

Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership

www.NeighbourhoodChange.ca

Experiences and Perceptions of Income Polarization in Calgary

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1. Rationale & Potential Policy Relevance

This project will examine the experiences and perceptions of income polarization in Calgary, focusing on the neighbourhoods of the highest and lowest income earners in Calgary. (Two sets of ten Census tracts, impoverished and high income, respectively, will be selected—see research design). While our NCRP quantitative and mapping analyses have provided an illuminating picture of the spatial manifestation of changing income distributions, they do not convey the human toll of such changes. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of declining (or increasing) material well-being is critical to any policy initiative seeking to ameliorate the expanding gap between rich and poor, yet the social experiences and perceptions of increasing polarization are not well understood. Particularly in a city like Calgary, where rapid growth is often assumed to benefit all, it is critical to compare and contrast the diverse social experiences and perceptions of increasing income polarization. This project will provide an important “experiential” complement to Townshend’s objective work on neighbourhood change typologies.

One of our community partners, Vibrant Communities Calgary, has recently taken over the lead role of implementing the Calgary poverty reduction strategy. This research will provide insights into both poverty reduction needs in declining neighbourhoods as well as perceptions of poverty in well-to-do neighbourhoods—perceptions that frequently represent a barrier to effective policy responses. A better understanding of the implications of polarization for social cohesion, economic integration, equality of opportunity, and quality of life will help to identify key dimensions of appropriate policy responses.

2. Research Questions

What are residents’ experiences and perceptions of income and social change *within their own* neighbourhoods *as well as* their perceptions of income and social change *in the opposite set* of 10 tracts, specifically with regard to:

- changes in social relations
- changes in social conditions
- changes in housing conditions (especially rental)
- changes in housing opportunities (especially rental)
- changes in employment opportunities
- changes in accessibility to employment and other opportunities

In other words, this study will investigate respondents’ experiences of income and social change in their own neighbourhoods as well as their perceptions of income and social change in the neighbourhoods of the “Other.”

3. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions

This research project directly aligns with two of the core NCRP research questions:

- 1) The consequences of urban spatial inequality: What are the implications for economic integration,

social cohesion, equity, and quality of life for all city residents?

- 2) Policies and programs: What policy responses and program options effectively address the consequences of urban inequality.

Additionally, this project addresses the following questions identified by the Rental Housing Working Group:

- 1) What are the key problems in the existing rental housing market?
- 2) How do we define these problems?
- 3) What socio-economic and ethno-cultural groups are most affected?
- 4) How and why did these problems evolve and why in their locations?
- 5) What other policies might be tried?

4. Research Design & Methods (outline of specific tasks)

This project follows a multi-stage mixed-methods design.

- 1) Two sets of 10 census tracts will be selected. The first set will be tracts that are impoverished and experiencing deepening impoverishment, drawn from within the lowest quintile of CT average personal incomes in Calgary and *simultaneously* experiencing a decrease of incomes of 10% relative to the CMA average (i.e. simultaneously low income and City 3). The second set will be tracts within the highest quintile of CT average personal incomes in Calgary and simultaneously experiencing an increase of incomes of 10% relative to the CMA average (i.e. simultaneously high income and City 1). Drawing upon data and maps already produced by the NCRP team (Maaranen) and the existing data sets used to identify the social characteristics of the Three Cities in Calgary (Townshend et. al.), we will map these areas to define the study area.
- 2) Using Census data map changes in the spatial distribution and average cost of rental housing, in the 20 selected CTs.
- 3) Using City of Calgary data map the spatial distribution of legal and illegal secondary suite renters (the City of Calgary has collected these data; locatable by neighbourhood); using City of Calgary data map changes in property values.
- 4) Survey a sample of residents in selected neighbourhoods to determine respondents' experiences of income and social change in their own neighbourhoods as well as their perceptions of income and social change in the neighbourhoods of the "Other."
- 5) Based on survey responses and contacts provided by our community partners, VCC and FCC, conduct in-depth interviews with select residents, community association leaders, other neighbourhood organization leaders, city planners, and political leaders.
- 6) Compare responses from residents of the two sets of CTs (neighbourhoods of highest and lowest income earners), as well as compare responses with empirical trends identified through the quantitative data.

5. Role of Community Partners

Our community partners, Vibrant Communities Calgary and the Federation of Calgary Communities, have pledged their support for this project and can put us in contact with a diverse range of people in the 20 selected CTs. FCC has also volunteered office space for our research team.

6. Role of Students / Research Assistants and Contributions to Training

We will employ a graduate research assistant to collect and analyze much of this data. The person we have in mind is highly competent, currently completing an after-degree in Urban Studies and now applying for admission to the M.A. program in Geography. He already has substantial expertise in qualitative methods, particularly content and discourse analysis, and basic familiarity with statistics and GIS. We will provide additional training in quantitative methods and GIS, as needed. He will be a co-author of the written

documents issuing from this research.

7. Schedule (timeline of research tasks, including deliverables submission dates)

- July-December 2015: review relevant literature and formulate specific interview questions; select two sets of 10 CTs; obtain ethics approval
- January-March 2016: complete mapping and analysis of mapped data
- April-December 2016: conduct in-depth interviews and survey research
- January-July 2017: analyze all qualitative data; write journal article and working paper

8. Outcomes / Deliverables

Academic deliverable: (1) a journal article focusing on respondents' experiences of income and social change in their own neighbourhoods as well as their perceptions of income and social change in the neighbourhoods of the "Other." Residents' versus non-residents' perceptions of change in given neighbourhoods will be contrasted and analyzed. (2) a master's thesis informed by this research.

Community deliverable: NCRP will assist with production of an 'accessible' summary; also, research team will produce a more extensive summary 'working paper' on experiences and perceptions of income and social change in the two sets of 10 CTs, addressing possible educational and policy implications.

9. Budget Explanation

The largest component of this project will be labour: much of this research will rely on a competent research assistant. Additional costs include office space for the research assistant (provided by our community partner, the Federation of Calgary Communities) and use of a GIS lab (both provided by the University of Calgary). The latter costs are covered as in-kind contributions. Other costs include travel expenses of the RA, a digital voice recorder, and the cost of printing and postage for questionnaires (only for those who cannot respond to an online survey—this group may be substantial in low income CTs).

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Sent to the NCRP's Research Advisory Board for comment: date _____ deadline: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Funding approved by the NCRP's Board: \$ _____ date _____ |

Proposal funded by the Board, 23 March 2015



\$18,600.

SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
Personnel costs				
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Undergraduate *				
Masters *	620 hours of research assistance @ \$25/hr plus 10.04% benefits (University of Calgary standard rate) = \$17,056.20	\$9000 RA office space (FCC in- kind); \$4000 GIS lab use (U of C in-kind)	Federation of Calgary Communities (FCC); Department of Geography, University of Calgary	\$30,056.20
Doctorate *				
Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Postdoctoral				
Other				
Travel and subsistence costs				
Applicant/Team member(s)				
Canadian travel	0			0
Foreign travel	0			0
Students				
Canadian travel	\$400			\$400
Foreign travel	0			0
Other expenses				
Non-disposable equipment (specify)				
Digital voice recorder and batteries	\$140			\$140
Survey research (printed questionnaires and postage for those who do not go online)	\$950			\$950
Other expenses (specify)				
Total	\$18,566.20	\$13,000.00		\$31,566.20

* Hourly rates for students: