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Inside Halifax's changing neighbourhoods

Sher Scott - March 14, 2014



Researchers Jill Grant (left) and Victoria Prouse. (Nick Pearce photo)

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Cities are constantly changing, and a team of Dal faculty and students in the School of Planning have been working with community partners to explore major shifts in HRM over the past 40 years — and what they might suggest for the city's future.

Their first report was released in January, titled *Neighbourhood Change in HRM, 1970-2010: Applying the Three Cities Model*. Now, the team is looking for input on the future of the project.

The "Three Cities" model

The impetus for the study, and several others like it across Canada, was sparked by the University of Toronto's *Three Cities of Toronto* report. Heralded as "a landmark," the report employed sociospatial data for the city of Toronto to show that the number of middle income neighbourhoods is dwindling, and the gap between high and low income neighbourhoods has widened.

Recognizing that patterns in large cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal may not reflect the realities of mid-sized cities, a national team of researchers was assembled with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Professor Jill Grant, director of Dal's School of Planning, is leading the research for Halifax, in partnership with several community organizations that feel the data can help inform important policy decisions.

"The United Way Halifax, HRM, and the Province have all made valuable contributions," explains Prof. Grant. "Each partner has actively been helping frame the research to make our findings as useful as possible, on top of providing funding and manpower to help collect data."

How Halifax incomes have changed

Since incomes in mid-sized cities are usually lower overall than in large cities, the gap between the highest income neighbourhoods and the lowest income neighbourhoods in Halifax is not as large as in, say, Toronto. However, this doesn't mean that incomes in Halifax's lower income neighbourhoods are higher than those in large cities.

What the researchers found is that displacement of lower-income households happens on a more localized scale in Halifax. Using the North and South ends as an example, Dalhousie Master of Planning student Victoria Prouse notes there are areas of the city with expensive housing right next to low-income housing. "Looking at a finer scale, we see evidence of growing local inequality and potential displacement," she says.

In related research, Will Gregory, also a Master of Planning student, has focused on the Halifax peninsula. Gregory's research shows that the demographics of downtown Halifax have changed drastically over the past 60 years. Some downtown areas have gone from earning far less than the city-wide average to earning far more.

Influencing policy

What is the practical application of this research? Prof. Grant hopes that the project will help us shape both policy and the image of our city.

Pointing to the arts community as a vibrant resource, Prof. Grant speaks to concerns about the peninsula becoming a solely high-income area. “Earlier projects have shown that people involved in the arts scene tend to live where they can get around easily and access venues. The concern is that if these households get priced out of these areas, the arts scene will suffer and this will have a big impact on how people view the city.”

According to Prof. Grant, the research can help combat unintended consequences of policy at both the municipal and provincial level.

“The HRM is trying to encourage intensification downtown, but raising the price is not the intention. What we’re asking is how to achieve policy goals while maintaining an area that also encourages the aims of a vibrant city.”

How to learn more

The team will be holding a community meeting on the project — sharing findings and welcoming feedback — on Wednesday, March 19, from 7 to 9pm in room 1116 in the McCain Building. All are welcome to attend.

For more information on the study, [visit its website](#).