



**Placemaking as a Public Space Planning Tool in  
New Providence, Bahamas**

Winning Essay of the 2023 Graduate-level Michael Baptista Essay Prize

by

**Nastassia Pratt**

Baptista Prize-winning Essay

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# **Placemaking as a Public Space Planning Tool in New Providence, Bahamas**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies  
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## Abstract

Public space in the Caribbean is increasingly under the planning and organizing power of the tourism industry. Since the emergence of development, the tourism industry has been positioned as an increasingly significant economic and spatial planning strategy in the region. In The Bahamas, waterfront public spaces for locals to enjoy and engage in everyday placemaking and social practice are often provided with “the tourist” as its primary end user. Locally activated public spaces, such as Potter’s Cay in New Providence, de-centers tourism and resists its spatialization forces. Potter’s Cay is an informal waterfront public space beyond the direct influence of tourism development and the “spatialization of race” that generally follows its projects. A literature review revealed a need to understand the full story of informal public spaces like Potter’s Cay to identify the impacts of development, the tourism industry, and local planning policy and development processes. Research revealed that the tourism sector in The Bahamas has been granted significant unofficial planning powers in lieu of explicit public space planning policy. Research also revealed that state and local community viewpoints on Potter’s Cay concerning its social practice, roots of spatial injustices, and cultural value differ. Additionally, a case study and observational study of Potter’s Cay has rendered as existing the complex transformation(s) of the area, its spatial injustices, its community and users, the ongoing placemaking happening in the area, and its layered Bahamian social space. It was found that public space planning that centers the lived experiences and needs of local Bahamians, like the Potter’s Cay community, is a more appropriate and relevant touchstone for Bahamian planning policy and enhancing the urban human scale of public life (Ghel, 2010).

## Foreword

During my summer breaks while studying and working in Toronto, I frequently travelled home to New Providence Island in The Bahamas. After a family member picked me up from the airport my first stop was often the vibrant, and seemingly ad hoc, strip of restaurants and vendors known as Potter's Cay. Here I'd purchase a cold drink and a fried snapper dinner and watch a chef expertly make our local delicacy, conch salad. To arrive at Potter's Cay, we would have to drive past the tourist-centered resorts and restaurants along West Bay Street as well as Arawak Cay, a commercial area that is architecturally similar to Potter's Cay and tightly linked to the nearby cruise ship port in downtown Nassau. It was never in doubt that Potter's Cay was always prioritized as the destination for my first "real" Bahamian meal in months. This was one of the few places along the waterfront that I experienced unapologetic "Bahamianess" and where I became a part of the layered knitwork of local public life. Though I was not fully aware of what the layered social space of Potter's Cay was composed of *specifically*, after years of visiting this public space, my instincts told me that formal state planning and a desire to center tourism were not major drivers for its vibrancy and existence. This is where my personal love of public space, especially the informal, converged with my academic and professional goals.

This major paper fulfills the requirements of the MES planning degree through deepening my understanding of my three learning components: 1) Planning and Public Space; 2) Spatial Justice; and 3) Placemaking. When I began the MES planning degree, Potter's Cay emerged as an obvious space of exploration. My research critically investigated the emergence of tourism development as strategy and the instrumentalization of the industry for planning public space. I used this research to deepen my understanding of the contradictory ideology and understandings about Potter's Cay as well as spatial justice issues and neglect in the area. This then led me to investigate what was really happening in Potter's Cay through an observational study. It is my goal with this research to render the public life of Potter's Cay and provide a potential touchstone for public space planning in The Bahamas that centers locals in creating a more vibrant and just public realm.

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## Introduction

Tourism development in the Caribbean region has historically been positioned as a major economic engine when colonial powers came to the realization that “the tropics” could be commodified (Sheller, 2003; Taylor, 1993). Nations in the region subsequently organized their economies, in part or entirely, around the industry. Tourism development emerged in the region alongside the concepts of “development”, “developing nations” and “The Third World”, concepts that modern-day economists would likely use to describe The Bahamas and most of the Caribbean region (Escobar, 1995). Much of this industry is centered on coastal and waterfront lands for a variety of reasons that significantly benefit tourism development actors and the tourists they hope to attract. Local government has given tourism development actors power to “draw lines in the sand” delineating which spaces are “private” and “public” and how these spaces are to be navigated by locals. This has always been an inherently racialized process. Though all beaches are considered public in The Bahamas, these actors and private landowners have found new ways to limit public access to the coastal areas that bound their properties (Mullings, 2004). This has created an environment where private waterfront lands are exponentially more prevalent than public waterfront lands in The Bahamas, and these public lands are not increasing.

Waterfront public space in The Bahamas has historically been formed through processes that prioritize tourism development and tourist visitors in the region. As a result, waterfront public space like Potter’s Cay in New Providence Island, that are mostly animated by Black locals and lie beyond the reaches of tourism and its spatialization activities, are often neglected by the state and regarded as “dilapidated” in state discourse. Informal public spaces that lie on the edges of tourism projects are particularly vulnerable and valuable, not only in The Bahamas, but throughout the Caribbean where “selling paradise” also generates tax dollars for many ‘small island developing state’ (SIDS) in the region. For this reason, the tourism industry has

wielded spatialization control over the planning of, provision of, organization of, and privatization of public space in the region and this control is only growing (Mullings, 2004; Bennett, 2015).

Informal public spaces like Potter's Cay have become the unofficial battleground for contesting the "force of control" of tourism and the (in)action by the state concerning spatial justice and providing safe, attractive public spaces for locals to gather and enjoy. The persistence of Potter's Cay's existence is an act of protest and the site of ongoing placemaking. This makes Potter's Cay more than simply a collection of romanticized "sleepy shacks", it is a cultural landscape that is consistently activated by Black locals with the potential to stimulate radical changes in public space planning policy. The state is not ambivalent about Potter's Cay. In the 1960s and 1990s the government engaged with local and international development professionals to conduct planning studies that included the redevelopment of Potter's Cay (Weiner and Ferguson, 1968). The wider Potter's Cay area was also the site of state agricultural activity, the site of a military battery, and is the major national shipping hub that services its archipelago of islands. Potter's Cay has been transformed by the state through a variety of decisions that included the placement and removal of people, businesses, and industry. Though Potter's Cay has also been transformed through neglect, it is its resiliency and public life that this paper aims to understand better to potentially present a foundation for community-centered public space planning that leverages placemaking at Potter's Cay. This is because Potter's Cay has also been transformed by its community members through the establishment of businesses, demands for mitigating environmental problems in the area, and social practice in the space. For this and many other reasons, Potter's Cay is an ideal case study to explore public space planning in a tourism-centric nation like The Bahamas.

### **Major Research Question**

The key research question guiding this paper is the following: How is the neoliberal thrust of tourism development as economic strategy implicated in the spatialization

and planning of public space in The Bahamas, especially those along highly prized coastal edges beyond the direct organizational influence of tourism? Supporting questions are:

1. How can the frameworks of neoliberalism, development theory, and critical race theory help to explain and render the increasing power of tourism development in the region?
2. Through a case study of periphery, coastal public space, Potter's Cay in New Providence Island, Bahamas, how can the local "creation of place" and "the production of space" be understood?
3. Can a case be made for periphery public spaces like Potter's Cay being rich in present (and potential) placemaking as a planning and development tool, and subsequently, an organizational touchstone for community-focused public space planning?

### **Methodology**

My research uses a qualitative methods approach comprising of a literature review, semi-structured interviews, a case study and observational study, and watercolor vignettes. Through theoretical and visual analysis, my research seeks to add to the discourse on planning and placemaking in the Caribbean region as I explore and render the neoliberal thrust of tourism development in a 'small island developing state' (SIDS), The Bahamas, as well as its influence on the organization and racialization of public space – and more specifically, on public spaces on the periphery of tourism activity in the nation. To that end, my research involves a literature review of planning documents, governmental legislature, academic discourse, and grey literature on the neoliberal tourism project at the local and regional scale, planning 'space' in a tourism-centric Bahamas, and the implications of these activities on spatial justice within the highly prized coastal public spaces on the periphery of increasingly intensified tourism development. Secondly, I conducted four semi-

structured interviews between February and March 2023 to gain an understanding of the local discourse on public space and Potter's Cay, a periphery public space in New Providence Island; these interviews were with two Potter's Cay business owners, one interview was with an artist, and the last was with an urbanist. I reached out to interviewees via site visits to Potter's Cay and through email. All interviews were conducted in person, business owner interviewees were approached during site visits while both the artist and urbanist interviews were agreed upon via email.

In addition to interviews, I conducted a case study of the Potter's Cay commercial area as an entry point to placemaking as a planning tool to understand its history, its development, and the present state of this public space both ideologically and spatially. This case study and observational study of Potter's Cay public life included exploring the national discourse on Potter's Cay, several site visits, and site studies to analyze the inherent spatiality of the area. The site studies involved mapping who the individuals are who are activating the public realm of Potter's Cay; how individuals move through this space; what activities individuals were performing and involved in; which businesses were open or closed during specific times and days; and how these businesses were woven into the production of space in Potter's Cay. Informal observation between shorter time frames noting general activities were also conducted to provide a sense of the "every day" placemaking happening within Potter's Cay. I seek to provide a lens for future planning decisions that centers the ongoing social production and placemaking in Potter's Cay, rendering it as existing, and provide an entry-point to a community-focused foundation of future planning and development that instrumentalizes placemaking in this and similar public spaces. Lastly, in addition of photographs, I explored the social aspects of Potter's Cay artistically through a series watercolor paintings and sketches that I hope are a helpful way of explaining the cultural landscape and social exchanges within Potter's Cay in a way that perhaps photographs cannot.

## **Literature Review: Neoliberalism, (Under)Development and Radical Spatialization through Tourism**

This paper situates the discussion on the processes of (under)development, tourism development as neoliberal strategy, spatial justice, and racialization through spatialization.

### *Tourism Development and Neoliberalism*

To understand the “force of control” that tourism development wields in The Bahamas, a small island developing state (SIDS), and the Caribbean region at large, it is necessary to view it through the lens of neoliberalism. Theoretical discourse on neoliberalism offers varied ways of understanding, i.e., as ideology or as project. According to Biebricher (2019), neoliberalism is understood as a political ideology in which the functioning market and its effect on its surroundings is at the center of discourse about political economy. Moreover, according to Biebricher (2019), neoliberalism is understood as emerging out of “the existential crisis of liberalism in the 1930s”, the product of a collective liberal soul searching that theorists determined was required to revitalize ideas about liberalism that were once established over a century ago (p. 21). According to Hart (2008), a different understanding of the problematic of neoliberalism as “class project” aids in showing the varied arrangements of neoliberalism conceptions (p.686). The capitalist preoccupation of the industrialized wealthy nations ushered in the concept *the hegemony*, or a class dominance, that Lefebvre (1992) holds is exercised over another class in both institutions and ideas (p. 10). For this research paper, neoliberalism is understood as real-life phenomenon or “project” that is a combination of economic activity, development activity, ideas about national culture, forms of government policy and state intervention (Hart, 2008). Because of the “color-blindness” of neoliberalism and the types of uneven development its arrangements produce, Hart (2008) insists on the importance of using the lens of racism and racialization to more adequately reveal

racialized forms of dispossession and spatial interconnectedness, an almost guaranteed reality of post-colonial nations (p. 695).

The Caribbean region has played a key, and some may argue *instrumental*, role in the industrialization and “capitalist intensification of the world economy” (Craton and Saunders, 1992, p. 32). Caribbean scholars have historicized the important role that tourism played in other SIDS, like Jamaica, as a beacon of hope for attracting foreign direct investment and their capitalist projects (Taylor, 1993). The colonial and post-colonial economic, infrastructural, and legislative landscapes were dramatically changed in the 1960s and 1970s to make Caribbean nations more attractive for tourism investment, and by extension, an economic generator for these nations via governmental taxes (Mullings, 2004). The increased consumption of the Caribbean tropics through tourism that was at one time enjoyed primarily by wealthy British subjects, was now extended to North Americans and Western Europe, and brought with it increased vulnerability and an economic dependency on these wealthier, more industrialized nations (Taylor, 1993). Mullings (2004) theorizes that in combination with “the relations of dependency that resulted from 400 years of colonial rule”, the tourism project was destined to result in reproducing the region as a place for tropical consumption by wealthier industrialized countries (p. 102). Here the racial lens enters the discussion as recommended by Hart (2008), in the form of critical race theory, as a useful way to render as existing how space is racialized, and race is spatialized because of tourism development projects in the region (Lipsitz, 2007). Contextually focused on the United States but universally applicable, Lipsitz (2007) theorizes that “the contours of racial inequality today flow directly from the racial and spatial heritage” inherited from the past and is concerned with how race, place, and power are connected (p. 17).

#### *Dependency and Underdevelopment*

“Dependency” as it relates to development that is prevalent in many nations of the Global South, described as “developing” or “under-developed”, is a concept that

scholars in the space of critical development theory understand to be “a historically produced discourse and a system of relations of elements” (Escobar, 1995, p. 10). Escobar (1995) holds that a critical examination of “development” and “underdevelopment” after World War II (WW2) is necessary, one that analyzes “the characters and interrelations of knowledges, power, and subjectivities” when one speaks of development (p. 10). Within the development discourse a model of economic development that emerged from Latin American economists in the 1940s and 1950s is a theory based on the concepts of “the centre” and “the periphery” (primarily understood to be the First World and The Third World respectively). As they relate to the deterioration of terms of trade, these two concepts were radicalized into the *theory of dependency* decades later (Escobar, 1995, p. 80). Development is also understood as “a response to the problematization of poverty” that appeared in the decade after WW2, as opposed to developing organically as a solution by the industrialized Global North to perceptions and definitions for poverty in the Global South, or “underdeveloped” world (Escobar, 1995, p. 44). Soja (2010) theorizes that when seen from a critical spatial perspective, “the development of underdevelopment” is a set of processes that involve the real-life production of discriminatory urban and regional built environments and a restrictive and dependent hegemonic series of relations (Soja, 2010, p.40). Soja (2010) holds that these underdevelopment processes have always been central to relations between the Global North and Global South geographically, culturally, and economically.

#### *Policy, Discourses on Local Development, and Grey Literature*

Though a gap exists concerning analysis of state planning and spatialization through tourism development in The Bahamas, grey literature, proposed (and discarded) plans and studies, and legislative Acts exist and speak to national discourse and the intent of the state. The Planning and Subdivision Act (2010) makes provision for land use planning and regulates the subdivision of land with all development approvals, in theory, happening within the Department of Physical Planning. In a recent news

article, a representative of the local architectural body, The Institute of Bahamian Architects (IBA), raised concerns about the lack of overall urban planning in The Bahamas and the nation being “in dire need” of it (McKenzie, 2021). This is not to say that governmental agencies have not engaged in planning initiatives as it relates to coastal areas. To that end, the current president of the IBA also notes that there is a chronic history of successive governments not seeing the benefits of urban planners as it relates to development, but this is only one part of a complex story that is *also* the story of public space planning (McKenzie, 2021). Bethell-Bennet (2015) called out the Bahamian government for the privatization of public cays and coasts, in full or in part, for the development of resort communities and exclusive private communities (p. 116). For Bethell-Bennet (2015), “relations of inequality”, “tourism as culture”, and “service indoctrination” to the all-inclusive resorts are only three of the interacting parts of a larger system of cultural transformation that is prevalent and extremely problematic, even with its seemingly innocuous assemblage (p. 118).

#### *Space, Spatial Justice, and Uneven Geographies*

Soja (2010) provides a useful way to perceive geography (or space), applicable to The Bahamas, by insisting that we construct our geographies like we create our histories, “not under conditions of our own choosing” but in the physical and imagined worlds that we collectively create – or that were formed for us (p. 18). Gehl (2013) offers a more literal take with his definition that public space is the physical space where public life happens. Concerning urban settings, Gehl (2013) also holds that, in most cases, how public space is “conceptualized and formed” has become an “overly rationalized” and “specialized” process at the institutional level (p. 3). However, Bethell-Bennet (2018) supports Soja’s view when he explains that public spaces as shared spaces are “where we experience a process of identity formation” and a means to provide “localized urban expression” (Soja, 2010, p.45). Lefebvre (1992) theorizes that all categories of social space, the space we are concerned with in this paper, may be subjected to formal, structural, or functional analysis and that any



approach will aid in “deciphering what at first may seem impenetrable” (p. 147). This is one of the touchstone challenges in what Soja (2010) theorizes is the “struggle of geography”, because removing the yoke of coloniality does not erase the “concretely embedded and imaginatively maintained unjust geographies of underdevelopment and colonial control” (p. 40). Here Hawthorne’s (2019) concept of “Black geographies” and her assertion that through the lens of Black geographies “the colonial and racist assumptions” that buttress a plethora of foundational concepts in geographical inquiry can be revealed (para. 1). These stubborn traces or imperialism are near impossible to remove and practically defines “what has come to be called the postcolonial condition” (Soja, 2010, p. 40). Soja (2010) notes however, that there is hope on the other side of the struggle for geography, and this is where alternative ways of understanding the production of space, embodied practice, and placemaking enter the local planning discourse through participatory planning practices (Taylor, 2003; Kretzmann and MacKnight, 1996).

## **1. Historicizing Tourism and Town Planning in The Bahamas**

What is it, then, that separates the ‘industrial world’ from what [is referred] to as ‘developing societies’ and ‘people living in more traditional settings, outside the most strongly “developed” portions of the world’...? Are these people not also living lives in ‘modernity’, lives enabled and constrained by the same processes that have made the West ‘modern’? (Sheller, 2003, p. 2)

### **Underdevelopment and the Regional Neoliberal Thrust of Tourism**

To understand the complex arrangements of realities and ideologies that are involved in the planning and production of space in The Bahamas, it is necessary to examine the increasingly influential “force of control” that the tourism project wields in the wider Caribbean region. This influence in the Caribbean, grew out of a capitalist agenda of “consuming the tropics” (Sheller, 2003). This influence also found fertile

grounds in the “underdevelopment” landscapes and ideologies of the post World War II era. An added complexity, or perhaps an added *benefit* to the industrialized countries preoccupied with developing “underdeveloped” nations, was that many of these nations (including The Bahamas) were recently or presently under colonial rule and after independence were left economically vulnerable (Craton and Saunders, 1992). Therefore, to speak of public space or the production of *any* space in the Caribbean region requires a closer examination of how capitalist concepts of *development* and *underdevelopment* emerged in step with the tourism project.

### *The Development of Underdevelopment*

The Caribbean region has historically been a space of North American and Western European consumption. Sheller (2003) traces this consumption back to the ‘discovery’ of the New World by Europeans (p. 22). Sheller (2003) is concerned with historicizing how these wealthy nations and their publics consumed all aspects of the Caribbean, which she argues is itself ‘invented’ (p.3). However, Sheller’s approach of critically analyzing the process of ‘invention’ is particularly useful to exploring development as discourse, ideology, profession, and interventions in the Global South as it emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. Escobar (1995) defines development as a discourse and “the result of the establishment of a set of relations among varied elements, institutions, and practices and of the systematization of these relations to form a whole” (p.40). These systems of relations grew out of the problematization of poverty in the years following WW2. The wealthier and more powerful industrialized countries agreed that the rest of the world was not developing as fast as they should have been and the term “underdeveloped” entered this development discourse. These “underdeveloped” countries were framed as “poor” in comparison to wealthier countries through metrics such as a nation’s gross domestic product (GDP) and subsequently positioned development and its gradual professionalization as “the Western way” to usher poorer nations into greatly increased industrialization and production (Munck, 2020, p.58).

Many of these “poorer” countries, referred then to as “The Third World” and geographically located in the southern hemisphere, were not undergoing the dramatic transformations that wealthier nations were undergoing (during the post WW2, communist nations were considered The Second World). Here, the idea of “poverty” entered as the nucleus of the development discourse. Escobar (1995) notes that in the 1950s a formulaic “economic development strategy” was routinely provided for Global South nations, based on its success with wealthier nations: (1) capital accumulation; (2) deliberate industrialization; (3) development planning; and (4) external aid (p. 74). This approach made the hoped-for rapid industrialization of the Global South an impossibility when one considers, to name a few differences, the lack of access to large amounts of capital that wealthier nations had during the post-WW2 era as well as the colonial landscape that many nations in the Global South – including The Bahamas -- were navigating. The Caribbean and Latin America were some of the regions considered to be “underdeveloped” during the earliest iterations of this discourse in the 1940s and 1950s. It should be noted that the creation of this discourse was under a power imbalance in many societies in the Global South, and Chandra Mohanty describes this as “the colonialist move” (as quoted in Escobar, 1995, p. 9). This is especially curious since imperial North America and Western European countries have consistently (and conveniently) removed themselves from the economic and physical realities of colonial and post-colonial nations, even as they engaged in development’s invention.

At the time of development emerging, another model of economic development was being coined by Latin American economists to challenge its ideology, the concept of *the center* and *the periphery*, useful ideas that will be repurposed when examining space later in this paper (Escobar, 1995, p. 80). A clear parallel can be made between *the center* and *periphery* in development theory and *the colonial empire* and *metropole*, where the former has replaced the latter. This concept of periphery and center would later become a *theory of dependency* and is based on the historic deterioration of trade agreements and subsequent dependency

on wealthier nations to “save them”, a lived reality for the Bahamian economy and many other Caribbean SIDS (Escobar, 1995, p. 80). However, despite the inclusion of theories like dependency, the capitalist machine moved on and within the span a decade after WW2 these relations among nations, institutional bodies, and projects quickly evolved in a way that legitimized development ideologies and planned interventions into the Global South (Escobar, 1995, p.40). An ideology and concept that has become embedded and coded within the term SIDS itself, ‘small island *developing state*’.

This is the climate that The Bahamas navigated post WW2 like many other Global South nations. It is no surprise that many nations of the Global South started to see themselves as “developing” or “underdeveloped”, a perception and description that theorists hold only make sense from a Western perspective (Escobar, 1995, p. 8-9). However, unlike many nations with large scale agricultural and natural resources that could be extracted and sold to wealthy nations (as in the case of Barbados and sugar or Trinidad and oil), The Bahamas was not similarly positioned. But what the nation lacked for in physical extraction it made up for in tourism consumption which translated into foreign investment and land speculation among other profitable tourism-related activities for a small, wealthy, and mostly White population of the country (Craton and Saunders, 1992 p. 301). It is not surprising that the tourism industry gradually became an important economic strategy in the nation. Since the arrival of the first tourists to Nassau (the main urban center of New Providence Island) in the 1820s, the nation has adapted and reorganized around this industry in transformative ways through a specific capitalist agenda that increased the wealth of the few at whatever cost to the many (Craton and Saunders, 1992, p. 32).

### **Understanding Tourism in The Bahamas through a critical race theory lens**

By the 1960s when airborne tourism began in The Bahamas, a square foot of land along the Cable Beach area, a waterfront edge in New Providence, was selling for what it had cost per acre forty years earlier (Craton and Saunders, 1992, p. 301). This

is one aspect of the role of tourism in The Bahamas and other Caribbean SIDS, the role of economic strategy for local real estate speculators. Considering that tourism in the region has historically possessed a neoliberal thrust in addition to the state's unapologetic positioning of this industry within national development strategies, it is important to frame our understandings of neoliberalism within this paper. As discussed earlier, the definition of neoliberalism held is that of project and real-life phenomenon that is a combination of economic activity, development activity, ideas about national culture, forms of government policy and state intervention. At its surface this appears to present these arrangements as "cogs in a market machine" and incapable of producing unjust, harmful, or hegemonic geographies (Hart, 2008). I apply the lens of critical race theory to render this project, its activities, ideologies, interventions and spatializations as inherently racialized, and in some instances, as racist (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 27). Critical race theory opens this discussion on the tourism project as a market generating tool by exposing that the organizing of its many moving and static parts (real estate, tourists, hotel employees, space, foreign investment, etc. or the "ordinary business" of society) fall into place along a scale of embedded "racist and oppressive thought processes and social structures" (p. 27). Along with this "ordinariness", Delgado et al. (2017) list the basic agreed upon prepositions among critical race scholars (p. 8-11):

1. *The ordinariness of racism* as the usual way that society does business;
2. *Material determinism* means that large segments of society have little interest in eradicating racism;
3. *The social construction thesis* holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations;
4. *Differential racialization* means that popular images and stereotypes of various minority groups shift over time;
5. *Intersectionality and anti-essentialism* mean that everyone has conflicting, overlapping identities and loyalties.;

6. And that *a voice of colour thesis* holds that minority status is said to bring a presumed competence to speak about race and racism in a singular way.

This lens is critical when discussing conceptual and real objects like “real estate” in tourism development that seem to “randomly” balloon in value for a particular class and race within society while the majority racialized group do not benefit from these “random” profits but are instead relegated to existing within the tourism project as “hospitality workers”. Critical race theory reveals that these developments are not random at all but are instead *designed* colonial inheritances that can be mapped back to the deeply racist times of slavery (Sheller, 2003).

#### *Tourism, Real Estate Speculation, and Profit*

The rapid rise in Bahamian real estate along coastal edges emerged as a direct result of the varied mechanisms at play within the neoliberal tourism project and, arguably, the region’s goal of “keeping up” with the GDP output of the wealthier nations of the Global North (Escobar, 1995; Mullings 2004). Positioned now as a major economic strategy of the state and a way for elites to generate wealth, tourism was viewed as an unobscured path to foreign investment and dramatic profit generation. An area of Nassau that is directly interwoven with the tourism project and tourism activity is Bay Street. Bay Street, a main street that is also known as “Downtown”, has been considered by many to be the central tourism-focused urban centre on New Providence Island. Bay Street runs parallel to the northern coastal edge with direct visual and physical links to large resorts as well as Prince George Wharf, the main cruise ship port of New Providence. Though this area appears to possess a fine grain of businesses and activities, the real estate along Bay Street has historically been controlled by a small group of White elites known as “The Bay Street Boys”, and to this day, many properties are still owned by these families (Craton and Saunders, 1992, p. 301). In the first decade after WW2 and in step with the new development discourse, properties along Bay Street increased in value by 300 percent and this

group and their families undoubtedly enjoyed the windfall from those valuations (Craton and Saunders, 1992, p. 301).

Bahamian policies concerning space and ownership become an important aspect of spatialization in The Bahamian context and, like our Jamaican neighbours, many tourism actors and developers are only required to pay nominal taxes on construction materials and land taxes (Hotel Encouragement Act, 1954; Mullings, 2004). However, cruise lines that are also significantly implicated in the tourism project and the spatialization in the region, because of their being viewed as ‘floating hotels’ cruise lines, are not required to pay the taxes required of land-based hotels (Mullings, 2004, p. 105). In the case of The Bahamas, the state has more recently offered a cruise line a nominal multi-decade lease for swathes of coastal lands on New Providence Island, known as Lighthouse Cay, for construction of an all-inclusive development (Hartell, 2021). Though most details on this development remain unknown, when local press revealed this cruise ship deal, the state’s reasoning for its defence was that the development project and lease agreement would create over 200 hospitality-linked jobs for Bahamians (Hartell, 2021). State attitudes toward job creation within the tourism industry implies a “trickle down economic effect” for Bahamians which rarely, if at all, is realized. Roles and access of any form to space for Bahamians within these all-inclusive enclaves and related tourism projects are often restricted to the individual’s hours of employment (Bethel-Bennet, 2015; Mullings, 2004). As exemplified by the case of Lighthouse Cay, there is an extractive interest in Caribbean coastal areas by foreign investment funded tourism projects, their actors, and government elites who have adopted roles of ‘resort project deal-brokers’.

#### *The Instrumentalization of Tourism: Foreign Investments, Dependency, and Control*

Within the working draft of the *Vision 2040 – National Development Plan of The Bahamas*, the Government of The Bahamas has described the purpose of this multi-decade plan as “providing a roadmap to the future development of The Bahamas” (Government of The Bahamas, 2016, p. 3). Throughout the Plan, the state describes

tourism as a weakness even as the Plan's language and included governmental development activity speaks to tourism being a key economic strategy. The tourism model is described as "the main pillar of the Bahamian economy", "one part of a two-sector economy", and "the main engine of growth" while the Plan notes a need for diversified industries and the ineffective organizing of the Bahamian economy around "the low value cruise market" and resort market (Government of The Bahamas, 2016, p. 357). The tourism industry accounts for sixty percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) and the industry employs approximately fifty percent of the nation's labour force which further illustrates the nation's complex dependency on the industry (Government of The Bahamas, 2016, p. 319). Though this dependency and hegemonic economy has been identified, the state has contradictorily expressed a continued desire to attract more foreign investment as a "monetary and fiscal approach" (Government of The Bahamas, 2016, p. 320). The Plan speaks to the contradictory long-term goals of government pertaining to tourism development where, on the one hand, the country acknowledges that tourism is unsustainable as a main industry and an "engine of growth", and on the other hand, noting that a measure of success will be intensified tourism investment (Government of The Bahamas, 2006, p. 320, 357). The language and the ambitions for future tourism development in the National Development Plan (which has since and continues to be realized) aligns with the imperial structure of colonialism that may seem far removed from modern Bahamian society (Bethell-Bennett, 2015, p. 125). The hegemony, control, and power of the tourism industry has emerged as a modern-day, neoliberal, and repackaged type of imperialism in The Bahamas and wider Caribbean region.

## **2. The Local Bahamian Context, Town Planning, and the Production of Space**

### **Space, Place, Public Space, and Planning**



Having explored the regional and local understandings of tourism development and the nuances of its neoliberal thrust and influence on spatialization, it is useful to shift to the micro and local scale of The Bahamas. An appropriate starting point would be to define what is meant by space, place, public space, and planning within this paper. Defining these concepts through the multiple lenses discussed offer the possibility of a Bahamian, and by extension a *Caribbean*, understanding of and approach to the “production of place”, or as it is referred to within Western planning discourse, *placemaking*.

### *Defining Space, Place, and Public Space*

The problem with the concept of *space*, in particular *social space*, is that its complexity is hidden, and in some instances *crippled*, by what one sees in the physical world and the existing written discourse on the concept. It is far more complicated than being a “thing” that an individual, community or state can possess or give away and Lefebvre (1992) provides an approach to defining this concept. Space “implies, contains, and dissimulates social relationships” and though *produced*, this *production* is “a precondition and a result of social superstructures” (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 82-85). Therefore, a space like the sidewalk of a market is an interconnected and overlaid collection of relationships that are ideological and physical. Lefebvre (1992) also holds that space is social and that this social aspect of space is also entangled with “property relationships” (i.e., land tenure) and the forces of production (i.e., some cost or tax from the land) (p. 84). In short, social space here is understood to be “social product” and something that is produced by every society via objects, histories, and ideologies that interconnect and overlay each other (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 26). Soja (2010) builds on Lefebvre’s concepts by asserting that a *critical spatial thinking* lens is required to contend with what he calls “a struggle for geography” (or the struggle for *space*) (p. 2). Critical spatial thinking is acknowledgement that from the beginning “the spatiality of human life must be interpreted and understood as a fundamentally complex social product” with arrangements that are invented, purposeful, and contain a

“socialization of space that define our contextual habitat” (Soja, 2010, p. 17-18). According to Soja (2010), a sidewalk in New Providence, with or without human presence, could not be reduced to “an empty void” (p. 19). This is because social space is consistently “filled with politics, ideology, and other forces shaping our lives and challenging us to engage with struggles over our geographies” (Soja, 2010, p. 19). Therefore, when one stands on a sidewalk in The Bahamas, one does not only confront the social space of that space, but *multiple* social spaces. *Social space can therefore be defined as being a societally produced, interconnected, and overlaid combination of objects, histories, ideologies, and politics that collectively shape our lives and are constantly in contestation in some way.*

Bethell-Bennet (2018) notes that within markets, *spaces* that are inhabited are staged for “the process of identity formation” because Bahamian life happens predominantly within these spaces (para. 3). Therefore, “place” is understood to be cultural processes, spaces of social life, and where “transnationalism comes to know the local culture, and where market economy meets with the sale of produce” (Bethell-Bennet, 2018, para. 10). To build on Bethell-Bennet’s (2018) useful descriptions, *place can be understood to be a society’s outwardly performative cultural characteristics of social space that are enmeshed with its deeply rich non-performative aspects.* This view naturally leads to defining *public space* for the purpose of this discussion. For Soja (2010), public space is synonymous with “the commons” and is understood to be “a localized urban expression of the notion of common property or, as it was once called, the commons” (p. 45). These are “democratic spaces of collective responsibility” that incorporate many geographical scales that begin at the micro level of property tenure (Soja, 2010, p. 45). Gehl (2013) holds that public space is comprised of sidewalks, streets, buildings, beaches, parks, squares, and other physical components that create the environment where public life unfolds (p. 2). Gehl (2013) further explains that public life happens in public space and that “public life should also be understood in the broadest sense as everything that takes place between buildings, to and from school, on balconies, seated,

standing, walking, biking, etc.” (p. 2). Public space creates an important part of what Bethell-Bennett (2018) call the “local cultural vernacular” (para. 3). Therefore, a working definition for this concept is that *public space is a localized urban expression of cultural vernacular and the unfolding of public life that is comprised of physical (sidewalks, porches, etc.) and social (histories, ideologies, etc.) components.*

### *Defining Planning: Local, Regional, and International*

Societies that have established planning institutes have provided a range of definitions for the professional practice of planning. In The Bahamas there is no institute of planning nor is there an explicit definition within legislative policy concerning planning and development processes. However, state legislature certainly alludes to the process, if not the professionalization, of planning and goes as far as to pass the Planning and Subdivision Act of 2010 that explains the role and responsibilities of public servants within Bahamian town planning. The Planning and Subdivision Act of 2010 perhaps offers *some* clues as to what the state considers planning to entail. In lieu of providing a definition of “planning” or “a planner”, Section 4 of the Planning and Subdivision Act (2010), notes that the purpose of the Act is (in part) to:

- prevent indiscriminate division and development of land;
- protect and conserve the natural and cultural heritage of The Bahamas;
- provide for planning processes that are fair by making them open, accessible, timely and efficient; and
- plan for the development and maintenance of safe and viable communities.

When the scale is shifted to the regional context of the Caribbean, the Trinidad and Tobago Society of Planners (TTSP) defines planning as “the process of positively managing the development of our villages, towns, cities and countryside” which involves but is not limited do “creating good policies and practical solutions for managing development; supporting economic growth; and being able to adapt to

climate change (n.d., para. 1). Similar language concerning *development*, and *safe and viable communities* is in Section 4 of the 2010 Planning and Subdivision Act. On the international scale, the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) defines the profession of planning as “scientific, aesthetic, and orderly disposition of land, resources, facilities, and services with a view to securing physical, economic, and social efficiency, and the health and well-being of urban and rural communities” (n.d., para. 4). And similarly, language concerning “promoting sustainable development in a healthy natural environment” appears in the 2010 Planning and Subdivision Act (Sec. 4). The question arises that if this Act, with the word “planning” in its title, contains similar language of planning institutes regionally and internationally, why then has “the planner” and the explicit processes of “planning” seemingly been left out of this legislation and general state development processes in The Bahamas?

In the absence on an explicit definition for planning like those provided by the TTSP and the CIP, does it follow that planning is simply not happening in The Bahamas? The answer is no, and this is because in lieu of the state defining this aspect of nation building, other entities have defined the process and practice themselves, such as the tourism sector and its actors. However, in the absence of state and institutional definitions of *planning* and *the planner*, there is the opportunity for communities (and government agencies) to embrace and legitimize new definitions and planning processes that center local lived experiences and social productions of space. New understandings of what it means to plan and develop local Bahamian spaces, communities, and neighbourhoods are incredibly important for places whose very existence is an act of resistance and contestation against the tourism project and its actors that, in some instances, include the state. Exemplifying resistance through existence, *periphery public spaces* beyond the spatialization power of tourism are determined to exist through varied environmental challenges, tourism development forces, governmental interventions, and disenfranchisement.

### **The Marketplace: An Important Space for Cultural Exchange and Placemaking**

To understand the value and importance of the marketplace in Caribbean life, it is necessary to historicize its social practices and spatial struggles. If we start from a fundamental understanding that within post-colonial societies spatial matters are inherently racial matters, then these market spaces of Black culture, Black exchanges and Black existence become critical to nation building. Historians Craton and Saunders (1999) note that Bahamian society has had Blacks comprising an overwhelming majority since 1787, since the moment White British loyalists and their Black slaves departed from East Florida to settle the archipelago. With the backdrop of colonial domination, Blacks have always found ways to carve out economic space to sell their wares by participating in “marketing”, whether on the way to market, within the Grants Town community or in the town centre (Craton and Saunders, 1999, p. 105). Like all aspects of Black life under colonial rule, it is apparent through since repealed laws, like the Markets and Slaughterhouses Act of 1947, that colonial powers were preoccupied with policing how Black bodies moved and engaged with spatial production within the marketplace.

An important aspect of Black culture in 1840s New Providence was that marketing was often a gendered activity with many of the vendors being women. Because many Black settlements were far removed from the tourist- and legislative-centric downtown, travel to and from these markets in the mid-1800s was lengthily and many women used these trips “to exchange news, ideas and gossip” (Craton and Saunders, 1999, p. 106). This daily “passage of market women” along Market Street, and their slowly ambling through a still existing archway called Gregory’s Arch has been “picturesquely” captured and sold for the tourist gaze and consumption since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Craton and Saunders, 1999, p. 106). What those historic portrayals of the marketplace failed to reveal was the multitudes of Black spatial production that have left traces within the modern-day Bahamian marketplace. The places these women and their children live in and leave, the miles they walk calling out their wares, and the marketplaces they participate in are all a part of the Black geography of The Bahamas.

*These social exchanges and productions, the performative and embodied, are a part of what makes Caribbean markets incredibly valuable, and this does not end (or begin) upon arrival to the physical market space but continues to transform into the making of multiple layers of place, or placemaking.* This definition of placemaking moves beyond an “intervention-centered” one provided by the UN Habitat where the process is about transforming ‘public’ spaces into self-sustaining and self-managed ‘living’ places (2020, p. 5). Placemaking is instead an ongoing process involving community members and public spaces (like marketplaces) that future interventions and projects can be built upon toward the positive transformation and centering of local community. Therefore, to revisit what comprises a public space, marketplaces are important public spaces that are localized urban expressions of placemaking and the unfolding of public life, both its physical and social components. If viewed from a critical race theory lens, then it becomes apparent that markets today are places of resistance and contestation by nature of their very existence. To that end, this paper holds that *all* marketplaces in The Bahamas are a product, in some form or fashion, of the spatialization forces of the tourism project. This produces what Lipsitz (2007) identifies as, a seemingly natural and dangerously innocuous, racialization via spatialization and vice versa. Now that the complexity of public space is more visible, how does society produce spatial justice within space?

### **3. Public Space and Justice: Racialization, Spatialization, and State Responsibilities**

One lesson is clear: once spatial injustice is inscribed into the built environment, it is difficult to erase (Soja, 2010, p. 41).

#### **What is Spatial Justice?**

Having defined the concepts space, public space, and place as well as forming an understanding of the process of placemaking in the Caribbean context, spatial justice

is an organic next step. Lipsitz (2007) explains that “having a better understanding of differential space” can aid local and professional community builders toward creating spaces that “ameliorate the racialization of space and the spatialization of race”, therefore eliminating injustice within space (p. 12). Adopting this lens means that, whether acknowledged or not, all individuals within private and public institutions are involved in the instrumentalization of the tourism industry and play explicit roles in exclusionary practices and in determining “the racial meanings of places” (Lipsitz, 2007, p. 12). Soja (2010) notes that justice has meaning beyond legislative concepts of being fair, justice is conceptualized as applying to varied “conditions of social life and everyday behavior” (p. 20). Once ‘spatial’ is added to ‘justice’, Soja (2010) holds that there is a collective search for “an explicitly spatialized form of social and economic justice” and that this search can provide an “organizational and motivational adhesive” that encourage scalar relationship building across groups, races, institutions, etc (p. 38). Can the organizing ideas of the public concerning their local public spaces and public needs extend nationally and regionally? Soja (2010) believes that they indeed can extend to regional and global scales and holds that it is not difficult to see “how local struggles for spatial justice” can be linked “to global movements and universal human rights” (p. 46). This paper reaffirms Soja’s stance and agrees that a collective search for spatial justice at the local Bahamian scale within public spaces can do the same. This means that the call for spatial justice in Bahamian marketplaces, coastal edges, and sidewalks, is in fact connected to the global struggle for spatial justice. What then is the working definition of spatial justice for this paper? Building on the ideas of Lipsitz and Soja, *spatial justice is defined here as explicitly defining the actors and roles (past and present) at play within the production of differential spaces, their implications in creating exclusionary practices, and collective organizing that is centered on clearly seeking a spatialized form of social and economic justice within these spaces.* The absence of spatial justice also signifies the presence of uneven geographies, a concept that scholars have been increasingly engaging with.

### **Uneven Geographies: Investment and Disinvestment in Periphery Public Spaces**

Spatial injustices materialize in *uneven geographies*. To provide a touchstone for this important concept, uneven geographies is understood to be spaces that experience the “maldistribution of vital public services and all other available resources of urban life” where these spatial discriminations are surface expressions of systemic power imbalances and colonial heritages (Soja, 2010, p. 49). In The Bahamas, public spaces along coastal edges are a particular form of uneven geographies. As a nation that is majorly comprised of Black nationals, spatial manipulation by private development has historically had immediate and visually obvious racial expressions. Through local private enclave development and FDI funded tourism-centric projects, the sale of once public lands to tourism actors, and the reorganization of public places within and on the fringes of this activity, spatial discriminations materialize. Some initiatives and/or public spaces where this is evident are firstly through the state’s consistent empowering of tourism actors to remake society in whatever tourist-focused version that it needs to generate profit. Resorts like Baha Mar and Atlantis have completely transformed the public sphere of New Providence through highly manicured sidewalks and tourist-only coastal areas. At first glance, a redeveloped public realm along strategic resort edges seems beneficial to all, but what is hidden is that these are highly policed spaces where natural and organic gatherings of Black locals, like the animated social exchanges, and Black life that happens at marketplaces, is discouraged and/or not permitted. Tourism resort development has historically been used by the state, to a fault, as a public space planning tool and a means to “beautify” the public realm. To qualify some of this shifting of “planning” responsibilities, this discussion has acknowledged a designed dependency among Caribbean SIDS. Additionally, in examining the issues of equity planning in the Global South, scholars Sotomayor and Danieri (2018) have also pointed to the dilemma for many urban regions in that “states and institutions are often weak” and “lack the resources, capacity, or political will to expand public good” (p. 274). However, do these



weaknesses and economic shortcomings of Caribbean SIDS mean that by proxy, foreign investors and their tourism projects should be given full responsibility to plan and reorganize space at will? The answer is no, because this instrumentalization is harmful and disenfranchises those beyond hegemonic control. Oftentimes the disenfranchised are racialized Bahamians.

Further, with this instrumentalization comes inherent power that is guided by the self-interests of these actors, and not the public good or the interest of spatial justice. Blacks are allowed to be in these edge “public spaces” like Baha Mar Boulevard, but the message is loud and clear, ‘observe our gardens and lake but please move along’. When the gaze is shifted to the actual coastal edges of the all-inclusive resorts, the racialization is even more apparent as by law locals are not allowed any social practice on the coastal lands from the “soft sand” to inland. Being a predominantly Black nation and catering to mostly wealthy, White tourists, these coastal public areas are, by definition, racialized. How then do we approach the provision and protection of public spaces that lie within view but beyond the direct reaches of the tourism industry in a way that is inclusive to all Bahamians? We have learned from the case of Lighthouse Cay public lands without local human activation, even if an unapparent social space exists, that the expression of urban life is a critical ingredient to resisting the organizing forces of tourism. What lessons are there to learn from the consistently, locally occupied and activated public lands along the prized waterfront edges of New Providence, spaces like Potter’s Cay? To draw on the theory of *center* and *periphery* that Escobar (1995) notes came out of Latin American discourse on development economics and the breakdown in trade agreements, the concept of *periphery public spaces* is introduced within the Bahamian spatial landscape because of the breakdown in governmental planning and development leadership and responsibilities. Concerning the stakeholders involved in producing even geographies within all public spaces in New Providence, they include (but are not limited to) the state and its varied agencies, community members both local and neighboring, community organizations, institutions, and private property owners

(including the stakeholders of tourism projects). However, without clear leadership in the form of government planning policies that foster just geographies and the state's reining in of tourism agents in spatializing activity, the power imbalances will remain. This is perhaps where Soja's (2010) call for collective organizing about specific spatial justice issues as a critical means to stir political change can come into play to force appropriate state action as it pertains to public space planning. Therefore, to restate, without the collective organizing around spatial (in)justices in coastal public spaces and clear state leadership and ownership of its responsibilities, the power imbalances within these spaces will remain.

*Disinvestment as Development Strategy: Potter's Cay as Center and Periphery*

It is the stance of this paper that Potter's Cay is an important public space that is a localized urban expression of Bahamian cultural vernacular where organic placemaking happens daily. Potter's Cay is also a space on the periphery of the state's organizing and planning power through tourism. By law tourism actors can defend their beaches and waterfront areas. However, Potter's Cay is a waterfront space that is undoubtedly public and occupied by Black Bahamians in a way that resists policing. It is, in a large part, the presence of the local Bahamian community of Potter's Cay that defends and protects this coastal space from erasure and tourism planning. Planning discourse has discussed the use of disinvestment by those with power and control to reorganize space for their own self-interests. This paper holds that an apparent lack of interest in the appropriate planning and services within community is *indeed* a planning strategy. At the very least it is a move toward cultural erasure and fostering environmental injustices, whether intentional or not. Environmental justice concerns for Potter's Cay, some of which will be discussed are: The citing of a nearby waste processing site in the 1990s, the threat and instances of fire razing stalls and businesses due to unregulated construction practices, the removal of swathes of mostly female vendors and subsequent increased gendering of this space, lax dredging of adjacent coastal waters, insufficient provision of garbage bins, inadequate

provision of places to sit and gather safely, and a lack of dedicated pedestrian crossings. This paper stands that it is unimaginable that the state would have ever cited a waste management site along the immediate coastal edges of the West Bay Street resorts or cruise ship port in the past or the present, therefore these injustices speak to a very specific lack of regard for protecting and planning for public spaces occupied by Black bodies in New Providence. However, it is the hope that this paper adopts a spatially critical examination of a Bahamian coastal public space, the Potter's Cay commercial area, by way of rendering this public space as one of value that has been historically resistant to the "forces of control" that tourism wields, the state's harmful lack of planning which this paper holds is indeed planning strategy, and the partial truths within national discourses concerning Potter's Cay.

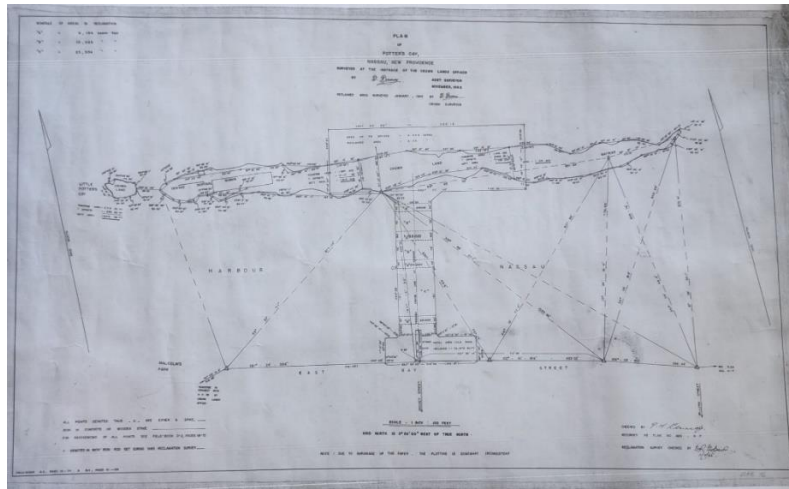
#### **4. The Potter's Cay Case Study and Observational Study**

Potter's Cay is a nice place for Bahamians. You get out here, you get your food. You get fresh fish and conch, your salad. You hang out and relax. No stress, that's good culture for Bahamians, I think (Local business owner 2, 2023).

##### **About Potter's Cay**

Potter's Cay, also known to locals as Potter's Cay Dock, is many things to many people. Geographically, Potter's Cay Dock as it is known today, has expanded from what was once an uninhabited, naturally formed cay located in the center of Nassau Harbour mid-way between New Providence Island and Paradise Island (*Paradise Island* being an island north of New Providence Island that is predominantly comprised of privately owned, exclusive properties and large-scale tourism resorts) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. 1965 map of Potter's Cay.**



Potter's Cay Dock is entirely public lands and is the home of the Bahamian mailboat system that traverse the waters between the Family Islands and New Providence Island. This shipping port is an important internal port of entry and exchange which further positions Potter's Cay Dock as a vital node within the nation.

**Figure 2. Location map of Potter's Cay commercial area.**



As a cay, its docks have historically been home to many industrial uses. At one time its docks housed the Ministry of Agriculture's Produce Exchange where Bahamian-

grown produce were sold and distributed. The docks also housed a large fish house for selling seafood products. Potter's Cay Dock is home to a historic military monument known as The Battery, the Port Authority, and a police station. Lastly, Potter's Cay is home to a commercial area that grew from the Ministry of Agriculture's produce exchange. In the 1970s and 1980s the area was an incredibly vibrant place of local economic and cultural activity that also included vendors that sold their wares directly beneath the Paradise Island Bridge that was constructed between 1966 and 1967. These businesses that were mostly within "shacks" at the time grew to include physical wooden buildings that now run along the eastern and western waterfront edges at ground level. This commercial area of restaurants and vendors is known to locals as Potter's Cay. Today, these businesses seem an organic development as fishermen and fisherwomen would sail up to these very edges to off-load their catches. Often these very catches would be immediately cooked and sold in the restaurants and stalls at Potter's Cay.

**Figure 3. Potter's Cay, photograph taken in 2023.**



Many of the Potter's Cay business owners have described the area as a "generational venue" and view themselves as "the backbones of" the small businesses of the wider Potter's Cay Dock community (Wells, 2016, para. 5). Though now only comprised of these edge businesses and stalls after the government's past reorganizing activities, the Potter's Cay commercial area (i.e. Potter's Cay) is still an important part of Bahamian culture that is rich in local vernacular inclusive of all things Bahamian: music, architecture, conversation, local colloquialisms, food, drinks, fishermen and women selling their wares daily, produce vendors engaging with customers, locals and

visitors interacting with business owners, vendors interacting with each other, trucks and cars travelling to and from the mailboats and ferries, patrons playing dominoes, individuals people watching, individuals standing beneath the bridge, individuals carting conch shells to and from various stalls, taxis unloading tourists at their favourite stalls, locals picking up conch salad on their lunch breaks, and unexpected conversations among pedestrians as they travel throughout the area. Those are only some of the outward expressions and instances of placemaking in Potter's Cay that continue to contribute to the wider Bahamian cultural landscape.

### *Environmental Issues and Injustice*

An important issue to note should be the relocation of a sewerage pump station that was located west of Potter's Cay, up until the mid-2010s, on mainland New Providence along the opposite waterfront edge of the harbour. Within the last decade, the Water and Sewerage Corporation, the state agency that manages sewage facilities, have since relocated this pump station though some Potter's Cay community members are skeptical that the site is environmentally safe (Russell, 2018). Potter's Cay business owners have also noted that there has been "work at the sewage treatment plant" and that this work likely "disturbed the water table in the area", subsequently deteriorating water quality in the immediate area (Russell, 2018, para. 2). At present, community members have also raised concern to the state and media that the septic tank used for Potter's Cay's waste disposal is damaged, a concern that the state has consistently not come to a definitive conclusion on (Russell, 2018, para. 6). With past health outbreaks of illnesses connected to contaminated seafoods that are often washed and/or stored by fishermen and fisherwomen, these governmental policy decisions and (mis)management of sewage facilities and infrastructure are problematic. State narrative concerning any outbreak of illness related to seafood at Potter's Cay has almost always shifted the blame and responsibilities to vendors and has been reduced to these vendors not following "safe handling standards" and their "refusing" to use fresh water to wash seafood (Russell, 2018, para. 6). Common state

narrative concerning Potter's Cay, like those in 2018, are unhelpful and harmful as it does not tell the full story about Potter's Cay and absolves the government of responsibility to the environmental injustices that the community faces, many of which have been exacerbated by state neglect. By the definition formed in this paper, these problematic lapses in governmental services and infrastructure can be described as spatial injustices that produce uneven geographies for the business owners and patrons of Potter's Cay.

#### *State Discourse and Ideology on Potter's Cay*

Portrayed in state tourism literature as "brightly coloured conch shacks" in a sleepy seaside village, this public space is discussed by the state in ways that are contrary to the daily placemaking that happens on site (Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, n.d.). Inclusive of language such as ministers developing "plans to spark renewed public confidence in Potter's Cay", the Potter's Cay area has been described by state agents as being "left to ruin" and having "lost its charm and lustre", and that the area "has been an eyesore for many years" (Wells, 2019; Wells, 2016; ZNSNetwork, 2013).

Throughout the past sixty years, the state has taken a keen interest in engaging local and international planning professionals with waterfront areas that they see as potential tourism centers. Potter's Cay did not escape this state interest and iterations of this cay's reorganization have been proposed in a redevelopment plan in the 1960s - namely the 1968 "Development Plan of New Providence Island and the City of Nassau" - that was prepared for the state by Columbia University and the 1992 "Waterfront Development Study: Nassau Bahamas" that was prepared by The Architects Partnership Bahamian and EDSA Planners and Landscape Architects (see Figures 4 and 5). These studies speak to the tourism-centric development agenda and tourism as strategy where "the existing economic pattern" of the industry and the state's tourism policy takes center stage (Weiner and Ferguson, 1968, Sec.B.2).

Figure 4. Development plans from 1992

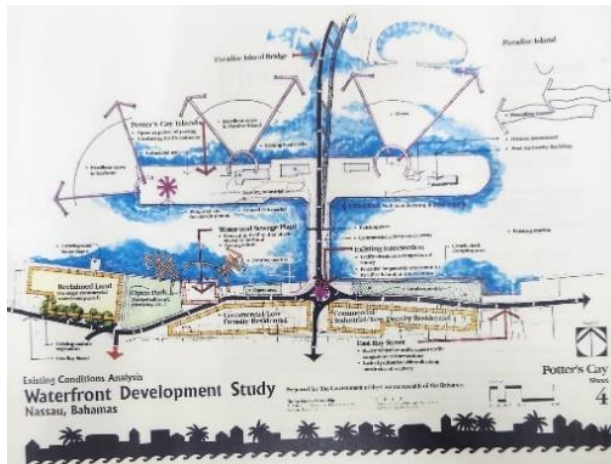


Figure 5. Development plans from 1968



### The Interviews: Potter's Cay and Public Space

It's basically just where Bahamian people can go, get live entertainment, and enjoy themselves. Just, everything Bahamian, you know? Where you can go rake 'n scrape, you can dance, you can listen to music, you can just be yourself. It's a place where you can just go and be yourself (business owner 1, 2023)

When asked what they believed an example of public space, or an area where public life happens in New Providence, both business owners who were interviewed



identified Potter's Cay as such a space. Business owner 1 shared that Potter's Cay was the public space she mostly visited and identified the Fish Fry on Arawak Cay as another public space. Business owner 2 (2023) responded "For Bahamians? Potter's Cay", which speaks to one of the defining aspects of public space that this paper holds, that it is a localized urban expression of cultural vernacular and public life. An urbanist (2023) noted that "it depends on the when you're talking about" when identifying public spaces and through a historical lens renders past social production as important and having existed (i.e., the since removed Public Market on Bay Street, the Eastern Parade, and the Potter's Cay Fish Market were mentioned), in addition to state decisions that cause the accompanying cultural erasure with the removal of these public spaces.

Concerning the question of Potter's Cay being an example of public space, three interviewees answered that it *was* an example of public space for reasons that include the area having "society, beautiful beaches, people sitting down relaxing" as well as "people feeling this fresh breeze" which speaks to the social, environmental, and almost atmospheric spatiality of this public space (business owner 2, 2023). Similarly, business owner 1 (2023) noted that it is a public space because of "the waterfront and the people that you could meet" and emphasized the stalls themselves and that "the setting of the stalls also...don't leave the stalls out." The urbanist (2023) said that "the fact that all the public activities go on there" as a reason that Potter's Cay, including its past and present shipping, agricultural and market aspects, is an example of public space. He explained that what makes it a public space are the interlocked and overlaying shipping, selling, buying, and collecting activities and exchanges taking place within this cay (urbanist, 2023). Interestingly, an artist (2023) that I interviewed said that when he thinks of public spaces he thinks of the inner-city parks in New Providence because of a similar vibrant expression of activities and public life that happens in Potter's Cay and the lack of barriers to access to these spaces, whether physical or ideological.

Both business owners said that Potter's Cay is a part of Bahamian culture, and as noted in this section's introductory quote, they identified an unapologetic and genuine *ownership* that locals express within this public space that is foundational to its 'Bahamianess'. Similarly, business owner 2 (2023) said that "It's where you can get the local food and meet people" and that "it's a good open space", the *outwardly* performative characteristics of social space that we have determined are layered with rich non-performative aspects of place. Though unable to define Bahamian culture, business owner 2 (2023) had clear reasoning for why the area was "a part of" Bahamian culture as was noted in the opening quote of this section, "it's a nice place for Bahamians. You get out here, you get your food. You get your fish and conch, your salad. You hang out and relax. No stress, that's good culture for Bahamians I think." The urbanist (2023) also said that Potter's Cay is a part of Bahamian culture for similar reasons to it being a space animated by locals and for locals *first*, "It's all aspects of Bahamian culture, the positive, and not-so-positive, and the really insalubrious."

When asked which activities they enjoyed doing or experiencing in Potter's Cay, business owners included activities such as fishing, watching the younger boys jump from the dock edges into the sea, and also the views, "Coming out everyday and putting out my stall is a joy, but just the waterfront. The waterfront itself." (business owner 1, 2023). A multi-generational business owner in the area, business owner 2 (2023) acknowledges attracting tourists to the area is important, however, his response to what he enjoys most about Potter's Cay is focused more on his own placemaking activities, his joy in cooking, his craft and how visitors respond to it, "We have a lot of tourists come and I love, just, interacting with them. I love making them a little conch salad, make them things that make them say "Wow, I'd like to come back here!"'" The same business owner 2 (2023) acknowledges that there are at times those who appear to be homeless individuals in the area but that this should not be a concern, "one thing is that we have a lot of stragglers and thing out here, but I even don't worry about them. I worryin' about the atmosphere and the fresh breeze that keep you lookin' young and wisely."

When asked what things they believe can be improved about Potter's Cay, some things mentioned were increased daytime security, beautification inclusive of adding flowering trees, flowers, seating beneath the bridge and the overall improving of stalls by the owners and government. Government responsibilities concerning maintenance, services, infrastructure, and improvements at Potter's Cay were raised as areas of concern for interviewees. Though not explicitly described as uneven geographies due to spatial discriminatory practices, one response took a collective approach to responsibility "We need to improve this place and get it together. Government needs to, we need to improve and make it better than it was" (business owner 2, 2023). Broken promises by successive governments concerning the complete overhaul of Potter's Cay commercial area were mentioned as well as the responsibilities of local business owners to take care of their establishments "You don't want to [improve your stall]? We take it and give it to people who can make it happen. You got to upgrade the standard...you got to upgrade and make it better, make it *look* better" (business owner 2, 2023). This leads to the idea of neglect and disrepair as strategy for dispossession in relation to lapses in governmental services and funding. In the case of Potter's Cay, the consistent occupation of this area and the wider cay has created an environment that makes erasure through disinvestment a near impossible tactic for dispossession. However, the threat looms always and the urbanist spoke to the realization of this strategy succeeding in the past when it comes to public space in New Providence and that the role of urbanists, planners, and other professional and non-professional stakeholders must be "culturally nuanced" and "culturally aware" to ensure that public spaces are significantly more inclusive than exclusive (urbanist, 2023). These responses point to an inherent and extremely localized unfolding of public life at Potter's Cay that shows the ongoing placemaking that is happening in an organic way that present and future policy, planning, and development should organize itself around if practitioners hope to be an aid to this community. Responses also speak to existing uneven geographies that have been created because of spatial injustices. However, though challenging, spatial justice can

be created within this and similar public spaces in The Bahamas and wider Caribbean region. In that spirit, community-centering is an important aspect in protecting and making great public spaces because as one of its members have said, “Fresh conch in the middle, fresh breeze, listen to some nice Bahamian music. Right there is the culture of us Bahamians” (business owner 2, 2023).

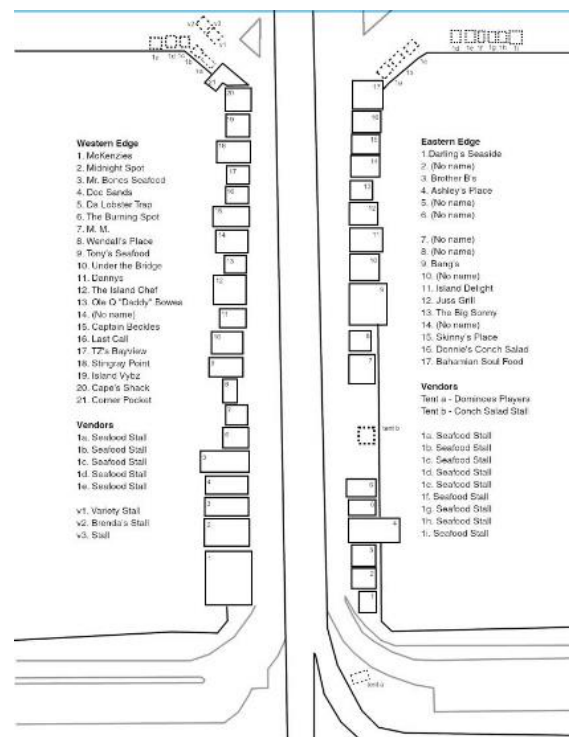
### **The Observational Study: Public Life at Potter’s Cay**

Like the interviews, my research involved an observational study to gain a better understanding of the local context of Potter’s Cay. The discourse on Potter’s Cay, and similar periphery public spaces like it, has generally emerged from an ideology of lack, degradation, and need instead of from a position of community agency, ongoing placemaking, and planning and development potential. Urbanists such as Gehl (2010) believe that within areas with urban life like Potter’s Cay, a clear starting point to “making life in them visible is to study life as it actually exists and use this information to make plans for where and how to reinforce city life” (p. 209). In the case of Potter’s Cay and other public spaces in urban New Providence, “documenting city life is an important instrument for city development” (Gehl, 2010, p. 16).

A community-centred (re)adjustment in state response to the environmental and spatial injustices the Potter’s Cay community faces is necessary, which this study can hopefully encourage. Similarly, educating the wider Bahamian public beyond the Potter’s Cay community is also beneficial since it is through community contestation to injustices that truly radical changes to (and creation of) public space planning policy can be realized. More importantly, rendering as existing the placemaking, layers of social space, and the actual work that the Potter’s Cay community is engaged in today (and has engaged with in the past) will hopefully lead to changes in (and introduction of) public space planning policy in The Bahamas. It is in that spirit I engaged in an observational public space study in Potter’s Cay to understand the; *what, where, when, who, and how* of Potter’s Cay. As the area is a community where Bahamian public life and culture happens in its most organic and natural forms, understanding

the varied activities by locals in this public space, and finding ways to increase this public life, should be foundational to how the state plans and improves public spaces instead of the ineffective use of tourism and its highly manicured spaces by proxy. The human scale within this waterfront urban area that Gehl (2010) calls the “small scale” or “human landscape” is an area that planners often neglect. Though Gehl (2010) notes that coordinated work with the city or *larger community scale, development scale*, and the *human scale* is necessary for good urban planning, it is the smaller human scale that is “the key to ensuring better conditions for the human dimension” (p. 195). And this is the dimension that varied aspects of this study aims to explore and render as real and existing at Potter’s Cay with the hope that it will be a guide toward more appropriate public space planning, development, and protection.

**Figure 6. Map of Potter’s Cay study area businesses.**

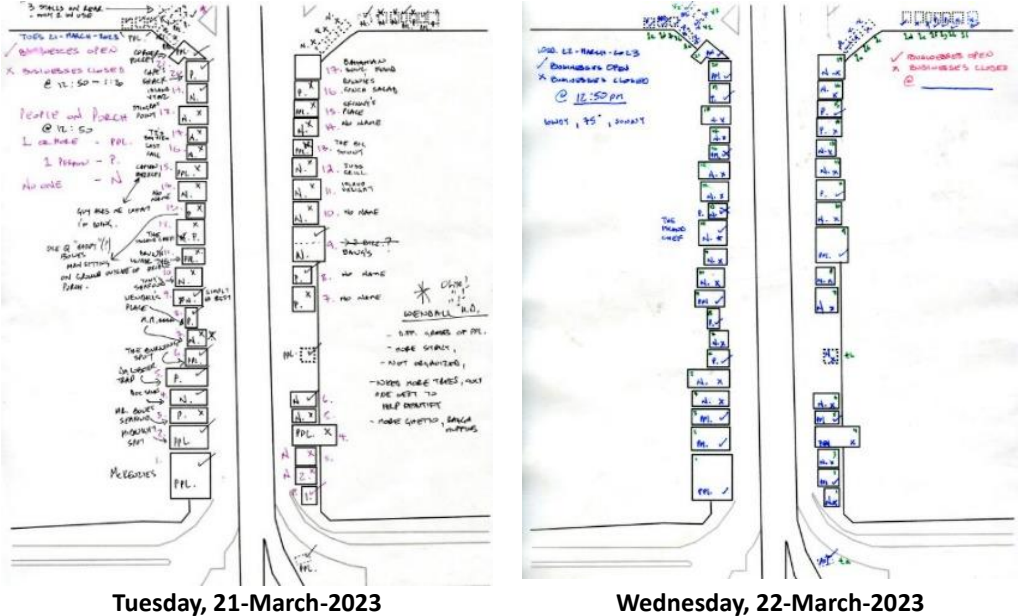


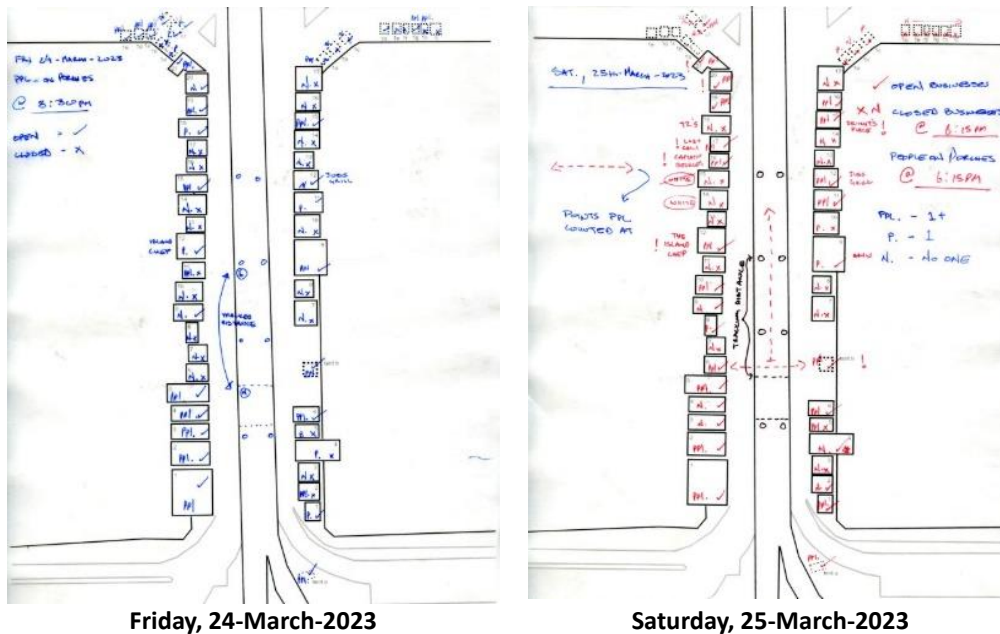
*Study: Observing Open/Close Businesses*

My public space study included several observational studies. To understand the continued activation, even if muted, it was useful to count which businesses were

open and closed as well as which porches of businesses had people sitting on them and adding another layer of social activation, whether in groups or single individuals (see Figure 7). This was an incredibly useful study as it revealed an aspect of public life that is very much tied to the Bahamian architectural vernacular, the front porch. This aspect of Bahamian architecture has poured into the built environment of this and similar marketplaces in New Providence like the Fish Fry at Arawak Cay that was mentioned by one of the interviewees as another example of public space. Most businesses at Potter's Cay have porches at their front facades which is important as varied activities took place in these porches that include people watching, enthusiastic games of dominoes, eating, drinking, and general socializing. Urbanists have discussed the importance of the conditions that buildings meet the street and have studied how the openness of front facades, front yards, and front porches played a large role in the social aspects of streets in urban areas (Ghel, 2010). Front porches serve a similarly important set of roles at Potter's Cay and offer a useful precedent for other local public spaces.

**Figure 7: Mapping which businesses were open/closed, individuals on front porches, and tracking pedestrian speed.**





*Study: Tracking Speed and Time of Walking Particular Distance*

The tracking speed study involved tracking the speed of persons who were walking approximately forty feet for ten-minute intervals (see Figure 7 above). This study was useful to determine walking speed along various Potter's Cay routes to determine if there are differences among individuals walking in a space. The area individuals where traversing was beneath the bridge and parallel to the road and most of the individuals captured were male, with a single female. Average speed recorded was that it took persons 24.9 seconds to walk forty feet (1.6 ft/sec) where, unsurprisingly, the longer times were recorded for older individuals (32 seconds being the longest at 1.3 ft/sec) and shorter times recorded for younger pedestrians (18 seconds being the shortest at 2.2 ft/sec). Most of the longer times were also men pushing carts to-and-from various stalls. If a walking speed of 4.5 ft/sec (3 miles/hr) for relatively healthy individuals under the age of 30 is considered "normal" in generally good weather conditions (i.e. sunny and warm), then the walking speeds at Potter's Cay are much lower than average. Some urbanists would consider this to be a good thing since this is anecdotal evidence that people are not rushing but are likely interacting more with

their environments, which has been observed to be the case at Potter's Cay in many instances.

*Study: Counting People Passing at Particular Point*

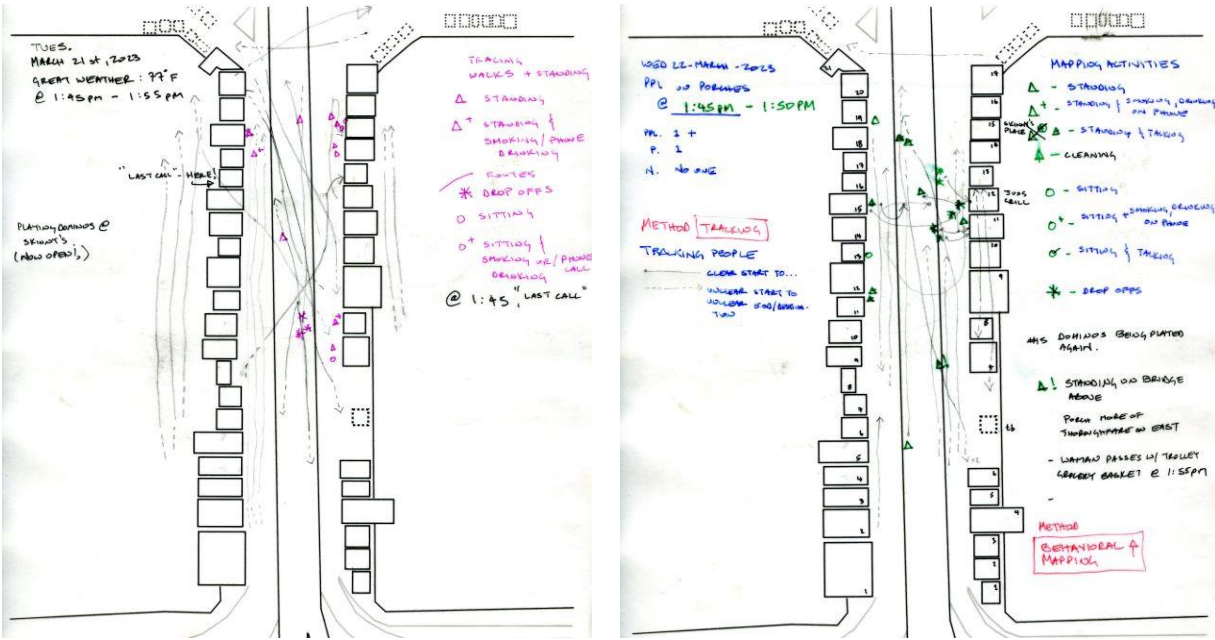
Pedestrians were observed passing a particular spot in Potter's Cay on Friday 24-March-2023 (at 3:41pm) and Saturday afternoon 25-March-2023 (at 6:27pm) of the same weekend for the duration of 10 minutes. On Friday a total of 17 adult individuals were observed passing an imaginary line and Saturday saw 47 persons pass the same line (Figure 7). On Friday, 1 female versus 16 adult males were observed and on Saturday the gendering was almost equal at 20 females, 24 males along with 2 children being observed. It is likely that Friday at 6:27pm, when many adults and children are likely not working or at school studying, would yield similar results. These results anecdotally suggest that the area need to be made more child- and teen-friendly. Additionally, the results reveal that Potter's Cay is a place where people walk and has the potential to attract longer stays and promenades, especially beneath the bridge. Walking opportunities should be highlighted and enhanced at Potter's Cay to support the emergence of a more safe, sustainable, healthy and animated community.

*Study: Observing Public Space Activities*

Pedestrians were counted over 10-minute intervals who were sitting, standing, and doing both activities while also: smoking, talking on the telephone, and drinking (Figure 8). Different symbols were assigned to each activity. This study reveals that a variety of social activities occur at Potter's Cay and that they happen at varied locations along the sidewalks and bridge underpass. These varied activities happen in groups or individually and it is apparent that if more urban design infrastructure were available to support them, they would likely be increased.

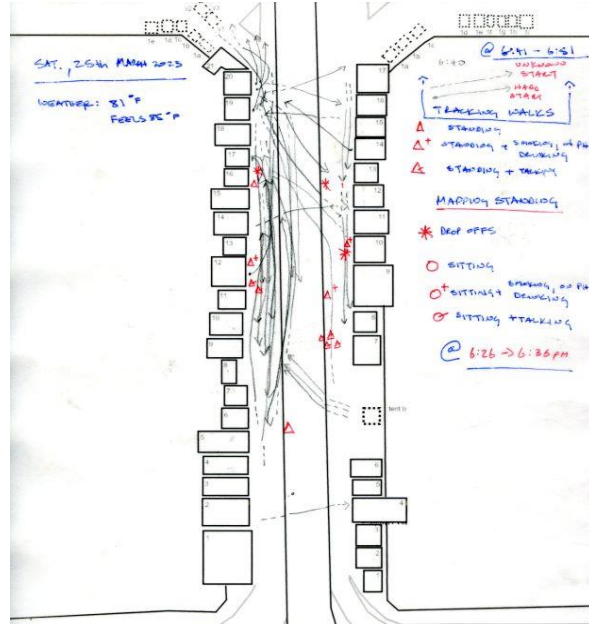


Figure 8. Observing public space activities.



Tuesday, 21-March-2023

Wednesday, 22-March-2023



Saturday, 25-March-2023

*Study: Tracing Pedestrian Movement*

Pedestrians were traced as they travelled from one end of Potter's Cay to another and travelling directly across the bridge underpass from the east to the west and vice-versa. This study simply used lines to identify the route and arrows to identify the

direction of individuals. Dotted lines indicated when the destination or arrival were ambiguous. Studies took place on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. On Saturday pedestrian traffic was dramatically increased and this speaks to Potter's Cay having a more vibrant weekend night life. Interestingly, pedestrian traffic also revealed that many individuals traveled from one end of a commercial edge to another beneath the connected porches. This means that in addition to the porches having the important role of providing seating for visitors to observe the public life at Potter's Cay, these porches are also a covered thoroughfare for pedestrian traffic (see Figure 8).

### *Photographing and Keeping a Diary*

Photographing key areas of social production was important for rendering the public life at Potter's Cay. Areas such as restaurants that were particularly activated with social life such as individuals animatedly playing dominoes, sitting on porches, and walking to-and-from businesses were also captured through photographs (Figure 10). Additionally, a diary was kept where I captured watercolour sketches of the social aspects of Potter's Cay. These sketches were the bases of two finished watercolours that help portray the placemaking at Potter's Cay in a way that photographs cannot (Illustrations 1 and 3). Keeping a diary also provided another way to track what Ghel (2013) terms "random samples of the interaction of public life and public space" (p. 32). This is important because these moments are rarely captured within quantitative studies of public space and in the case of the Caribbean that lacks studies on public space, mapping these nuances of human behaviour offers some qualitative ideas about Bahamian public life within this waterfront public space (Diary Pages Excerpt below). Some moments captured in my diary during a select 10-minute interval on Saturday 18-March-2023 at 1:50pm were as follows:

2:04 A lot of cars driving by, to and from the shipping docks.

2:05 People walking on bridge above.

2:06 Taxi driver lights a cigarette and says hello to his "Cuz" who walks by. He gets in his taxi but doesn't drive away.

- 2:08 A man with locs in a pink shirt smokes a cigar as he walks by, searching for someone or somewhere. He says hello and then crosses the street.
- 2:10 Man in a black sweatshirt walks by behind where I'm sitting for the third time. He's pacing along the connected porches thoroughfare.
- 2:12 A taxi filled with tourists stops in front of me and partially unloads.
- 2:12 Seagulls are screaming behind the restaurants in Nassau Harbour.
- 2:13 Two women walk by holding red cups are discussing how some of the stalls will be open tonight.
- 2:14 I spotted a Potcake (a stray dog).
- 2:15 Man across the street and opposite Capes Shack walks by holding a red cup.
- 2:18 Two male tourists approach the taxi filled with tourists that still haven't moved. They chat with the occupants.
- 2:19 Both male tourists leave the taxi, one now has a backpack on.
- 2:19 The taxi drives away with remaining tourists.

**Figure 9. Photographs series of pedestrian activity at Capes Shack, Potter's Cay.**



*General Findings: Ongoing Placemaking and Placemaking Potential*

This observational study reveal that Potter's Cay has a unique, vibrant, and extremely local arrangement of social space that expresses itself through public life in varied, physical as well as social ways. Potter's Cay is public space and within is ongoingly engagement with placemaking activities as this paper defines it, as engaging in social exchanges and productions, the performative and embodied. This placemaking is happening and transforming Potter's Cay undoubtedly in a physical way, but these transformations are also happening across multiple layers of *place* through activities,

histories, ideologies, and politics of vendors, business owners, local visitors, tourist visitors and state agents and the wider Bahamian community.

*Where does this leave Planning?*

The exploration of this paper reveals that though the neoliberal thrust of the tourism project is a force of control and though the local Potter's Cay community relies in part on tourists, the project's organizing force has limited power in the area. This means that there is rich opportunity for community-centered planning and development that addresses and reduces the injustices identified through national discourse, and more importantly, the desired improvement raised by Potter's Cay business owners. There are several entry points and useful concepts toward community-centered planning at Potter's Cay. The idea of a bottom-up approach known as asset's-based mapping has been proposed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1996). This is characterized by the strengths of every local patron, business owner, civic associations, urbanists of Potters Cay being identified and leveraged for development for eventual partnerships with public institutions and agencies, private institutions, external private businesses, the media (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996). By doing this, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities of production can be discovered and leveraged for self-driven development projects (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996). This bottom-up approach is compatible with arts-based placemaking, or creative placemaking projects, that can potentially take a variety of forms and offer countless opportunities for innovative engagement strategies and reimagining of space. The artist interviewee said that a role certainly exists for artists and creatives within public space, and this paper holds that this extends to public space planning. In thinking about murals within public space, a popular placemaking tool used throughout the island, he shared:

"I always think about murals, that's kind of like the number one obvious one, right? ... If it's a public space where they can go see work, they'll think "oh, this a public space for everybody." I think that artists can facilitate that role, bridge the two in a

certain way you know? Art and then the space and bring people to those spaces.”  
(L#4, personal communication, March 24, 2023)

The concept of *bridging* that the interviewee introduces is a useful one when adopted to individual roles such as that of a planner. This means that in the case of Potter’s Cay, each stakeholder and/or participant within local planning and development projects must see themselves as a facilitator for Potter’s Cay community-led and community-centered improvements, beautification, (re)development, etc. that centers and builds on the placemaking already occurring in the area. For this approach to planning to work with state partnership, it is necessary that the state see themselves and Bahamian spaces without the lens of the tourism economy and instead through the lens of the local Potter’s Cay community members. This is surely challenging for the nation considering the organizational power and influence of tourism in the region, let alone the nation, a power that the state has given the industry’s actors, in many instances, through varied arrangements, land agreements, and state policy. Intentional reviewing and, if necessary, repealing of harmful development policies and agreements is also an important step toward increased local activation and spatial justice in Bahamian public spaces. An increase in *local* activation at Potter’s Cay through centering Bahamian public life and placemaking in its planning and future development will organically lead to a mutually beneficial increase in tourist visitation. This is because people enjoy *being* where people *are*.

## **Conclusion**

From an agricultural and fisheries dispersal node to a vibrant commercial market area, Potter’s Cay is the site of multi-layered social practice and placemaking. It is a public space where the performative and embodied Bahamian urban expressions and unfolding of public life takes place. And though community members acknowledge a need to engage with tourism and their own roles within the larger economy, a sense of place, enjoyment, and belonging were found to be more central ideologies associated with the social space produced by community members in Potter’s Cay.

The state has a critical role within the planning and development of Potter's Cay, especially so if the state is interested in creating more *spatially just* public spaces that center locals *first*. Partnering with the Potter's Cay community for the drafting of intentional public space planning policy and corrective legislature that fosters the increased vibrancy of Bahamian waterfront and interior public spaces are critical steps toward a public space that is planned *for* local Bahamians *by* Bahamians. This is a radical approach to planning within a nation that has consistently centered the neoliberal tourism project and its preoccupation with organizing space in its own image. However, if the state, wider Bahamian public, and wider international public require evidence for placemaking as a foundational planning tool, the potential of this approach in many ways has already been proven to be a successful one due to the very existence of Potter's Cay. The observational study and interviews reveal that there is a rich and vibrant public life already happening at Potter's Cay despite the national discourse. The results from the observational study and interviews also suggest that leveraging what already works within periphery spaces like Potter's Cay is a spatialization touchstone that should be built upon to create more spatially just, locally activated public spaces that all Bahamians can enjoy. This local activation will undoubtedly also lead to increased tourist visitors, which is generally a good thing for many Caribbean nations. This paper argues that opportunities for placemaking as a foundational planning tool in Potters Cay abound. Building partnerships with Potter's Cay community members, the wider Bahamian public, non-profit agencies, government agencies, and tourism actors (to name a few) and bridging ideological ideas and presumptions about this important cultural node will aid in facilitating suggested improvement projects in the area (Business owner 1, 2023; Business owner 2, 2023; ZNS 2013). These new scalar relationships for local public space planning projects can help foster community buy-in which is critical, as developing creative avenues for acknowledging Bahamian public life and enhancing it should be a priority. The results from this research have rendered the public life and human landscape at Potter's Cay as visible and foundational to good public space planning. It is the hope



that in The Bahamas, over time, this and similar studies can be a factor for carrying out intentional planning and qualitative improvements at this and similar public spaces like Potter's Cay.

**Illustration 1: "Old man on a porch at Potter's Cay", watercolour on paper, 2023.**



**Illustration 2: "Conch Vendor's Stall at Potter's Cay", watercolour sketch on paper, 2023.**

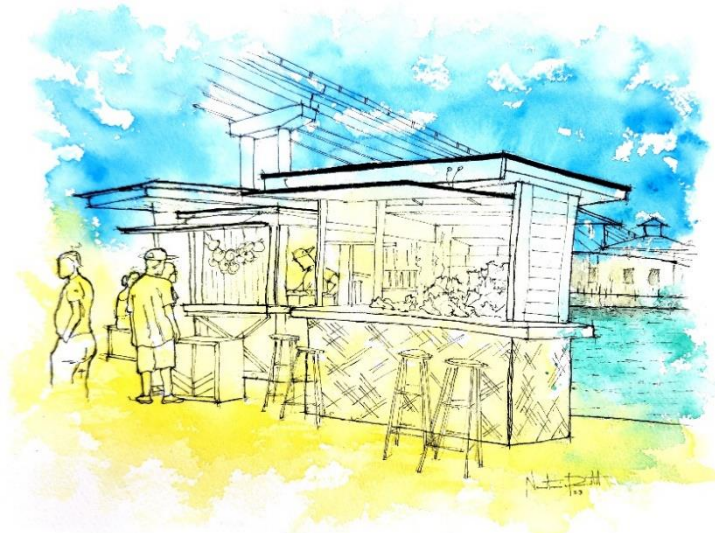
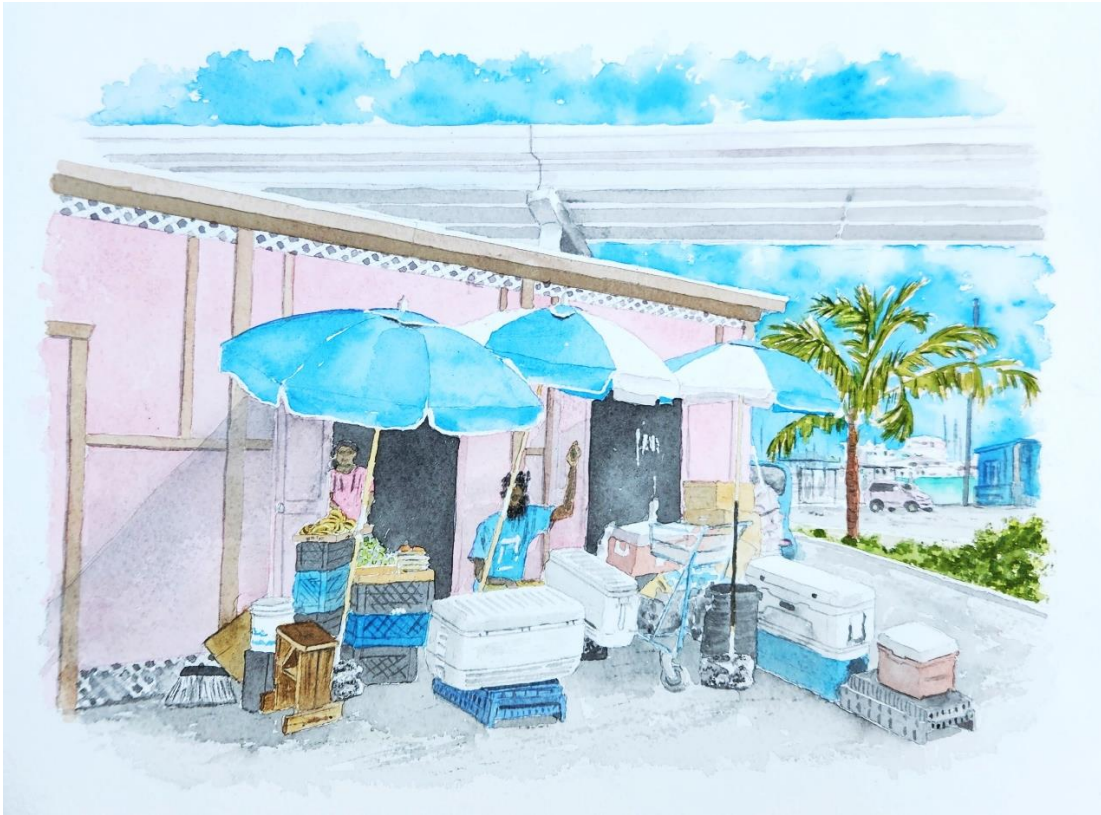


Illustration 3: "Produce vendor at Potter's Cay", watercolour on paper, 2023.



"Tourists at Potter's Cay", watercolour sketch on paper, 2023.





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