverty from outsiders. An accurate portrayal of the DTES is that of a *community*. People within this community are not simply statistical figures; they are not a problem to be solved. They are people who live together, who know one another, who have ties to the area, and who struggle together. Hopes are that people within this community can escape addiction, but the value of this community is greater than its difficulties.

People of this community are not hostile to outsiders who treat them with respect. Some students noted that many DTES residents appreciated the presence of students because they provided an outside perspective and new

topics to discuss. Visitors such as these are different than camera-flashing tourists because they recognize the community aspect of the DTES. Of course, visitors must exercise a degree of caution that would be expected in any city; walking alone late at night, bothering people, or flashing cameras at people who are sleeping on the streets would be foolhardy.

An informed understanding of the DTES would be beneficial for both the city of Vancouver and for the residents of the DTES; the city of Vancouver would not need to hide away the poverty of the area, tourists would not be nearly as afraid of East Vancouver, and residents of the DTES would not be falsely stereotyped. In order to counter the present view of the Downtown Eastside as wildly dangerous, a level of communication should be established between the community of the Downtown Eastside and visitors. This communication may be established via reports, interviews with residents or word-of-mouth. The media is a powerful channel that shapes people's perceptions about communities and people groups. Therefore, any advertisement should accurately reflect the community of the DTES.

Apart from purported safety concerns, the area is a place which can be seen in a more positive light. A review of articles, reports, and personal experiences regarding art, tourism and community development in the DTES reveals some common themes: authenticity, community solidarity, rich cultural heritage, and the need for interaction and self-direction. It is these aspects of the DTES which make it a rich community and an intriguing place to visit.

Many tourists desire to escape the typical tourist locations in search of a more authentic cultural experience. Visitors are intrigued by the way in which people of various cultures live and interact. The DTES provides this experience with a wide array of cultures, events, and lifestyles. Additionally, the DTES offers art, lively markets, smaller scale musical performances, and unique spectacles such as the "Backwards Rider," a bicycle performer who rides backwards through the streets.

The DTES is where Chinatown and First Nations art intertwine. The art and culture exist in the DTES not because of corporate planning. They are there because life circumstances guided them there. Many people purposely move from various cities in Canada to the DTES for the great weather and also an experience in the vibrant culture. Those who left their homes to be part of this city desire to be part of this tight knit community. No matter where people are in their lives, the same longing to express themselves and integrate their joys of life with those around them is shared.

Given the unique milieu of the DTES, the area begs not to be hidden from visitors. Its strengths should be displayed alongside its weaknesses, and it should be promoted as an area of authentic cultural significance, because it is. More importantly, this area must be given the chance to speak for itself. Events such as "Heart of the City" encourage residents of the DTES to celebrate their community in a way that is fitting to their perception of this community, which is why events

like this are so important. Quite simply, the rich culture of the DTES must be experienced. Stigmas about the DTES need not scare visitors away, because what makes the DTES worth seeing is its refusal to give in to stigmatization.

## **Marketing**

*David McComber*

To market the Downtown Eastside it is best to use a psychographic and income segmentation of the market, not a specific demographic or geographic segment, as the Downtown Eastside appeals to a certain type of person—the countercultural, alternative lifestyle, and artistic person. Therefore, the target market includes people:

- Who want an authentic cultural experience
- Who feel marginalized and desire acceptance
- Who are living alternative lifestyles: the LGBT community
- Who don't want to spend a lot of money to travel: backpackers, low income groups, students
- Who want to experience artistic expressions

Through targeting people with these characteristics who are seeking unique experiences, the marketing strategy would be directed towards a market segment which desires the current culture of the DTES. If the focus becomes demographic or geographic, the target market will include people who may reject the Downtown Eastside culture, therefore, maintaining the current stigma.

Advertising methods for the DTES should not try to compete with the larger marketing strategy for BC and Vancouver (although, it should be represented in these strategies); rather, it should focus on social media, blogging, word of mouth, and video to shift the public perception of the Downtown Eastside. Several suggestions include a Facebook page for local street artists and using official websites and social media outlets to promote the Downtown Eastside.

Create a series of tourist videos that, instead of a series of cut shots of nature set to music, would each be a really brief interview with a local artist, musician, bartender, chef, barista, etc., saying why they love their community. Their dialogue would be interspersed with images of their place of work, such as clips of them working in an art studio, or of their restaurant. The videos would help show a positive side to the DTES by highlighting the creative people within the community and would also act as a publicity boost for every featured person. These can be linked into a DTES artists & musicians Twitter/Facebook/social media system featuring regular updates on the underground arts & music scene in the DTES, links to which could be included in the Tourism Board's advertisement of the area.

In addition, official tourism websites and social media/blog sites should not be afraid to showcase some of the less conventionally 'beautiful' areas of the

DTES, but rather, promote the cultural authenticity of the DTES. Some examples of these less conventional spaces include: Oppenheimer Park, Victory Square, Save On Meats, community gardens, the interior of Carnegie Community Centre, and shops and artists in poor areas of the DTES. Support of these various cultural locations could increase the legitimacy of the DTES community and attract tourists that desire an authentic and alternative experience.

There is a need for an official community website which could promote different events happening in the DTES and the greater Hastings area. Some such websites exist for Gastown and Yaletown, however, when searching for any information on the DTES there appears to be no official page that promotes the area in a positive light. In order to decrease tourist stigma, as well as local preconceptions about the area, there must be a source of information that consolidates the information about what is going on in the DTES and the tourist attractions that people can visit. Since there is no visually attractive website with a realistic portrayal of the Downtown Eastside's arts, nightlife, shopping, music, and cultural scenes, it is far more likely for the person to stop searching for information on the DTES.

For larger cultural events such as the Heart of the City, the Culture Crawl, and the Talking Stick Festival, there needs to be advertising across the lower mainland for the local tourists. Through utilizing local community centers, libraries and university campuses to distribute advertising materials like posters and flyers it would be possible to reach the local person interested in participating in these events.

Overall, the Marketing strategy for the Downtown Eastside needs to reflect the culture of the people living there. In order to develop a strong understanding of the DTES community, it is vital to have many people interacting with the those living in that community. Through connecting with the community and opening up the paths to communication with the residents, police, organizations, and businesses in the DTES community, there is the potential to capitalize on the unique and vibrant life within the DTES. This may even shift the public's perception away from the drugs and homelessness without removing it or hiding these aspects of the DTES community.

In order to make a tangible impact on the way the DTES is viewed and to increase exposure of the vibrant cultural life, there must be facilitated interaction. Through highlighting the authentic culture of the DTES and cultivating available space for expression, the DTES could become a major cultural attraction for people seeking an authentic, accepting and alternative experience as opposed to the more mainstream cultural expression of Vancouver. This will only happen through increasing communication and collaboration, creating cultural symbols and icons, and potentially changing the name of the Downtown Eastside to remove the associated stigmas.

## Rebranding

Hearing the name “Downtown Eastside” brings up a lot of negative connotations and stereotypes. One way to change these perceptions is by rebranding the DTES community with a new name. Names are powerfully connected to community identity and come burdened with certain connotations that, in turn, can trap that identity in negative stereotypes. While changing the name of a community in a way that is authentic and does not betray the true nature of the community is difficult, it is one possible way of reversing the negative rhetoric surrounding the DTES. For a list of suggested alternative names to the Downtown Eastside refer to Appendix IV.

## Interactive Art

In order to draw people into the DTES, there must be an object of attraction. An interactive art installation would be an inexpensive way to entice both tourists and locals to a particular area. The concept of interactive art installation in the DTES was inspired by the “Gum Wall” in Seattle, Washington. This is a dingy alleyway in which tourists from all over the world can create designs by contributing chewing gum to the side of a wall. There are many different ideas for an interactive art installation that could be implemented in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver:

- **Shoe Tree:** A local artist can create a modern tree sculpture on which tourists can “fling on” their shoes to represent the theme of “I was here. Where have you been?”
- **Chalk Zone:** Create a zone in which all surfaces are covered with chalkboard paint. This will be kept open for tourists to express themselves artistically.
- **Photo Wall :** Give residents disposable cameras and ask them to take pictures of their favorite and most meaningful places, people, and events. The pictures would then be developed and compiled into a collage, displayed in a public place, to depict the community, pride, and artistic capabilities of people living in the area. Hope in the Shadows<sup>liii</sup> is charitable organization that hosts an annual photography contest that could be expanded to include a project like the Photo Wall.
- **Sound Sculpture:** A sound sculpture is a piece of art that produces sound by taking noise from the environment and transforming it into tones, or by people manipulating the structure to create a sonic experience. An outdoor, interactive, and aesthetically pleasing sound sculpture made from materials common to the DTES (ie. pop cans) and reflecting a cultural practice found in the DTES (ie. First Nations drumming) could re-conceptualize the auditory landscape of the DTES. The Organ of Corti is a sound sculpture installed in the UK that reflects this idea.<sup>liiii</sup>

For all four installations, it would be possible for Tourism Vancouver to announce monthly themes for people to express their feelings and opinions accordingly, through a variety of methods. There is also potential for grassroots contributors to start their own theme and invite others to join in the conversation.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration amongst the different sectors who are involved in various capacities throughout the DTES is essential to ensure long-term and effective change in the community. There is great potential for DTES residents and Tourism Vancouver to both benefit greatly from the creation of a partnership program to connect and share information with one another. Organizing regular round table discussions where DTES residents have the opportunity to relay to Tourism Vancouver their views and ideas for increasing awareness of their community, would both increase the number of ideas being brought up and also involve residents in their own community's development. It may be beneficial to create the position of a cultural communication liaison to organize the round table discussions with residents, artist groups, and local business owners themselves, building relationships between Tourism Vancouver and the community.

A large portion of the DTES community is of First Nations descent; therefore, a partnership with this specific group would also be very valuable, especially in regard to sharing and showcasing their culture. Overall, First Nations people, like many other people groups, when others are willing to listen and genuinely show appreciation for the culture and community, will be happy to contribute through cultural presentations. In light of this fact the cultural communication liaison would need to have an understanding of how to interact and understand different cultures, a liaison with a background in anthropology would be beneficial to all parties involved. The position would have an interactive emphasis, focusing on developing relational ties with the community in the DTES, proposing solutions, and facilitating grassroots development projects.

In addition to collaboration with the community of the DTES, it is imperative that Tourism Vancouver work together closely with the City of Vancouver to ensure smooth implementation of initiatives. A specific action the City of Vancouver could take is to reform their licensing system for street performers and venue spaces for performance art to allow for a more affordable and simpler licensing process. It is essential for the various organizations involved to all be working together towards the common goal of building up the DTES as a viable tourist destination, as well as building up the community in regards to both economic development and empowerment of its residents.

Finally, as the vast majority of tourists book hotels outside of the DTES, it is recommended for Tourism Vancouver to also create relationships with these

businesses. The DTES community would benefit if hotels, as well as tourism information offices, were encouraged to recommend local DTES businesses to tourists rather than simply cross the area out, which often occurs. In order for this to be effective, the DTES needs to be marketed in a way that emphasizes its many positive aspects rather than a continuous focus on the negative aspects. There is the potential for tourists to enjoy the diverse range of businesses, restaurants, cafes, shopping, and art; however, they need to be given the information and encouraged to visit these amazing places, instead of being dissuaded. For this to be possible, a public relations plan should be directed at changing the perception of the DTES in these businesses.

## **Conclusion**

The DTES is a vibrant, dynamic community with a vast array of tourist opportunities, both for international traveling guests and locals seeking to branch out of their immediate surroundings. From the thriving music and art scenes, to the eclectic display of ethnicities, the DTES offers a means of participation through active involvement in the area. In the close-knit community, visitors are invited to engage in the local music and art scenes already brimming with authentic talent. Alternative lifestyles and points of view are creatively portrayed by expressive artists as the potential impact in the DTES comes to fruition within the community. Adding to the depth of culture in the DTES, a variety of distinct ethnic groups successfully blend together to form a unique cultural identity. Restaurants, shops, and sporting venues also provide opportunities for tourists and locals to participate in enjoyable leisure activities, which contribute to the greater historic and dynamic community in the DTES. Each of these sections reflects a wealth of potential growth and opportunities for tourists to explore and engage in the “cultural heart” of Vancouver.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix I: Language in the News and the Downtown Eastside**

*Simone de Paula*

People count on a powerful tool when trying to find information about virtually anything—the media. Be it through the newspaper, online news, blogs or television, the media’s message reaches millions of people all over the world. This message has the amazing power of influencing people’s beliefs and opinions. The following section scrutinizes four online news articles written about the Downtown Eastside Vancouver in order to evaluate what type of message they are spreading.

Marketing is a powerful tool and should be used wisely because it has the ability to influence people’s perceptions. If the Downtown Eastside is to attract tourism, how it is conveyed in the media should be carefully considered. Words are influential; there are different ways of saying the same thing. Why not send a positive message? People should not be deceived to think the DTES is a perfect community, but they should be given information that highlights the positive characteristics, but doesn’t refrain from mentioning the negative. The analyzed articles have one thing in common: they illuminate many of the real problems of the area, but use extremely unfavorable words to describe the DTES. They portray a picture of danger, ugliness and disgust that would not be appealing to any tourist coming to visit Vancouver.

The first article called “Beggars, Homeless & Junkies” cites the following words and phrases regarding the DTES: “disgusted, humiliated, hungry, heavily addicted, hate, homeless, scared, drunks, cringe, mean, gross, bad people, dangerous, HIV, horrified, scum, aggressive beggars, rob, scam, infect, bum, junkie, worthless, monster, mentally ill, homeless, eyesore, embarrassment, ghetto, panhandlers, crack heads, scary as hell, stay away, not human, dumpster divers, harassed, poorest, zombies, street animals, awful smell, sick people, dingy, plague, pimps and break-ins.”<sup>liv</sup>

The second article called “Love your Ghetto,” mentions the words and phrases: “shock, stench of urine, fresh vomit, scabs, crack, heroin, syringe, ghetto, stinking carts of bottles, roaches, bed bugs, rats, slumming, the poorest neighbourhood in Canada, crystal meth, heroin and ashamed.”<sup>lv</sup>

The third article called “Eastside Stories – Diary of a Vancouver Beat Cop – A Drop of Human Potential” uses these words to describe DTES: “brutal place, stabbed, drunken, people fished packages of expired ground beef out of dumpsters, bed bug bites, rat-infested lanes, human feces, crack, heroin, pot, pills, dope, misery, pain, loneliness, drug addiction and mental illness.”<sup>lvi</sup>

The fourth article called “Downtown Eastside, Vancouver’s Dark Side,” mentions these words: “homeless, Dante-like stretch of Vancouver, destitute

people, human desperation, junkies, street walkers, mentally ill, drug dealers, poorest postal code in Canada, not an area to frequent, bad dudes, garbage bag tents, cardboard mattresses, avoid forbidden zone, crooks, thieves and steel bars.”<sup>lvii</sup>

After reading articles and blogs that use negatively charged wording, people have a strong aversion to the DTES. The horrific image depicted by the media is received by the public as the only way to view the DTES. Deeply entrenched prejudices and labels have been formed. The negative perception of the area is not invalid; there are serious social and economic problems. At the same time, there are many interesting cultural options in the area available to tourists. The issues are highly visible and should not be glossed over in an attempt to attract tourists. Providing a balanced view of the DTES requires thorough, thoughtful, and truthful journalism. Reporters must change the way these problems are portrayed through the rhetoric they use. Instead of a shock and scare approach, media should choose to paint the DTES as a community with both strengths and weaknesses.

There are a variety of ways of looking at any given situation. Positive and negative interpretations of the DTES are possible. Neither a completely optimistic or pessimistic stance should be taken, rather a balanced approach would be most beneficial. The use of pejorative words does not support a rethinking of the DTES. The media is responsible for the use of language and should reconsider how it could more accurately portray the DTES. The rhetoric used to market the DTES can be highly influential in changing the public’s perception. Advertising adds value to a product by changing one’s perception, rather than the product itself. The problems in this area do not have easy solutions. If the Downtown Eastside Vancouver area is advertised using positive language, it is more likely that people will perceive it differently.

## **Appendix II: Sacred Spaces in the Downtown Eastside**

*Amadea Vance*

What is Sacred? The sacred is difficult to define because of cultural variance in defining and experiencing it. Different cultures have been creating their own definitions and classifications of sacredness for thousands of years. However, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines the sacred as “regarded with or entitled to respect or reverence similar to that which attaches holy things.”

A workable definition of a sacred place or space is one where a person should stand in “awe.” It is a place where people feel spiritually inspired by sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations. In these spaces, a person can feel or sense a connection with the divine. Usually sacred places are set apart from common or profane spaces to reflect the otherness of the divine. Ultimately what a person considers sacred comes down to personal experience. No one can dictate to another person where he/she feels elevated or connected with a divine power, however, there are spaces and places where a collective group identifies the place as sacred.

In an area like the Downtown Eastside, is it possible to find sacred spaces or places? The answer is yes, if you have the eyes to see them. One space that inspires meditation is the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen classical Chinese garden on the edge of Chinatown. It is a free public park that is open at any hour and is a quiet beautiful oasis in the midst of the busy city. It is physically separated from the outside world, and as a person walks through the entrance into the space, the calming site of the beautiful outdoor garden immediately surrounds them. The space is sacred because it provides a haven from the outside world.

Oppenheimer Park is another example of a sacred space. It is an open space welcome to anyone, and for people living in the Downtown Eastside it is a place of rest. Along with being a green area, it is also the oldest surviving park in the downtown core. There is a totem pole in the park which stands in memory of First Nations women from the Downtown Eastside who have died or been killed. The park has a long history with the First Nations community. A western red cedar is planted in the park as a sign of the First Nations heritage, and the park hosts healing ceremonies. To many residents in the DTES, Oppenheimer park is a natural sanctuary.

Along with these places in nature, there are a few churches in the Downtown Eastside, as well as a Buddhist temple. St. James Anglican Church, First United, and Living Waters are the current Christian gathering places. Churches in the DTES are particularly unique because not only do they offer religious sanctioned spaces, but services to people in need and space for a variety of programs. Churches bring people relief from the hardships they are facing by giving them shelter, and providing space for them to focus in on the divine or spiritual.

There are many sacred spaces in the area connected with art, as well. Galleries, both public and private, provide reflective spaces for tourists and DTES residents.

What is the attraction for tourists? For the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden, there is an incredible interaction to be seen of the classical beauty of Ancient China in the middle of an urban city. This sacred place is unlike any other space because of the mixing and blending of cultures and traditions within one space. Not every space may be sacred for each tourist because of the subjective nature of sacred experience. Considering where residents of the DTES experience the divine, provides an enlightening experience to view life through an alternative perspective. As tourists seek out these sacred places, they have an opportunity to talk with the people in the community and hear from them where the sacred places in their lives are. This interaction could be sacred in and of itself as barriers are broken between the tourist and the local residents.

## Appendix III: Positive Terms for the Downtown Eastside

*Adrienne Baumunk*

- Richness
- Historical
- Heritage
- Unique
- Colorful
- Artistic
- Up Beat
- Infusion
- Relationship
- Communicate
- Community
- Night Life
- Vibrant
- Reality
- Original
- Self-Expression
- Be yourself
- Liberated
- Treasure
- Alive
- Lively
- Friendly
- Engaging
- Vast
- Abundant
- Substantial
- Aberrant
- Abundant
- Accessible
- Energetic
- Exuberant
- Complex
- Cultured
- Bustling
- Astonishing
- Imagery
- Cultural
- Underrated
- Likeable
- Thrifty
- Lyrical
- Real
- Plucky
- Reminiscent
- Robust
- Stimulating
- Vancouver's first neighborhood
- Founding neighborhood
- Independent

## **Appendix IV: List of Positive Alternative Names for the Downtown Eastside**

- Historic Downtown
- The Hub
- VanGo
- Heart of East Van.
- Historic Eastside
- Authentic Downtown or Authentic Eastside.
- Cultural Eastside
- Cultural City
- Cultural Downtown
- Sol Temeksequeh, Sultemex, or Temeksek (named after S'olh Temexw, the original Coast Salish name for the DTES which means "our world" "our land")
- Downtown Drive
- Eastside Village
- The East Hub
- Old Vancouver
- Downtown Loveside
- Vancouver Town
- Vancity East
- Port Side
- East Village
- East Central
- Rail-town
- Carnegie Village

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