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
Neighbourhood influences
# Neighbourhood influences

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