



NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Trends | Processes | Consequences | Policy Interventions

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Halifax | Montréal | Toronto | Winnipeg | Calgary | Vancouver

Two key national income trends — the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the progressively smaller middle-income group — have major social implications at the neighbourhood level that we are only beginning to identify, understand, and explain.

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Research Partnership

Scholars around the world have documented increased income polarization and ethno-cultural divides in large cities. These trends are known in the research literature as that of divided cities, dual cities, polarized cities, and the like.

Though many of the trends are global, they play out at the local level. Can growing socio-economic and ethno-cultural divides be mitigated? Can we find ways to promote a society in which all have fairer access to the opportunities and benefits that cities and neighbourhoods provide?

Thanks to a seven-year grant of \$2.5 million from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, together with support from the University of Toronto and partner organizations, the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership is seeking answers to these questions.

Focus of the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership

Our partnership is specifically examining inequality, diversity, and change at the neighbourhood level in Canada's metropolitan areas, with an in-depth focus on Halifax, Montréal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver, where local research teams will carry out city-specific studies. We are identifying trends and seeking to explain the processes causing the trends, as well as the consequences and their implications for public policies and programs. We will investigate how these trends and processes relate to segregation and disadvantage arising from age, gender, race, ethnicity, Aboriginal identity, and immigration status.

We will identify both broad public policies and specific local actions that may help mitigate the causes and consequences of socio-spatial segregation and disadvantage.

How inequality affects cities

Although inequality is not solely an urban problem, wealth and poverty tend to be concentrated in cities, where reactions to inequality have been expressed in demonstrations and outbursts of violence. Riots in England in 2011 and in Paris in 2005 were triggered, at least in part, by problems of inequality and unequal access to opportunities.

More research is needed on how inequality affects different cities in different ways. What factors accelerate or slow down the trend towards inequality, or even prevent it from occurring? Can successful interventions be used elsewhere to achieve the same results?

Research questions

In our analysis of socio-spatial change in urban areas, we are seeking answers to questions about: the nature and causes of neighbourhood restructuring trends and processes, both social and physical; the human and urban consequences of socio-spatial income inequality and polarization; policy and program responses (or the lack of them) at all levels of government; and the development of new or more effective policies and programs.

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Why look at neighbourhoods?

Researchers and policy makers agree that neighbourhoods shape people's routines and quality of daily life, affect access to services, and influence overall well-being. For example, living in a poor neighbourhood can reduce an individual's opportunities to secure a quality education, find employment, or gain access to needed services.

Although we know that the negative consequences of inequality and polarization are concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, we need to better understand how broad socio-economic trends are affecting neighbourhoods, how different neighbourhoods affect the lives of the people who live in them, and how public policies reinforce or reduce inequalities and access to opportunities at neighbourhood and city-wide levels. Improved knowledge in these areas can help inform public debate about these important trends and improve policy and program responses.

Researching neighbourhood trends in six Canadian metropolitan areas

The Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership builds on a multi-year study that identified and mapped trends in neighbourhood inequality in Toronto over 35 years. *The Three Cities in Toronto*, a report that came out of that research, has been extensively discussed in the media, universities, government, and community agencies.

Our current research in Halifax, Montréal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver is the first major study of these trends across Canada and one of the few studies in any country to cover a 40-year period.

We will compare the six Canadian cities with one another and with comparable American and European cities to learn how inequality is aggravated or lessened by the local economy, geography, history, public policies, and social structures within each urban region. An important part of this research is to identify policies and programs that reduce the negative effects of inequality.

Sharing the findings and encouraging debate

In addition to publishing findings in academic journals and books, our research partnership will engage policy makers and the public through media briefings and broadcasts, community research days and forums, and active local neighbourhood research networks.

Building partnerships for change

It takes the knowledge and skills of a diverse team to define important and socially relevant research agendas. Our research partnership includes Canadian and international scholars from geography, social work, political science, sociology, planning, economics, criminology, and education. Many public, private, and non-profit partners are helping us plan, implement, and share the research.

In addition, local advisory networks of policy makers and community organizations will provide input on specific city studies, engage community residents, give feedback on findings, and inform stakeholders in all six urban regions.

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Research Management

The Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, together with support from the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and many partner organizations and universities in Halifax, Montréal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver.

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