

MEETING OF CURA RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1 NOVEMBER 2005

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FACULTY CLUB

PRESENT:

David Hulchanski, UofT
Maureen Fair, SCH

Larry Bourne, UofT
Philippa Campsie, UofT
Shawn Conway, SCH
James Dunn, St. Michael's & UofT
Rick Eagan, SCH
Don Embuldeniya, United Way
Reed Henry, Artscape

Rob Howarth, Toronto Neighbourhood Ctrs.
Hugh Lawson, TCHC
Harvey Low, City of Toronto
Richard Maaranen, UofT
Prachi Mehta, UofT
Sylvia Novac, UofT
Luz Rodriguez, UofT
Daniel Schugurensky, UofT
Melissa Tapper, UofT
Alan Walks, UofT

Research Update and Review of Phase 1 Research Projects

1. NEIGHBOURHOOD PROFILE AND TRENDS

Alan Walks and Richard Maaranen reported that the data team are still compiling information, but have largely completed assembling the StatsCan census data from 1971 to 2001. Maps of the study area are available for viewing on the CURA website and a selection of them will be published in the forthcoming SCH newsletter. The team has also gathered data on 5 other CMAs in Canada for comparison. One pleasant surprise was that the team was able to get access to data on occupations and the locations of jobs, data that was previously thought to be unavailable. The team is also working on cross-tabulations of the data. Additional data will come from the City of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board, and the Real Estate Board. What is needed is data on renters and owners and cross-tabulations of this data with other variables.

David Hulchanski mentioned that all are welcome at the data team's meetings, which are held about four times a year. Also, members of the Research Advisory Committee can suggest topics for future maps to be posted on the website. He also asked for suggestions for a link to the Toronto District School Board; Harvey Low suggested inviting Rob Brown to join the RAC.

Daniel Schugurensky asked if it is still possible to suggest new questions to StatsCan for the 2006 census. Richard Maaranen suggested income by tenure. Rob Howarth noted that StatsCan has a new approach for the 2006 census; it will start by mailing out census forms, and only after receiving an initial response will it send out enumerators. A questionnaire will also be available on the web. Together these changes suggest that data may be available more quickly, but may be less reliable.

David Hulchanski recommended that the team make data available for the Urban Affairs conference in Montreal next April, when CURA is hosting a roundtable on gentrification and displacement. Daniel Schugurensky proposed putting together a documentary with personal stories to use on this occasion.

Maureen Fair noted that the data team is working with the United Way data committee and that the CURA project allows for a consolidation of research efforts by researchers and not-for-profit groups.

Harvey Low said that the City of Toronto had recently passed the Priority Neighbourhoods Strategy, which is based on the findings of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force. About 13 neighbourhoods will be targeted for investment, most of them outside the boundary of the old City of Toronto. Some of this work may have implications for the CURA initiative. He added that data from Toronto assessment records is being prepared; this data is at the level of parcels (individual properties) and indicates housing type and structure, the age of buildings, and the quality of the building. At present, the City does not know how reliable the data is. However, when it is made available, it could be very useful for the CURA researchers.

Larry Bourne warned against trying too many cross-tabulations; on an earlier project, attempts to cross-tabulate many variables generated so many tables that they were unusable.

David Hulchanski noted that the data committee will be looking at other neighbourhoods around the GTA, such as Mississauga, Bolton, or Cabbagetown, in order to make comparisons.

2. HOUSING

David Hulchanski reported that a first draft of the housing profile has been completed and will soon be available. The study area has 4% of the city's population and 5% of its non-market housing, much of which is in Parkdale. The report provides a snapshot of what is known so far, as a basis for further research in the area.

3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Daniel Schugurensky reported that CUCS's collaborative master's program in community development has fifteen students from planning, social work, adult education, public health, and counselling. The students are keen to do hands-on work in communities. The two options are to have the community identify a special project and let the students follow up, acting as consultants, or to have the students simply work in an agency like SCH so they can learn more about the day-to-day activities of community development. The decision has not yet been made on which option to pursue. He added that the students have a variety of different skills and types of experience that could be used.

Maureen Fair noted that Ryerson has also started a community development program at the undergraduate level. Those students are doing projects in South Riverdale. She suggested bringing the two groups together so they can compare experiences.

Rob Howard said that the Toronto Neighbourhood Centre has secured funding for a forum on community development to be held February 2006 to which all interested individuals and groups will be invited. The TNC also sponsors a network to allow the sharing of information among those involved in community development.

David Hulchanski suggested that the CURA may need a community development committee, similar to the data committee, to meet regularly to discuss these initiatives. He also circulated an announcement of the next seminar in the community development series, which will be led by Maureen Fair on November 16 at CUCS.

4. LOCAL ECONOMY

Luz Rodriguez reported on the project that is taking stock of local economic activity. This group is not conducting an analysis; rather it is identifying available sources of information. The final report from the group will be organized in four parts:

1. Formal economic activities, including data from the Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity at Ryerson and from StatsCan, including initiatives to promote business or generate jobs.
2. Informal economic activities, based on a literature review on ways to identify and measure such activities.
3. A discussion of the need to promote economic and financial inclusion, which largely means access to economic and financial resources.

4. Proposals for further research, including research on ethnic businesses. This information is being gathered through interviews with lenders, BIA leaders, city officials, Artscape, and others.

Harvey Low mentioned the recent spate of articles about the City losing business and jobs to the 905 area and asked whether it would be possible to find out if this is true for the study area. Alan Walks said that the data should show where jobs are increasing or decreasing by occupation and industry. Reed Henry noted that something similar is being done for Regent Park. One problem is that Urban Development Services at the City codes occupations and industries in its own way.

Harvey Low said that the city is developing a more robust data set on employment, based on a census-like survey, rather than a sample, as in the past. The survey is conducted by students every two years. He also mentioned that the City's assessment data includes information on commercial establishments. Rob Howarth suggested getting permit data to indicate where people are investing in their businesses, although he noted that not everyone obtains a permit to do renovations.

5. SOCIAL SERVICES

Melissa Tapper reported on work to make an inventory of formal and informal associations and organizations in the study area. The groups are being classified in the following categories:

- Quality of physical life
- Human development
- Cross-community support services
- Rights and advocacy
- Neighbourhoods and the local economy
- Physical environment

Some organizations fall into more than one category. At present, information on informal groups is being gathered using contacts at SCH, but the research group will use the snowball method to identify other sources of information. Rob Howarth suggested that the study area as a whole might be too much for the group to tackle, and it might want to focus on a particular neighbourhood in depth. Rob Howarth suggested convening small groups to identify informal groups and to find out what resources they use.

Harvey Low said that it is important to identify the purpose of each group, and compare the types of groups to demographic data. There is often a disparity – for example, an area with lots of children may have few groups related to children's needs. He mentioned that

it is difficult for some organizations to change their focus in response to changing needs. Sometimes the purpose of an organization is determined by what funding is available.

Daniel Schugurensky recommended doing a snapshot now and then repeating the work in 2009 to track trends over time. Alan Walks said that the research team is compiling a list of contacts and will keep these people informed; there should be more than one contact per organization, in case people leave.

Shawn Conway noted that groups evolve over time and slip from one category to another. Harvey Low added that more and more organizations are being lumped together as “multi-service,” because they keep adding new services. Rob Howarth suggested trying to identify what the greater part of the organization’s resources are used for. Sylvia Novac mentioned that in her work on Homelessness and the Criminal Justice System, she found that some organizations that were listed as providing services in certain areas turned out simply to provide referrals to other services. Rick Eagan said that services change as funding priorities change, whether or not those services respond to actual needs. For all these reasons, it is very difficult to classify community organizations.

6. TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR

Prachi Mehta, who is working with Eric Miller, reported on her research, which is due to be finished in April (this is her master’s thesis). She has completed a detailed analysis of available travel data for the study area for the period 1986 to 2001, and is currently preparing models for the GTA; from these she can extract models for the study area that will allow for predictions of travel patterns. The data already shows some differences between the study area and the GTA as a whole – higher transit use, lower automobile use, fewer trips per day, etc. Using information on the origins and destinations of trips by traffic zone, it is possible to see where people in the study are going, and, if broken down by work-related trips, where they work. Information is also available on the number of jobs accessible to a particular area within 30 or 45 minutes by transit or automobile.

Daniel Schugurensky asked how this information relates to gentrification. The group discussed this question, suggesting that the data show change over time in the neighbourhood in general. Alan Walks also noted that in gentrified areas, wealthy people use services such as transit that are of greater marginal utility to low-income people, while low-income people are pushed out to live in areas that are not as well served by transit, such as the older suburbs.

7. NETWORK DATABASE

Sylvia Novac reported on the database of articles that has been compiled. The researchers who were working on this part of the project have left to go to other work. The database

contains articles that relate to efforts to deal with neighbourhood change and gentrification in other cities. Some of the information is in hard copy, and some is in electronic form. The final report will summarize the methods that have been used to improve neighbourhoods. Eventually, it may be possible to connect with those who did the work, to get their first-hand comments.

The work of compiling useful articles will continue throughout the project, as new information becomes available. Most of the articles collected deal with current projects, but Rob Howarth asked if there were older examples available that might indicate the eventual outcome of such efforts. Rick Eagan added that people in the community are anxious to learn about practical actions they can take, which may involve using existing tools, such as zoning, or new tools that are being developed.

8. NEIGHBOURHOOD ISSUES

Rick Eagan explained that concurrent with the CURA research, SCH is conducting a review of its own activities and doing strategic planning. It is exploring the implications of staying put, moving elsewhere, or expanding. In the course of this planning, it has become apparent that there is a difference between people's lived experience and the findings from statistical research. SCH staff are experiencing increased demand and an increased complexity of the demand for services. Shawn Conway added that demand is clustered in certain areas. Also, rapid changes in the housing stock are leading to rapid demographic changes, but it takes time for infrastructure and services to catch up.

Rob Howard said that there are also changes related to amalgamation, and the relative lack of services in the former municipalities outside the old City of Toronto. At the same time, no new resources are available to expand services. It is possible that SCH may need to focus its activities on certain groups, rather than a geographical area.

Next phase research projects

The committee discussed options for the next phase of research. At present there are four working groups, looking at:

- Neighbourhood issues and trends
- Housing issues and trends
- Social and physical community infrastructure
- Life transitions and aging

David Hulchanski asked the committee members if these groupings are still relevant and if others are needed. He also mentioned the need to identify potential partners. For example, Wellesley Central is working in the area of urban health. Michael Shapcott will be going to work there, and it may be possible to use this link to build a partnership.

James Dunn said that he is already talking to Wellesley and is interested in getting beyond the “30,000-foot view,” whereby data on communities is aggregated to the point at which the details disappear. He is interested in an intensive research on neighbourhoods initiative (IRONI) similar to work conducted by Sally McIntyre in Scotland. Her group has followed two pairs of dissimilar neighbourhoods in Glasgow over 20 years. It might be possible to do something similar in Toronto, perhaps using the priority neighbourhoods identified by the Strong Communities Task Force. Intensive research focuses on four factors:

- risks (such as crime)
- resources (community assets)
- relationships (social capital)
- resilience (why some neighbourhoods succeed and others fail)

Rick Eagan suggested partnering with St. Joseph’s Hospital, which is close to the study area. The hospital is working in the area of population health, and George Tolomiczenko, a CUCS research associate, is involved in this work. David Hulchanski recommended that CURA become part of this effort.

Hugh Lawson said that TCHC is looking for funding to do work on community safety, and on ways to evaluate which interventions are effective and which are not. Daniel Schugurensky mentioned that there is a UofT professor of criminology who is also working in this area.

Maureen Fair said that SCH would like to know more about other community organizations that have land as an asset and how they use this asset to improve their services, considering that the not-for-profit sector tends to be risk-averse.

The group returned to the topic of identifying practical actions that they could recommend to community residents, who want to do something to improve or stabilize the neighbourhood, but don’t know what to do. Shawn Conway noted that efforts must be relevant to the residents’ particular interests and concerns. Rob Howarth said that low-income groups, for example, are concerned about income support, jobs, and housing, rather than gentrification, and said that there are limits to mobilizing certain residents. Rick Eagan mentioned the difficulty of reaching out to individuals who are not part of any organization.

Sylvia Novac noted that the research conducted for the network database had not identified any “magic bullets,” although it contains ideas and some models, although not all may translate to the Toronto context. She also mentioned her work with consumer survivors, many of whom live in rooming houses; this is a difficult group to reach or mobilize. Advocacy for this group is generally done by community agencies. Rick Eagan

said that there is already a group of working poor people that has organized in the study area.

Newsletter

SCH is preparing a special issue of its newsletter, focusing on CURA. David Hulchanski asked committee members from community agencies if they would like copies, and if so, how many.

Year 2 Symposium

Monday and Tuesday, May 9 and 10, 2006, at Metro Hall. There will also be a community forum, and the committee discussed possible venues (St. Lawrence Hall, OISE, CAMH). Nathan Edelson has been invited, and David Ley and Blair Badcock will be there. Recommendations about other potential participants are still very welcome.

Next meeting

Monday, March 6, 2006, at 9 a.m.