NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

Building Community in Vancouver

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Contents

Foreword

Affluent societies have always been socially and spatially divided by income and wealth disparities, which have become much greater over recent decades. We have become increasingly polarized socially and spatially due to the steady loss of the once numerically dominant and growing middle-income group.

Although economic inequality is not solely an urban problem, it is most evident in cities, where wealth and poverty tend to be concentrated. Researchers have thoroughly documented the social and economic polarization of metropolitan areas, using terms such as "divided cities," "dual cities," "polarized cities," "fragmented cities," "partitioned cities," or "unfairly restructured cities."

Decades of post-industrial economic restructuring have eliminated jobs in primary and secondary sectors and created a polarized labour market. Over the last three decades, political, economic, and social policy has reflected the philosophy of neoliberalism, facilitating the operation of market forces, principles, and practices. The retreat from the welfare-state philosophy of the mid-twentieth century produced major policy shifts that have redistributed poverty and affluence across the urban fabric. This increased inequality and polarization is the result of public policy choices – the way we have chosen to allocate societal resources and regulate economic activity. There is nothing natural or accidental about the outcomes.

In metropolitan areas, wealth and poverty are increasingly concentrated in disparate neighbourhoods that have unequal access to the benefits of urban life. Researchers and policy makers agree that neighbourhoods are important in people's lives. Neighbourhoods help shape the routines of daily life, affect access to services, and can contribute to well-being in many ways. Living in a poor neighbourhood can reduce the opportunities for education and employment. The pattern of concentrated urban advantage and disadvantage – producing multiple types of urban disconnection – affects the life chances of urban residents in terms of health, education, housing, and employment. Strengthened socio-spatial divisions within cities with increased inequality and sharper lines of division undermine social cohesion, economic productivity, and political stability.

Neighbourhoods are part of the solution. Neighbourhoods have always been at the fault line of social isolation and spatial separation. There is a long history of both support for, and neglect of, the neighbourhood level.

This book, *Neighbourhood Houses: Building Community in Vancouver,* is a detailed look at the neighbourhood house model of building welcoming and supportive communities using Vancouver's fifteen neighbourhood houses as case studies. It provides an insightful analysis of the way in which neighbourhood houses carry on the early-twentieth-century settlement house "machinery of connection" tradition, as place-making mechanisms within the context of contemporary urban conditions. Settlement houses have a 135-year history internationally. They are today a global movement represented by the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centers, an umbrella organization established in 1922 with more than 10,000 members from thirty countries. Neighbourhood houses in Vancouver are a continuation of the social settlement movement that began with Toynbee Hall in 1884.

Neighbourhood houses are place-based community service organizations with a mandate to serve and advocate for the well-being of residents sharing the same geographical area. They provide services for the local community while being a constitutive part of this same community. They are locally governed by elected members mainly drawn from the local community. They are multi-service organizations serving as a community service hub for all age groups. The services and programs that they offer can facilitate meaningful interaction and engagement among diverse residents.

Neighbourhood houses are a unique form of social infrastructure due to their place-based and multi-service approach to serving the neighbourhood. Single-purpose agencies do not have this community development

potential for significant individual-level relationship-building outcomes as well as community capacity-building outcomes. When a metropolitan area has many neighbourhood houses, as Vancouver does, they can also become an integral part of a city's governance structure. They can play a significant role in identifying problems in the neighbourhood and setting the agenda for new policies and programs, and they help bring government and civil society actors together.

In addition to providing a history and assessment of Vancouver's neighbourhood houses that contributes to a better understanding of their potential, this book is an important contribution to the literature on the "community problem" of modern urban life. The community problem is generally considered to comprise the following problems of connection and engagement: the avoidance and superficial level of interaction, the living together at high densities as strangers, and the feeling of isolation while surrounded by others. This can lead to alienation and a social disconnection from the social world around us. As a form of social infrastructure focused on the development of relationships and social capacity, neighbourhood houses have the potential to contribute to the ideal of creating welcoming communities in cities and societies that are often less than welcoming and supportive for marginalized, racialized, and disadvantaged groups.

The growth of income inequality is widely acknowledged to be the defining social challenge of our time. Neighbourhood income inequality and polarization continue to grow. As income inequality rises, access to opportunity decreases. Middle-income neighbourhoods continue to disappear, and most are replaced by low-income neighbourhoods. Canada needs more place-based programs as part of an inclusive neighbourhood strategy at the community level to support the macro social and economic change that is required to reverse this trend, a trend greatly exacerbated by COVID-19. Neighbourhood houses can play a vital role as part of this process, as this book demonstrates.

Neighbourhood houses face many challenges, with short-term and precarious funding at the top of the list. They must be well managed, have open democratic governance, and seek to provide services and supports in a way that fosters community development. The work of community-building is not easy. We should not be over-optimistic about its potential impact. But community-based organizations working in the tradition of the settlement-house movement are important neighbourhood institutions. Not all community organizations have a place-based focus. As this book points out, neighbourhood houses have a proven record as essential community players in a

place-based governance approach. As such, they not only provide import-ant supports and services but can also be the glue that holds together di-verse and disadvantaged communities by fostering collective capacity and social inclusion. They can be places for meaningful social, family, and civic engagement, and serve as hubs for social and economic development and for self-development. They are, in short, places full of potential.

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Introduction

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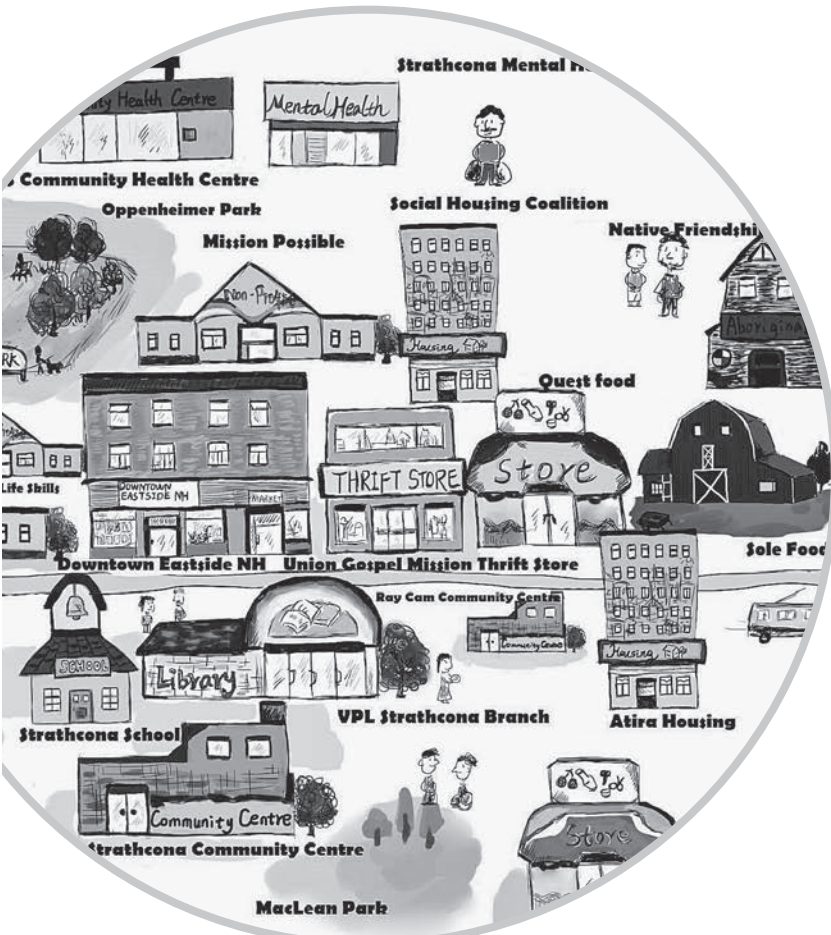
What would it be like to live in a welcoming community? Perhaps residents of a welcoming community would share rich sets of social ties that span the community and form a dense network of relationships with friends, family, and neighbours. Through these ties, the community would work together to achieve shared goals and tackle issues that arise. The dense relationships and the sense of efficacy that develop from successfully working together would, in turn, encourage a positive sense of community.

Of course, given its name, the community would make welcoming newcomers to the social life of the community a priority and include an openness that invites differences and change. In the contemporary world, where residential mobility is high, neighbours often leave their communities for new destinations, and new neighbours arrive in the community from all walks of life. The welcoming community would demonstrate its uniqueness with its approach to welcoming diversity – immigrants and refugees who are new to Canada and others who bring unique differences to the community.[1]

To succeed, a welcoming community would rely on support from local municipalities and a social infrastructure made up of formal and informal organizations and groups that help to develop and nurture these aspects of the community. Neighbourhood houses in Vancouver, Canada, provide one model for what these organizations might look like. Neighbourhood houses are long-standing place-based multi-service community organizations that developed from the legacy of the settlement house movement. They serve the local residents of urban communities in Canada as they have for over a hundred years. Their work is guided by a community-building mission, so that neighbourhood houses not only provide services to residents but also build their social capacity to fully participate in the community and the greater society.

Our goal for this volume is to provide a detailed look at the neighbourhood house model in Vancouver and consider how it contributes to building welcoming communities. This goal did not originate in the offices, corridors, and meeting rooms of a university. Rather, it developed as a collaborative research project including three universities and the fifteen neighbourhood houses operating in Metro Vancouver. The idea for and focus of the research

emerged from conversations between academics and the staff of local neighbourhood houses, and the research process was guided by an advisory committee that included four neighbourhood house leaders. All together, over a thousand board members, staff, volunteers, users, and community stakeholders participated in individual interviews, focus group meetings, or a survey conducted through eleven data collection activities that took place from 2012 to 2014 (see Appendix 1).

This volume is also the result of an interdisciplinary collaboration among a group of academics representing the disciplines of anthropology, geography, history, political science, social work, and sociology. Some of us already had experience working with neighbourhood houses. Prior to his academic career, Miu Chung Yan worked at neighbourhood houses in Hong Kong and Toronto in a variety of roles. Since moving to academia, he has published and advocated for the community work done by neighbourhood houses as essential to the social work discipline. Miu introduced Sean Lauer to neighbourhood houses through work on an earlier research project. Sean got more involved in the operational work of neighbourhood houses by sitting on the board of the largest neighbourhood house organization in Vancouver for seven years. The work of all of the academic contributors to this volume already explored themes involving community-building and non-profit organizations. It was this shared interest that brought us academics together, and over the course of this project, we all became even more engaged with the work of neighbourhood houses.

The Community Problem in Vancouver

At the outset of the project, a public discussion dominated local non-profit and government circles concerning the community problem in Metro Vancouver. The conversation was spurred by the release in 2012 of the Vancouver Foundation's first *Connections and Engagement* report.[2] For many in the region, the findings were startling. The report found that connections – the strength of relationships Vancouverites hold with others – are hard to make; they are cordial but weak. Concerning engagement – commitments to community and willingness to take steps toward improving community – the report found that residents were retreating from community. People were not participating in clubs or local activities, not volunteering, and in many cases not voting. In short, the report determined that Metro Vancouver had a community problem.

It would be difficult to overstate the reaction to the report's findings. The *Vancouver Sun* ran a four-part series on the report that addressed issues

of social isolation, relationships with neighbours, ethnic divisions, and difficulties for newcomers to feel at home. Simon Fraser University organized its first community summit inspired by the report. "Alone Together: Connection in the City" was a week-long summit that attracted thousands of participants to events such as panel discussions with urban planners, social scientists, and artists, and a mayors' roundtable that brought together seventeen representatives from local governments in the region. Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson initiated the Engaged City Task Force to address the problems raised by the report. Once the community problem was recognized, there was enthusiasm for overcoming it.

Within the social sciences, the community problem in urban areas has been a long-standing topic of discussion (Simmel 1950; Wirth 1938; Wellman 1979). Interestingly, the themes and findings described in the Vancouver Foundation report are a common part of these academic discussions. The problems of connections and engagement are often attributed to the larger processes of urbanization, technological development, growing insecurity, and rampant individualism. Today we might include pressures from globalization, financialization, and growing inequality that are sometimes grouped under the term "neoliberalism." The influence of these processes on community life was first addressed by the Chicago School of Sociology, and have continued to draw the attention of scholars interested in urban areas. One outcome of these processes comprises the superficial interactions and avoidance of interaction attributed to urban life. The sheer number of people with whom urban residents come into contact on a day-to-day basis is one factor contributing to the problem of community. Louis Wirth (1938) recognized that in large metropolitan areas it is impossible to interact in a meaningful way with everyone with whom we come into contact. Consider trying to say hello to everyone when walking down a busy street, or waving to every car that you pass while driving. Urbanites stop trying, and the majority of their interactions with others are superficial, and in many cases, such as walking through a busy street or taking public transportation, they avoid social interaction altogether. A man interviewed by the *Vancouver Sun* about the community problem in Vancouver described with dismay his experience of running along a popular route on the Vancouver seawall. In his experience running in other places, runners typically greet each other in some way, such as with a nod. In Vancouver, those who passed him carefully avoided social interaction as he passed, even ignoring him when he said hello: "If you simply wave ... they almost move away from you" (Carman 2012a). For another new resident of Vancouver, "it got to the point where I

was contemplating printing up a T-shirt: 'Would it kill you to just say hello?'" (Carman 2012b).

This avoidance and superficial level of interaction often extend to the neighbours who reside in close proximity to one another. Today, urban residents live in large apartment buildings or dense neighbourhoods, surrounded by many fellow residents but simultaneously not knowing most of their neighbours very well. In many cases, neighbours do not know each other at all. The *Connections and Engagement* report found that 60 percent of respondents do not talk to their immediate neighbours living in the four households closest to them more than two or three times a month, and 15 percent talk with them only once a year or never. A woman interviewed by the *Vancouver Sun* captured this well when she described living in her apartment building: "To give up more [privacy] and get to know my neighbours ... feels a little too invasive for me. I never have sugar and I don't want them coming over and asking for sugar" (Carman 2012c). This desire for a superficial relationship with neighbours, or the outright avoidance of them, captures the community problem well. Georg Simmel (1950) first described this as the paradox of living together as strangers – living in close proximity to many others but being socially distant from them. For some, there is even a paradoxical experience of feeling isolated while surrounded by others. This quality, Simmel suggests, is an underlying aspect of modern urban life that leads to feelings of isolation and alienation from the social world around us.

Along with large numbers of people living in dense contexts, urbanization also brings people from diverse backgrounds and experiences into contact. Cities and metropolitan areas are typically diverse places, and the implications of that diversity for social life is a common and sometimes controversial topic in discussions of urban life. Vancouver is traditionally one of the top immigrant-receiving locations in Canada, and over 40 percent of the metro area residents are immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada 2017). One of the key findings of the *Connections and Engagement* report suggests that diversity limits opportunities to make meaningful connections. Few respondents reported close friends outside of their ethnic group, and many expressed a belief that people prefer to be with others of the same ethnicity. This finding may not be that surprising given the well-known *homophily principle,* which is often described with the aphorism "birds of a feather flock together" (Lazersfeld and Merton, 1954; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Marsden 1987). Interpersonal attraction is a driver of homophily, as similarity influences attraction and signals ease of communication and shared interests (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001, 435). Evidence

that relationships between similar people occur at higher rates than between dissimilar people has accumulated in research on co-workers, romantic partners, and friends (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001, 416).

There are good reasons to expect close friends and affiliations to be co-ethnic when we consider ethnic and immigrant communities. There are simple advantages that come with co-ethnic affiliation, including language and cultural similarities and shared experiences. Alejandro Portes's theory of immigrant and ethnic enclaves proposes that there are clear advantages for newcomers to affiliate with those like themselves in language, culture, and national origin. Along with his colleagues, Portes has shown that similarity breeds trust, and for newcomers with particular needs, these ties can lend support in their new circumstances (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Wilson and Portes 1980; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; see also Breton 1964). Living in large metropolitan areas allows for the possibility of ethnic enclaves to form, given the critical mass of co-ethnic populations. As the co-ethnic population grows, the possibility of ethnically homogeneous communities that are institutionally complete increases.

The formation of ethnic enclaves suggests a fragmented community, including strong connections among co-ethnics with boundaries between these groups. Robert Putnam (2007) has advanced the more dismal proposition that growth in diversity within communities threatens social cohesion overall. Rather than allowing for strong co-ethnic connections, diversity leads to a lack of connections between, but also *within,* ethnic groups. In an invited lecture at Uppsala University in Sweden, Putnam presented findings suggesting that, when faced with diversity, all community members tend to "hunker down – that is, to pull in like a turtle" (Putnam 2007, 149).[3] These findings have been challenged empirically, and a review of sixty-five studies from around the world finds only limited support for the proposition – and this support comes primarily from the United States (van der Meer and Tolsma 2014). In Canada, research does not appear to support the hypothesis of diversity leading to a decline of social cohesion (Aizlewood and Pendakur 2005; Phan 2008). Diverse neighbourhoods and trust are not associated with declining social trust, but Feng Hou and Zheng Wu (2009) find a slightly more complex dynamic where minority concentrations in neighbourhoods are associated with declines in social trust among white residents.

Questioning the Community Problem

The community problem as described in the *Connections and Engagement* report reflects a general retreat from local social life among Vancouver

residents, and these findings echo long-standing academic discussion of community in large metropolitan areas. But there are those who challenge the argument of community decline. For some, the question is whether local, place-based communities remain important today. Others question the assumptions of an ideal community that is presumably being lost through the pressures of modern society.

It is possible to see the retreat from community as described above as a mistaken empirical observation that is based on an assumed quality of previous community life that never actually existed. Conceptions of the loss of community often owe their origin to Ferdinand Tönnies's (2001) well-known description of a *Gesellschaft*-like modern world characterized by individualized, rationally motivated relationships, which he famously contrasted with *Gemeinschaft*-like natural social bonds between family, friends, and neighbours that reflect his conception of community. But whether a natural, *Gemeinschaft*-like community ever existed or is a conception based on nostalgia remains a question. As Stephen Brint (2001) has noted, community studies have consistently found that small communities are rife with power, self-interest, stratification, and privilege.

Perhaps more importantly, as Patricia Hill Collins (2010) has suggested, the rhetorical use of an ideal community includes moral and political implications that are characterized as seemingly natural but actually do make political claims. In this sense, harking back to an ideal community often assumes a geographic specificity, cultural homogeneity, and inherently apolitical entity that is in fact a political ideal. Alejandro Portes and Erik Vickstrom (2011) make a similar criticism of Robert Putnam's communitarian ideal of community in their critique of diversity and community decline. Our image of a welcoming community at the beginning of this chapter is explicitly constructing an ideal set of relationships with moral and political implications. In doing this, we are not suggesting that a welcoming community existed in the past, or is even an obtainable goal in the current social and political landscape. It is aspirational, however. In this sense, we are following Hill Collins's (2010, 25) suggestion that the construct of community enables people to imagine new forms of community, and to participate in building toward that ideal.

Another line of questioning the community problem raises is whether the retreat from community and social life is as a sign of changing forms of social connection and community rather than a community problem. For some scholars, the relevance of the local, residential community of place is questionable. Residential mobility today includes moving from neighbourhood

to neighbourhood within cities, across the country, or from country to country. And technological developments allow us to maintain meaningful connections over long distances. This idea was first described by Barry Wellman as *community liberated* in an influential paper published in the 1970s that described the social life of residents of the Yorkville neighbourhood of Toronto. The argument suggests that urban residents are liberated from the confines of their local neighbourhoods by a confluence of factors, including high rates of residential mobility and cheap, effective means of transportation and communication (Wellman 1979, 1206).[4] As a result, ties to family and close friends are still important, but the assumption that local community is important to organizing these relationships is abandoned. Today, with the advent of social networking technologies, Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2012, 12) argue that we have entered a period of *networked individualism* where people act as free-floating, connected individuals rather than as embedded group members (see also Benkler 2006).

Whether or not the local, residential neighbourhood remains relevant has been one of the more enduring debates among the social scientists who study urban life. Despite the arguments for the declining importance of local neighbourhoods, many scholars still believe that where we live has an important influence on the quantity and quality of our social interactions. Robert Sampson, among the most compelling urban scholars who argue that place matters, rejects the notion that technology, dispersed social networks, state policy, and the accoutrements of (post)modernity explain away neighbourhood differences (Sampson 2012, 21).[5] He focuses instead on the enduring differences across neighbourhoods, often differences that reflect persistent inequalities, arguing that a durable spatial logic organizes or mediates much of social life. We agree with the continuing importance of communities of place, and discuss it in more detail below.

Place and Place-Based Practice

What is a place? This question has been persistently debated in the literature.[6] Very often, as Arif Dirlik (1999) observes, the theorization of place is inevitably appropriated by the priority of an academic discourse. Despite the disciplinary differences, different theoretical articulations of place may at least agree that a place is a geographical space, often including its architectural components. Some may argue (e.g., Liu and Freestone 2016) that as a concept, place does not have a discernible geographic or spatial scale. For neighbourhood houses (NH), however, the local community that they serve is always relatively small and within a certain geographic proximity, or,

self-evidently, the neighbourhood, which as John Friedmann (2010) argues, has existed in the urban history for over 5,000 years.

It is not easy to delineate the boundary of a neighbourhood, however. From an urban planning perspective, Friedmann (2010) suggests that in terms of size, a place should be small enough in geography, possibly within walking distance, for the residents to be able to functionally engage in meaningful social interaction through daily activities. For everyday people, their neighbourhood is the physical locale where their everyday life takes place. Their understanding of the boundaries of their neighbourhood may be more fluid, experiential, and functional. For instance, the City of Vancouver has administratively divided the city into twenty-two distinct neighbourhoods. The boundaries of these twenty-two neighbourhoods are arbitrary, mainly for the purposes of "delivering services and resources and [to] identify the distinct culture and character of different areas of [its] diverse population" (City of Vancouver 2020). One of the co-authors of this chapter, Miu, resides on the west side of Alma Street, which is a boundary between the neighbourhoods of West Point Grey and Kitsilano. While he routinely takes leisurely walks along the beaches in West Point Grey, in which his residential address is located, most of his daily shopping activities take place in Kitsilano. To him, the boundaries of his neighbourhood are a mix of the two officially defined neighbourhoods.

What Is a Place?

Why is the concept of place important? A place is not just an inhabitable space where people reside. As some phenomenological geographers suggest, human existence is experientially inseparable from place. In his canonical text, *Place and Placelessness,* human geographer Edward Relph (1976, 1) contends that "to be human is to have and to know your place." While human activities are one of the key elements in defining a place, people need a place that defines them. In other words, place and its residents dialectically shape each other (e.g., Dirlik 1999; Escobar 2001). Residing together in the same neighbourhood, for instance, people shape "its character, its daily and seasonal rituals, and the recurrent socio-spatial patterns"; in return, people are also shaped by the place by "imprint[ing] themselves on its memory" (Friedmann 2010, 154). Sharing the memory, residents engage *intersubjectively* with and make sense of each other in their everyday interaction.

A place is where people's "here and now" social interaction with others takes place and where they co-create the material and cultural conditions of and within a close geographical locale (Escobar 2001, 152). As Doreen

Massey (1994) suggests, social interrelations are critical to a place. A place is meaningful to its residents not only as a physical locale but, more importantly, for networks of social relations and understandings. Similarly, Arturo Escobar (2001) argues that the notion of a place is derived from a mixture of influences of social relations found together there. In other words, a place is not only about a physical locale. People's sense of a place is more than just a static physical setting and the human activities taking place within this setting. It is also an "organized set of practices for dealing with oneself, other people, and things that produces a relatively self-contained web of meanings" (Escobar 2001, 17). The existence of a place is therefore rooted in the shared meanings among residents who reside in this setting and engage in these activities.

Meanwhile, people's sense of a place also gives meaning to who they are. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) argues that through the shared meanings of a place, people organize their identities and sense of belonging. The physical setting and objects, human activities, social relations, and shared meanings are all "raw materials of the identity of places, and the dialectical links between them are the elementary structural relations of that identity" (Relph 1976, 48). People's identity of a place is a manifestation of the integration with and socialization of knowledge to each other. From the place that they identify, people can have a secure point to look out on the world.

Sense of Insideness

By sharing a web of meanings, residents also foster a sense of "insideness," which implies the unconscious connection of residents to their neighbourhood (Relph 1976). Some people equate "insideness" with a sense of place, a sense of attachment, or a sense of belonging (Liu and Freestone 2016). Underneath all these different kinds of sense is the notion that people cherish the place in which they spend most parts of their everyday, i.e., the neighbourhood (Friedmann 2010). To Relph (1976), "insideness" is also an authentic attitude toward a place – a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of the place. Graham Rowles (1983) has articulated three types of insideness of place that insiders share and treasure: 1) physical insideness is a sense of familiarity and mastery of the physical space and architectures; 2) social insideness is the sense of knowing and being known through everyday social exchanges and relationships; and 3) autobiographical insideness is a sense of self-identification generated by memories embedded and connected to the place.

This insider authentic attitude subjectively demarcates the boundaries of a neighbourhood that distinguish the "insiders" from the "outsiders." To insiders, a place is a pause – relatively stable and permanent (Tuan 1977). To an outsider, such as a tourist visiting Jericho Beach in West Point Grey, the neighbourhood is just a space of movement (Tuan 1977). To the tourist, Jericho Beach is just a beach like many other beaches that "offer the same bland possibilities for experience" (Relph 1976, 20). The tourist has no awareness of the deep and symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of the identities that the "insiders" share.

Place and Placelessness in a Globalized World

Tuan's notion of permanency is under siege in today's increasingly globalized world. A place can no longer be defined only within the local geographical boundaries. The rapid advancement in communication technology enables people to extend their social relations from afar. The everyday life of many people, such as shopping, and personal emotional connection, is no longer confined to a fixed locale. In a global era, the distinction between place and placelessness is also fading as a result of cultural globalization. As Relph (2016b, 30) observes: "Everywhere has become, to some degree, a microcosm of everywhere else. It doesn't matter if somebody has stayed in one locality and avoided a multi-centered life; the rest of the world has slipped into their place anyway."

The growing diversity among the residents due to global migration has also prompted radical human geographers to question the politics of place. As Tim Cresswell (2004, 29) summarizes: "Place was not simply an outcome of social processes though it was, once established, a tool in the creation, maintenance and transformation of relations of domination, oppression and exploitation." Indeed, by making places, we create social identities and boundaries that include some but exclude others.

However, David Harvey argues that Tuan's optimism regarding the seeming permanency of place may still give people the sense of a secured haven in the unpredictable, globalized world (quoted in Cresswell 2004). As Escobar (2001, 147) observes, despite the high mobility within blurring boundaries, people still functionally and existentially "construct some sort of boundaries around their places, however, permeable and to be grounded in local socio-natural practices, no matter how changing and hybridized those grounds and practices might turn out to be." People still hold on to the place where their everyday life takes place.

Escobar's observation also indicates an important notion that place making is a conscious effort. In the era of globalization, this conscious effort of making a place is a re-embedding process through which like-minded people from diverse backgrounds collaboratively select a place to live and to invest themselves (Relph 2016b). As Ash Amin (2002) suggests, to build a sense of togetherness among the socially diverse population of a place, we need to go beyond the mere proximity of physical coexistence. In a highly mobile world, to make place among diverse groups of residents requires not only their concerted effort but also "both informal and formal political processes that can facilitate re-embedding and inclusion for those who come from elsewhere" (Relph 2016a, 271).

Place-Based Policy

Recently, place has been increasingly discussed in public policy (Bradford 2005). Place is indeed also a nexus where power relations are produced, enacted, reproduced, or transformed. Similar to the radical human geographical articulation, in public policy place is articulated as a dynamic locale – with its own diversity and power relations – where the larger forces and flows that structure daily life are contested and given meaning. In place-based policy, neighbourhood as a place is an open system aligned "with larger areas such as metros and regions and the geography is embedded in market forces and public policies" (Ferris and Hopkins 2015, 100). Thus, proponents of place-based policy are critical for the state in mobilizing concerted efforts to address challenges confronting local communities (Shugart and Townsend 2010). They see that a place, like a neighbourhood, is seen not only as where people live but also where social problems are manifested and policy should take effect. A place is also rich in local knowledge and resources that make innovation possible in resolving social problems. The shared identity of a place is a source of social capital – social cohesion and reciprocity – that can be used to supplement limited public resources.

A place-based approach advocates for enhancing opportunities for participation of local people to work with policy elites and professionals, support local initiatives, and create local innovation. To do so, we need some effective mechanisms of place making to generate various opportunities that facilitate social interactions among local residents and foster social inclusion of the diverse populations in the neighbourhood (Friedmann 2010). Community gardens, religious gathering places, and libraries are some examples of place-making mechanisms that provide a safe space for

residents to meet, gather, and interact with others. Indeed, the idea and practice of place-based local mechanisms of connection are not new. Settlement houses have historically proven to be successful place-based community organizations connecting people in many urban communities (Ferris and Hopkins, 2015).

Neighbourhood Houses as Place-Based Community Organizations

One key finding of the *Connections and Engagement* report is respondents' lack of engagement in their communities. Most Vancouver respondents did not participate in neighbourhood or community activities, with many explaining their lack of engagement as a result of their not feeling they had much to offer. In academic discussions, a primary concern following from the observation of guardedness in personal relationships is that it will translate to an inability of neighbourhoods to act together to improve where they live or tackle problems that confront society as a whole. Perhaps Alexis de Tocqueville ([1840] 2003, 587) first expressed this concern when he described the embracing of a calm and considered feeling that persuades a person to withdraw into small groups of family and friends and leave society to fend for itself. Here again, Robert Putnam (2000) has successfully started an international discussion about the decline of community and engagement in contemporary life. Putnam has warned of declines in trust in others, personal connections, and face-to-face interactions, and documents a parallel trend of retreat from participation in large voluntary organizations over time and declines in informal gatherings such as neighbourhood picnics and inviting friends to homes for dinner.

While de Tocqueville feared the retreat of individuals from society, he maintained a sincere optimism for local associations to bring people together to participate collectively in their communities. He believed that the pleasure gained in coming together enabled participants to recognize the value of collective life. Others have suggested that participating in local, community organizations forms an essential infrastructure for building local communities. Such organizations bring together people who share a residential location in common but often come from a wide variety of other social positions. New, diverse connections are formed, different experiences are shared, and new ideas and worldviews are confronted. This sounds a lot like the proposal of Amin (2002), who envisions community organizations generating opportunities for intercultural understanding and fostering social inclusion in socially diverse local communities. Amin recognizes the intense social

diversity of contemporary urban communities as the foremost challenge to engagement, and close physical proximity of a diverse population alone can lead to retreat from society or conflict. Effective mechanisms of community-building are needed to achieve a functioning community life.

The term "community organization" refers to a loose social category comprising social service organizations that are established and operated by civil society. Very often, community organizations are also labelled as voluntary organizations, NGOs and/or non-profit organizations, or third sector social organizations. Not all community organizations have a place-based focus, however. Many are mandated to serve and advocate for a group of people who have similar psychological and social needs and predicaments due to personal characteristics such as ethnicity, disability, gender, or life-cycle stages such as aging and youth. Service users of these organizations do not necessarily share physical proximity. In contrast, place-based organizations define community as a locally bounded place within which users reside and share. It is also the place that facilitates and limits the everyday life of local residents and the place with which the residents identify themselves. Community organizations not only serve the needs of local residents but also help them build a sense of belonging and togetherness as residents sharing a place.

Questioning the Effective Solution

There are those who see problems with proposing community organizations as a solution to the community problem in contemporary society. A common analytical tool for examining community organizations is to contrast the role of these organizations with that of the governmental and for-profit sectors (Hansmann 1987). Using this framework suggests that community-building is non-sustainable as a for-profit endeavour, and falls outside of the mandate of local governments. As a result, when it continues to be recognized as a public good, the work of community-building falls to community organizations (Williams 2003). This working division between sectors assumes that community organizations maintain some autonomy from the political sector and remain locations where participant identities and interests are formed independently (Clemens 2006, 207); in this case, they are building local identities and collective interests around community.

Perhaps this image of a division of responsibilities among government, for-profit, and community organizations, and community organization as an effective solution to the community problem, is unrealistic? John Shields and Mitchell Evans find that community organizations not only do the work

of community-building but also provide essential services to local residents that have previously been the responsibility of local government (Evans and Shields 2010; Shields and Evans 1998). As the governmental sector retreats from service provision, these responsibilities have been devolved to local community organizations, which rely more and more on government funding. As local governments move these services outside their mandate, such funding becomes piecemeal, short-term, and unstable. Community organizations are asked to do more with less, while also being required to work under extensive accountability and oversight measures (Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005; Yan et al. 2017). Evans and Shields (2010) express concern that these processes move community organizations away from their mission, commercialize their operations, and compromise their autonomy. Given these challenges, we might question the view of community organizations as effective solutions to the community problem in contemporary society.

Similar concerns have been expressed with regard to the settlement houses. Judith Trolander (1987) documented the trend toward professionalization within settlement houses. For her, this trend challenged the settlement houses' ability to maintain focus on their core mission. Michael Fabricant and Robert Fisher (2002) have documented the commercialization of operations and the compromised autonomy of settlement houses in New York City. Miu Chung Yan (2004) is aware of these challenges to the settlement house movement, but despite them, he remains optimistic about the potential of local community-based organizations, seeing the legacy of the settlement house movement as a model for community-building for place-based organizations such as neighbourhood houses. Noting that the movement has lost some momentum in the West, Yan points out that the community-building approach of settlement houses has spread around the world to countries and regions including India, Hong Kong, Eastern Europe, and Japan (Kaul 1988; Chow 1980; Yan 2002). Today, Yan suggests, neighbourhood houses, as community-based organizations working in the tradition of the settlement house movement, are important neighbourhood institutions that both provide services and build community among local residents.

The Settlement House Tradition

What is the tradition of the settlement house movement? The first settlement house, known as Toynbee Hall, was established in London's East End in 1884 in response to growing urbanization, industrialization, and

immigrant concentrations in neighbourhoods in London. The goal was to overcome these destructive forces and maintain face-to-face friendship in a society becoming increasingly impersonal and anonymous (Meacham 1987). The settlements earned the name from the educated, middle-class residents of the houses who moved to neighbourhoods deemed particularly in need. The presence of these relocated residents alone was thought to be important, but the settlement houses also developed a multifocal, reformist approach to programs and activities. There were services addressing direct needs in the community, programs geared toward building community in the neighbourhood, and activities that promoted individual development, such as learning to play musical instruments.

While Toynbee Hall was the first settlement, perhaps Hull House in Chicago went on to more notoriety, along with its founder, Jane Addams.[7] Addams's inspiration to start Hull House followed from a visit to Toynbee Hall and her witnessing of the work being done there. After sharing her experience with her friend Ellen Gates Starr, they opened the Hull House settlement together. Addams received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 after her work at Hull House became well known due to her advocacy work and her writings. In her written works, Addams developed many of the principles of the settlement house tradition that are useful for understanding their continued importance for neighbourhood houses today.

Addams introduced the concept of perplexity as the organizing concept of her first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics*. The concept of perplexity arises from her interest in pragmatism and her recognition of the limitations stemming from pre-reflective, habitual, non-thinking behaviour (Schneiderhan 2011). For Addams, perplexity describes those moments when situations no longer accommodate non-thinking, habitual behaviour. We feel perplexed when we get out of our comfort zones and are forced to challenge our assumptions about how to be a good person in the world.[8] Hull House embodied the perplexities of its times, according to Addams. Entering the house and engaging with other participants through activities posed a challenge to preconceived ideas about the problems of the day and the people who inhabited the neighbourhoods and city. Neighbourhood houses today continue to provide these opportunities for interacting with people from different walks of life that lead participants to have moments of perplexity that can challenge assumptions as well as develop new abilities for working with others (Yan and Lauer 2008; Lauer and Yan 2013; Lauer and Yan, forthcoming).

A second important aspect of Addams's conception of a settlement house addresses the reciprocal relationship of Hull House to the community. Eric Schneiderhan (2011) develops this in his examination of Addams's pragmatism in both ideas and practice. In *Twenty Years at Hull House,* Addams describes the aim of Hull House: "To develop whatever of the social life of its neighbourhood may afford, to focus and give form to that life and to bring to bear upon the results of cultivation and training." Schneiderhan describes how the many early activities undertaken at Hull House developed gradually through regular interaction with residents in the surrounding area, and responded to the needs that followed from these interactions. Addams herself said that they had no definitive theories as they started their work at Hull House, but their approach reflected the interactions with local neighbours. In Schneiderhan's analysis, Addams's approach was reciprocal between residents of Hull House and residents of the surrounding neighbourhood. He quotes Dorothea Moore, writing in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1897, who emphasized that "the exchange [was] the vital thing," and Addams's emphasis that the work was a two-way exchange between Hull House residents and the community. This idea of a two-way, reciprocal exchange between neighbourhood houses and the local community remains today. This localized exchange results in each neighbourhood house developing its own character, which reflects the uniqueness of the neighbourhoods where they operate (Yan, Lauer, and Sin 2009).

Nina Eliasoph (2011, 2013) sees Jane Addams's work as being about more than building reciprocal relationships with the local community to solve problems, and more than providing opportunities for perplexity. She describes Addams as a community builder who saw a direct link with that work to political activism. We can see this in Addams's own writing, where perplexity, for instance, provides opportunities for new connections and shared experiences among diverse others, but also translates into a broader social ethic. In *Democracy and Social Ethics,* she says: "We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the throng and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another's burdens." Addams thought that these experiences would lead to an adoption of a social ethic that recognized our interdependence and the need for collective solutions. For her, that experience is fundamental to a successful democratic system.

Eliasoph (2013, 30) sees a similar link in the way Addams practised reciprocity in the work of Hull House. Drawing on an example from *Twenty*

Years at Hull House in which a local slaughterhouse was disposing of dead animal carcasses in the streets of a local ghetto, with local children getting sick as a result, Eliasoph describes the multiple responses to the problem. On the one hand, an individualistic approach warned parents and encouraged children to avoid the area. A second, collective response led to local residents assisting in building a small incinerator to deal with the waste. But Eliasoph is particularly interested in Addams's third, political response, in which Hull House put pressure on the city to pave the streets and establish regular garbage pickup. For her, this is an illustrative example of how Addams's community-building focus translates to political action.

Drawing on the legacy of Jane Addams and Hull House provides a framework for understanding the contributions of neighbourhood houses, as local, community-based organizations, in addressing the problems of community. In this book, we provide evidence of how neighbourhood houses, which inherit the "machinery of connection" mandate and tradition of early settlement houses, persist as place-making mechanisms in contemporary urban communities.

Organization of the Book

We organized this book into seven chapters that are interrelated and intersect at the themes discussed above. We make many key connections across the chapters clear, and encourage readers to find their own connections in order to fully appreciate the nature of neighbourhood houses (NH) as a long-standing place-based organization that meets local service needs while connecting and organizing local residents.[9]

Neighbourhood houses are a continuation of the early social settlement movement. However, this history of how settlement houses are transformed into today's neighbourhood houses in Vancouver is neither linear nor smooth. In Chapter 1, Sean Lauer, Miu Chung Yan, and Eleanor Stebner briefly capture the unique historical background of the formation of the first settlement house, Toynbee Hall, which was part of the social movements aiming to correct the social ills caused by the rapid industrialization and urbanization in the Victoria era. The social reform orientation and success of Toynbee Hall quickly appealed to the rising new middle class in the United States, where the urban centres also experienced similar social problems. With the support of churches, the new middle class, comprising mostly women, enthusiastically copied this model from across the Atlantic and spread it throughout the country. Experiencing relatively slow economic development, Canada was a latecomer to the social settlement movement.

Due to social and physical proximity, early Canadian settlement houses were significantly influenced by the American pioneers. When the movement arrived in Vancouver in the 1930s, many traditions of early settlement houses were lost. Unlike their predecessors elsewhere, they were all started as secular and professionally run place-based and community-based organizations. The church, the new middle class, and the university played a minimal role in the development of NHs in Vancouver, where almost all NHs were formed by the concerted effort of local residents and/or as an outcome of professional intervention of social planners and community developers.

The involvement of social planners in the development of early neighbourhood houses in Vancouver indicated a close relationship between NHs and the state. For NHs in Vancouver, this relationship has become closer over time. As with many social service organizations in Canada and elsewhere, government has become a major source of funding of NHs. However, the prevalent neoliberal influence on government expenditure has significant impacts on the operation of NHs and their perceived place-based mandate. In Chapter 2, Oliver Schmidtke focuses on the role of NHs in governing the local community from a place-based perspective, considering their dual role as service providers and community advocates. What are the political ambitions of NHs in terms of working with and on behalf of the community as an independent, grassroots civil society organization? How do NHs in Metro Vancouver contribute to governing the community and stimulating democratic practices? Addressing these questions, the chapter explores how NHs in Metro Vancouver have provided institutional capacity for the empowerment of marginalized social groups, bottom-up governance, and effective policy initiatives. The analysis draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with NH executive directors and representatives of the city, as well as on surveys and focus groups conducted at various NHs. Based on the analysis, Schmidtke elaborates on two central aspects of NHs as agents of civic engagement and political change. First, NHs are critical in facilitating the development of social capital by connecting citizens, helping them to overcome their social isolation, and providing them with the tools to become involved in communal affairs. Second, NHs provide a significant forum for place-based governance operating at a complex intersection between community members and different levels of government.

In Chapter 3, Miu Chung Yan offers an analysis of NHs both as a mechanism to generate community assets among local residents and as an organizational asset that is accessible to local residents. As place-based organizations, NHs are not only physically close to local residents who can

access multiple services and help within walking distance, they are also psychologically close to local residents who find them a safe and welcoming place, like home. The homey feeling is reflected in the strong sense of ownership and volunteerism among their service users, which have converted service users from passive receivers to active participants. As reflected in the results of the service users survey, respondents agreed that NHs are a community asset that solves community problems by successfully nurturing resources. Most often these resources are from other community organizations and public institutions that are fragmented and that often operate in isolation. NHs have enabled an institutional accessibility that bridges the gap between the needs of local residents and the public resources hidden in the hard-to-navigate service network. Their proximity to local residents has made them a local place-based hub of the web of multiple service networks.

In Chapter 4, Sean Lauer examines the concept of social infrastructure more closely. He considers social infrastructure the physical places and organizations that shape the interactions of people in a community, and he uses this definition to show that neighbourhood houses are a unique form of social infrastructure. The place-based focus of NHs discourages focus on a narrow set of programs and activities and encourages attraction of a diverse set of participants from varied backgrounds and from across the life course. These characteristics of neighbourhood houses enable participants to engage in a variety of different activities and to come into contact with the demographic variability of participants at the NH. These unique aspects of NHs provide opportunities for community-building through the maintenance and development of relationships and the development of social capacity. The chapter demonstrates these outcomes through an analysis of survey data collected from neighbourhood house participants.

Based largely on life history data, in Chapter 5, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá and Erika Ono examine how structural challenges such as racism and poverty, and everyday obstacles related to lack of inclusion, discrimination, and other social attitudes of dominant members of society toward new immigrants and refugees, have historically impacted immigrants' economic, social, and political incorporation. This chapter considers neighbourhood houses as place-based organizations that have played a unique role in immigrants' pathways toward incorporation in the economic and social life of the city. Based on life history interviews, it traces two complementary dynamics and functions of the NHs: as places for meaningful social, family, and civic

engagement and as hubs for exchange, career path, and self-development. Applying holistic place-based approaches to the understanding of civic engagement and to Arjun Appadurai's notion (2004) of individual and collective aspirations as a navigational capacity, the authors find that in the context of a settler colonial country such as Canada, immigrants have played a central role in the envisioning and maintenance of NHs as places of social and racial inclusion, place-based learning, and leadership. They also interrogate this dynamic of inclusion and engagement from the lens of a racialized architecture of power where racially minoritized staff and volunteers have scant presence in the decision-making roles and systems of the NHs.

Neighbourhood houses exist to serve local residents, making the lived experiences of NH participants central to their story. In Chapter 6, Jenny Francis summarizes the stories of twelve immigrants to Canada whose lives have been transformed through connection with their local neighbourhood house. The people who shared their stories initially struggled to find employment, navigate new systems, make friends, and develop a sense of belonging in their new home. Social isolation, non-recognition of foreign experience and credentials, and low incomes left them feeling out of place, lonely, and "worthless." In these contexts, their narratives underscore the role of neighbourhood houses as critical sites of empowerment and belonging that helped them develop both a sense of place and a feeling of trust in Canadian institutions. Through volunteer and paid work opportunities, neighbourhood houses foster the connections that enable immigrants who once felt like useless outsiders to develop a feeling of "insideness" and become contributing members of society. In other words, neighbourhood houses empower immigrants to help others, which is in turn empowering! The stories reveal the means by which the networks that evolve around the neighbourhood house transform disconnected urban residents into a community, creating the "ripple effect" of care and belonging that makes a neighbourhood home.

Finally, we are cautious that this book not be over-optimistic about the roles and functions of neighbourhood houses as place-based organizations. In Chapter 7, we highlight three major challenges for NHs. Financial constraints are neither new nor unique to NHs. Under the neoliberal funding model, the community service sector experiences ongoing challenges driven by financial shortages and precarious employment conditions. De-professionalization has led to questions about service quality. However, NHs uniquely experience a place-based paradox: being successful in their

local community but invisible in the greater society. Coupled with growing competitiveness in public funding, this paradox erodes collaboration among NHs and further hinders the NH movement from raising funds from government and donations. Despite these challenges and limitations, we contend that NHs are vital place-based community organizations in contemporary urban communities.

Notes

1 This description of a welcoming community is inspired in part by that of Lars Meier (2017). In Canada, welcoming community initiatives at the municipal level have inspired a small literature on welcoming communities and integration of immigrants and refugees at the community level (Guo and Guo 2016; Brown 2017). Esses and colleagues (2010) have suggested seventeen characteristics of a welcoming community for new immigrants that include both aspects of a welcoming community and characteristics of communities that facilitate these welcoming aspects. See Power and Bartlett 2018 for a discussion of non-immigration-focused welcoming communities in Britain and Canada.

2 It released a follow-up report in 2017.

3 The notably folksy description came to be known as the constrict proposition.

4 Wellman actually develops a total of five factors that contribute to this outcome. His own view is that only some aspects of the liberated view have empirical support.

5 Sampson has made a career out of documenting what he calls neighbourhood effects that has culminated in the publication of *Great American City* (2012).

6 For further discussion of the idea of place, place attachment, and place identity, please refer to Chapter 5.

7 There are numerous good introductions to Jane Addams, including Knight 2010, Elshtain 2002, and Stebner 1997. Of course, Addams's own *Twenty Years at Hull House* ([1910] 1960) and *Democracy and Social Ethics* (2002) are also excellent introductions.

8 This is a paraphrase of Nina Eliasoph's (2013, 26) use of the concept. I also rely on Schneiderhan 2011 and Seigfried 2004 in my discussion of perplexity.

9 Readers will note that although the majority (77 percent) of our respondents are women, gender does not provide an analytical focus in the chapters that follow. We intend to pursue this important avenue of inquiry fully in subsequent publications, which we invite readers to explore.

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