

TORONTO NEIGHBOURHOODS RESEARCH NETWORK

June 11, 2007

Fourth Meeting, Wellesley Institute

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NEXT MEETINGS

September 24, 2007, Centre for Research on Inner City Health, St. Michael's Hospital

November 26, 2007, Community Social Planning Council (to be confirmed)

2008 dates confirmed:

January 14

March 10

June 9

September 22

November 24

MEMBER UPDATES

St. Stephen's Community House

www.ststephenshouse.com

- St. Stephen's House, although it has not conducted much research itself, is interested in neighbourhood issues and wants to participate in discussions.

Community University Research Alliance

www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/cura

- The CURA project is working on indicators of neighbourhood change. Maps that interpret the data are available on the website.
- Bob Murdie is looking at immigrant settlement issues, and Larry Bourne is studying the dynamics of local areas, getting beyond snapshot-in-time statistics to uncover processes at work that lead to change.
- The group has developed ten policy proposals, which will soon be released for comment.
- Several papers from recent conference presentations are available on the website: "Toronto's Rental Housing: Neo-Liberal Policies, Market Failure and Neighbourhood Housing Tenure Polarization," by J. David Hulchanski; "Deconstructing Neighbourhood Transitions: The Contributions of Demographic, Immigration, Life Style and Housing Stock Changes," by Larry

S. Bourne, and “Ethnic Transformation and Gentrification in West-Central Toronto,” by Robert Murdie.

United Way of Canada

www.unitedwaytoronto.com

- The United Way is following up on its Decade of Decline report to determine the trends since the 1990s. This research should be available in fall 2007.
- A new project is just getting under way, tentatively titled, “The High Cost of Poverty.” This research will look at the way in which low-income families often have to spend more than higher-income families on goods and services, partly because they live in underserved neighbourhoods, and have to travel to get to services or use services such as payday lending companies, which charge high service fees.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

www.mah.gov.on.ca

- Dana Richardson, Assistant Deputy Minister, has proposed that the Ministry carry out place-based research on community development. The Ministry will consult academics as part of its research effort.

Catholic Children’s Aid Society

www.ccas.toronto.on.ca

- The CCAS is hoping to map child protection cases by neighbourhood, along with the factors that affect child welfare. CCAS is looking for partners in this work.

Community Social Planning Council

www.socialplanningtoronto.org

- “The Rich and the Rest of Us: The Changing Face of Canada’s Growing Gap,” released in March 2007, is on the CPSC website: <http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/Index3.htm>.
- CPSC is participating in a project on “Globalization and the Health of Canadians” with the Canadian Institute for Health Research, looking at income inequality data.

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- The United Way of Canada, through Action for Neighbourhood Change, is carrying out a survey on neighbourhood issues. Research may be based on ridings as well as neighbourhoods, in order to get the attention of MPs and MPPs.
- An emerging issue is that of non-status residents of Canada, such as people with expired work visas.

Ministry of Finance

www.fin.gov.on.ca

- Amanda Helderan is participating in a project on transitioning economies.

Toronto District School Board

www.tdsb.on.ca

- The Learning Opportunities Index is an ongoing research project that has been carried on for more than 40 years.
- TDSB is tracking students who were assessed by their teachers in kindergarten, and comparing their academic achievement in Grade 6 with the original assessment; another project tracks students who were assessed in Grade 3 and compares that assessment with their Grade 10 academic achievement.
- TDSB recently conducted a student census to gather information about the daily lives of students. The data is currently being input.

Centre for Urban Health Initiatives

www.cuhi.utoronto.ca

- CUHI is carrying out an environmental scan of six selected neighbourhoods (Eglinton East, Weston–Mt. Dennis, Parkdale, St Jamestown, North Riverdale and Don Mills) and will be talking to service providers in those neighbourhoods, to identify key areas for research.
- A May 10 neighbourhood policy forum was offered in conjunction with St. Christopher House and the Wellesley Institute on the Role of Neighbourhoods in the Development of Social and Health Policy. See: <http://www.cuhi.utoronto.ca/seminars/workshopdetails.html>
- Wendy Mendes is interested in consultation-based neighbourhood planning and social indicators. Following a project in Vancouver, she is looking into ways to measure social progress in cities at the regional, municipal and neighbourhood levels.

Inner City Health Research Unit (ICHRU), St. Michael's Hospital

www.stmikes.ca/content/research/ichru/about_ichru.asp

- The Unit is carrying out a large cohort study on neighbourhoods and mental health. This includes structured observations in six neighbourhoods, concept mapping on factors that affect mental health and well-being,
- A neighbourhood survey was a test of rapid small-area health needs assessment, a technique that would be useful for Local Health Integration Networks, which need disaggregated data.
- Jim Dunn is applying for a chair in applied public health; the focus would be on population-based interventions that may affect health.

Wellesley Institute

<http://wellesleyinstitute.com>

- The Institute was created with the endowment and assets left after the demolition of the Wellesley Hospital in east-central Toronto. There are three spheres of activity: research, capacity building, and public policy.
- Some research is commissioned, and some is brought forward by community organizations who have specific research needs.
- The St. Jamestown initiative deals with the question of the health of immigrants, who tend to arrive in Canada in relatively good health, but whose health declines after five years in the country; this study may become the focus of another Community University Research Alliance project.
- Capacity building consists of training for people who work in the service and non-profit sector, including an executive leadership program.
- Policy work includes the development of effective advocacy strategies to advance policy proposals. The Blueprint to End Homelessness is one example (<http://wellesleyinstitute.com/theblueprint>).
- The Institute is experimenting with using the web to gather rapid feedback on proposals. Using wiki technology, about 1,000 participants contributed to a city budget proposal. Blogs and other media are used to disseminate information on policy proposals.
- The original Wellesley site is now used for Fife House (a residence for people with HIV), a long-term care facility, and condos. A park is also proposed for the remainder of the site. Fife House and the long-term care facility participate in research projects by the Institute.
- For more information on “Positive Spaces, Healthy Places,” a community-based research initiative, see the Fife House website (www.fifehouse.org).

PRESENTATIONS

A few key points are summarized here.

Community University Research Alliance

www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/cura

Greater Toronto Urban Observatory, University of Toronto

www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/gtuo

- The CURA project is working on indicators of neighbourhood change. Maps that interpret the data are available on the website. J. David Hulchanski covered some of the key points of the research.
- The CURA research team has mapped net increase or decrease in income between 1970 and 2000 by neighbourhood, as well as persistent increases or decreases in income, and found evidence of income polarization. The sharpest downward trends are in the older, inner suburbs, and the most marked upward trends are in the central city.
- Although ghettoization along U.S. lines is not occurring in Canada, Toronto neighbourhoods are certainly segregated by housing tenure, socioeconomic status, and skin colour (white/non-white).
- Maps also show the distribution of educational achievement, single-parent households (which do not necessarily co-relate to low incomes), immigrants, visible minorities, and the amount that households spent on housing by ethnic group. These maps can be viewed on the GTUO website (see, for example, “Ghettos of the rich and the poor: Is this where Toronto is headed? Mapping neighbourhood change since 1970”).

Toronto District School Board

www.tdsb.on.ca

- Rob Brown introduced the Learning Opportunities and explained how schools are ranked. Although the schools at the very top and very bottom tend to garner interest, the real change is happening in the middle.
- The Early Development Indicators project has found that teacher assessments of children in kindergarten are a reasonably good predictor of academic achievement later in a child’s school career.

- A comparison between two schools (Parkdale and the Ursula Franklin Academy) shows that school populations do not correspond clearly to neighbourhoods. Although the Parkdale catchment area is stable, the Academy attracts students from all across Toronto. Moreover, about half the population of students is on the move over time – 25% within the TDSB, and 25% between the TDSB and another school board.

The Growing Gap

www.growinggap.ca

- Armine Yalnizyan, author of “Ontario's Growing Gap: Time for leadership” spoke about her research, which she considers as much a political project as a research project. Although she studies income distribution, income is just a proxy for many other factors in the lives of Canadians: learning opportunities, access to services, determinants of health, and so on.
- She is interested in the ecological footprint of inequality, debt loads, labour markets, and business cycles. The research started with focus groups to follow up on some Environics polls about inequality. The focus groups revealed that people respond to startling numbers about inequality, but do not identify with the various income groups. Also, although we are living in prosperous times, the degree of financial insecurity remains high and Canadians are working harder than ever to stay in the same place.
- Yalnizyan is focusing on families with children under 18, because they are the single biggest group of all the household groups, and because those children will grow up believing that the current situation is “normal” – including income polarity.
- Although it is not certain if funding will be renewed for the project, there is a legacy database, which will be kept up, and it offers researchers a rich source of information for similar projects.
- The different sources of data for this project each have limitations: tax data, census data, labour and income data.
- The discussion after the presentation focused on the wider implications of income polarization. Provided that access to public goods is provided, income inequality may not necessarily affect life opportunities or health, but in places where public goods are not available, income inequality is a much stronger determinant of health and mortality (as it is in some U.S. cities). The situation is particular bad in places where municipalities depend on own-source revenues and are also responsible for social programs, and not so bad in countries where risk pooling is moved up to higher levels of government.
- Given the interest in the topic, David Hulchanski recommended a further meeting on this specific topic.

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Next meeting: Monday, September 24, 2007, 9:30am

Location: Centre for Research on Inner City Health, St. Michael's Hospital

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***Remainder of 2007 schedule: November 26, 2007***