

# MODERN URBAN GREEN SPACES:

## AN EXPLORATION THROUGH THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE OF STANLEY PARK

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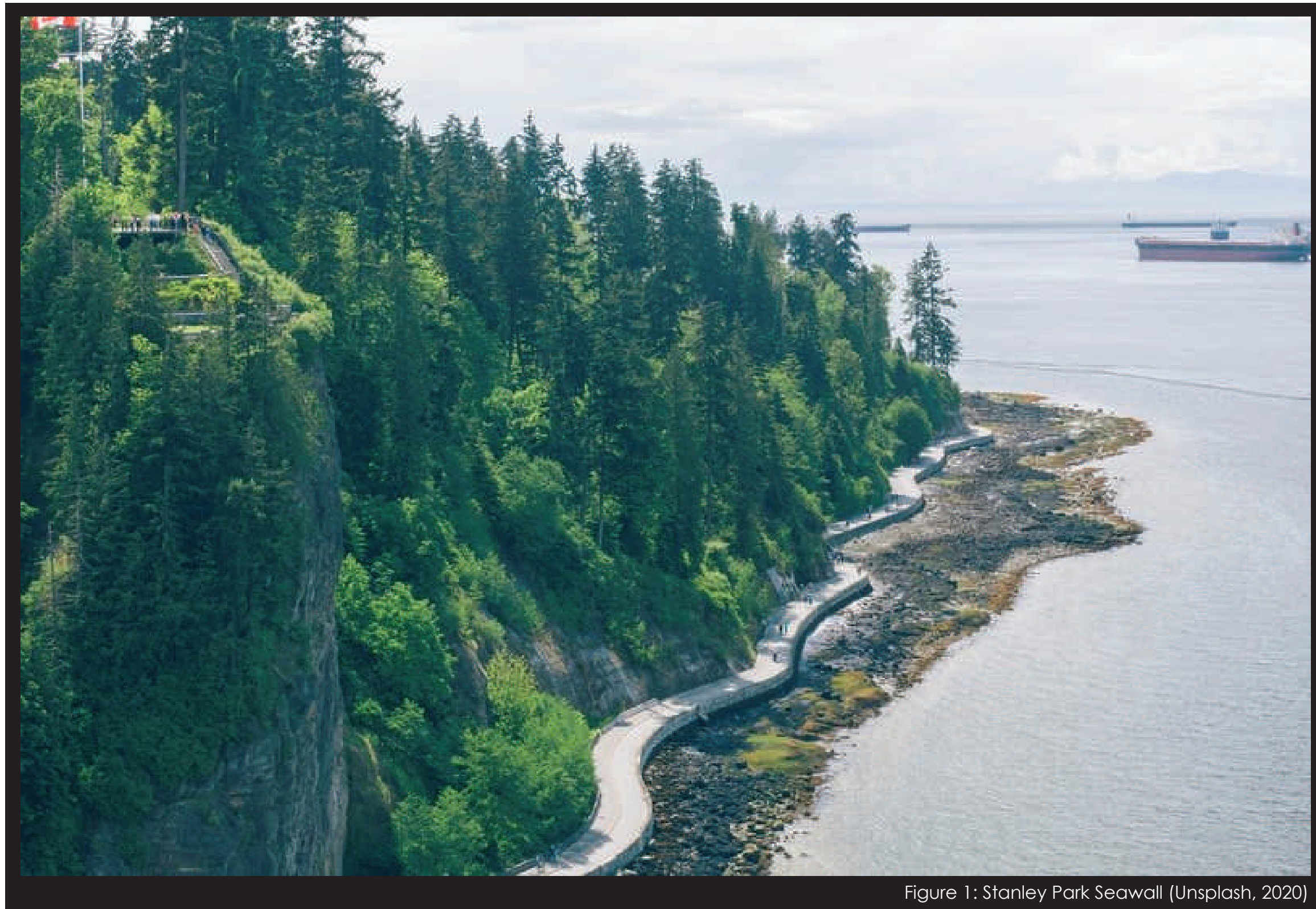


Figure 1: Stanley Park Seawall (Unsplash, 2020)

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The Industrial Revolution sparked many urban planning reforms with new concepts and innovations emerging as a result. City parks are a critical example of this, marking the beginning of the transition from socio-economic exclusion in urban green spaces to areas of inclusion for all members of society. While the intentions of inclusion are present in many public green spaces, the result is often contradictory – numerous of these spaces (in Canada and elsewhere) exist on stolen land with dark and violent histories. This collection will explore the design of Vancouver's Stanley Park while examining how its colonial narrative continues to perpetuate institutionalized racism on the indigenous peoples of the region, and other aspects of its design that propagate the concepts of social exclusion to other marginalized groups.



Figure 2: Modern day Stanley Park (Tourism Vancouver, 2020)

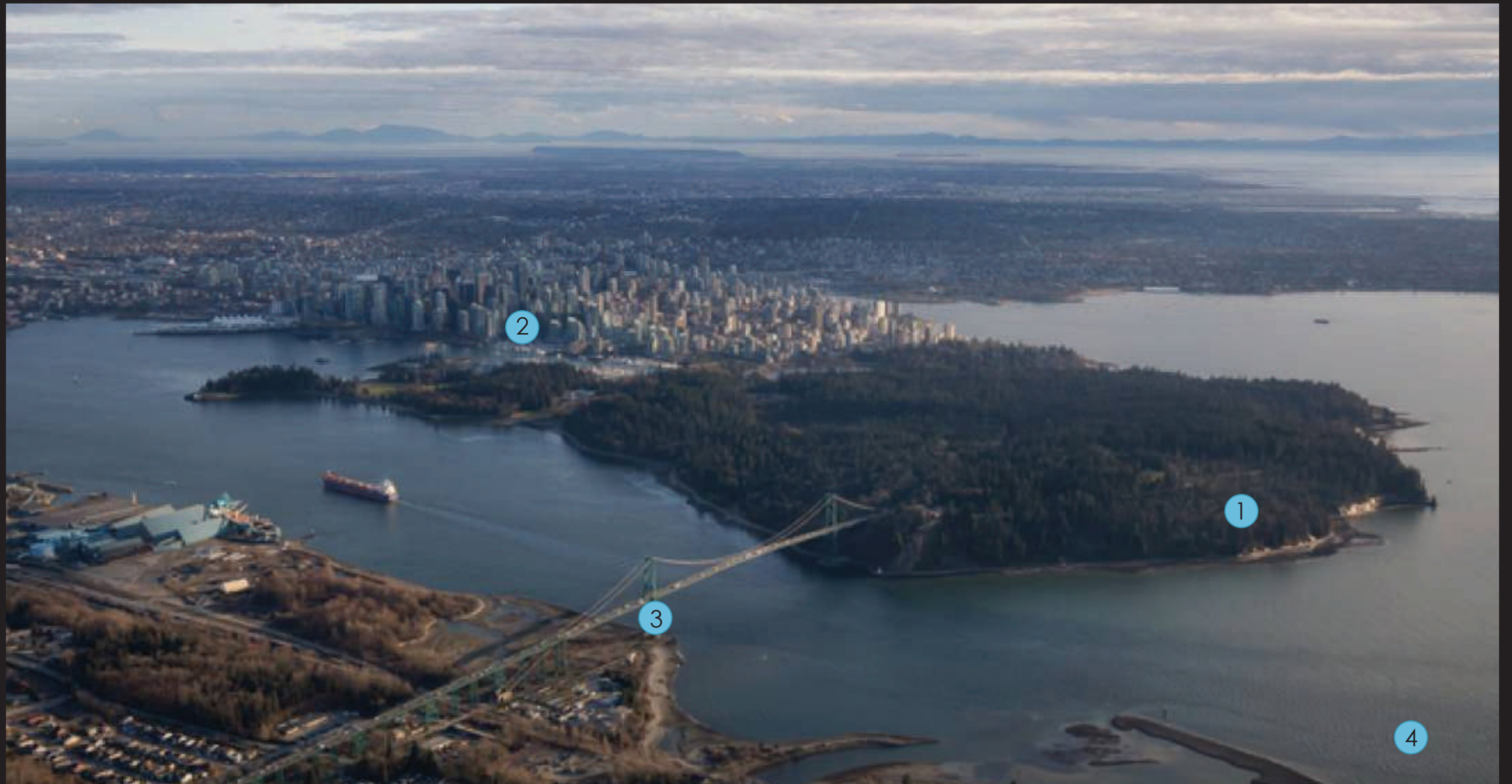


Figure 3: Stanley Park and downtown Vancouver (Takeuchi, 2020)

1 - The Peninsula of Stanley Park

2 - Downtown Vancouver

3 - Lion's Gate Bridge

4 - Burrard Inlet (historically the Salish Sea)

# STANLEY PARK

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Stanley Park is located adjacent to Vancouver's downtown and the waters of the Salish Sea (Lastman, 2019). For over 3,000 years, this densely forested peninsula was home to the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam peoples (Lastman, 2019). Historically, the land was used for fishing, gathering, as a sacred ceremonial site, and as the site of the Xwayxway longhouse village (Bula, 2018). Today, this iconic park holds little trace of its indigenous ancestry (Lastman, 2019). Following the land's official designation in 1886, entire communities of indigenous occupants were removed from their ancestral homes without remuneration (Lastman, 2019).



Figure 4: An 1897 settlement in Stanley Park (Thanasis, 2018). The centre structure of this colonial settlement is a traditional longhouse of the Squamish peoples.



Figure 5 (above): Stanley Park's famous seawall (McGrath, n.d.). This pathway is very popular for activities such as running, walking, and cycling.

Figure 6 (right): Statue of Lord Stanley (StanleyParkVan, n.d.). This settler monument serves as a constant reminder to the First Nations peoples of the violence they were subject to.

Currently, Stanley Park exists as a world-renowned recreational area that features gardens, designed landscapes, athletic facilities, monuments, outdoor museum displays, and even an aquarium (Parks Canada, 2020). Officially recognized as a heritage site in Canada for its relationship between its natural environment and its cultural elements, its designation as such fails to acknowledge the pre-colonial cultures that have been subject to erasure by settler activity (Bula, 2018). Furthermore, many of the monuments and structures that serve as key-defining features of the heritage designation are directly associated with colonial violence: for example, a large monument of Lord Stanley may be interpreted as a source of Canadian pride for some, but in reality, it is a blatant reminder of Canada's genocidal past towards indigenous peoples.





Figure 7: The Haida totem poles in Stanley Park (Matthews, 2018).



Figure 8: The Sawish Rock along the seawall (Brenna, 2020).

The erasure of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh presence has been perpetuated by the layering of activities and physical design entities on the landscape of Stanley Park (Bula, 2018). By accepting donations of monuments and memorials on sacred sites, allowing activities and events to occur in the public space, and other acts of cultural appropriation, the Vancouver Park Board continues to fail at reconciliation by discrediting the park's pre-colonial history (Bula, 2018). In addition to the urban planning of pathways, roadways, and other forms of construction that have been imposed on Stanley Park, colonial narratives are present throughout the park in a number of ways. For example, the main sign of indigenous presence in the park currently is a set of totem poles – a set that were brought from the Haida peoples (Bula, 2018). As the Haida peoples were never interconnected with the local indigenous groups, these symbols are not slightly reflective of the cultures of the Musqueam, Squamish, or Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and are a sad attempt at accurate historical representation and reconciliation (Bula, 2018). Another example of cultural appropriation is the misnaming of the sacred "Sawish Rock", which translates to "savage" (Schmunk, 2017). What once represented a man turned to stone to honour his purity and dedication to fatherhood in Squamish culture now implies a derogatory reference to indigenous peoples (Bula, 2018). Although true progress has not yet been established, there is hope – the Board has recently come to recognize that resolutions are an utmost necessity and are confronting the past with a process described as a "colonial audit" (Bula, 2018). This process will seek to change the way the park is managed by involving the three First Nations in discussions to ensure principles of cultural practice, ecological stewardship, and visibility of the three Nations are reflected in futures decisions and designs (Lastman, 2019).

In addition to the colonial narratives that continue to segregate the local indigenous peoples from their native lands, much of the designs of Stanley Park contribute to social exclusion of other groups of Vancouver's population. In terms of urban planning, exclusion exists to keep certain groups from participating in certain aspects of urban life on the basis of race, class, religion, income, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, or some other characteristics (Madanipour, 2016). These aspects of exclusion are classified under three broad categories: economic, in which members are excluded from employment, political, in which members are denied political representation or voting rights, and cultural, where members are marginalized from the symbols, meanings, and rituals of the dominant culture (Madanipour, 2016). In regards to Stanley Park, social exclusion exists in all three ways. While the design of Stanley Park does not directly create unemployment, colonization and perpetuated systemic racism towards local indigenous peoples continues to contribute to the homelessness of indigenous peoples in Vancouver, and is therefore an example of economic exclusion. Furthermore, the activities facilitated in Stanley Park primarily cater to those of the middle and upper-class, often requiring some kind of financial stability to participate (i.e. expensive sporting activities or visiting the aquarium), thus creating barriers for peoples that find it difficult to participate on the basis of lack of income. In the past, political exclusion occurred in Stanley Park on the basis that the three Nations were not included in the politics of the park and were denied the right to contribute to the decision-making process that would govern their sacred territories. While the Board is attempting to address this, the concept remains a pressing problem. Finally, cultural exclusion can be identified in Stanley Park in a number of ways, from the misnaming of the regions of the park (from their historical names in their native tongues to English settler names) to the misrepresentation of the Nations through inaccurate art installments. The Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples are continually marginalized from their historical symbols, rituals, and language by Stanley Park's urban design.



Figure 9: The Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park (Diskin, 2020). This is an expensive attraction that caters to the middle and upper-class members of society.



Figure 10: The sacred territories of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam peoples (Andersen, 2020).

To consider Stanley Park an innately inclusive urban area would discredit the trauma currently and historically experienced by the local Nations. When examining Parks Canada's historic site profile, it can easily be observed that the key defining features reflect settler activities and designs, from elitist recreational activities (that exclude many demographics of society) to gardening and planting initiatives that were enforced as methods to propagate indigenous erasure. The heritage value associated with the culture of the First Nations is barely mentioned and at the end of the list – a lack of recognition that continues to oppress the local indigenous peoples.

While the Vancouver Park Board has acknowledged the unjust treatment of the people whose land we occupy and that reconciliation is an utmost concern, Stanley Park still operates in a very socially exclusive manner that serves to instill institutionalized racism through lack of information, representation, and consideration. The narrative is predominantly colonial, with a lack of indigenous symbols, names, and structures. While accepting our past faults is a painful and complicated process, it offers an opportunity for learning, one that is essential to all settler-Canadians in the process of reconciliation.



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