



Living Harmoniously: Resource Partitioning and Co-existence of Music Venues in Toronto

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Abstract:

This research on co-existence of small and large music venues investigates spatial distribution and operation model of music venues within Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Our findings suggest that large and small venues can co-exist in a proximity to each other in downtown Toronto, hinting into several factors that allow this. Main factors are varying operation models such as being frequency of operations, being a multi-purpose space and resource partitioning where venues either cater to specific niches or cater to masses with a more general programming.

Key words: Cultural Production, Spatial Distribution, Music Venue, Resource Partition, Scale, Genre, Specialist Venue, Multi-purpose Venue, Operation, Toronto, Greater Toronto Area

Introduction:

How can any small-scale music venue operate in a city like Toronto where large music venues are many and tastes are so diverse? In our research, we examined 80 music venues across Toronto—known for its diversity—and tried to gain insight on how they operate and how they co-exist with each other. Our team tested three hypotheses; Similar types of venues cluster with each other to signal market type to potential customers, smaller venues had to hold more music performances to make up for the costs, music specialist venues had smaller capacity and music specialist venues had to hold more performances.

Our team has examined venue location, audience capacity, type of genre performed—whether they focus on one genre or not, Venue Purpose—whether the venue is specifically designed for music or not and frequency of music operations to understand how music venues across Toronto operate and earn revenue. Our research has found that compared to what we've initially thought, different type of venues tends to cluster, there is no

correlation between venue size and performance frequency. And as we've thought, specialist venues tends to hold more music events and music focused venues tend to also have a focused genre.

Background

Embarking on the research, we defined music venues as any venue that has music as one of their core appeals, meaning that they demonstrably put production effort into their music programming—such as sound systems, booking performers months in advance, having a performance calendar and not venues that have one night of live music once a week as an amenity—such as local pubs. Our research is built off from resource partition model by Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) which was used to explore microbrewery movement with great vigor. As Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) suggests that large industrial breweries and small breweries produce products according to their strengths and thus partition the resources without direct intense competition, we believe a similar case applies to music venues where music venues are able to co-exist due to their diverse offerings and operational models.

Methods:

Our research team has utilized search engines like Google and venue review sites like Yelp to compile a list of 80 music venues in Toronto. Later, using venue websites, Google Reviews and directly calling the venues, our team collected data on these 80 venues based on four key concepts that would inform of how they operate: Capacity, Genre Performed, Venue Purpose and Frequency of Music Performance. The data was then organized into an Excel sheet. The venue location and capacity data were used to create spatial distribution maps using MapCustomizer. Venue capacity and other unused data points were later used to analyze business operations and create graph charts that would inform us of trend lines, distributions, and correlations within our data set.



Findings

Our first spatial finding suggested that smaller music venues can co-exist with each other. On all our focus clusters there was a mix of smaller venues to larger venues. This suggests at small and large venues do not choke each other but instead they form a symbiotic relationship. Our second spatial finding was regarding spacing of music venues across GTA, almost all the music venues were located in downtown area. Considering that there is music audience living in suburbs, research suggests that the suburbs are not suited to support music scenes.

Insights drawn from business operations data also suggested to interesting findings—some which our team thought otherwise. First insight drawn was that capacity had little correlation with number of operations contrary to our thought that there would be a strong trend either direction. This could partially be explained with multi-purpose spaces that make up for costs through different income streams. Our second finding suggest that 68% of venues are generalist venues, meaning they have to play many genres that cater to broader audiences. This would suggest that Toronto's music audience is diverse and a venue with a focused genre is hard to sustain. Third finding suggests at specialist venues—venues where the music is sole attraction—tend to be larger in capacity up until 600 people, which where then all venues turn into multipurpose. This is extremely interesting as it suggests that music venues prefer larger operations over smaller ones, but no business can survive solely on music after a certain overhead cost. Fourth finding is about monthly events, which exhibit a clear tendency that music focused venues perform more music events. This was expected as multi-purpose venues need to use the space for other events to sustain. The fifth and final finding is distribution of music venues with a specific genre type in respect to venue type. As expected, genre focused venues are very likely to be also music-focused venues. This suggests that genre focused venues work well when they arrange their operations to maximize their capitalization on the niche they serve.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

To conclude, the research team classified several attributes of Toronto music venues to understand their operations, and systematically collected data to compare and understand how large- and small-scale music venues co-exist. Our team has later drawn several insights from the data, suggesting bigger venues need to operate less cater to broader groups, and use their space for multiple purposes while smaller venues tend to cater to more specific genres and focus me on music. We have also noted that larger and smaller venues do not leech from each other, meaning that they exist within proximity. All our findings are in line with Carrol and Swaminathan's (2000) research, which suggested similar findings for microbreweries.

Further research could be built on this reach by conducting similar research to different cities with various sizes to confirm the phenomenon observed in our findings. Another way to utilize this research would be the audience of small and large music venues, since small and large venues can exist within proximity, it may suggest that small and large venues may feed audience and awareness into each other, or the contrasting clustering may inform business operations due to customer habits. Future research may also consider looking into why suburbs cannot support music scenes. And finally, future research could look deeper into spatial distribution and how urban growth or design affect operations of music venues, hindering or cultivate existence of music venues of different sizes.

References

Carroll, G. R., & Swaminathan, A. (2000). Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(3), 715–762. <https://doi.org/10.1086/318962>