Your neighbourhood: how it’s changing

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “neighbourhood”? Do you think of your street, or the cluster of streets around where you live, your nearest shopping area, the area served by the local school?

Can you find the services and friendship you need in your neighbourhood? Some neighbourhoods make people feel at home, others may make them feel isolated. Do you feel like you belong to a community when you think of your neighbourhood?

Urban researchers are starting to study neighbourhoods as the building blocks of city life. There is a lot of interest in understanding better how neighbourhoods age and change over time.

For example, some neighbourhoods have many seniors who become frail and leave their homes which are then taken by families with children. Recently in our area, some streets had fewer than 20 children going door to door on Halloween while other streets had over 250 “trick or treaters.” Thirty years ago, it may well have been the opposite situation on these streets.

Other changes in neighbour- hoods may be due to economic reasons or government policies (e.g. immigration). A downtown area with affordable housing attracts artists and young professionals. Increased popularity results in rising costs. A neighbourhood that once housed many people from a particular ethnic group may become the centre of a completely different ethnic population. One thing that these changes have in common is that they involve displacement of one group of people by another.

To answer with your help. See the box at left for how you can participate. This newsletter will introduce you to some of the work done so far.

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The research also includes a profile of the area’s housing stock, as well as an inventory of its businesses, community organizations, and informal social groups. We will be looking at data on local school enrollments, crime and travel and transportation in the area.

Can we control neighbourhood change? Is it possible to promote changes for the better and control changes for the worse? And if so, how? Those are two of the questions the researchers want to answer with your help. See the box at left for how you can participate.

St. Christopher House and the University of Toronto, and it involves resident associations, community agencies, academics, government departments, local businesses and, we hope, you. If you are a resident of one of the eight neighbourhoods, we want you to participate. The newsletter will introduce you to some of the work done so far.

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Get involved in change!

The next phase of the research requires active community input. We will be holding public meetings (see below) at which residents can comment on the research so far and discuss ways to deal with local changes and displacement.

What would you like to preserve about your neighbourhood? What is improving because of the changes and what needs to be improved? What role can St. Christopher House play? What more research needs to be done? We invite you to get involved in our work and let us know your ideas. Visit our website (www.ubtoronto.ca/cura) or call Rick Eagan at 416-532-4828 x238.

Public meeting, Feb. 7, 2006
Public meeting about the Neighbourhood Change project: Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2006, 6:30 pm at 248 Ossington Avenue.

Community forum, May 8 or 9, 2006
Community forum for the Neighbourhood Change project: May 8 or 9, 2006 (watch web site for details).
West-central Toronto is very diverse

This map illustrates the diversity of Toronto in 2001. It is based on 23 demographic variables used in the census (e.g. age, income level, first language, type of home ownership, number of people in the household) that we have combined into different “clusters” (see examples at right). All the different small clusters of colours reflect that our neighbourhoods in the downtown west end have far more diversity than the rest of the city. (There are 15 types of “clusters” in our small part of the city.) This map should be considered a preliminary draft. Further maps like this and detail about the variables and clusters will be on the website www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/cura (compiled by Richard Maaranen, Alan Walks and Larry Bourne).

The clusters (colours) represent combinations of factors that result in the local area having relatively more of the following characteristics than the Toronto, Oshawa, Hamilton, Montreal and Vancouver census areas. For example:
- more visible minorities, more low-income people, more high-rise residents
- more middle-income people and more blue-collar workers
- more professionals, more medium-density housing
- more young professionals, more medium and high-rise buildings or condos
- more middle-income people, more tenants
- more blue-collar workers, more Latin Americans, more high-density housing
- more middle-income people, more East Asians, more families
- more higher-income people, more low-density housing and home ownership

These language graphs indicate the ethnic origins of residents of the area according to mother tongue (their first language). In 1971, the top two languages spoken by residents, after English, were Italian and Portuguese, followed by Polish and Ukrainian. In 2001, although Portuguese was still the most common language after English, it was followed by Chinese. The numbers of Polish and Italian speakers were much smaller. This change affects services and businesses that focus on certain language groups. Some of these may adapt to different language groups, others may leave the area to move to areas with a larger population of the particular language group they serve. New services and businesses are created to serve groups moving into the area. These changes tend to reinforce each other – as businesses and services change or leave, the groups they serve may leave too; as new businesses and services arrive, they attract more people to the area who want those businesses and services.
Home ownership and rentals, ups and downs

These maps show the local neighbourhoods that have a high proportion of rented housing compared to the city. Overall, the stock of rented housing has increased by 10 per cent between 1971 and 2001. At the same time, other parts of the city have lost rental accommodation. However, within the local area the changes are not evenly spread around. Rental housing has increased in some areas and dropped by almost 15 per cent in areas such as Roncesvalles, west of Lansdowne. Rented apartments and houses tend to be home to many single people, seniors, students, and those on low incomes. Rental housing in this area, which is close to so many jobs and services, is therefore a very important part of the housing stock.

West-central incomes are low for Toronto

These maps show changes in the income of people in our area compared to people across the whole city. The median income is the midpoint, with half of the households having higher income and half of the households having lower income. The shading on the map compares the median household income for the area to the median household income for the city as a whole. As you can see, in all our neighbourhoods, local median income is below that of the city. However, some neighbourhoods have higher household income in 2001 than they did in 1971. In general, household income has risen for people living east of Dovercourt Road, and has fallen for those on the west side of the area. Rising incomes may indicate “gentrification,” a process in which low-income residents are displaced by higher-income households.

More about these maps

These maps and other features of neighbourhood change can be viewed on the CURA project website at: www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/cura.

In addition to the maps displayed on these two pages, there are maps on change in the number and pattern of one-person households, the number of people who have moved out of or into the neighbourhood, place of birth, recent immigrants, occupations, housing values, rent levels, and locations of apartments.

Join St. Chris as a member!

We welcome you to join as a member of St. Christopher House. You get voting privileges at our Annual General Meeting, an annual fall House to House newsletter and spring Annual Report. Our membership fee is sliding scale from $5 to $15 a year. Contact Jennifer Woodill at (416) 532-4808 x 108 for membership information or for information about volunteering at St. Chris.
COMMUNITY SWEEP 2005:

Residents like convenience and neighbours

Every year, St. Chris conducts a Community Sweep when multilingual teams of volunteers and staff speak with local residents in their homes or in local parks and streets. The goal of these conversations is for St. Chris to identify residents’ needs and concerns and to build relations with diverse people in this community.

This year, we asked 225 residents about their perceptions of the changes occurring within their neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Characteristics
Most people provided more than one response to the question, “What do you like about the neighbourhood?” Overwhelmingly, the most common response was convenience/access to amenities. The second most common response was having good neighbours and a sense of community. Four people said that they did not like anything, or did not like much about their neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood Concerns
Most people also provided more than one response when questioned about the main concerns in the neighbourhood. The most common concern was criminal activity, which included drugs, prostitution, and public drinking. This was followed by parking or traffic issues and concerns about other people in the neighbourhood such as groups of youth who appeared to have nothing to do. About 21 per cent of respondents said they had no concerns about their neighbourhood.

Resident Participation in Neighbourhood Activities
When asked about their participation in neighbourhood activities, the most common response was that they socialized with neighbours. The second most common response was that they used local resources such as community centres or schools as well as local stores and businesses. Interestingly, the next most common response was nothing; these residents did not interact with others in their neighbourhood. Other activities included participation in church events or activities with their children and family.

Neighbourhood Changes
The next series of questions asked residents if they have noticed any changes in the neighbourhood over the past few years. Of the 155 responses to this question, the most common things people perceived were that the area has become more multicultural, with more families, more homeowners, and a decrease in the elderly population. However, 23 per cent of the respondents did not notice any neighbourhood changes.

Of the 76 residents who indicated that they did notice neighbourhood changes, 40 said they were happy with the changes, whereas 20 said they were not happy with the changes. The rest indicated that they had mixed feelings about the changes, or did not care.

“Having a Say” in Neighbourhood Changes
Most people had no response to the question, “Do you have any say in the neighbourhood changes?” However, of the 80 people who did respond to this question, 51 said they felt they have no say in neighbourhood changes, and 24 said they do have a say in the neighbourhood changes to some extent.

Role of St. Christopher House
When asked what they would like to see St. Christopher House do to improve the neighbourhood, 65 people suggested more community programs for youth, seniors, or homeless people. Others suggested more advocacy for affordable housing, parking improvements, solutions to traffic issues, a community clean-up, increasing community policing and maintaining the diversity of the neighbourhood.

Several people suggested that St. Chris raise its profile within the community by producing a newsletter or improving communication with the local neighbourhood.

Consulting with Our Community
The sample gathered from the Community Sweep constituted only a small portion of the 107,000 people who live in the St. Chris catchment area. Still, the Community Sweep did provide ideas for future community-based research on neighbourhood change.

St. Christopher House thanks all the residents who took the time to provide insight into the changing dynamics of these unique neighbourhoods. We want to hear more from residents about their interests and concerns. If you would like to be involved in future community-based research with St. Christopher House, please look at our website: www.stchrishouse.org or contact Rick Eagan at (416) 532-4828, x238.