

Community leadership and engagement after the mix: The transformation of Toronto's Regent Park

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Abstract

The CAD\$1 billion transformation of Toronto's Regent Park neighbourhood from Canada's largest public housing site to a mixed income community is likely to inform the next several decades of public housing redevelopment policy both nationally and internationally. This paper focuses on the process and impacts of large-scale redevelopment, in the context of attempts to build a physically and socially inclusive neighbourhood incorporating non-market and market housing in downtown Toronto. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 32 Regent Park community leaders and other key decision makers, the paper explores how resident engagement and leadership development opportunities impact redevelopment processes in mixed income initiatives. Results focus on three key emerging areas of both strength and concern: (1) efforts to build community alongside the redevelopment as an integral, evolving and place-specific strategy; (2) the impacts and challenges of both a strong institutional environment in Regent Park and a sense of weak institutional memory; and (3) formal and informal leadership and mentorship opportunities and their contribution towards the development of engagement and cohesion in Regent Park. The opportunity for low-income housing initiatives to support knowledge building and learning, preservation of institutional memory and local leadership development is significant in the context of examining physical and social redevelopment.

Keywords

engagement, mixed income, public housing, redevelopment, Regent Park

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Introduction

Regent Park was developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s as Canada's largest public housing site, and remains the largest site of

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public housing in Canada to this day. Located in downtown Toronto on 28 hectares, Regent Park was home to approximately 7500 low-income residents in 2005. Since 2006, Regent Park has been undergoing a CAD\$1 billion process of transformation from an exclusively low-income public housing community to a mixed income neighbourhood (Toronto Community Housing, 2012). Of the original 2083 non-market units managed by the local housing authority, Toronto Community Housing (TCH), 1800 will be replaced with new non-market units on site. On completion of redevelopment, the neighbourhood will also contain 5400 newly constructed market units and an additional 200 affordable housing units. This transformation is taking place through a complex web of partnerships between multiple levels of government, private-sector developers, non-profit agencies and community partners. It is also taking place at a time of changing government priorities. Regent Park was originally built with funds from the federal government; it has since transitioned from being managed through federal initiatives, to provincial initiatives, and most recently to the municipal government as a responsibility of the City of Toronto. In recent decades, funding for social housing has declined across the country, and the redevelopment of Regent Park in part represents an attempt to provide quality housing for low-income residents within a policy environment in which there are extensive restraints on public spending for social housing, limiting potential options.

The 15- to 20-year timeline of the revitalisation presents a challenge to understanding the impacts of the neighbourhood's transformation, in part because plans and processes are undergoing constant change, alongside the changing landscape.

This paper situates the redevelopment of Regent Park within the context of economic trends that have led to the increasing

valuation of central and inner city real estate. The City of Toronto is undergoing intensification in its downtown core, which includes Regent Park. Toronto's downtown area accounts for only 3% of the city's land area, yet currently represents one-third of the city's jobs, one-quarter of the tax base, and 240,000 residents (City of Toronto, 2015). The downtown area contains concentrations of financial services firms, healthcare and educational institutions, government, retail, and arts and cultural activities (City of Toronto, 2015). The primacy of downtown Toronto contributes to its increasing desirability as a place to live and work. Given the combination of declining government funding for social housing, and the increasing value of downtown Toronto real estate, the redevelopment of Regent Park, by means of leveraging its real estate assets, has become a plausible opportunity for revitalisation.

The redevelopment of Regent Park is premised on leveraging the economic value of downtown Toronto real estate in an attempt to provide more socially just outcomes for public housing residents. Regent Park's future is premised on redevelopment and social mix. However, at the same time, the Regent Park redevelopment is situated within the context of networks of residents, their interactions and their engagement in the redevelopment process. Taken together, the connection between low-income residents, the economic opportunity based on increasing land values and redevelopment, and the ways in which these factors converge, affects the landscape of neighbourhood and city-building in Toronto.

This paper is focused on the process and impacts of resident engagement and community leadership in large-scale redevelopment, based on research conducted with both residents and non-residents working and volunteering in leadership roles in Regent Park. Given the critical importance of

understanding both place-based and people-based outcomes associated with redevelopment of low-income neighbourhoods (Fraser and Kick, 2007), our research helps to elaborate on mechanisms for achieving improvements in both realms. Furthermore, our research suggests that resident engagement and leadership development opportunities play an integral role alongside the redevelopment process and towards the building of a mixed income community. These findings are a significant contribution towards acquiring a detailed and multi-faceted understanding of Regent Park's redevelopment, which is crucial to the conception of a framework for informing public housing redevelopment elsewhere, nationally and internationally.

Method

The paper draws on analysis from a total of 32 interviews conducted with adult community leaders¹ and professionals working and/or living in Regent Park, as well as other stakeholders involved in the revitalisation process. The interviews were conducted between March 2014 and April 2015 either at the TD Centre of Learning in Regent Park, at the interviewees' place of work, or at a local coffee shop or restaurant. Interviews were between 45 to 90 minutes in length and were digitally recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

To identify potential interviewees, we developed a database of community leaders by scanning national, print and online media, event listings and organisational websites. In identifying potential interviewees, we searched for community leaders who had done one or more of the following: (1) addressed the media or participated in a media interview with regard to change in Regent Park, (2) participated as a panelist or discussant in a Regent Park-related event or (3) worked either in a paid or unpaid (volunteer) position within the community

on behalf of a local organisation. We included both residents and non-residents as potential interviewees if they met the criteria above, in recognition that individuals from various organisations develop professional and personal investments in Regent Park's transition despite living elsewhere. We also recognise that the priorities and perceptions of residents and non-residents may differ. A process of snowball sampling was used to identify additional interviewees. The 27 community leaders interviewed included 12 residents and one former resident (nine of whom were current non-market housing residents in Regent Park), in addition to 14 non-resident leaders, representing a range of community agencies, businesses and non-profit organisations operating within Regent Park.

An additional five interviews were conducted with individuals involved in the planning and redevelopment process throughout its history, including decision makers at the City, housing authority and private developer, and a municipal politician. The purpose of these interviews was to provide context to our understanding of how redevelopment took place, to understand the guidelines behind the initial consultation process, and to understand the ways in which resident engagement priorities shifted throughout the process. Much of this information does not appear to be captured in existing documentation, and therefore this process was an important component of understanding how leadership and engagement issues were addressed.

Background

The story of Regent Park has been well documented elsewhere (August, 2014a; Gladki, 2013; James, 2010; Purdy, 2004). The neighbourhood's history and narrative is characterised by its shift from an inner city slum in the 1940s, to an innovative new Garden City community in the 1950s. Subsequent to the

deterioration of those buildings, the area experienced a shift in residential makeup from predominantly working poor to predominantly those on social assistance, alongside a shift in demographic and ethnic makeup. The image and narrative of Regent Park transitioned from one of opportunity and innovation in the 1950s to one of decline, stigma and isolation by the 1990s. In the mid-1990s, a group of community residents began to meet with representatives from government and local organisations to develop a pilot project focused on the redevelopment of 163 units in the northeast corner of the neighbourhood. This group worked together to eventually recommend the wholesale redevelopment of the neighbourhood (interview, former resident, 6 March 2014). In 2005, this recommendation was accepted by the City of Toronto, and Phase 1 of the project began in 2006.

As of February 2016, 1271 households moved out of their old homes to make way for redevelopment – of these, 47% returned to new housing in Regent Park, 32% are waiting to return, 11% moved out of TCH and 10% waived their right to return (Toronto Community Housing, 2016).

The process of planning and revitalisation in Regent Park was designed to incorporate leading practices in terms of community engagement and resident participation (Gladki, 2013; Micallef, 2013). The planning process was undertaken on a site- and place-specific basis rather than as part of a preconceived citywide or nationwide strategy; however it now serves as a model for local, national and international study and comparison. Furthermore, while the redevelopment is focused on poverty deconcentration through the creation of a mixed income neighbourhood, there is no concurrent emphasis on population dispersal or overall reduction of public housing units as has been the case in Housing Opportunities for People

Everywhere (HOPE VI) redevelopments in the USA (Smith, 2013). Poverty deconcentration in Regent Park is instead being pursued through a strategy of densification by means of a nearly fourfold increase in the number of residential units in the area.

There exists a growing body of case study research on contemporary Regent Park (August, 2014a; Dunn, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Kelly, 2013; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009; Leahy et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2013). To date, research has focused on declining government funds and the de-prioritisation of social housing alongside increasing inequality and socio-economic polarisation, misguided theories on building mixed income communities in traditionally low-income neighbourhoods and the everyday lived experiences of public housing residents.

Kipfer and Petrunia (2009) and James (2010) suggest that government intervention in the neighbourhood, spurred on by an entrepreneurial state attempting to capitalise on market rents, is part of a larger continuing trend of moving government support away from public housing. Indeed, some argue that the redevelopment process represents a form of state-led gentrification (August, 2014a; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009). Recent studies focus on the tension between support for place destigmatisation (Dunn, 2012) and alternately, the 'benefits of concentrated poverty' (August, 2014a). August (2014a: 1330) articulates the challenges of neighbourhood transformation for low-income residents, asserting that 'the causes of advanced marginalization and enduring inequality that have daily impacts on the lives of public housing tenants' cannot be addressed through the process of rebuilding. Criminologists studying neighbourhood youth identified strong levels of collective efficacy in Regent Park pre-revitalisation, and question whether the disruption of networks as a result of relocation and

rebuilding might unintentionally lead to increased crime in the neighbourhood (Thompson et al., 2013). Existing literature highlights a lack of agreement amongst residents, experts and others as to whether the development of a mixed income neighbourhood will preserve or reproduce the positive attributes of Regent Park for low-income residents, or alternatively, exacerbate inequalities and lead to increased criminal activity in a fractured neighbourhood. Pasotti (personal communication, 7 June 2016) refers to critical scholarship as highlighting ‘pockets of discontent’ amongst residents and scholars alike.

Areas of scholarly consensus appear to centre around the maintenance of three positive attributes for low-income residents of Regent Park: (1) the need to preserve the sense of neighbourhood cohesion that existed before the redevelopment; (2) the value of non-profit services and organisations in supporting the quality of life for residents and (3) benefits derived from the central, downtown location of Regent Park in terms of access to transportation, services, employment and educational facilities. Additionally, there is generally agreement that the current model of social housing provision in Toronto, and indeed nationally, inadequately addresses population needs based on increasing socio-spatial polarisation across major Canadian cities (Hulchanski, 2010).

The remainder of this paper is divided into three sections. First, we discuss the current state of knowledge related to community-building initiatives as outcomes of large-scale redevelopment of public housing sites, with a particular emphasis on North American examples. Second, we focus our research results on three key emerging areas of both strength and concern with respect to redeveloping Regent Park as a mixed income community: (1) efforts to develop socially oriented opportunities

alongside the physical redevelopment as an integral, evolving and place-specific strategy; (2) the impacts and challenges of both a strong institutional environment in Regent Park and a sense of weak institutional memory; and (3) formal and informal leadership and mentorship opportunities and their contribution towards the development of engagement and cohesion in Regent Park. Finally, we examine the implications of these findings in the context of continued redevelopment of public housing sites. We attempt to identify whether privileging community engagement and leadership throughout the redevelopment process may support greater success in the development of mixed income communities.

Large-scale public housing redevelopment and community-building

A number of scholars have explored the redevelopment of Regent Park situated within a larger economic trend in the Canadian welfare model in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which provincial and local government assumed the responsibility for housing that was previously held by the federal government (August, 2008; James, 2010; Kelly, 2013; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009). This trend has placed provincial and local governments under significant economic strain, driving Canadian cities to turn towards ‘entrepreneurial’ approaches to housing including public-private partnerships (August, 2008). This is particularly true in the case of Toronto, which has by far the longest waiting list for social housing in Canada with nearly 100,000 households (Housing Connections, 2016), adding pressure to not only maintain existing housing stock but also build new units to meet growing need.

In addition to the economic pressures that it strives to mitigate, the underlying

rationale for socially mixed housing, which may refer to housing that includes a range of tenure types and/or income levels, is predicated on the notion that high concentrations of poverty contribute to the social and economic isolation of residents. In theory, social mix is assumed to result in improved socio-economic outcomes for low-income residents through: sharing of information and resources between people of different socio-economic status; a stronger sense of social control through greater accountability among community members; positive behaviour change through role modelling and mentorship between people of different socio-economic status; and higher quality local services and infrastructure through stronger collective efficacy (Joseph et al., 2007). In addition to purported social benefits, the development of socially mixed neighbourhoods is viewed as an opportunity to achieve place-based goals such as revitalising the built environment and securing new commercial investments (Fraser and Kick, 2007).

The idea of social mix has guided housing policy in the USA, UK, Australia, the Netherlands, France and other European countries over the past two decades through a variety of mechanisms including voucher programmes and homeownership programmes (Fraser et al., 2013b). The case of Regent Park most closely resembles HOPE VI developments in the USA, where local housing authorities work with private developers to rebuild distressed social housing sites as mixed income communities. This model has also gained traction in the UK and Australia in similar contexts of privatisation and downloading of welfare (Darcy, 2010; Fraser et al., 2013b). Although they share a similar general model, there are substantial variations both within and between countries in terms of the goals and principles of socially mixed neighbourhoods, as well as the operationalisation of the policy in terms

of the balance of tenure type and income levels, relocation and return of original tenants, and spatial integration of different unit types (Fraser and Kick, 2007; Fraser et al., 2013a; Levy et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2013).

In spite of the methodological challenges of assessing such heterogeneous programmes and policies, reviews of evidence have been conducted in the USA (Joseph, 2006; Levy et al., 2013), UK (Kleinhans and Van Ham, 2013; Sautkina et al., 2012), the Netherlands (Kleinhans, 2004) and Australia (Morris et al., 2012). These reviews generally agree that socially mixed housing policy can lead to significant place-based improvements such as new neighbourhood amenities and improved quality of housing. However, they also find little indication that social mix has resulted in social benefits for low-income residents, such as stronger social networks or behaviour change through role modelling. The lack of demonstrable social benefits is perhaps unsurprising given that programmes such as HOPE VI have often failed to articulate clear long-term expectations and priorities (Fraser et al., 2013a; Joseph, 2006; Kearns et al., 2013). Moreover, this rationale implicitly and incorrectly suggests that low-income residents are the primary beneficiaries of social mix (DeFilippis and Fraser, 2010; Levy et al., 2013).

A key reason why the theorised relationship between social mix and social benefits has not been realised is that in most cases, there is very little substantive mixing or interaction between community members of different socio-economic backgrounds. Several studies suggest that new and old residents participate unevenly in social and civic activities, and their interactions in these activities are generally not substantive enough to generate significant outcomes (Chaskin and Joseph, 2010; Kleit, 2005; Tach, 2009). Others have found that formal structures, such as building management

rules or neighbourhood governance structures, can effectively discourage social interaction between community members (Chaskin et al., 2012; Graves, 2011). Furthermore, some residents are simply not interested in creating strong social ties with one another because of different lifestyles and priorities (Arthurson, 2010; Chaskin and Joseph, 2011; Rose, 2004; Tach, 2009).

The existing evidence demonstrates that mixed income housing does not organically lead to the emergence of a mixed income 'community'. Chaskin and Joseph (2010: 327–328) suggest that part of the challenge relates to the fact that 'many urban dwellers are quite comfortable thinking about local community in essentially functional ways, about their membership in it as partial and contingent, and about their local relationships as largely casual and flexible'. This fleeting and relatively non-committal approach to community is further complicated in mixed income community settings.

Furthermore, several additional shortcomings in the rationale behind mixed income redevelopment have been identified. Contrary to the dominant assumptions about poverty concentration, support networks and social control have been found to be very strong in low-income communities prior to redevelopment (August, 2014a; Manzo et al., 2008). One study on the Regent Park community found that the disruption of social networks during the relocation process left residents feeling more vulnerable to violence (Thompson et al., 2013), a trend that has also been observed in mixed income communities in the USA (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010). Others have observed that residents of mixed income communities may experience antagonism or distrust from other community members of different socio-economic backgrounds (August, 2014b; Chaskin and Joseph, 2010; McCormick et al., 2012).

Others have proposed strategies for encouraging social interaction among

residents in order to achieve redevelopment goals focused on social mix. The existing evidence suggests that in order to create successful socially mixed communities and positive outcomes for all residents, investment in housing redevelopment should be coupled with investment in employment, education and social services (Joseph, 2006). Moreover, research has pointed to the critical importance of community empowerment and civic engagement, particularly privileging the role of low-income tenants (Chaskin and Joseph, 2010; Chaskin et al., 2012; Fraser and Nelson, 2008; Lucio and Wolfersteig, 2012). Levy et al. (2013) suggest that further research on resident participation can help highlight how socially mixed neighbourhoods can build a stronger sense of 'community' among residents and improve the likelihood of achieving positive social outcomes.

Community leadership and engagement in Regent Park: Strengths, concerns and opportunities

The case of Regent Park stands apart from many large-scale public housing redevelopment initiatives undertaken in the recent past, in large part because of the integration of socially oriented opportunities in redevelopment plans and an emphasis on building an inclusive mixed income community, in which the replacement of social housing on site is a key focus.

A key component of the redevelopment process was the creation of the Regent Park Social Development Plan (Toronto Community Housing (TCH), 2007). Developed through consultation with residents, agency staff and board members, local businesses, and local institutions such as schools, the Social Development Plan (SDP) focused on providing a 'guide to

building a successful, cohesive and inclusive community in Regent Park throughout the process of redevelopment and in the years that follow' (TCH, 2007: 2).

Acknowledging that without interventions, mixed income communities tend to divide based on differences in income, ethnicity and length of tenure, the SDP examines the context of redevelopment, assesses research on social inclusion referencing the neighbourhood effects thesis, and in turn, identifies strategies for facilitating social inclusion. The SDP prioritises community consultation, engagement and interaction. This recognition shapes 75 recommendations, emphasising the importance of formal and informal social and civic activities; structures for local governance; the role of local facilities and schools; employment and economic development; and strategies for managing change over time. The existence and emphasis of the SDP set the stage for community engagement and efforts to build an inclusive environment in Regent Park. Emphasis on achieving both place-based and people-based improvements associated with the redevelopment process are understood and underscored through the lens of both physical and social change in Regent Park.

Our research has identified three themes around which interviewees tended to coalesce with respect to their understanding of how community engagement was and continues to be entrenched in the redevelopment process. First, interviewees acknowledged the importance of their own connectedness in Regent Park before, during and after redevelopment. In particular, pre-existing relationships with other residents, non-profit organisations and TCH shaped the ways in which individuals and groups interacted with the redevelopment process, and also challenged the ways in which residents understood this process. Efforts to build community in the neighbourhood appear to

be both time- and place-specific, and part of an evolving process incorporating learning and change. Second, the sheer number, embeddedness and responsiveness of institutions in Regent Park represents a community strength, while at the same time, the planning and redevelopment process suffers from a lack of attention to institutional memory. Third, community initiatives focused on the formal and informal development of leadership skills appear to be an important precursor to participation in redevelopment initiatives, as well as an important component of perceived community engagement successes and failures.

Community-building as a learning process

Redevelopment in Regent Park was initiated by public housing residents, together with the support of representatives of provincial and municipal governments, and the housing agency. The earliest versions of redevelopment plans pre-date the 1995 start date that is frequently referred to in documentation (TCH, 2015). According to one interviewee, by 1995 after many discussions about redeveloping a small portion of the housing units, a group comprised of residents, government representatives and the housing authority began to work towards a plan that would see all of Regent Park redeveloped (Former resident, 6 March 2014).

Throughout interviews with senior leaders from organisations involved in the redevelopment, a consistent emphasis was placed on the need for community engagement and community building as an integral part of the redevelopment. Modelling the redevelopment based on cases from elsewhere was challenging as the most proximate examples of public housing redevelopment focused on appropriating space for market housing and dispersing public housing residents, such as in the case of Cabrini-Green in Chicago (Miller, 2008).

Both senior leadership and day-to-day management recognised that efforts to engage, inform and involve residents in the redevelopment process were critical to the neighbourhood. As one interviewee suggests: 'If you don't understand that community development is a central piece of redevelopment, you're doomed to fail, you're doomed to fail' (non-resident, 8 April 2015).

During the early stages of planning in Regent Park, over 2000 people attended community meetings, charrettes and kitchen table conversations. Through these interactions, residents contributed to the development of 12 principles that guided the redevelopment process, including 'involv[ing] the community in the process' (Gladki, 2013: 8). While Regent Park residents were served by a variety of social service agencies, TCH was not particularly consultative prior to the redevelopment process.

According to a senior TCH decision-maker, the emphasis on engaging residents was driven by three underlying goals:

There was an interest in finding a way – an organizational structure – that would engage tenants in those decision processes. Secondly, there was an interest in building community capacities ... so those communities could intervene in the civic realm. So that the housing company no longer had this intermediate role between the communities and the civic realm, but that the communities could actually engage much more directly in the activities of the neighbourhood, of the city itself ... And I guess in the third part, there was an interest in engaging tenants into ... action. (Non-resident, 18 March 2015)

TCH, together with a local consulting firm, devised a resident engagement strategy that included the hiring of community animators. Community animators lived in TCH housing in Regent Park and were trained and employed to support communication efforts (Public Interest Strategy & Communications,

2008). Regent Park is a culturally and linguistically diverse community, with 56 countries and 47 languages represented, and with 50% of households speaking a language other than English at home (City of Toronto, 2013). To mitigate the communication challenges posed by such a high degree of diversity, community animators were tasked with liaising between TCH and residents, as well as representing the perspectives of their respective cultural, ethnic and nationality-based groups living in Regent Park.

Interviewees suggested that animators played a crucial role in connecting residents to information and discussions regarding the redevelopment. TCH has continued to hire and work with community animators, including adults and youth. In interviews with current and former community animators, interviewees emphasised that working as animators helped them learn about the redevelopment process. Animators developed first-hand experience related to the challenges of effectively communicating between the seemingly powerful housing authority and often vulnerable public housing residents for whom the redevelopment contributed further to an already marginalised environment. Additionally, one challenge for animators was that their dual roles as both employee and resident led to a feeling of discomfort in sharing their opinions at public meetings, particularly if their opinions were contrary to what was being proposed by the housing authority.

Ensuring robust community engagement in Regent Park is not a static endeavour; a key feature of the redevelopment has been the ongoing improvement of the community engagement process. Changes have been implemented over the first ten years of the active redevelopment process based on input from community members and TCH's perception of missteps and potential to improve. According to one interviewee:

I think what we did learn at Regent ... was that there is no single model that works in each community ... you have to be able to ... work in linguistic groupings ... That there are some ethno-racial differences that are not barriers that come down overnight and you want to work with those communities quite distinctly. (Non-resident, 18 March 2015)

The engagement and consultation process in Regent Park has been adapted over time in response to learning on the part of TCH and also in response to community demands. The relocation process of public housing residents awaiting new housing is one of the most contentious parts of the redevelopment. Based on predominantly negative feedback gathered during consultations with community members and interactions between residents and staff of TCH, amendments were made in an attempt to reduce some of the stress of the relocation process. Significantly, all relocation moves now take place outside of the school year to ease the transition for families with children.

As redevelopment continues, adaptations to the ways in which residents communicate with one another, as well as with the housing authority, are indicative of attempts to ensure that resident engagement goals are honoured and met. In interviews, residents addressed the ways in which they have improved upon their approach to communicating with organisations and city officials by using newly acquired knowledge and experience to advocate for their needs more effectively. Still, others described a sense of continued frustration because of their perceived lack of voice in the process, particularly as subsequent planned phases of the redevelopment underwent changes to building form, density and changes to the proportion of non-market to market residences.

Given the lengthy timeline of the redevelopment process, now in its second decade, the opportunity to review and adapt

processes and learn from experience is significant, both for Regent Park and more broadly for redevelopment initiatives in Toronto and elsewhere.

Strong institutions and weak institutional memory

Regent Park is characterised by the presence of a large number of government and non-profit organisations. Given the area's decades-long history and concentration of households living in poverty, and also higher than average proportion of residents who are youth, elderly, disabled, recent immigrants and single parents, it is unsurprising that a multitude of agencies are located in the neighbourhood to help serve the population. The depth and breadth of local institutions – which include a City of Toronto employment centre, faith-based food programmes, youth-focused media and music training, and adult education programmes – is extensive. However, as the redevelopment proceeds there appears to be a concomitant loss of institutional memory complicated by disruptions in organisation leadership and focus.

Institutional memory, a concept borrowed from the literature on organisational behaviour (Ashkenas, 2013), refers to knowledge held at an institution such as an organisation, agency or firm. It is built over time and tends to be held in the form of knowledge by individual experts and actors, rather than being tracked in formal documentation or in policy processes. When people move on to new roles or opportunities, or when reorganisation of an entire institution takes place, institutional memory can be lost.

Interviewees suggested that frequent changes in administrative leadership at the City of Toronto and TCH materially impact institutional memory in the neighbourhood. For instance, between 2009 and 2014, the leadership of TCH was held by four different

individuals. Several interviewees described the different attitudes and orientations to community participation held by a rotating group of administrators throughout the revitalisation's history. When new staff are hired, the relationship between administration and residents can shift rapidly. Community leaders suggested that during periods of transition, it can be difficult for them to know where they stand in relation to TCH or the City of Toronto. Staff turnover at the administrative level can pose a major challenge for accountability. Incoming staff members may not be aware of agreements made by their predecessors, or may not honour them.

The frequent turnover in leadership is further complicated by challenges in record-keeping. TCH and the City of Toronto maintain records of official decisions around the revitalisation, including budgets, contracts and minutes from public meetings. However, these documents provide details about only a small component of the redevelopment-related activities and meetings, and may not provide enough information for community members' needs. They may also not be easily accessible for a variety of reasons: they may be challenging to locate, inconsistently maintained, out-of-date, or difficult to interpret without suitable context.

Instead of relying on official sources from TCH and the City of Toronto, in practice many residents draw from the experiences and knowledge of other community members, particularly individuals who played leadership roles in the revitalisation, including community animators. However, a fundamental challenge for sustaining institutional memory in Regent Park is the rapid turnover of residents during the revitalisation. Former community leaders have been relocated temporarily or have chosen to move away from the neighbourhood permanently, while new residents without

knowledge of the revitalisation have moved in. Inevitably, some valuable community expertise and lay-knowledge of the revitalisation is lost during these transitions. While these first-hand accounts are the most accessible and robust source of information for many residents, some interviewees held concerns around the subjectivity and accuracy of information shared between community members.

In the context of Regent Park's rapidly changing revitalisation plans, institutional memory is a critical component of accountability. Several community leaders agreed that without access to records and documents about the history of revitalisation, community members are less able to ensure that current plans reflect the community's collective input from previous years. For example, one community leader expressed frustration and anger that records of preliminary community consultation were not considered later in the process:

We had a meeting about the park, 2006, or 07, when they talked about it. They said residents, please come out and put your input about what would you like to see in the park ... A couple of years later, they come back, they invited Cabbagetown and Rivertowne [adjacent communities]. And I asked them, where's the ideas from residents in Regent Park? [They said], what are you talking about, we don't have nothing from residents of Regent Park. I go, excuse me? There was two meetings or three meetings at Lord Dufferin School, and you're telling me you don't have no documents of what happened with residents, what they wanted? They lied! They lied to us. (Resident, 12 May 2014)

As illustrated above, several community leaders felt that their initial participation was not taken into consideration later in the process. We heard of agreements, decisions and promises that were made during the planning process, only to be completely forgotten, neglected or changed without

consultation. The perceived lack of accountability for the revitalisation process has left some residents feeling disempowered. These types of experiences can have the effect of making residents feel distrustful of the revitalisation process, or in some cases, of discouraging their continued participation altogether.

Frustration and struggles with understanding decision making, or disenfranchisement from decision-making processes, appears to be an outcome of the lack of institutional memory in Regent Park. The lengthy process of redevelopment, the relocation of residents in and outside of the community, the entry of new residents, and staff turnover at institutions all contribute to the challenge of attempting to create a consistent set of facts related to the redevelopment process. Despite the breadth of non-profit organisations and services that benefit the neighbourhood, the absence of a central neighbourhood organising body leaves a gap in the residents' ability to track institutional decision-making processes.

Often the significance of institutional memory is understood only after radical change takes place in the city's built form. Without a dedicated effort to preserve institutional memory, and given the massive change taking place in Regent Park, it remains likely that individual and collective knowledge about decision-making, priorities, goals and promised results will be lost.

Formal and informal leadership and mentorship

A third theme that emerged through this work was the presence of opportunities for residents to develop leadership skills and new knowledge through engagement in community initiatives. These opportunities include participation in the redevelopment process and in other community-based initiatives, through which aspiring

community leaders acquire skillsets that support them in their redevelopment-related work. Resident engagement is prioritised through the Social Development Plan (TCH, 2007), and highlighted as a key mechanism for promoting social inclusion and building community capacity.

Based on the thickness of institutions and organisations operating in Regent Park, opportunities for residents to develop skills through leadership and mentorship are fulsome. Particular programmes that were singled out as helping residents develop leadership skills included a training programme for newcomer women, youth education programmes, and other initiatives focused on building community capacity. For instance, a programme evaluation course taught at a community-based adult learning centre is credited with helping residents build research and advocacy skills to effect change in their neighbourhood (Chiose, 2016).

Organisations also provide training on administrative functions by holding orientation and training sessions for new community representatives and board members. However, some interviewees suggested that without some prior knowledge of administrative processes, prospective leaders face barriers. One resident suggested that:

I think people are intimidated by what they think being a board member means ... there's a sense of, well I don't know if I can do that, I don't know what that involves and it sounds really complicated or it sounds like work that I'm not qualified to do ... [it is] a potential barrier for them to get involved. (Resident, 16 July 2014)

As a direct result of mentorship, training and engagement, community leaders gained transferable skills including the ability to understand complex budgets, manage volunteers and interact more effectively with professionals from a variety of fields. However, interviewees also highlighted the need for

differentiated and supportive systems to encourage sustained involvement of low-income residents in the community.

In addition to formal opportunities for engagement in committees, as animators, and as participants in meetings, residents described informal opportunities through which they acquired skills, with a focus on informal mentorship from community role models. Several interviewees, particularly young people, noted that participating in programmes led by empathetic and supportive staff, such as arts-based workshops or outdoor education, helped them to build greater confidence in their skills and abilities. In these situations, mentorship from programme staff (often community members themselves) was identified as a valuable source of support.

Despite formal and informal training and mentorship opportunities, there are persistent challenges to equitable participation. Community leaders identified specific groups within the neighbourhood who are particularly difficult to engage, such as youth and elderly residents. Additionally, Regent Park's high degree of linguistic diversity poses a challenge for resident engagement, which was mitigated but not resolved entirely through the hiring of community animators. Several interviewees suggested that greater outreach and mobilisation skills would allow community leaders to better engage with these hard-to-reach groups. One interviewee suggested that:

We have to learn how to mobilize people so that we don't lose their voices. So I think that's an important skill to have, because some of the greatest leaders are those that we least expect, and it's when we can't share those voices that we lose the community. (Resident, 9 July 2014)

The concept of resident engagement within the context of redevelopment is not just about the process of engagement, but also

about creating an environment in which residents of all backgrounds and circumstances are able to engage. In reference to the significant economically marginalised conditions in which many residents live, one interviewee pointed out:

People talk about resident engagement and ... getting the residents involved in all this planning around the redevelopment. I said, so why is it that they don't? Why is it so hard? And [a colleague] just turned to me and said, look, when you're trying to figure out how to feed your kids, and where your next job is, and all of this, you don't have time to look at anything else, but just what's going on immediately. (Non-resident, 11 June 2014)

Implications

It is clear that in Regent Park, as in other redeveloped and redeveloping neighbourhoods, rebuilding alone is insufficient to address broader structural inequalities (Chaskin and Joseph, 2010; Dunn, 2012; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009). However, the physical rebuilding of the neighbourhood alongside the implementation of the Social Development Plan has brought along with it numerous opportunities for building partnerships, community facilities, social capital, education, cultural and arts-based opportunities, and resident empowerment. At the same time, rebuilding is still underway and it will be years before the current physical transformation is complete.

The impacts and outcomes of social changes taking place in the community are less obvious than the physical changes. Prior to redevelopment, Regent Park was characterised by distinct strengths that included a rich array of community programming and cohesion amongst groups of residents. However, its image was dominated by its characterisation as a place of stigma, social and economic distress, and criminal activity.

Wholesale redevelopment and resident engagement processes and plans, while welcome by many social housing residents, are not unanimously lauded. Opportunities for engagement and satisfaction with outcomes are uneven. Other limitations include persistent funding challenges; divisions associated with distinctions in culture, language and socio-economic status; and the challenge of communicating complex and rapidly changing information to a large group of people who are living in precarious circumstances. Further exacerbating matters is the uncertainty and distress associated with the relocation process: residents may move away from the community for years at a time, eventually returning to a community that they may no longer recognise or feel a part of. A lack of influence can deter community leaders from participating in the redevelopment process. Even as this process has improved over time, it is difficult for community members to overcome initial feelings of tokenism and lack of ownership where neighbourhood outcomes are concerned.

Based on this research, it is clear that the transformation of Regent Park will not only reshape 28 hectares of downtown Toronto and the lives of the thousands of low-income residents who live there, but also has the potential to influence social housing redevelopment initiatives more broadly. Regent Park holds lessons about the potential challenges of lengthy redevelopment timelines, which may take decades from planning to buildout. While these long-term projects offer an opportunity to build lasting partnerships and create opportunities for learning and trust-building among stakeholders, the need for preserving, documenting and sharing information about decision-making processes is abundantly clear, particularly given the involvement of a large and changing cast of characters. The weakness of institutional memory in Regent Park points to the critical

challenge of maintaining accountability throughout the redevelopment process. It is worth exploring how this might be addressed, and by whom: can the many resident-serving and resident-led agencies develop their capacity to preserve and disseminate records of important decisions, or can existing municipal documentation systems be made more accessible and transparent for community members? Furthermore, more thought needs to be given to the manner in which leaders and leadership development is supported through targeted initiatives, both formal and informal.

In the context of examining physical and social redevelopment, there is significant opportunity for public housing redevelopment initiatives to support knowledge building and learning for all stakeholders, enhance the preservation of institutional memory, and develop local leadership. For residents, organisations and government, it is obvious that the redevelopment process requires a constant process of learning, an openness to revising and adapting processes and plans, and a willingness to work with and across difference.

As the redevelopment proceeds, and as the neighbourhood continues to frequently be referenced as an internationally relevant model for mixed income redevelopment, key questions remain: Is it possible to develop an economically feasible plan to build much needed social housing within the confines of a public system that inadequately funds social housing? What is the best way to design and implement community-focused initiatives that continue to privilege non-market residents? Can the new Regent Park model, combining purposeful rebuilding of both physical and social neighbourhood infrastructure, address the shortcomings of previous social housing redevelopment and substantively realise the purported benefits of mixed income communities?

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Note

1. We attempted to include older youth leaders (between the ages of 16 and 18 years) in our study, however, we were unable to secure interviews with those who we contacted.

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