“We embrace winter here”: Celebrating place in winter cities

SHORT TITLE: Celebrating place in winter cities

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Weather is an elementary and fundamental characteristic of place. In any given place we encounter the materiality of weather, local meanings attached to weather, and practices adopted in response to living with weather. Winter cities are places defined by their weather—long, cold winters that can pose challenges to urban life. Efforts to address these challenges centre on place-making activities, such as seasonal festivals, which seek to enrich public spaces. In this paper, we examine the relationship between winter, place, and placemaking in three Canadian prairie cities. Participants sought to promote a celebratory relationship with winter by changing public attitudes, fostering unique winter experiences, and incorporating winter into their cities' identities. This shift was encouraged by strategies and events that were "authentic" to local context and community. They did not simply reframe winter weather as positive, but recognized the season as presenting both challenges and opportunities. Enabling residents to realize opportunities is critical to being a successful winter city, and requires negotiating a set of dyads: warm/cold, indoor/outdoor, and light/dark. This paper highlights the constitutive role of weather in shaping place, while revealing the agentic ways in which communities act towards and with weather.

Keywords: winter cities, weather, place, festivals

Key Messages

- Weather in winter cities presents challenges for urban life, but also opportunities for celebration and community building.
- Winter city planners and programmers navigate fundamental tensions in order to foster conditions for celebrating winter.
- Winter festivals are placemaking activities that seek to tell authentic stories about weather, place, and culture.

Embrassons l'hiver : célébrer le lieu dans les villes d'hiver

La météo est une caractéristique élémentaire et fondamentale d'un lieu. Dans tout endroit donné, nous rencontrons sa matérialité, ses significations et les pratiques adoptées pour vivre avec la météo. Dans ce contexte, les villes d'hiver sont des lieux définis par leur climat, c'est-à-dire de longues périodes de froids qui peuvent poser des défis à la vie urbaine. Les efforts visant à relever ces défis se concentrent sur des événements locaux, comme les festivals saisonniers, qui cherchent à enrichir les espaces publics au cours de l'hiver. Dans cet article, nous examinons la relation entre l'hiver, le sens du lieu et la création d'événement dans trois villes des Prairies canadiennes. Les participants ont cherché à promouvoir l'idée d'une célébration de l'hiver en changeant les attitudes du public, en favorisant des expériences hivernales uniques et en incorporant l'hiver dans l'identité de leurs villes. Des stratégies et événements considérés comme « authentiques », par rapport au contexte local et à la communauté, ont encouragé ce changement. Ils n'ont pas simplement reformulé le cadre hivernal comme étant positif, ils ont reconnu que cette saison présentait à la fois des défis et des possibilités. Pour être une ville d'hiver réussie, il est essentiel de permettre aux résidents de saisir les opportunités qui s'offrent à eux, ce qui oblige à composer avec diverses dualités : chaud/froid, intérieur/extérieur et lumière/obscurité. Ce texte fait ressortir le rôle constitutif de la météo dans le façonnement du lieu, tout en révélant des modes novateurs de construction sociale de la représentation de l'hiver par les communautés locales.

Mots-clés : villes d'hiver, météo, lieu, festivals

Introduction

The term "winter cities" defines certain urban centres by their weather; long, cold winters distinguish winter cities from other places. Found across the higher latitudes of the northern hemisphere, winter cities exhibit a diversity of winter conditions, with significant variations in temperature, darkness, precipitation, ground conditions, and wind during the winter months (Pressman 1985). Nevertheless, "there is a consensus that winter—be it dark, long, cold, snowy, or wet—poses significant challenges to urban life" (Stout et al. 2018, 3). Winter commonly leads to reduced use of outdoor public spaces for active travel, recreation, and socialization (Chapman et al. 2019). This contributes to a lack of vibrancy at street level during winter months. Indeed, some public activities temporarily relocate to indoor environments—e.g., malls and enclosed pedestrian systems—which explicitly design out exposure to winter (Balsas 2021).

Winter cities are, therefore, often characterized by their problems. Many of these problems can be attributed to the interaction of weather and the built environment; climate insensitive urban design exacerbates the negative effects of winter on city life. This is in part a legacy of modernism, which typically prioritized standardization and efficiency over vernacular styles and sensitivity to local conditions (Samalavicius 2017). Modernism resulted in a proliferation of buildings and urban forms that were unresponsive to geographical context (Bosselmann et al. 1995; Relph 2016). In winter cities, the "special local flavour of the north" (Erskine 1968, 166)—its *genius loci* (Pressman 1996)—was disregarded in favour of sameness.

It followed that urban landscapes were often both poorly adapted to winter and placeless in character (Davies 2015).

Critically, however, not all winter conditions are perceived negatively. Recent research spanning Scandinavia and Canada found that sunshine, snowfall, and snow cover encourage outdoor activity in winter, while darkness, rainfall, and icy or slushy terrain are barriers (Larsson and Chapman 2020). A key implication of this finding is that diverse winter conditions should not be bundled together as an undifferentiated set of problems. Indeed, the idea that winter offers positive features and opportunities that can and should be promoted is central to the Winter Cities Movement, which emerged in the 1980s to improve quality of life and sustainability in northern settlements (Davies 2015). This movement does not ignore the challenges posed by winter, but nor does it understand winter as an obstacle to be overcome. Rather, it seeks "to ensure that winter is better coped with and celebrated, not just endured" (Davies 2015, 307). This requires an intentional approach to placemaking: the Winter Cities Movement advocates building designs and landscaping choices that foster favourable micro-climates, seasonally-themed outdoor events and festivals that encourage positive engagement with winter, and outdoor public spaces that combine creative lighting with winter-specific cultural and recreational activities.

In light of these challenges and opportunities, this research asks: what kind of place is a winter city, and what types of placemaking occur in this context? To address this question, we focus on three self-described winter cities: Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. As Canadian prairie cities, they share similar climates, topographies, and cultural histories. Additionally, all three urban centres feature activities organized around winter, particularly winter festivals, and have engaged with the Winter Cities Movement to varying degrees. Through key informant interviews with professionals involved in winter city planning and programming we address two objectives. First, we explore the relationship between weather and place in these cities, all of which experience long, cold winters, with many days below freezing point. Second, we examine their winter-related placemaking activities. In so doing, we seek to bring the winter cities literature into conversation with contemporary debates around place, and pay particular attention to the nuances of placemaking, focusing on tensions between community-based and market-driven approaches.

Weather, place, and placemaking

Weather places

The concept of place is central to geographic inquiry, and is broadly understood as a site of human attachment, loaded with social meanings and values. Places have unique locations in space, but cannot be reduced to these locations; they are sites of social significance, differentiated from each other by the practices and identities they support, as well as the representations and symbolism ascribed to them (Quesnot and Roche 2015). While the literature theorizing place as a social phenomenon is voluminous, it has often failed to conceptualize—or even acknowledge—the role of weather (Endfield 2019). This is in some ways surprising, as weather "influences the way we experience, remember, commemorate, and indeed celebrate place" (Endfield 2019, 2–3).

Over the last decade, geographical scholarship has begun to recognize these influences, and take seriously the mutual interconnection of place and weather. A foundational observation of this work is that weather, far from being a force that is external to place, is an elementary and

necessary component *of* place (Vannini et al. 2012). Wright and Tofa (2021) characterize this relationship as co-constitutive, noting that weather is embedded in place in relational and more-than-human ways. In a similar vein, Pillatt contends that "the weather *in* which one stands can be as much responsible for generating a sense and use of place as the ground *on* which one stands" (2012, 578; original emphasis).

Vannini et al. (2012, 373) coined the term "weather places" to acknowledge and conceptualize "both the place dimensions of weather, and the climatic components of place." Weather places are created through socially-conditioned experiences of and responses to weather, including shared ways of coping. The term acknowledges that weather "profoundly, sometimes irrevocably, shap[es] the possibilities and conditions of our lives" (Berland 1994, 112), while simultaneously being shaped by our actions, as we respond to it in reflexive and agentic ways. This point is particularly salient in winter cities, where winter affects profound shifts in social activities and movements—for example, as people spend more time indoors ("hibernation") or relocate temporarily to warmer climes ("migration") (Gappert 1987). As Vannini et al. (2012, 373) observe, "our sensual experience of weather cannot be understood outside of the weather's constant movement, and the ways we move along with it."

To assist in operationalizing the concept of weather places, we turn to Cresswell's (2009, 169) observation that "in any given place we encounter a combination of materiality, meaning, and practice." The tripartite understanding of place characteristics allows us to identify specific connections with weather. First, the *materiality* of place impacts the experience of weather and indeed the weather itself. In addition to the interactions between weather and elements of the natural environment, interventions in and adaptations of the built environment can be informed by weather experiences, while also changing those experiences (Endfield 2019). In winter cities, for example, design choices may exacerbate exposure to cold winds (e.g., by creating wind tunnels) or offer protection from them, enabling comfortable outdoor activity (Davies 2015). In this sense, the built form is dynamic and responsive to weather. This is a key premise of climate-sensitive design, which is centred on adapting the built form to local weather conditions, and seeks to create welcoming microclimates.

Second, weather plays a significant role in generating place *meaning*. For example, there are locally shared understandings of what constitutes "good" or "bad" weather for any place (Hulme 2017). Moreover, as Butts and Adams (2020, 11) remark, "weather has a cultural meaning, both individually and collectively, within the community that creates a sense of shared experience and belonging." As with materiality, the relationship between weather and meaning is reciprocal: "Familiar sensations over time build personal memories and intersect with collective memories and common skills, hence shaping weather-based personal, social, and collective identities, which themselves are then used as resources to make sense of weather and to weather places" (Vannini et al. 2012, 370)

Third, weather shapes the individual and collective *practices* that occur in place. With respect to individual agency, Hulme (2017, 58) writes that "I can change how I imagine the weather and, within limits, how I choose to live with it." At the collective level, social activities, techniques, and ways of life are influenced by weather and the opportunities and constraints it creates. Ultimately, our experiences of weather are informed by and inform our place-based practices. Through these practices, we not only act "*in* or *toward*" weather but also "*with*" it (Vannini et al. 2012, 396; original emphasis).

Placemaking and festivals

While weather's influences on materiality, meaning and practice shape place, the term "placemaking" refers to more intentional, strategic human activity. With respect to *what* is being made, the most common answer centres on the public domain:

> Turning public spaces into public places; places which engage those who inhabit them, places through which people do not merely pass, but have reason to stop and become involved; places which offer rich experience and a sense of belonging; places in short which have meaning, which evoke pleasure or contemplation, or reflection and, most importantly, an appreciation of cultural and environmental diversity. (Ryan 1995, 7)

Placemaking centres on, and seeks to promote, the public values of place—facilitating access to cultural activities, social opportunities, and common infrastructure, particularly through interventions in the built environment (Carmona 2019). Carmona (2019, 3) advances the concept of "place value" to capture the "complex but inter-related basket of benefits" that flow to stakeholders (visitors, residents, business owners, etc.) from successful placemaking activities. These can encompass health and safety benefits, enhanced street-level vitality and social interaction, stronger civic pride, greater inclusiveness, and so on.

The development of high-quality public places can play out in various ways, with a distinction often drawn between community-based and market-driven approaches to placemaking. The former prioritizes public participation in animating the public realm, anchoring its revitalization in "local values, history, culture and the natural environment" (Habibah et al. 2013, 86). It seeks to deliver places that promote quality of life and social exchange, grounded in values of equity and sustainability. The latter prioritizes the needs of market actors, particularly corporations, for public places that safeguard investments, appeal to target markets, and stimulate economic activity. It seeks to produce consumption-oriented places that contribute to agendas of economic development and competitiveness (Carmona 2014). Indeed, this form of placemaking can serve as a way of branding cities, "pushed forward by loose concepts such as intercity competition" (Madureira 2015, 161). While community- and market-driven approaches to placemaking are conceptually distinct, and at times opposed, in practice high-quality public places can deliver both social and economic benefits, and even strongly market-led developments may be harnessed to support public ends (Carmona 2014).

The differences between community and market priorities can be illustrated with reference to festivals, which (as we explain below) are pivotal to placemaking in the winter cities examined in this study. The term "festivals" covers a wide range of events that suspend quotidian routines and temporarily transform place. Put another way, "[f]estivals represent a unique time and space outside of everyday experiences" (Van Winkle et al. 2016, 203). They are fundamentally celebratory in purpose (Getz 2010), and engage the public through combinations of education, aesthetics, entertainment, and escapism (Van Winkle et al. 2016). Many festivals are also recurring events that "have a regular and rhythmic relationship with places, often being a fixture in the cultural life of a location over decades or even centuries" (de Brito and Richards 2017, 4).

At their best, festivals enrich place by providing opportunities for social exchange and engagement (Stevens and Shin 2014). These positive attributes are strongly associated with "authentic" festivals—"locally unique gatherings, indigenously conceived, rich in distinctive

content, based on local consumption and organized around localized geographic ties" (Gotham 2005, 242). By celebrating community values and identity, such festivals can foster place and group identity, generate social capital, and sustain local traditions (Waitt 2008; Getz 2010). However, festivals can also serve "instrumentalist" purposes, particularly when integrated into tourism, where they become tools for "attracting tourists (to specific places, and to overcome seasonality), contributing to place marketing (including image formation and destination branding), animating attractions and places, and acting as catalysts for other forms of development" (Getz 2010, 5).

When tailored primarily to tourism and economic development, festivals are often "formulaic" and "devoid of any real connections with place" (Quinn 2005, 928). Moreover, they may exclude and displace rather than benefit local residents, whose needs are secondary to the desire of cities to "reposition and promote themselves on a global scale in order to create or maintain reputations as desirable destinations to live, work and visit" (Finkel and Platt 2020, 4). In these instances, festivals are less community-based, place-specific celebrations than they are tourist spectacles and commodified, competitive assets (Gotham 2005). We now turn to explore the purposes of festivals, and the goals of placemaking more generally, in the context of three winter cities.

Methods

The research reported here is based upon a collective case study of Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. An overview of the cities' climate characteristics is provided in Table 1. Of the three cities, Edmonton has the most developed winter city policy, beginning with an overarching strategy *For the Love of Winter* (City of Edmonton 2011), followed by an implementation plan and winter city design guidelines. Additionally, Edmonton hosted the Winter Cities Shake-Up conference in 2015 and 2017, and is a member of the World Winter Cities Association for Mayors (WWCAM). The city hosts an array of winter festivals, one of which is highlighted in this study: Flying Canoë Volant. Inspired by La Chasse-galerie, a French Canadian folktale about a flying canoe, this free festival includes light-based art installations, cultural programming, children's activities, a local market, an outdoor patio, and indoor and outdoor live music.

City	Population	Days with Max <=0°C	Days with Min <-20°C	Days with Min <-30°C	Snowfall per year (cm)
Edmonton	932,546	80	24	3	124
Saskatoon	246,376	106	39	10	77
Winnipeg	705,244	113	20	13	114

Table 1. Population, winter temperatures, and snowfall in the case study cities (Government of Canada 2020).

While this study was being conducted, the City of Saskatoon was in the process of developing a Winter City Strategy after its Mayor and several councillors attended the 2015 Winter Cities Shake-up Conference in Edmonton. Development started in 2016 with funding for ice sculpture displays, warming huts borrowed from Winnipeg, and grants to support local organizations offering winter programming and events (City of Saskatoon 2020). Saskatoon also hosted the Winter Cities Shake-up Conference in 2019. Its premiere winter festival is Nutrien Winter Shines, a free, family-oriented event featuring an ice castle and garden, a local market, children's activities, kick sledding, and fat bike races.

Unlike the other two cities in this study, Winnipeg does not have a formal winter strategy or policy, although it did join the WWCAM in 2017. Winnipeg has focused on incorporating winter into its tourism and business development practices, promoting unique experiences and activities. A key event is Festival du Voyageur, a ticketed music festival centred on French Canadian history. In addition to live music, it features an international snow carving competition, children's activities such as sleigh rides, and cultural programming.

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants. Recruitment was purposive, "based on the researchers' judgement about what potential participants will be most informative" (Moser and Korstjens 2018, 10). Specifically, we sought participants with professional knowledge of winter city planning and/or programming. These participants fell into four groups: municipal planners with responsibilities for winter city projects; staff in the cities' tourism and business development organizations; representatives of relevant community groups; and organizers of winter festivals. Even with this broad approach to recruitment, the number of potential participants was modest, as relatively few people work in the specialized winter city field.

Interview questions were designed to "elicit the participant's experiences, perceptions, thoughts and feelings" (Moser and Korstjens 2018, 12) regarding winter in the case study cities. The interview guide was informed by literature on winter cities and included questions about: (a) the challenges and opportunities presented by winter in the city, and its effects on quality of life; (b) the origins, objectives, and characteristics of winter events and activities; and (c) the development and extent of winter city policy. In addition, participants were encouraged to share whatever details or experiences they thought were important to understanding winter in their city. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta, and all interviewees gave written informed consent to participate.

In total, 16 participants were interviewed across the three cities between February and April 2020. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants, as well as the codes used in our results.

Code	**Role**	**City**
E1	City Staff	Edmonton
E2	Festival Organizer	Edmonton
E3	Tourism/Business Development Staff	Edmonton
E4	Festival Organizer	Edmonton
E5	Festival Organizer	Edmonton
E6	City Staff	Edmonton

S1	City Staff	Saskatoon
S2	City Staff	Saskatoon
S3	Community Organization Staff	Saskatoon
S4	Festival Organizer	Saskatoon
S5	Festival Organizer	Saskatoon
S6	Festival Organizer	Saskatoon
W1	Festival Organizer	Winnipeg
W2	Tourism/Business Development Staff	Winnipeg
W3	Tourism/Business Development Staff	Winnipeg
W4	Community Organization Staff	Winnipeg

Table 2. Participant code, role, and location.

Audio files of interviews were transcribed in full, anonymized, and uploaded to NVivo. Using this software, we undertook thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns in the data. We first read the transcripts line-by-line, and openly assigned initial codes to distinct concepts. Next, we grouped initial codes to create themes. This process was iterative, allowing us to break apart, relate, and recombine codes (Watson and Till 2010) until stable inductive themes were identified. Finally, we organized these themes around the three dimensions of place (materiality, meanings, practices) outlined above.

Results

In this section, we present the main themes identified in our qualitative analysis, demonstrating how winter cities as places are co-constituted by distinctive environmental factors, galvanizing understandings of the value of winter, and concerted efforts to facilitate unique and enjoyable experiences.

The materiality of winter cities

Participants frequently referenced the natural environments of Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon in winter, and in particular their river systems. In Edmonton, the North Saskatchewan River valley provides recreational opportunities such as cross-country skiing and skating. Moreover, two of Edmonton's most popular winter festivals engage directly with the river valley landscape. The Silver Skate Festival is held in a park with a frozen lake, adjacent to the river. Some of Flying Canoë Volant's activities take place in the "magical environment" (E2) of Mill Creek Ravine, part of the river valley system. Similarly, participants in Saskatoon noted that the South Saskatchewan River valley functions as a place for material encounters, with opportunities for physical activity and educational activities. For example, the Meewasin Trail system offers skiing trails and skating rinks, and is utilized for ecological education:

> [Programs focus on] the ecology that happens in the winter, and the different adaptations of plants and animals and people to how we actually function in the winter. It's a very long season, so if we try to ignore winter and try to just stay inside and not have any programming, I think we're missing an opportunity for education, but we're also losing a lot of time throughout the year. (S3)

In Winnipeg, where the Assiniboine and Red Rivers freeze entirely, the River Trail (an on-river corridor used for transportation and recreation) is a defining winter feature:

> Going west on the Assiniboine … that's one of the beauties or the most intriguing parts of the River Trail. It connects neighbourhoods that are normally separated by the river, and it makes this great active transportation route that people use to commute and recreate, and people will cut through The Forks or get to other downtown places. (W4)

Participants did not dispute that engaging with the natural environment in winter could involve being exposed to cold conditions, but emphasized that this was an opportunity to embrace. From this perspective, celebrating winter in the city involves experiencing its unique materiality, including its cold beauty, first-hand:

> ... like no, this is a beautiful place: blue skies, hoarfrost, light displays, fresh air, you know? (S2)

> It's an opportunity to get outside and play in a different way. We tend to think about recreation in summer terms, so it's an opportunity to think a little differently about recreation. (E1)

> It's about showcasing the amazing things that our city has to offer, and sort of to shy away from "it's cold so we don't go outside." That is not our city. We embrace winter here. (W2)

The materiality of place was emphasized in conversations about relationships with rivers and cold temperatures, which are shared and defining features of prairie cites, and the context for unique winter experiences. The meanings and significance of these embodied experiences are taken up in the following section.

The meanings of winter cities

A second prominent feature of conversations with research participants was the emphasis on celebration of winter, and a related understanding of community as both a context for and outcome of winter city planning.

Celebration. Participants across all cities and professional roles emphasized the importance of celebrating winter. This idea refers to appreciating winter and engaging with the opportunities it offers:

> I think celebrating that we choose to live in a Northern climate is an important part of this whole thing. (S5)

> It's cold in winter, but it can also be a great time to enjoy the outdoors and celebrate what we have. (W2)

> People are getting out and celebrating winter … as we should because it is our longest season! (E2)

These exhortations were accompanied by a recognition that celebration has not been the dominant attitude towards winter, and that as such some opportunities go unrealized. Working to change attitudes is therefore important:

> I guess Winnipeg traditionally, with the exception of Festival du Voyageur, has kind of been "it's cold and miserable here in winter", right? But that's changing with the support of the tourism agencies and that kind of stuff, people are becoming more proud of being a cold destination and a cold city. (W1)

> ... attitude changing ... changing our collective story. So how do we talk about it? How do we think about winter, changing attitudes, right down to "how do we decide how our budget's going to be spent?" ... attitude changing is all-encompassing. (E6)

> The typical view is that Saskatoon in winter is a thing we endure not a thing to celebrate, and we were thinking how can we move the mentality toward a more positive way around winter, where this thing needs applause and needs a badge of honour. (S1)

Participants also discussed the shift to celebrating winter becoming part of their cities' identities. In this regard, the shared experience of winter weather conditions was part of local culture and a source of pride:

> We kind of want to celebrate community and celebrate the fact that we are a hardy bunch and when it gets to be -40 and -50 we can still be prepared. (S6)

> We kind of own winter here. You might have heard the expression "Winterpeg"—it can have very negative connotations, but I think in the last decade we've taken a lot of pride in winter here in the city. So I think of winter in Winnipeg as fun, sunny, exploring the great outdoors, to gathering with friends in sort of the hottest meeting spots in the city, like The Forks, which gets as many visitors in winter as they do in summer. (W2)

From participants' perspectives, realizing opportunities and shifting public attitudes are key parts of moving towards a more celebratory relationship with winter. This involves actively embracing winter not in spite of characteristics like low temperatures and snow, but *because* of what these characteristics offer.

Community. In celebrating winter, the need for cities to be community-minded and "authentic" in their approach was also emphasized. Participants often spoke of the importance of winter strategies and policies being context-appropriate, historically and geographically. It is not adequate for initiatives simply to be winter-based, they must be attuned to the specific physical, social, and cultural conditions of place:

> So "authentic" was very quickly identified as a guiding principle [for the Winter City Strategy], and what that means was it had to be based on our context in every way you can think of, and it has to work for Edmontonians first. (E1)

> We can't just take an idea from Scandinavia and say "oh, here this is from a winter city, let's just take this and impose it on Edmonton." It might not work because our winters are very different, our snow loads are different, the way our cities are designed and built are different, the culture's different. (E6)

> I do find it hard sometimes when ... people from other places are like "winter, winter, winter!" and how easy it is to do things in winter, and you look at their climate and it's -5, right? So yeah, it would be super easy to do everything in winter and have them walk everywhere, and outdoor patios when it's only -5. (S3)

For festival organizers, authenticity meant considering local weather and geographic features, and emphasizing cultural and historical connections. Discussion of authenticity through storytelling was prominent in conversations about French Canadian themed festivals:

> I think what fundamentally we [Flying Canoë Volant] are getting to is telling an Edmonton story. And I think that is its strength, and we're hearing it from patrons year after year, I feel that I'm a part of this story—whether you're French, or you're not French or if you're a new Canadian, you feel like you're partaking in a piece of history and those celebrations. (E2)

> [Festival du Voyageur] is anchored in history. There's a real story behind it. … we have a very special place in the community because we tell an authentic story of where a lot of folks from up here came from. (W1)

> I think locals are very much part of sort of celebrating our winter, and if you look at Festival du Voyageur … it's very much a celebration locally of our Francophone, Métis and Indigenous culture and celebrating the fur trade, but it's also a time to celebrate winter and engage our visitors in that story. (W2)

In describing the stories their festivals tell—historic and contemporary accounts of cultural connections to place, which make the festivals unique and authentic—participants further

articulated a core set of meanings associated with winter cities. In particular, the need to celebrate winter is best accomplished with community in mind. Achieving this in practice is not without its challenges, as we explore in the next section.

The practices of winter cities

Throughout participants' accounts of winter, they described numerous practices that involved negotiating countervailing phenomena. For example, festival organizers discussed the challenges of weather being cold enough for winter activities but warm enough for attendee comfort. Countervailing phenomena could also be mutually constitutive: winter light installations are effective and valuable because of long, dark nights. We identified three practices that involved navigating "dyads"—a term that captures the interplay of a pair of factors without implying opposition.

Warm/cold. The most pervasive dyad in participants' accounts, warm/cold centres on practices for navigating temperature in winter cities. Participants emphasized that embracing cold weather and the opportunities it offers does not mean being cold; it is paired with ways to keep warm. For example, movement is intentionally incorporated into festivals:

> I'm going outside. I'm wearing my parka and my winter boots and we're dancing. And why do you dance? Well dancing is a way to keep warm. (E2)

> I've come to learn that unless it's really really fantastic, something really awe-inspiring ... it has to be an active activity. Even if it's 0 degrees or -2 degrees, you don't want to be standing. So, there's movement and things to keep them busy, there's a way to keep it going. (E5)

Festival organizers also discussed the essential role of heated spaces for keeping warm:

> That is something that is very unique to us and to a winter event I would say, is that things have to be indoors and heated, otherwise people don't show up. (W1)

> There's far more challenges in winter than there is for summer. Like I can have people have hypothermia, I can have people get frostbite, so creating and having warming spaces [is essential]. (E5)

Spells of warmer weather in winter can address concerns around comfort, but also compromise festival activities:

> We love it when it's warm, the sun's shining, but at the same time, all of a sudden, the snow is soft, then it's mushy, then it freezes, then it becomes ice. So for patrons, it's a real concern, like how can we keep all those trails ... safe to navigate. (E2)

> We have had to close the rink as well if it's too warm, so it starts to create dips and holes in the ice surface, and it's again another safety issue that we have actually had to close the rink for a few days. (S3)

> There's often times melting periods which kind of, [I] wouldn't say ruins, but I guess … impacts … trying to think of a positive word, impacts the festival's ability to show the creative side, so the ice and the snow sculptures. (S4)

The warm/cold dyad captures a fundamental tension in winter cities: keeping warm in the cold is a major concern, but cold weather is also essential to winter celebration.

Indoor/outdoor. The indoor/outdoor dyad was referred to in conversations about utilization of space in winter cities. It is closely tied to warm/cold, with indoor space linked to the imperative of keeping warm. However, it also captures unique strategies and highlights the value of being outside in winter:

> What we wanted to do with [the festival] was kind of make something really special and intriguing enough that people came out. We have two tipis, and we have demonstrations from local business owners for fat biking and snow shoeing and other business owners have kick sleds, there's some snowdrift that happens in association with the school. … It's lots of fun and it's all about … people having a really good time outside in the middle of winter. (S6)

> You know, when the Forks will do a DJ that's on the ice with an ice bar and there's fire pits, and you're hanging out on the river in the middle of winter at night, there's a DJ playing, but you're outside. Those are like, amazing experiences. I love that kind of thing; for me that embodies winter. (W3)

To balance outdoor experiences with comfort and safety during cold weather, it is often necessary to *provide* access to indoor spaces, or to create temporary "in between" spaces that are neither fully indoors nor fully outdoors:

> Let's be outside but inside this temporary structure, create something that's unique. (E2)

> We kind of look at it that day, it was -12, we had a little bit of a breeze, so it felt about -18, so it was a little bit chilly, but inside the tent it was a lot better, and the artists didn't have a problem, we had heaters set up on stage for the artists. (E4)

Such "in between" spaces are not limited to festivals. Winter patios alter outdoor space to make it more comfortable, and are particularly encouraged in Edmonton, which is "building a 4-season patio culture" (E1). Participants also referenced warming huts, which provide respite from cold conditions along trails in Saskatoon and Winnipeg. While embracing winter necessarily entails engaging with the outdoors, indoor and "in between" spaces also have value, and are used strategically to support winter activities.

Light/dark. Participants emphasized that the long, dark nights characteristic of northern cities in winter create possibilities for innovative lighting. All winter festivals make use of artificial light, for example, to illuminate walking trails, or attractions such as snow and ice sculptures. In Edmonton, Flying Canoë Volant includes artistic light installations which use the snow as a canvas (see Figures 1 and 2):

> … this is Edmonton in winter. And the magic of light. And I say we celebrate everything that's great about a long winter's night. Because there's a lot of long winter's nights and it's just, how do we create something that is vibrant and interesting, down in a municipal park at the bottom of a ravine, in the dead of night? (E2)

Figure 1: Snow as canvas at Edmonton's Flying Canoë Volant festival.
SOURCE: Damian Collins.

Figure 2: Illuminated tipis at Flying Canoë Volant.
SOURCE: Damian Collins.

In Winnipeg, The Forks is giving increasing consideration to the lighting of their skating trails to increase usage (W4). Saskatoon has also seen investment in lights, to create eye-catching displays throughout winter:

> [The City] did inject some funding into the decorative lighting program this year, … which is good because those are the lighting fixtures that go on poles every season. Trying to bring them [lights] more into winter than just Christmas. (S2)

A related point is the dualism of long, dark nights and bright, sunny days. All three cities experience a high number of sunny days throughout winter, creating beauty and uniqueness:

> So, to me it's those types of experiences [that embody winter], the super-cold but super-sunny day, but you're out snowshoeing and the crunch of the snow, those are the things that I love, I love the shift in terms of just the difference in vibe in winter, I love everything about it. (W3)

The light/dark dyad encompasses practices that take advantage of winter's long dark nights through creative lighting, and its short but often sunny days through outdoor recreation.

In summary, winter city planners and organizers in all three study sites navigated fundamental tensions in convening celebrations of winter. In the process, these placemaking activities articulated specific meanings invested in the winter city; namely, a strong imperative to embrace the unique materiality that winter brings, which was itself construed as a celebratory act of authentic community building. In the discussion that follows we examine this claim in relation to recent arguments regarding festivals as placemaking activities and the complexities of winter cities as weather places.

Discussion

Our study highlights the constitutive role of weather in shaping place, while revealing the agentic ways in which communities act towards and with weather. The material effects of winter on the environment (e.g., low temperatures, snow and ice, darkness) create challenges for urban life, but also opportunities for celebration and community building. These opportunities are realized through placemaking practices that carefully and intentionally craft positive experiences of weather place, and in so doing encourage a shift in public attitudes and behaviours: "to shy away from 'it's cold so we don't go outside.' That is not our city. We embrace winter here." (W2). Indeed, participants from all three cities identified an *imperative* to challenge negative outlooks towards their respective place-in-winter, recalling a foundational principle of the Winter Cities Movement.

Festivals emerged as central placemaking activities in Canadian prairie cities, serving to activate public space, showcase elements of cultural history, and provide a focal point for collective celebration. These roles evoke the historic significance of festivals as themed public celebrations anchored in community values and identity. They illustrate that not all contemporary festivals are co-opted as tools of economic development and inauthentic place marketing, or otherwise reduced to instrumentalist ends (Getz 2010). Indeed, winter festivals were framed by participants as vehicles for articulating a positive and authentic relationship between local identity, weather, and place. In Edmonton, for example, Flying Canoë Volant tells a story about French Canadian folklore and "the magic of light" in a unique winter setting: "a municipal park at the bottom of a ravine, in the dead of night" (E2). In this respect, winter festivals can themselves be seen as (temporary, site-specific) manifestations of weather places.

The work of celebrating winter was not a simple task of reframing winter weather as "positive" or "good." Rather, participants recognized that cold and dark conditions in outdoor environments presented both challenges and opportunities. This is a central claim of the Winter Cities Movement, but one that is easily lost sight of when diverse winter conditions are framed solely as obstacles to using public space (see Larsson and Chapman 2020). In the first instance, participants emphasized celebrating the positive conditions that winter brings, particularly fresh snow and sunshine, while managing negatives such as icy terrain. Critically, they also went beyond this, acknowledging that challenges and opportunities are often interconnected in what we identify as dyads. Navigating these dyads was central to the work of winter city planners and event organizers. In terms of warm/cold, experiencing cold weather was part of celebrating winter, but needed to be paired with ways to keep warm. With respect to indoor/outdoor, being outside in winter was valued and prioritized, but access to indoor heated space was necessary for

the success and safety of festivals. Finally, regarding light/dark, long winter's nights were a valuable opportunity to build lighting displays that would not be as effective in other places or times; darkness enabled creative lighting and was an opportunity to be seized.

These findings add nuance to understandings of the Winter Cities Movement. Generally speaking, its proponents have understood indoor and outdoor spaces as separate, and have problematized reliance on the former, while extolling the virtues of the latter (e.g., Davies 2015). For this reason, there is an emphasis on creating opportunities to experience winter weather, an act that can be interpreted as a "rebellion against modernity—rejecting the idea of living in an artificial climate (with heating and air conditioning)" (Butts and Adams 2020, 10). However, creating successful outdoor public spaces in winter cities necessitates access to some form of shelter—whether permanent structures, heated tents at festivals, or microclimates created through climate sensitive design. Indoor and outdoor spaces do not exist solely in opposition to each other, and both are required for the success of a winter city. This underscores Pressman's foundational recommendation that winter cities "provid[e] residents with a choice between safe, warm indoor space and comfortable, climate-considerate outdoor space" (Stout et al. 2018, 5).

Conclusion

The materialities, meanings, and practices of winter cities are profoundly (indeed, definitively) shaped by the weather of their "longest season" (E2). Our participants were determined to overcome negative attitudes towards winter in their respective cities, and to foster collective pride in, and experience of, the opportunities and beauty that winter offers. Achieving this goal centred on promoting engagement with outdoor public space, particularly via recreation and winter-themed festivals. This could not be achieved through passive acceptance of winter weather conditions, but required active placemaking.

We identified winter festivals as central placemaking practices; they harness and creatively redeploy inherent tensions in winter cities in order to tell authentic stories about weather, place, and culture. This is not to say, of course, that winter festivals are not also woven into place marketing strategies, or that they are devoid of exclusionary dynamics; indeed, future research in this area could examine *who* such festivals engage, and whose quality of life they promote. However, in our three case study cities, winter festivals were bespoke events primarily concerned with facilitating community celebration, rather than mass-produced events "devoid of any real connections with place" (Quinn 2005, 928).

The narrative of winter cities as distinct, celebratory weather places stands in stark contrast to understandings of winter cities as placeless (see Davies 2015), articulating instead a positive vision of place anchored in communities embracing the opportunities presented by winter. It is also a reminder that weather is always necessarily contributing to the social meanings and symbolic and functional properties that define and distinguish places (see Quesnot and Roche 2015). We do not simply dwell within places and passively experience weather; rather, the materiality, meanings, and practices of place are necessarily constructed *with* weather. Through placemaking practices—such as winter festivals—we inhabit weathered places. In this regard, the case studies documented above illustrate the co-constitution of weather, people, and place on the Canadian prairies.

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