



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS  
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

## **Making Invisible History Visible**

Investigating the Decline and Preservation of Queer  
Spaces

By Noah Powers  
Social Connectedness Fellow 2019  
Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness  
[www.socialconnectedness.org](http://www.socialconnectedness.org)  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Queer spaces, defined as spaces in which 2SLGBTQ+ people experience a greater sense of security and safety, have historically acted as sites of community-building and activism for queer people. As such, queer spaces and the communities formed around them actively work to improve the social connectedness of a severely isolated population. Over the past decades, urban queer spaces have been under threat. Rising rents and property costs due to gentrification, changes in the way that queer people meet due to technology and queer population dispersal caused by the rising acceptance of queer identities, challenge the continued existence of queer spaces.

Policies are needed to preserve these vital spaces for the queer community. In London, a series of policies to inform queer space owners, developers and other relevant actors on how to protect extant queer spaces were recently introduced. Further, a policy that is being used to a limited extent in the United States, uses heritage preservation to preserve historic queer spaces. Based on these case studies, this report recommends the following policies for safeguarding extant queer spaces and preserving queer spaces of the past:

### 1. To preserve extant queer spaces

- 1.1. ***Establishing municipal “Culture at Risk” offices to support cultural venues at risk of closure or change of use in urban areas:*** by recognizing the importance of cultural spaces, these offices can work to actively and financially support spaces at risk of closure or change of use;
- 1.2. ***Supporting municipal governments in drafting a charter to safeguard the future of queer spaces:*** a charter that provides practical support for developers, venues, and other actors at a governmental level can help protect queer spaces against risk of closure or change of use, while encouraging new queer spaces to open;
- 1.3. ***Initiating annual audits of queer spaces in urban areas:*** the creation of a database of queer spaces in urban areas can track the closure of, changes to, and opening of, queer spaces year-to-year and can be used for planning decisions.

### 2. To commemorate and designate historic queer spaces, events, and figures

- 2.1. ***Expanding the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada’s (HSMBC) definition of ‘underrepresented’ to include 2SLGBTQ+ communities:*** a definitional change to include the 2SLGBTQ+ communities under the HSMBC definition of ‘underrepresented’ would establish that queer history is Canadian history;
- 2.2. ***Initiating a thematic study into possible sites of commemoration to serve as a guidebook and toolkit for nominations:*** a report identifying potential 2SLGBTQ+ heritage sites for actors would kickstart the nomination and proposal processes;
- 2.3. ***Create a specific grant program to increase the number of 2SLGBTQ+ designations administered by the HSMBC:*** the creation of a specific grant program towards increasing 2SLGBTQ+ diversity among HSMBC designations would provide a “catch-up” mechanism to account for decades of exclusion of queer heritage from Canada’s national history.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

The term 'queer' is often used in a radical and anti-assimilationist sense as an umbrella term to reference the two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer and questioning (2SLGBTQ+) communities.<sup>1</sup> These communities face historic and continued discrimination, and as a result, tight-knit, physical communities of queer people can act as a safe haven. These physical communities, referred to as queer spaces, have existed for centuries. Modern queer spaces in North America as we know them today, developed after World War Two as queer soldiers, realizing that they were not the only queer people in the world, returned to port cities in the United States and Canada and set up localized communities.<sup>2</sup>

These communities grew and gained legitimacy throughout the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but certain factors in recent decades have led some scholars to speculate that these spaces are declining, and that their potential disappearance is imminent.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the AIDS epidemic, queer spaces and specifically gay villages experienced structural decline, and more recently, throughout the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, three main factors have applied pressure on the existence of queer spaces: gentrification, technology, and the rising acceptance of queer people in urban areas.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary", *UC Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center*, last modified August 9, 2019, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Burnett, "History of Queer Montreal Walking Tour: 1648 to 2018," *Three Dollar Bill*, last modified June 21, 2017, accessed June 18, 2019, <http://bugsburnett.blogspot.com/2017/06/brief-history-of-queer-montreal-and.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine J. Nash, Andrew Gorman-Murray, "Recovering the Gay Village: A Comparative Historical Geography of Urban Change and Planning in Toronto and Sydney," *Historical Geography* 43 (2015): 84-105.

<sup>4</sup> D. Rosenfeld, B. Bartlam, R.D. Smith, "Out of the closet and into the trenches: gay male Baby Boomers, aging, and HIV/AIDS," *Gerontologist* 52 no. 2 (2012): 255-64, doi:10.1093/geront/gnr138.

As such, recent projects have sought to preserve extant queer spaces while also recognizing and commemorating the importance of queer spaces to the queer community's collective history. Through policy efforts to support owners of queer spaces and other cultural spaces at risk, extant queer spaces can be safeguarded against these pressures. Moreover, activists, mainly in the United States, have used heritage preservation – an endeavour to preserve, conserve, and protect buildings, landscapes, or other artifacts of historical or cultural significance – to protect historic queer spaces from development while commemorating queer heritage of the past. Heritage preservation, especially of underrepresented groups, allows communities to see themselves reflected in a nation's historical narrative, contributing to a sense of belonging and connectedness. However, in Canada, the 2SLGBTQ+ community is not categorized as “underrepresented” by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), representing a significant roadblock to heritage preservation of queer spaces in this country.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Key definitions***

Social isolation is in large part due to injustice. Social isolation encompasses the structural factors that create barriers for people to find a sense of belonging in a community, to form meaningful relations with other people, to be agents of change, and to exercise their human rights. Contrary to social isolation, social connectedness involves creating a society in which everyone is valued, seen and heard. At the core of creating a connected society is the principle

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<sup>5</sup> Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration: National Historic Sites System Plan*, Ottawa, ON: Parks Canada, 2019.

that no matter an individual's age, race, gender, ability, and/or sexual orientation, everyone has the opportunity to belong.<sup>6</sup>

## ISSUES, EVIDENCE, AND KEY FINDINGS

### *Social isolation and 2SLGBTQ+ identities*

Part of realizing that you are anything other than cisgender and heterosexual is accepting that you are different and that you are separated from the majority. As such, many young 2SLGBTQ+ people hide their authentic selves from others before they come out, which is an incredibly isolating experience.<sup>7</sup> Michael Johnson from the Lavender Health LGBTQ Resource Centre states that 2SLGBTQ+ youth face five types of isolation:

1. **Social isolation:** not being able to talk to others about their sexuality and/or gender identity;
2. **Emotional isolation:** 2SLGBTQ+ youth feel separated (emotionally) from social networks, and are often guarded about their sexuality;
3. **Cognitive isolation:** 2SLGBTQ+ youth often do not have access to positive and 2SLGBTQ+ specific information or 2SLGBTQ+ role models;
4. **Concealment of identity:** due to pressures to be 'normal', 2SLGBTQ+ youth often try to conform to heteronormative expectations and isolate themselves from others;

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<sup>6</sup> "About us," *Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness*, n.d., accessed August 12, 2019. <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/>.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Levine, "How to Cope When You're Gay and Lonely," *GQ*, last modified January 10, 2018, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.gq.com/story/how-to-cope-when-youre-gay-and-lonely>.

5. **Recognizing that self is different from heteronormative society:** 2SLGBTQ+ youth recognize their difference and while this difference is for the most part invisible, it is extremely isolating.<sup>8</sup>

These five types of isolation compound one another, leading 2SLGBTQ+ people, and specifically 2SLGBTQ+ youth, to experience continued and significant levels of social isolation and associated mental health issues.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Technology and Grindr's effect on social isolation and queer spaces***

Dating and hook-up apps have far reaching implications for society. However, their effects on the queer population are hyper-concentrated, as 70 percent of queer relationships now start online.<sup>10</sup> For queer men,<sup>11</sup> Grindr is the most popular dating and hook-up app available, while the app Her is queer female-centric; and a queer setting for Tinder also exists.

Grindr is a geosocial, queer male-centric dating and hook-up app with four million users in almost 200 countries.<sup>12</sup> Grindr has been widely criticized as contributing to social isolation and unhappiness among the queer community. For instance, Steven Cole, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has said that, "Using hook-up apps excessively could contribute to social isolation by substituting momentary, relatively anonymous, and

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Farrar, "Tackling Loneliness in the LGBTQ+ Community," *The Proud Diplomat*, last modified June 18, 2019, accessed July 23, 2019, <http://www.theprouddiplomat.com/facts/2018/6/10/tackling-loneliness-in-the-lgbtq-community>.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Hobbes, "The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness," *The Huffington Post*, last modified March 2, 2017, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/gay-loneliness/>.

<sup>10</sup> Janet Burns, "There's Now Evidence That Online Dating Causes Stronger, More Diverse Marriages," *Forbes*, last modified October 25, 2017, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janetwburns/2017/10/25/theres-now-evidence-that-online-dating-causes-stronger-more-diverse-relationships/#488c4ec858bd>.

<sup>11</sup> While Grindr mainly caters to queer men, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans people also use Grindr.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Fox, "10 years of Grindr: A rocky relationship," *BBC News*, last modified March 25, 2019, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-47668951>.

shallow relationships for deeper, more sustaining intimacy.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say, “They’re like ‘empty-calorie’ socialization, fun snacks that ultimately are not deeply nutritious for our sense of belongingness and deep connection. They don’t cause literal isolation, but instead promote brief relationships that may sometimes come to substitute for, or even displace, a deeper sense of connection to others.”<sup>14</sup>

Overall, the reliance on Grindr and other apps to meet other queer people leads many to feel that this social medium has reduced or changed the need for queer spaces. In general, this manifests as queer people, rather than going out to a queer venue or community space, using Grindr and similar apps to form, usually temporary, connections with other queer people. This has led many venue owners and queer people alike to proportion a large amount of blame on Grindr for the decline and disappearance of queer spaces.

### ***Queer spaces and gentrification***

Gentrification is the process by which older, poorer, inner-city areas are newly inhabited by people with more capital who buy property and invest in “restoring” or “upgrading” the area, raising prices and leading to the displacement of the original inhabitants. Gay villages around the world arose from gentrification, as these cheap inner-city areas played an emancipatory role as sanctuaries in attracting rural and suburban queer people to cities during the “Great Gay Migration” through the 1960s to the 1980s.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mike Miksche, “Grindr, Tinder, Scruff: A Recipe for Loneliness,” *The Advocate*, last Modified May 5, 2016, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2016/5/05/grindr-tinder-scruff-recipe-loneliness>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Kath Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration,” *A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 2 no. 3 (1995): 243-277, doi:10.1215/10642684-2-3-253.



Now, corporations and non-queer people are moving into traditionally queer spaces or gay villages and further “upgrading” housing and amenities, forcing the current inhabitants out in a new wave of gentrification. The drivers of this current wave of gentrification have been dubbed ‘super-gentrifiers’ as the rate of gentrification in cities today is unprecedented.<sup>16</sup> The increasingly expensive nature of living near queer spaces or in gay villages is shown in real estate data from cities around North America. In Montreal, the average price of a condo is \$341,495 CAD; in Montreal’s Gay Village, a two bedroom condo starts at \$430,900 CAD.<sup>17,18</sup> In San Francisco, one of the most gentrified cities due to the booming tech industry, the average price of a single-family home in the city’s Castro gay village is more than \$2,000,000 USD.<sup>19</sup> In Seattle, nearly every city neighbourhood had an increased concentration of gay and lesbian residents from 2000 to 2012, except for the Capitol Hill gaybourhood, which saw a 23 percent decrease of gay and lesbian residents.<sup>20</sup> The main reason for this exodus of queer residents from Capitol Hill is rising housing prices. Queer residents were priced out and outnumbered as thousands of new housing units were built in response to the Seattle tech industry, in which the new residents are mainly straight and male.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis Smith, “There’s plain gentrification ... and then you have Islington,” *The Times*, last modified September 1, 2006, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theres-plain-gentrification-and-then-you-have-islington-0jm9cwd9cmn>.

<sup>17</sup> “Le Beaudry,” *Guide Habitation*, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.guidehabitation.ca/en/9673/le-beaudry/>.

<sup>18</sup> “Buying a Condo in Montreal,” *MonDev*, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.mondev.ca/resources/buying-a-condo-in-montreal>.

<sup>19</sup> Scott James, “There Goes the Gayborhood,” *The New York Times*, last modified June 21, 2017, accessed June 28, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2017/06/21/us/gay-pride-lgbtg-gayborhood.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/21/us/gay-pride-lgbtg-gayborhood.html).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

### ***The rising acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ people across urban areas***

The overall positive factor of increasing acceptance of queer people in urban areas, particularly in the Global North, has led many queer people, most often privileged, white, gay men, to accept an assimilationist view of their queer identity. This view, also called a post-gay attitude, sees queer identity as not “mattering” anymore, and hence, queer spaces and gay villages also don’t matter, leading many queer people to live elsewhere. Amin Ghaziani, a professor at the University of British Columbia and the Canada Research Chair in Sexuality and Urban Studies has referred to this new pattern of dispersed queer populations as ‘cultural archipelagos,’ where smaller pockets of queer spaces are now spread throughout urban areas to accommodate for the increasingly dispersed urban queer population.<sup>22</sup> Ghaziani suggests that this dispersed living pattern is pushing queer neighbourhoods towards acting as centres for queer-oriented businesses, and away from being hubs for the entire community.<sup>23</sup> Ghaziani recognizes that this can lead to old famed gaybourhoods becoming watered-down versions of their former selves, and the political clout, services, and opportunities that these spaces offer could be diminished.<sup>24</sup> This is exemplified through the dispersed queer populations in Toronto and Montreal, such as Queer Street West in Toronto and the Queer Mile End in Montreal.<sup>25,26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> James, “There Goes the Gayborhood.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “The Best of Toronto’s Queer Nightlife,” *Queer West*, last modified June 28, 2019, accessed August 12, 2019 <http://www.queerwest.org/guide2.php>.

<sup>26</sup> Arizona Newsum, “Montreal: Canada’s Mecca for Queer Women,” *GoMag*, last modified May 5, 2017, accessed August 12, 2019, <http://gomag.com/article/montreal-canadas-mecca-queer-women/>.

### ***Exclusion of queer heritage from Canada's historic commemoration***

A key principle of historic preservation is the power of places: a conviction that historic places matter and that they can inform current generations about the lives of people and events of the past.<sup>27</sup> Many young people today continue to grow up struggling as they come to terms with their gender and/or sexual identity; discovering concrete, physical evidence of queer history, especially in a public place, can help affirm a vital connection to a community with a rich, yet poorly visible, past. As there are still parts of Canada where people do not feel comfortable being themselves in terms of their sexuality and gender identity, having physical queer places that are recognized as undeniably worth preserving are important to build a sense of belonging and connectedness among queer communities.

In 1981, the National Historic Sites of Canada system plan identified areas of underrepresentation in Canadian history. The most recent updates in 2000 and 2019 built upon the 1981 system plan to introduce a thematic framework addressing underrepresented topics in the National Program of Historical Commemoration.<sup>28</sup> These plans sought to build a more inclusive system of national historic designations by increasing designations related to three underrepresented areas: Aboriginal History, Women's History and Ethnocultural Communities' History.<sup>29</sup> From 2011 to 2016, 66 new national designations related to these underrepresented areas were approved by the Government of Canada.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Stonewall 50: Defining LGBTQ Site Preservation," *Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation*, last modified April 6, 2019, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/events/1237-stonewall-50-defining-lgbtq-site-preservation>.

<sup>28</sup> Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

The absence of 2SLGBTQ+ identities in the definition of the HSMBC underrepresented areas exemplifies a gap in Canada’s commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Since the HSMBC was established in 1919, 3,600 designations of national historic significance have been made, but none are explicitly designated to queer heritage.<sup>31,32</sup> As such, under current efforts, queer heritage is not considered of equal significance to other culturally important sites, events, or figures, leading to the continued social isolation of Canada’s 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. To preserve extant queer spaces

#### 1.1. *Establishing municipal “Culture at Risk” offices to support cultural venues at risk of closure or change of use in urban areas*

Cultural venues, especially those that support underrepresented and marginalized communities (including the 2SLGBTQ+ community), foster a sense of belonging by tying that cultural community to the culture’s past, present, and future. Protecting these spaces and providing financial and logistical support to secure their future through the creation of Culture at Risk offices, following the example set by the City of London,<sup>33</sup> is crucial to including, uplifting and promoting a city’s multiple cultural narratives and history, including queer heritage.

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<sup>31</sup> Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration*.

<sup>32</sup> “Directory of Federal Heritage Designations,” *Parks Canada: History and Culture*, last modified December 11, 2018, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/culture/dfhd>.

<sup>33</sup> “Figures reveal LGBTQ+ venue numbers remain stable for a second year,” *Mayor of London: London Assembly*, last modified July 5, 2019, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/londons-lgbtq-venue-numbers-remain-stable>.

### **1.2. *Supporting municipal governments in drafting a charter to safeguard the future of queer spaces***

The creation of a queer space charter can help safeguard queer spaces against risk of closure and changes of use, while encouraging new queer spaces to open. Following London's example, a charter drafted by municipal governments can provide practical support for developers, venues and other actors to establish, protect and promote a space's queer affiliations.<sup>34</sup> The creation of a charter by municipal governments in Canada should be followed by practical guidelines to achieve the charter's goals.

### **1.3 *Initiating annual audits of queer spaces in urban areas***

Requiring little funding while providing several tangible benefits, the creation of a database of queer spaces (including spaces that are temporarily queered, such as spaces that regularly host queer-focused events) in an urban area can track the closure of, changes to and opening of queer spaces year-to-year. Further, this database can be used to safeguard queer spaces during planning decisions, as the spaces' queer usage is documented and can be used as proof of the cultural significance of a site.

## **2. To commemorate and designate historic queer spaces, events, and figures**

### **2.1. *Expanding the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada's (HSMBC) definition of 'underrepresented' to include 2SLGBTQ+ communities***

Through a simple definitional change, expanding the HSMBC's (administered by Parks Canada) underrepresented areas as listed in the 2019 system plan to include 2SLGBTQ+

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<sup>34</sup> "Figures reveal LGBTQ+ venue numbers remain stable for a second year," *Mayor of London: London Assembly*.

communities would establish that queer heritage has a place in Canadian history. Further, this change would unlock funding and investments from Parks Canada for public designation proposals of 2SLGBTQ+ heritage sites and reaffirm Canada's commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ rights and equality.

## **2.2. *Initiating a thematic study into possible sites of commemoration to serve as a guidebook and toolkit for nominations***

Like the thematic study conducted by the United States National Park Service (NPS),<sup>35</sup> a report identifying 2SLGBTQ+ sites of commemoration spearheaded by the HSMBC and Parks Canada would provide a starting point for private and public actors to begin nomination and proposal processes. Further, an associated toolkit for the proposal process would provide the 2SLGBTQ+ community and activist groups with the necessary tools and advice to expedite nominations.

## **2.3. *Create a specific grant program to increase the number of 2SLGBTQ+ designations administered by the HSMBC***

The creation and funding of a specific grant program towards increasing 2SLGBTQ+ diversity among HSMBC designations would provide a "catch-up" mechanism to account for decades of exclusion of queer heritage from Canada's national history. As per the NPS Underrepresented Communities Grant Program,<sup>36</sup> grants administered to provincial, territorial

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<sup>35</sup> Katy Steinmetz, "National Park Service Releases First Report on historic LGBT Sites," *Time Magazine*, last modified October 11, 2016, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://time.com/4523492/lgbt-theme-study-nps/>.

<sup>36</sup> "Underrepresented Community Grants," *National Park Service Preservation Grants*, last modified July 15, 2019 accessed July 17, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/preservation-grants/community-grants.html>.

and municipal heritage agencies, and community and activist groups to catalogue queer sites worthy of designation is a proven way to increase the number of designations.

## IMPACT

To be put into practice, these recommendations must be considered by involved actors, including municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as arms-length heritage agencies and non-profit or activist groups. To evaluate the benefits of these recommendations, actors should follow the case studies that exemplify these recommendations.<sup>37</sup> Once the necessity of preserving queer spaces is recognized by all actors, meaningful change can be put into place to safeguard queer spaces for all future generations.

By advocating against the social isolation of queer people, and by partnering with relevant organisations in Montreal, such as *Fierté Montreal Pride* or the *Centre Communautaire de Gais et Lesbiennes de Montréal* (CCGLM), the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness can make queer issues a more concrete part of their core mission and share and implement these recommendations to their full effect.

An impact of this project is its ability to inspire activists, as well as others reached through my research outputs,<sup>38</sup> to internalize the importance of queer spaces to the queer community in their work going forward.

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<sup>37</sup> See footnote 32 and 35.

<sup>38</sup> Community engagement initiatives included a podcast, titled [Queer Here, Queer There](#), that has reached a total of approximately 500 people (as of August 2019) and continues to garner 20-30 listens per week. Other initiatives included providing an interview for a [CBC article](#) profiling this research.

## CONCLUSION

As urban areas become increasingly desirable places to live and urban population density increases dramatically in the coming decades, queer spaces will face increasing threats to their existence. Queer spaces have played a vital role in the queer community, acting as sites of community building and fostering a sense of belonging among queer people. In light of the threats that queer spaces face, it is essential we invest in their protection, promotion and preservation.

This report, prompted by these threats as well as the epidemic of loneliness and social isolation faced by the queer community, identified three main factors influencing queer spaces today. Through gentrification, the ubiquitous use of technology (specifically dating apps) within the queer community and the rising acceptance of queer people in urban areas around the world, queer spaces are under constant threat of closure or change of use.

A combination of soft and hard policies is necessary to combat these threats and protect extant queer spaces. Canada should establish “Culture at Risk” offices, audit queer spaces, and draft a charter to safeguard these spaces. Moreover, including the 2SLGBTQ+ population in the HSMBC’s definition of underrepresented and creating queer-focused grants and research reports are achievable policy goals that go a long way to preserve queer spaces and recognize that queer history is a fundamental and inalienable part of Canada’s history.



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