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**Duncan Garage And Showroom:**

**A Local Case Study on the Slow Food Movement**

**History of the Slow Food Movement**

The Slow Food Movement originated in Bra, Italy in the 1970's. The group's rhetoric is a direct reflection of its founder, Carlo Petrini, who firmly believed that the homogenization resulting from the processes of industrialization and globalization could be combated by preserving local cultures through the taste and pleasure of food. Petrini was a member of Arcigola, a group associated with the Italian Communist Party, which raised questions about where and how we obtain the food that we eat. According to Stephen Schneider's article “Good, Clean, Fair: the Rhetoric of the Slow Food Movement”, Arcigola began to gain momentum in March, 1986, when Italy saw nineteen deaths from wine that had been produced with methyl alcohol. Furthermore, that same year, agriculture and food was impacted by herbicide pollution and the Chernobyl disaster (2008). However, the turning point for the movement was the decision to open a McDonalds at the Piazza di Spagna, or Spanish Steps, in Rome. Arcigola protested the opening, calling for a culture of slow food instead of adopting standardized, western fast food practices.

In 1989, the movement went global, holding the first international slow food movement meeting in Paris. One of the challenges the international movement is facing is the spread of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The group fights against the integration of GMOs because little research has been done to demonstrate the long term environmental effects that could jeopardize biodiversity and local agriculture. . Over the years, the movement has garnered increasing international attention resulting in increasing international chapters, support from members of the scientific community, and celebrity endorsements. The movement has been so popular that Petrini started the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy, allowing students to complete not only undergraduate programs, but also master degrees in food studies.

In short, the Slow Food movement is a new social movement that believes food is an expression of various political, economic, cultural, and agricultural networks. Slow Food argues that good, clean, fair food prepared with localized ingredients can build social and cultural capital while resisting the dehumanizing effects of industrial agriculture and food production. Champions of Slow Food further argue that when the global food markets are reduced to smaller number of plant and animal species, cultivating plant and animal monocultures, and transforming farmland into the same limited resource, industrial agriculture undermines the diversity that globalization promises. Slow food is based around the concept of community. The movement uses tools like community gardens, public workshops, and farmers markets to educate consumers about food and why they should seek out local products that make immediate economic and cultural contributions in the local community.

**My Intent**

My main goal was to assess the Duncan Garage and determine if there was any way I could link it to the slow food movement. It was important to not just look at food, but examine the entire establishment as a part of the local culture in the Cowichan Valley. The mix of music, performance, food, staff, and community involvement would give me a holistic view of the environment produced and it's effects on the patrons. Going into this project, I intended to find that the Duncan Garage would excel in enhancing not only social, but also cultural capital and can be supported by advocates of the slow food movement.

**Duncan Garage & Showroom**

The Duncan Garage and Showroom is located right in the heart of downtown Duncan. In a beautifully restored auto shop, the building contains an organic whole food grocery, organic bakery, organic coffee bar, all vegetarian cafe, and a showroom. According to the Duncan Garage Showroom's website, the venue has hosted over 1700 shows in the last seven years (N.d.). Artists from all over the world are invited to play in the intimate all-ages venue. The owner, Longevity John, has a “finger snapping, toe tapping” guarantee: If you do not enjoy a performance he will refund all your money within the first half hour, however if he or his spies see you doing anything that indicates you are enjoying yourself the guarantee is null and void.

The Community Farm Store provides customers with all their organic nutritional needs. They offer a variety of products at reasonable costs and the staff is available to address any questions or concerns the consumer has. The cafe serves hot breakfast and lunch which consists of freshly made vegetarian dishes. Adding an organic coffee bar and bakery into the mix makes for a complete and pleasurable shopping experience. The location has also become a must-see for tourists.

**What I Found**

To compose this project, I decided that I would visit the Duncan Garage and write my paper while sitting in the coffee shop. The very first thing that I noticed was that the coffee shop was able to bring together an eclectic group of people. To use stereotypes, patrons consisted of hippies, business people, students, families, elderly, and tourists. The open floor plan allowed for people to mingle and children to roam free. It became a social environment very quickly: customers were conversing and interacting with each other and with the staff. It became a space that allowed for conversation which is extremely important for building relationships, make connections, and build social capital.

The Duncan Garage does not place specific importance on eating locally, other than using local ingredients for the Cafe whenever possible. However, they put a lot of emphasis making healthy diet choices. All of the food that they serve is vegetarian, including their coffee, and the products they sell in the community farm store are certified organic. In spite of their lack of focus on selling local produce, they are known around Duncan as major supporters of the local farmers market and advocate that people buy local whenever possible.

Newsletters and magazines are circulated to customers. They contain staff bios, notices of community events, and other points of interest regarding the community. There is also a board located just outside the kitchen where people can post bulletins about their own local events. The aim appears to be raising awareness of issues and encouraging their customers to participate in the local community. This strengthens the staff's claim that they believe in building a healthy community. Participation appears to be a key focus for the Duncan Garage in their efforts.

The establishment also contains a used book store. Here, people can bring in their old unwanted books, which are then resold and the money goes back into the business. In the bookstore, they sometimes sell local crafts, like scarves, and handmade musical instruments. As an extra source of income, this model is effective. The money is re-syphoned to pay for the different programs that makes the Duncan Garage an asset to the community. The community also benefits from this program by being able to access literature at a reduced cost.

In my opinion, the best part of the building is the Showroom. This unique space provides audiences to view artistic performances in an intimate setting. Around town, the showroom is known for fostering and embracing local talent. The staff views creativity and the arts as a key part in building a healthy community. The Showroom also hosts artists from all over the world. This allows for an escape, the audience can forget about their troubles and take part in the creative process. Eyes are opened to all kinds of world views and different means of personal expression. There are very little rules in the showroom. As long as you are enjoying yourself, and don't impede on anyone else enjoying themselves, you have free range to express your joy.

Unfortunately, I could not find any representation of First Nation culture at all. Not only in Duncan, but in all of British Columbia, the First Nations are usually represented as an integral piece to local culture. For the future, this my be an area that the staff wants to pursue, especially because the Duncan Garage is being a tourist hotspot.

**Conclusion**

It is important to remember that the slow food movement does not just preach that everyone should purchase and consume local foods. Ideally, slow food activists are concerned about preserving local cultures and fighting against the homogenization that accompanies globalization. Mentioned earlier, the Duncan Garage does not focus on selling local produce, just organics. However, slow food enthusiasts will recognize how effective the establishment is in supporting the preservation of local culture.

The Duncan Garage is an open space that allows for socializing, educating, creativity, and leisure. Patrons can escape the tediousness of everyday life by sitting alone and reading a book or by enjoying a musical performance. The music venue is the greatest feature of the entire building. Having a space where people can express themselves and allowing the audience to experience performances from global artists is nothing short of magical. Music allows for individuals to view the world through other peoples eyes, and may leave room for individuals to critically analyze their part in their own culture. By understanding our responsibilities as global citizens, and community citizens, we can work to strengthen our own local culture.

Deciding whether the Duncan Garage and Showroom actually enhanced social capital was not easy, because there is no distinct definition for the term. Fukuyama defines social capital as “the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations” (Claridge, 2004), and Pennar states social capital is “the web of social relationships that influence individual behaviour and thereby affects economic growth” (Claridge, 2004). Sitting in the coffee shop, my instinct was that social capital was being enhanced, but at the surface level I could not see it.

The establishment is extremely effective in bonding and bridging relationships between highly diverse groups of people. Also, the business works as a catalyst for getting the community to think about making healthy nutrition choices. This can be tied to economic growth through the education of consumers and the distribution of news letters that discuss other local projects. After being educated and committed to making healthier choices, patrons are more willing to participate. Consumers can use their purchasing power to support these sustainable projects, thus strengthening the local economy.

Cultural Capital is even harder to define. Patti Choby (2010) explains it in a way that is similar to my own understanding. She loosely defines it as a set of rules for engaging in other types of capital. At the core of the Duncan Garage, there is a belief that their role is to aid in building a cohesive community. The staff is transferring skills like understanding, knowledge, pride, and generosity that customers internalize and are utilized in their interactions throughout the Cowichan Valley. In my opinion, this will have a domino effect where important skills will be transferred throughout the town and strengthen the local culture.

Overall, the goal of demonstrating that the Duncan Garage and Showroom plays a role in the slow food movement and is a vital part of the local culture in the Cowichan Valley was proven. By creating an environment that allows for community building and creative expression the staff is able to enhance the social and cultural capital of their customers. Going forwards, it would be nice to see the inclusion of local food and first nations culture into their business model. However, the standardization of cultures spurred by globalization is actively fought and the Duncan Garage should be heralded by slow food supporters.

**Works Cited**

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**Major Project Outline**

**Case:** Slow Food movement

**Location:** The movement originated in Italy in 1986 by Carlo Petrini in response to a McDonald's being opened in the Piazza Di Spagna. Slow Food has since become an international movement, and for the purpose of this project I will try to draw attention to Slow Food Canada, Slow Food Vancouver, and Slow Food Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands.

**What is the Slow Food movement?**

The Slow Food movement is a new social movement that believes food is an expression of various political, economic, cultural, and agricultural networks. Slow Food argues that good, clean, fair food prepared with localized ingredients can build social and cultural capital while resisting the dehumanizing effects of industrial agriculture and food production. Champions of Slow Food further argue that when the global food markets are reduced to smaller number of plant and animal species, cultivating plant and animal monocultures, and transforming farmland into the same limited resource, industrial agriculture undermines the diversity that globalization promises. Slow food is based around the concept of community. The movement uses tools like community gardens, public workshops, and farmers markets to educate consumers about food and why they should seek out local products that make immediate economic and cultural contributions in the local community.

**Aspects of Capital:**

Cultural, social, and natural capital.

**Approach to be Examined:**

This is the area of my project that has not been fully realized yet. I want to critically examine the slogan of the Slow Food movement: good, fair, clean food. After dissecting the slogan I have two options:

1. I can talk about the complexities this slogan presents for consumers, and examine how easy or hard a slow food diet would be to switch to.
2. I could apply the slogan to the Duncan Garage Showroom and see how it fits in the Slow Food movement. The Showroom is unique because it consists of a bakery, cafe, and grocery store that focuses on health, local, and organic, but the venue also brings local music and art into the mix.

**Three Initial Sources:**

Pietrykowski, B. (2004). You Are What You Eat: The Social Economy of the Slow Food Movement. *Review of Social Economy,* 62(3), 307 – 321.

Schneider, S. (2008). Good, Clean, Fair: The rhetoric of the Slow Food Movement. *College English*, 70(4), 384 – 402.

Bommel, K. & Spicer, A. (2011). Hail the Snail: Hegemonic Struggles in the Slow Food Movement. *Organizational Studies,* 32(12), 1717 – 1744.

**Page Budget:**

1-1.5 pages: explain the history of the slow food movement and what it stands for.

2-3 pages: dissecting good food, fair food, and clean food.

2-3 pages: apply the three values to the Garage Showroom or go in to details about the complexities the values bring.

1 page: conclusion.