The role of community-based organizations in neighbourhood collective agency

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Overview

- Our questions

- Project activities

- Defining Neighbourhood Collective Agency

- What neighbourhood factors influence collective agency?

- How do community-based organizations promote it in their work?

- Directions for future research

Questions

- How is collective agency **defined and measured** in the literature?

- What **neighbourhood factors** influence it?

- What is the **role of community-based organizations** in neighbourhood collective agency?

- What agency-promoting **practices** do CBOs employ?

- What **indicators** can identify when agency is flourishing?

NCA Project Activities

- Initiated by Toronto Neighbourhood Centres

- Collective efficacy working group

- Scoping review

- Interviews and focus groups
  - 3 community based organizations
  - Managers, front-line workers, community members
  - How do organizations influence NCA? How do they know when that work is successful?
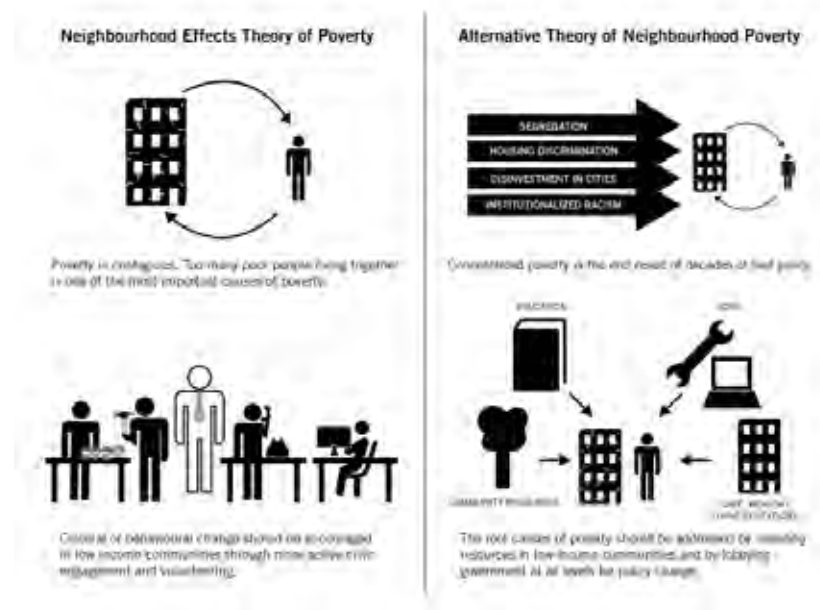
Defining NCA

Where we began:

Sampson & Earls (1997): "Collective Efficacy"

- "Informal social controls under social norms of trust"
- Shared expectations
- Mutual engagement

Defining NCA

- ## Neighbourhood effects (Galster)
  - "Where you live affects your life chances"
- ## Critiques of neighbourhood effects
  - Slater, 2014: "Your life chances affect where you live"
  - Mayer: "Engagement" as neoliberal governance
  - Cowen & Parlette, 2011:

    Disregards

    structural

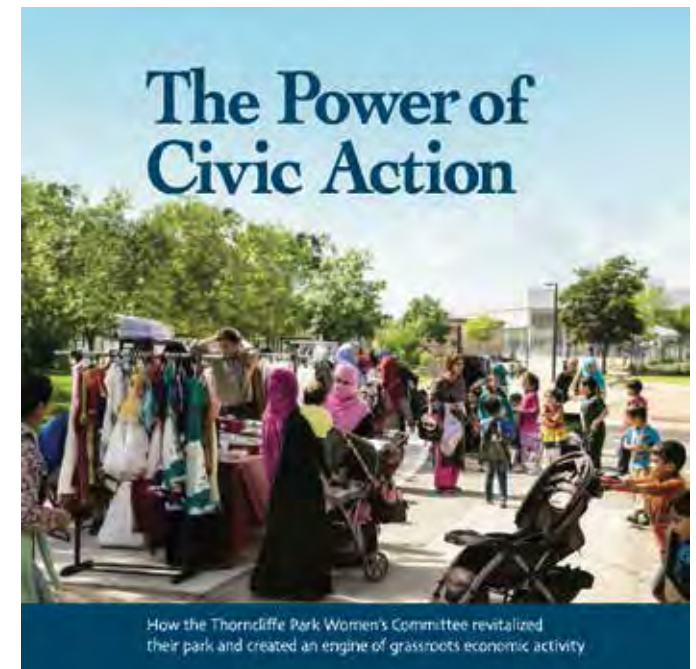   drivers

Defining NCA

Where we ended up:

Neighbourhood Collective Agency

Residents' desire and capacity to work together to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice in their neighbourhood.
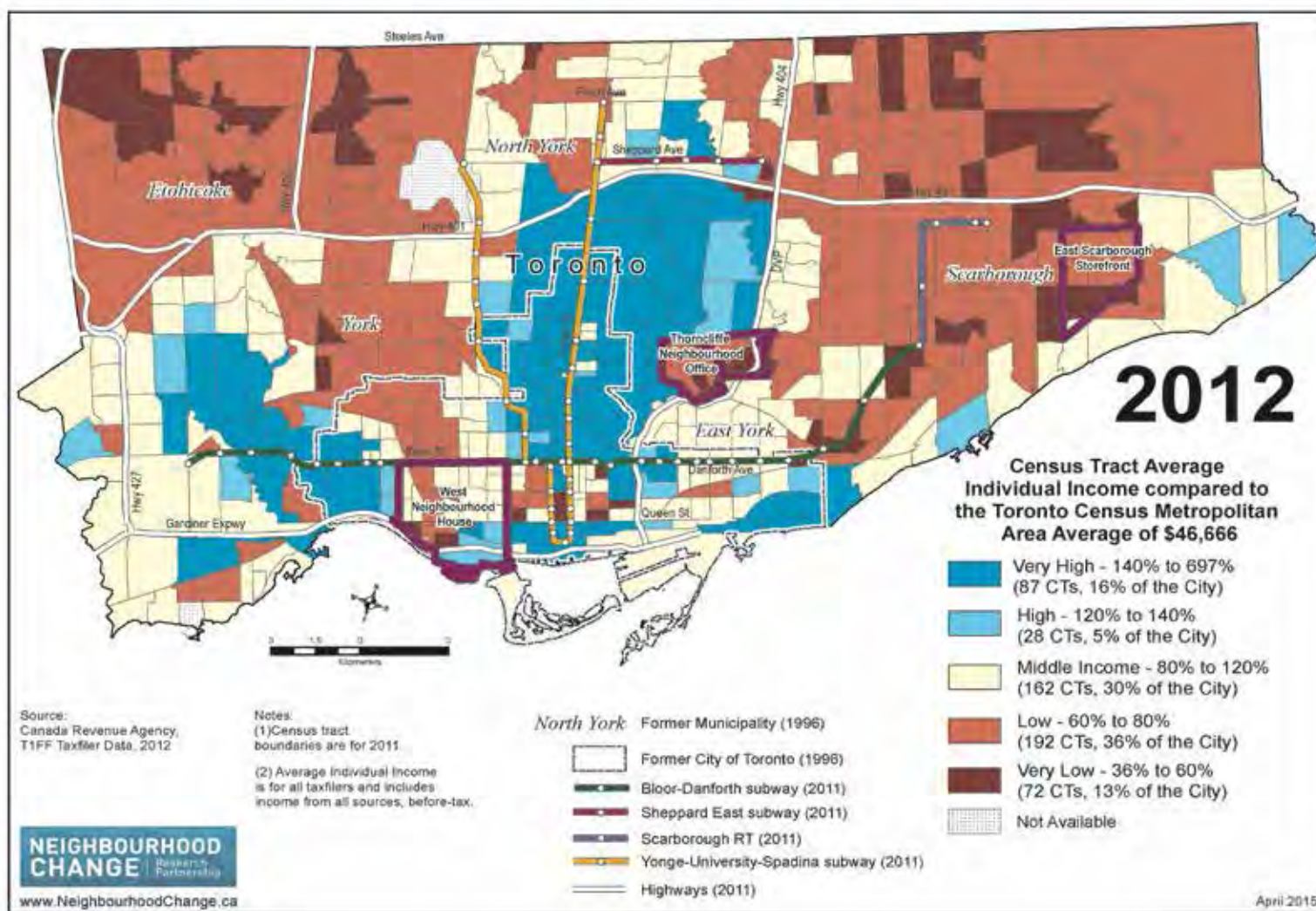
A **potential** that can lead to action – the "magic"

Defining NCA

- Originates with **residents**

- Rooted in **desire** (trust, attachment, cohesion)

- Depends on **capacity** (skills, resources)

- Manifest when residents **work together**

- Aims to **improve daily life**

- Promotes **equity and social justice**

- Based **in the neighbourhood**

The Power of Civic Action

How the Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee revitalized their park and created an engine of grassroots economic activity

Neighbourhood influences

Neighbourhood influences

	West Neighbourhood House	Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office	East Scarborough Storefront	Toronto
Catchment area pop. 2011	110,700	41,400	26,500	2,615,100
Organization characteristics				
Year established	1912	1985	2001	
Annual Budget (2013-14)	$10.9 million	$6.3 million	$1.4 million	
Locations	7	4	2	
Neighbourhood demographics				
Average income (% Toronto)	$44,488 (94%)	$27,755 (58%)	$29,444 (62%)	$47,476 (100%)
Poverty rate	29%	43%	33%	25%
Racialized	35%	76%	62%	46%
Immigrants	45%	67%	51%	49%

1. SOCIAL & STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

2. RESIDENT & HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

INCLINATION
TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

RESOURCES
FOR PARTICIPATION

3. NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT

DEMOGRAPHICS

RESOURCES

HISTORY & EVENTS

GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENT

4. NEIGHBOURHOOD SITES THAT MAY INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIVE AGENCY

STATE

CIVIL SOCIETY
(INFORMAL & FORMAL)

MARKET
(INFORMAL & FORMAL)

COMMUNITY-BASED
ORGANIZATIONS

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD COLLECTIVE AGENCY

DESIRE

CAPACITY

POTENTIAL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

INDICATORS OF NEIGHBOUR-HOOD COLLECTIVE AGENCY

6. COLLECTIVE ACTION

DECISION *Take action?*
   No   Yes

PROCESS OF ACTION

IMPACT

CBOs' Role in NCA

Community-based organizations influence NCA in all areas of their work

- Discursive (e.g. stories, terminology, frameworks)

- Services to individuals (e.g. counselling)

- Work with groups (e.g. adult day program)

- Intra-organizational (e.g policies, allocation of resources)

- Inter-organizational (e.g. neighbourhood and sectoral networks)

- Structural & systemic (e.g. policy advocacy)

CBOs' Role in NCA

Examples of CBO practices that promote NCA

Discursive: Employ critical analysis, egalitarian language

Individual: Treat service users as active participants, not passive recipients of service

Group: Foster connections across difference

Intra-organizational: Allocate space, staff time and resources to supporting resident initiatives

Inter-organizational: Speak out for equity and social justice in neighbourhood and sectoral networks

Structural and systemic: Release public statements

CBOs' role in NCA

Indicators to identify collective agency

- Success stories circulate in the neighbourhood

- Program participants feel ownership

- Meetings and events are well-attended

- Grassroots residents' groups approach CBOs for support and partnership

- CBO staff are active in and knowledgeable about neighbourhood networks

- Concrete evidence such as park improvements

Directions for future research

Neighbourhood ecologies of agency

– How do residents draw upon traditions of collective agency from their cultures of origin? How do they negotiate differences in approach?

How NCA is connected to action

– How does collective agency become action?

– What role can CBOs play in moving agency to action?

– What kinds of neighbourhood-based action have proven effective in addressing socio-spatial inequities?

– What funding and policy mechanisms are needed to support this work?

Thank you!

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