

Student X

Unit 2

Carousel Mall: From Public to Private Property

The city of Syracuse, founded 1847 along the thriving veins of upstate New York, has gone through many changes the past two hundred years. What used to be the only city in the Onondaga County that mass produced salt and was once known as the place where immigrants imported into the United States to, has now settled into the norm of cities amongst the nation. However, the mere settlement of this city through its industrialization does not necessarily signify an upward economic progression. Many blame the shift of its main specified salt industry – perhaps the main and only reason for its industrialization – into an industry of no specialization as a cause of its economic downturn. In terms of social problems, social classes were largely based on economic statuses and other factors. However, one of the biggest problems Syracuse faces today is its switch from shared public spaces into private communities – something that the Carousel Mall perfectly deploys. Although Carousel Mall is the economically thriving center of Syracuse, it is felt as though the general public is not displayed in these areas; rather, sectorized communities where people have similar tastes are formed. This “breakage” of the public causes a multitude of problems – and may be one of the biggest problems Syracuse faces yet, ultimately changing the spatial and economical structure of the entire city.

Carousel Mall, just like other contemporary malls located within the United States, features a variety of different retail stores. Whether one would wish for an Xbox 360, a \$500 prom dress, or simply a stuffed bear, it is the ideal place to go. Built many decades ago,

the mall is continually expanding into a place where everything is offered – everything from food, movies, various retail stores, and so on. Many individuals set this mall as a hangout place because of the utilities offered there. Not only that, but the mall was mixed with many different groups of people, which made it a place to meet others. But is this really what the mall wants – a bunch of people just hanging out in its privately owned, cost-driven mall? According to an interview conducted on the managers of the mall, one said “...Our primary purpose is to make money...we are constantly looking at traffic to see how we’re doing from day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year, looking at sales reports to see how tenants are doing” (Mitchell, 1983). Although Carousel Mall does understand that there will always be the people in malls that go there just to walk around, this is obviously not the mall managers’ intentions – they want all these individuals to turn into consumers, which leads into a very important point of exclusion in malls.

Is there a possible way to make all the individuals into consumers? What if Carousel Mall were to exclude certain groups, while at the same time include other groups, to maximize their profits? After all, Carousel Mall is only focused on attaining their customers’ money – as stated above by the manager. Interesting enough, the managers of Carousel Mall have been continually finding ways to exclude the groups of people that somehow threaten their net revenues. To illustrate, one of the groups that may threaten possible revenues is teenagers. Don Mitchell, a notoriously well known writer on public space, states that “The effort to create a non-threatening, non-challenging environment has led many malls to exclude or to severely limit access to the mall for one segment of the public: youth” (Mitchell, 1983). Adults as well as young adults tend to make presumptions about teens and

youth; these generalizations tend to be negative, especially with “...young males or young people of colour...” (Collins and Kearns, 2001;Pain, 2001) because their presence is simply “...challenging and threatening [which] disrupts the feeling of safety that many expect in the mall” (Mitchell). Because teen culture is portrayed, and given off as, “...rebellious and misunderstanding...” (Mitchell), elderly consumers don’t want to be around groups of these kinds of people. For instance, many of the older customers “...complained that the youth dressed in gang colors...” (Mitchell) which is obviously intimidating This example of teen differences is even more exaggerated because the teens and young youth of Syracuse are even more rebellious, mainly because most of these locally brought up kids are born in the ghetto and thereby dress and put off an exaggerated image of being threatening. Another example of popular exclusion in malls concerns non-profit organizations or any mode that offers free service or items. For instance, Pheasant Lane Mall, located in Nashua, MA, used to have a free Gatorade stand every Friday. This policy went on for years and years until, finally, one day it just stopped. Reason being? Mall management announced that it was depleting competition from stores that actually charged Gatorade to customers. And by depleting competition, fewer revenues were made, which ultimately meant less money for the mall owners.

One of the things Carousel Mall is known for is its’ Sky Deck, located on the top Deck of the mall which is used as a meeting room for various non-profit organizations. One would think that a meeting room would be free, especially if it’s just filled with chairs and tables just like any other meeting room. However, when the manager was asked in an

interview about examples of people that can or have used Sky Deck, he stated "...It can be used for weddings. Stores use it for training, for interviewing. Proms. There was a Boy Scout dinner up there last night. We also have a private community room, which is an area for anywhere from a couple of people up to 25, 30 people, and it's a little more private..." (Mitchell, 984). However, when asked about the usage in the past by nonprofit organizations, the manager was unable to name any whatsoever – all the users of the space seemed to be as private users. In addition, the charge of using that room was \$300 on top of paying fifteen percent more for catering. When caterers were asked why these charges were imposed on them, they simply said ""The Carousel Center can do anything they want. It's their place". (Carr, 1991) Apparently, Carousel Mall is in charge of the Sky Deck's expenses as well. So why exactly would Carousel charge a non-profit organization? And if a non-profit organization does not make any profits, as the title applies, then wouldn't it mean that they are not going to be able to pay it? Some experts say that this is the flaw of the Sky Deck, but the main reason may be because Carousel Mall ultimately just wants to make more revenue out of everything it does – even when it claims to be helping nonprofit organizations.

However, completely eliminating the market of young adults and teens wouldn't be the best idea. So how exactly would the managers strategize the exclusion of such a class, but at the same time maintain maximum profits? After all, a national study found out that "...nearly 75 per cent of youth between the ages of 13 and 18 either had jobs or hoped to find jobs during the school year and that over entertainment, including music, movies

and video games in shopping centers” (Auer, 2003). Carousel management eventually decided to put a curfew on these teens, with which “Anyone under the age of 18 visiting Carousel Center must be accompanied by a parent or guardian 21 years of age or older... on Fridays and Saturdays between the hours of 4pm and closing” (Marshall, 987). This way, adults who were drained from going to work on weekdays could spend time in the mall with people of their own without having to worry. This example brings about the topic – and the actual practical example – about the difference between actual public and community.

It has been noted that malls are similar to downtown areas because of comparative economic and spatial structures. However, because malls are enclosed areas, there must be *some* difference between the two – and there are. According to a recent interview on managers of the Carousel Mall, it was agreed that the expansion of the mall is for “...linking all the plans to internalize the public life and to create an all-new community setting governed by a ‘unique single-owner model’”(Voyce, 12). This ‘community’ idea is exactly what is being composed by excluding certain parts of the public, such as the youth. The people in this new “mall community” would obviously have similar interests because they would be the ones that are both not threatened by each other and have the fact that they shop at the mall in common. The hopes of bringing these people together would be that people feel not threatened with each other, and therefore, shop with ease – ultimately causing them to stay longer or maybe even spend more money on items.

By excluding certain groups it is quite evident that there is a difference between the open downtown areas of Syracuse, where anyone is free to roam in public, and Carousel Mall, where selective amounts of people of the public are socially preferred. By having a

select public area, where only specified people are allowed to roam in certain areas, malls are creating what are called *communities* (Voyce, 270). By separating parts of the public, isn't the social fabric of the true public being destroyed?

Managers argue that there are extreme benefits with having people with similar interests shop in malls. Besides from the obvious facts discussed about having similar interests, there comes a point of civility. After visiting the mall myself and viewing the bus schedule, I realized that Carousel Mall is spatially excluded from the city. Whether the construction of the mall was distant from the downtown area or not, it was interesting to see that there is a lack of transportation to and from certain areas of Syracuse. For instance, when I was going through the bus schedule, I noticed that there was very limited transportation to and from the mall and the poorer parts of Syracuse. Parts of the north side and east side barely received any bus transportation. If one were to miss a bus from those areas, then he or she would have to wait hours. In addition, it seems as though the bus stops made in these areas were also for fewer times. For example, the bus stop in the middle of downtown would only be for a maximum of two minutes, while the bus would stop for a minimum of five minutes on campus, waiting for the students. However, transportation to Carousel Mall from areas such as Syracuse University and parts of Armory Square is plentiful. Economically speaking, it would make sense for this reason because the malls want people with more income to shop at their place. To verify whether this schedule was outdated or anything of that sort, I decided to go to the information booth and ask why transportation was limited to certain areas of Syracuse, the respondent answered by saying that the north side and east side are "too far". However, when I calculated the distance between Carousel and these parts,

they were only slightly further, if anything. By offering less transportation to such areas, not only does Carousel Mall exclude the unwanted, but also imply that these people are unwanted as well.

The issue of having new communities made up and differentiated from each other is that it messes with one advantage of living in a society – it distorts the democracy. Although the construction of the Carousel Mall cannot be solely blamed for causing the creation of new socioeconomic groups, it is a factor in such the issue. By having different groups form into communities, all the communities eventually differ in discourse and opinion due to being surrounded by their own kind of people – thereby only strengthening their own “group views” (Voyce). Eventually one would lead to believe that this may lead to spatial differences as well in the city of Syracuse – and this is very well the case.

To illustrate, the individuals who are not able to shop at the mall will not be content with the entire situation. After all, shouldn't individuals be able to walk around freely without having to worry about socioeconomic differences? Because of these tensions, people such as the homeless poor, youth, and other will stay in their previously owned public areas, which constitutes original downtown areas such as Armory Square, Clinton square, and so on. In these downtown areas, people will be able to exchange ideas a little differently in their newly constructed communities of people. The main effect that impacts these areas is the economical effect of the downtown retail stores. For instance, before Carousel Mall was built, many retail stores were built to serve every class of individuals. Because of the loss of many of the upper and middle level economic classes to the mall, the retail stores in the downtown areas, or as called the “current public areas”, are subject to change accordingly

(Chan, 2). Rather than having stores that served all genres, the stores eventually went through the opposite of what we call gentrification; that is, the stores in downtown areas began selling cheaper and lower quality material because they knew their market was composed of lower class individuals (Chan, 2). On the other hand, the higher scale stores are in the mall because they are fit to serve the respective communities of shoppers with more money. In this fashion, retail stores are obviously indirectly affected by the grouping of communities.

Although the retail shift can arguably just be a change of genre, many experts such as Mitchell state that it has permanent altering effect. Once the stores in the downtown areas begin to progressively de-gentrify themselves, the chances of the middle and upper class coming to shop in the downtown area or even in live in these areas will be even lower than before because they have less of a reason to shop at these places – therefore causing a positive feedback loop (Chan, 3). For instance, a shopper that prefers to buy upscale clothing may have previously shopped in both the down town areas of Syracuse and Carousel Mall for his or her clothing. However, as time goes by, and the process of anti-gentrification occurs, there are less upscale stores and more lower class stores such. In addition to the creation of lower class stores, more bazaars/street vendors hit the streets as well. So as more lower class stores take over downtown areas, people of the “Carousel Mall” community will less likely, if at all, continue to shop at the downtown areas. By this process, the different communities formed become stronger amongst each other.

All in all, it’s quite surprising how Carousel Mall can have such an impact on the city of Syracuse. Although it may not be an absolute negative attribute to have formed

communities with similar tastes segregated from each other, it does cause problems with an idea that many people refer to as the “democracy” of a city. Cities are made to be inhabited with different kinds of people, have dynamic interaction, and most importantly, are made to exchange ideas and information. With the formation of such communities, this does and will not occur – thereby causing social tensions and social differences amongst each group.



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