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JUST HOUSING PROVISION: CONTESTED URBAN SPACE AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

RESUMEN

Un sello distintivo de una sociedad justa incluye el acceso a una vivienda financieramente asequible, segura y adecuada, y la falta de este tipo de viviendas representa a nivel mundial, un serio problema de justicia social. Nuestra presentación relaciona esta noción de justicia social con consideraciones de residencia en un medio urbano utilizando el caso de Vancouver, Canadá. Muestra como un enfoque pragmático de formulación de políticas eficaces puede asegurar una distribución más equitativa de los recursos de vivienda, que se centra en la adecuación, accesibilidad y seguridad de la tenencia. Más específicamente, una política progresista sobre la provisión de vivienda es relacionada con las ideas y las normas de intervención del gobierno, asociaciones públicas / privadas, y la regulación del mercado que forman a las comunidades urbanas en el complejo estado federal que es Canadá. Nuestro trabajo plantea el reto de volver a imaginar la participación ciudadana y el fortalecimiento ciudadanos en el contexto de las respuestas locales a la reforma progresiva del medio ambiente urbano. La densificación, la diversidad y el acceso (como expresiones de compromiso con la sostenibilidad social y ambiental) catalizan la resistencia a nivel comunitario. El compromiso ciudadano reúne una variedad de fuerzas de desarrollo urbano que hacen que el desarrollo de nociones de comunidad, el fortalecimiento de las personas y sus derechos, sean delicados y complejos. Este trabajo presenta un enfoque teórico para el compromiso con el proceso que busca estrategias para el cambio social en el contexto del espacio urbano en el que compiten la diversidad de demandas y la distribución de los recursos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: DERECHO A LA CIUDAD - JUSTICIA HABITACIONAL

ABSTRACT

A hallmark of a just society includes access to affordable, safe, and adequate housing, and lack of such housing is a key social justice issue globally. Our paper interweaves this notion of social justice into considerations of citizenship in the urban environment using the case of Vancouver, Canada. The pragmatic focus is on how effective policy development can ensure a more equitable delivery of housing resources, one that focuses on adequacy, affordability, and security of tenure. More specifically, a progressive politics about housing provision engages with notions and norms of government intervention, public/private partnerships, and market regulation as they shape urban communities in the complex federal state that is Canada. Our paper takes up the challenge of reimagining citizen involvement and empowerment in the context of local responses to progressive reform of the urban environment. Densification, diversity, and access (as expressions of commitments to social and environmental sustainability) catalyze resistance at the community level. Citizen engagement enlists a variety of conflicting forces in urban planning, rendering notions of community, empowerment and rights tricky and complex. This paper theorizes an approach to engagement that seeks strategies for social change in the context of contested urban space and resource distribution.

KEY WORDS: RIGHT TO THE CITY - HOUSING JUSTICE

PROLOGUE
OPPENHEIMER PARK

Oppenheimer Park is one square block smack dab in the middle of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Canada's poorest urban neighbourhood. Hot summer months see the park serve as sleeping quarters for homeless or poorly housed residents in the area. In July 2014, these park users were given moving-on orders by the City. Galvanized by the City's actions, against the backdrop of the current unstaunched housing crisis, calls went out. A thirty-tent protest camp rose, accompanied by communal governing structures and protest narratives about the lack of adequate housing for all in Vancouver. The issues this camp invokes are complex; the land beneath the camp is layered. It is unceded aboriginal land and, disproportionately, the protesters are indigenous. The park also abuts an area of early Japanese settlement, recalling through these cultural associations the internment of Japanese Canadians and seizure of their lands during World War II. Provocatively, in this space past and present injustices of Canadian society sit atop one another. All shape the current conflict.

Dunbar Neighbourhood

Travel six kilometres to the south west and you enter one of the more affluent areas of Vancouver, home to spacious single family dwellings. Part of the ring of low density neighbourhoods that circle the high density downtown core of Vancouver, Dunbar's contrast with the neighbourhood of Oppenheimer Park could not be more stark. Leafy streets sit between urban wilderness parkland and an arterial commercial street, itself lined by boutiques, a community centre and library, and a large upscale grocery store. Once a middle-class neighbourhood of young families, it is now mostly upper-middle class, middle-aged, and senior "empty nesters," These residents are highly organized in their efforts to maintaining their neighbourhood's character, strongly opposing any densification. A number of recent multi-family housing proposals have been forced to scale down, and even so remain controversial. Development projects that would increase housing opportunities, at a range of income levels, have had to be put on hold because of neighbourhood opposition.

Introduction

These two vignettes of conflict around housing in Vancouver anchor the story we tell in this paper. Civic politics of housing are at play in each; the events "tag team" each other, speaking in different registers but in a deeply connected manner, nonetheless. Thus, our focus is a local one, the city of Vancouver, Canada's third largest city, on the far western coastline of North America. We use the urban politics of housing justice here to plot more theoretical contemplation of notions currently in circulation around social justice struggles and the politics of representation and identity in the city.

A hallmark of a just society includes access to affordable, safe, and adequate housing. Our paper interweaves this notion of social justice into considerations of citizenship in the urban environment. The pragmatic focus is on how effective policy development can ensure a more equitable delivery of housing resources, one that focuses on adequacy, affordability, and security of tenure. More specifically, a progressive politics about housing provision engages with notions and norms of government intervention, public/private partnerships, and market regulation as they shape urban communities in the complex federal state that is Canada. But, most critically, we examine this policy context from the perspective of the political goal of inclusivity. A just city is one that grants to all its residents a central hallmark of substantive citizenship—access to adequate housing.

Our paper takes up the challenge of reimagining citizen involvement and empowerment in the context of local responses to progressive reform of the urban environment. No clear, widely acceptable response to the housing crises of cities like Vancouver has emerged. Policy analysts, politicians, communities activists, business representatives struggle over articulation and implementation of solutions to dire circumstances. Densification, diversity, and access (as expressions of commitments to social and environmental sustainability) catalyze resistance at the community level. Citizen engagement enlists a variety of conflicting forces in urban planning, rendering notions of community, empowerment and rights tricky and complex. Outlining the legal framework for intervention, using data from a survey on housing experiences, and referencing case studies of affordable housing initiatives and approaches in Vancouver, the paper theorizes an approach that seeks strategies for social change in the context of contested urban space and resource distribution.

THE VANCOUVER CONTEXT

One of the more beautiful cities in the world, Vancouver is also one of the least affordable. The desirability of its social and physical assets is a significant factor in this unaffordability, as well is a fixed amount of developable land limiting possibilities for housing development. Vancouver is considered by some to be a "hedge city"; a safe place for the wealthy to park money in real estate.[1] High housing prices have, for some time now, affected a large portion of the population. Home ownership is a pricey proposition; single family homes in Vancouver are typically well about the million dollar mark.[2] Not surprisingly, then, more than half of Vancouver residents are renters, a significantly higher percentage than other Canadian cities, and, of those, many are paying the highest rents within one of the tightest Canadian rental markets.[3]

Canada used to have a model housing delivery system. These days are past. In the early 1990s, the federal government effectively got out of direct involvement in housing and, since then, the housing situation across the country has deteriorated. The current era is marked by the general absence of effective governmental strategy at the federal and provincial levels to reduce homeless and housing insecurity.[4] Reports document the range and degree of housing inadequacy for too large a number of residents in Canada (for example, Shapcott, 2014). At the international level, experts express deep concern. The recent report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Adequate Housing referred to a "crisis of homelessness and inadequate housing" in Canada (Kothari, 2009: para. 32). International human rights expert members of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights have called for Canada to "implement a national strategy for reduction of homelessness that includes measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms, in keeping with ICESCR standards" (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2006): para. 62). Efforts have been made to advance a national strategy in Parliament. Twice, a private member's bill has been introduced into the House of Commons to institute such a national strategy.

1 "What are hedge cities and why is Vancouver considered one of them?," *Globe and Mail*, May 20, 2014, retrieved on August 18, 2014 from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/the-unusual-nature-of-vancouvers-real-estate-market-gets-the-new-york-er-treatment/article18768027/. .

2 'Canada's most expensive housing market not headed for crash, says credit agency," retrieved on August 18, 2014 from DBRShttp://business.financialpost.com/2014/07/30/canadas-most-expensive-housing-market-not-headed-for-crash-says-credit-agency-dbrs/.

3 "Are Stats Glossing Over Vancouver's Housing Crisis?," *The Tyee*, retrieved on August 18, 2014 from http://thetyee.ca/News/2013/09/24/Vancouver-Housing-Crisis-Stats/.

4 Government of Alberta, "One province, Alberta has implemented a strategic plan called "*A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*," Retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf.

And, twice, the private member's bill in question has been effectively vanquished.[5]

This erosion of public sector involvement in housing provision has occurred at the same time as housing prices have risen faster than income, creating a housing affordability crisis for those who are low to moderate income. The rise in homelessness is significantly linked to incomes growing slower than the cost of living, resulting in inability to afford housing (Laird, 2007). This much discussed "affordability gap" is characterized by an increasingly disenfranchised population over-extended financially, and inadequately housed (Pelletiere et al, 2009). One quarter of all Canadian households spend 30 per cent or more of their gross household income on housing, and, for renters alone, this climbs to 40%.[6] Of those, 13.2% of urban households were in "core housing need," in 2010, up from 12.3% in 2007.[7] Not surprisingly, then, Canada's homeless population has grown dramatically with estimates varying between 150,000 and 300,000 people living in shelters or unsheltered.[8]

Nowhere in Canada is the housing crisis more acute than in Metro Vancouver. The rental vacancy rate is one of the lowest in Canada at 2.6%, and rents are among the highest ($1,237 for a two-bedroom unit).[9] The secondary market is the main source of new rental accommodation in the Vancouver area with more than half of renters in Vancouver in secondary rental units.[10] Investor-owned condominiums (which occupy the higher end of the rental apartment market) make up about one-quarter of condominium ownership, with an estimated 90% of those on the rental market.[11] For a number of years there have been few new purpose-built rental units and the existing stock is declining as units are redeveloped to non-rental condominiums. Much housing such as SROs (single room occupancy units) once rented by low or no income people now rents to the working poor and students, desperate for housing. A chain reaction forces those with the least amount of resources to scramble for the dwindling pool of affordable, cheap housing.

The combination of high housing costs and low average incomes makes Vancouver particularly unaffordable. Vancouver residents' average income is one of the lowest in Canada. The median Vancouver household income in 2012 was $71,140,[12] with a median house price in 2013 of $670,300.[13] For several years the City of Vancouver has ranked as the 2nd worst in the world for homeownership affordability (in 2013, Hong Kong was the most unaffordable and San Francisco ranked third).[14] Consequently, in 2006, for example, 39% of homeowners in Vancouver paid more than 30% of their income in housing costs, and 18% more than half their income.[15] Renters were even worst off; over two-fifths (44%) of Vancouver renters paid more than 30% of their household income in rent, while more than one in five (22%) paid more than half their income in rent.[16]

The result of this situation is that Vancouver has an acute homelessness and housing insecurity problem. Those who can't find housing become homeless. A March 2014 homeless count found that the number of homeless in Vancouver has increased significantly since 2012.[17] Indeed, current numbers (widely acknowledged to underreport the number of homeless) are the highest ever recorded.

A survey of housing experiences in Metro Vancouver conducted by the authors[18] corroborates the data above.[19] Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported spending over 30 percent of their household income on housing; 52 percent of respondents were market renters, sub-leasers, or subsidized housing tenants; and, in Vancouver's lower income eastside, two-thirds of respondents were renters. In addition, renters reported substandard housing including mould, rot and bedbugs. This anecdotal evidence attests

5 The first private member's bill died on the order paper when an election was called. The second private member's bill was defeated on second reading.
6. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) sets 30 per cent of pre-tax income as the threshold for core housing need. More specifically, occupying housing that falls below any of the dwelling adequacy, suitability or affordability standards and needing to spend 30% or more of gross income to pay for alternative local market housing that meets all three standards constitute core housing need. Statistics Canada, "2011 National Household Survey," retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-014-x/99-014-x2011002-eng.pdf
7 CMHC. (2013). "Canadian Housing Observer 2013" , retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/67989.pdf .
8 Ibid.

9 CMHC.(2012). "Canadian Housing Observer 2012," retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/67708.pdf
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Statistics Canada. (2012). Median total income, by family type, by census metropolitan area. Retrieved august 18, 2014 from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/famil107a-eng.htm.
13 Demographia, (2014). 10th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2014 Ratings for Metropolitan Markets, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.demographia.com/dhi.pdf.
14 Ibid.

15 2006 Census Housing Series: Issue 3 – The Adequacy, Suitability, and Affordability of Canadian Housing, 1991 – 2006. Socio-Economic Series 09-006. February 2009. Ottawa ONT: CMHC, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/66383.pdf?fr=1300474391275.
16 Ibid.
17 See Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (2014), retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://stophomelessness.ca/
18 See Metro Vancouver Housing Affordability Survey (2014), retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://housingjustice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/HJP-Affordable-Housing-Survey-Results.pd
19 The survey was conducted online generally andby hard copies in selected neighbourhoods. The survey was not designed to be representative of the general Metro Vancouver population. Nevertheless, the findings provide critical anecdotal information about the region's housing profile and experiences.

to a tough housing climate, with many forced to live in substandard, unhealthy, unaffordable, and inadequate housing.

It is within this context that the stories above about the Oppenheimer Park homeless camp and the Dunbar neighbourhood revolve. An overheated housing market, combined with the lack of effective senior government involvement in housing, has created a powder keg. Diverse communities, each experiencing different tips of the housing iceberg, are in conflict. We see the homeless demanding more, and less expensive, housing while over-housed residents are desperate to preserve the financial value of their housing and the low-density character of their neighbourhoods.

A JUST HOUSING FRAMEWORK

Housing Law

Canada is a federal state; lawmaking powers are divided between the federal government and provincial governments.[20] Legal jurisdiction over housing law and policy is placed most straightforwardly in provincial governments. However, various constitutional provisions and doctrines have historically allowed for significant federal government involvement in housing policy despite what a literal reading of the Canadian constitution might imply. It is the case, however, that the most effective level of government housing intervention is with the provincial governments. Municipal or city governments have a small set of delegated provincial powers and thus are considerably limited both in terms of jurisdiction and revenue sources in much direct housing provision.

A right to housing is nowhere formally recognized in domestic law. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protects a number of classical liberal civil and political freedoms. These provisions could be competent to protect socio-economic rights such as housing rights, but judicial approval of this interpretation, although fought for, has yet to be achieved.

Canada is signatory to most major United Nations international human rights treaties. And, of course, the right to adequate housing is codified in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*[21] and the United Nations *International Covenant on Social and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.*[22] Fulfillment of the right to housing means more than simple provision of a roof over one's head: it encompasses the right to live in peace, security, and dignity. More specifically, it entails legal security of tenure, affordability, accessibility, habitability and cultural adequacy.[23] The right to adequate housing also requires that due priority is given to social groups living in unfavourable conditions, and that policies and legislation should correspondingly not be designed to benefit already advantaged social groups at the expense of others. Canadian governments' obligations under international human rights law serve as a critical lens through which to view the lack of attention to housing provision in Canada.

THE CITY

Cities have been identified as at the forefront of opportunity for progressive policy agendas. More specifically, Berry (2014) and others note

that the 2008 global financial crisis provided an opportunity to re-conceptualize progressive urban debates. Civic and local politics can establish the political base for interventions that address inequality, and, more specifically, issues of inadequate provision of affordable housing and urban infrastructure" (Werbner and Yuval-Davis,1999:3). The issues of citizenship pinpoint the very immediate and local scale of the city and its politics, a scale where "state, civil society and individual particularity intersect" (Ibid.: 8.) Since 2007, the majority of the world's population live in urban centres.[24] Canada is highly urbanized at eighty-one per cent.[25] Consequently, the city has emerged as a site for research across a range of scholarly disciplines (Fainstein, 2010). Sassen (2002) argues that the global city has a dynamic that reflects direct interaction with other levels of community — the national, regional and global. It is in cities that new political, economic, cultural and subjective processes emerge, particularly given the transformation and diminishment of the national level.

A focus on cities emphasizes the immediate everyday environment in which citizenship is experienced. Urban citizenship is the product of localized sets of social relations and practices core to our daily experiences. Here, for some feminist theorists, the focus is on the 'ordinary', a concept that encompasses both social and legal orders, and standard, routine, or average experience (Staeheli et al, 2012:628; Young, 2014). Urban citizen literature thus looks to the prosaic, not extraordinary, instances and experiences of citizenship: the 'humdrum' of daily life

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20 **The original constitutional division of powers recognized only feder-**al and provincial jurisdiction. Evolution of the Canadian constitutional system has required ongoing and increasing acknowledgment of the presence of indigenous peoples and governance systems.

21 Article 25, UDHR, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml.
22 Article 11, CESCR, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www..org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx.
23 For elaboration of these criteria see: *The Right to Adequate Housing CESCR General Comment 4*, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e.

24See, for example, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm8.
25 These are areas of 1,000 people and more with a density of 400 people per square kilometre. Statistics Canada, "Population, urban and rural, by province and territory," retrieved August 18, 2014 from online: www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62a-eng.htm.

containing the unfolding of "acts of citizenship" (Isin and Turner, 2007:5; Young, 2014). How cities contemplate, order, and recognize diversity in their built environments ground and make concrete, and pragmatic, more abstract discussions of the politics of difference (Staeheli, 2003).

It is thus argued that cities occupy a place of recent, resurgent importance. Discussions of social justice necessarily, therefore, invoke a focus on the city — its politics and the "crucial importance of public space, action, and connection; and a sense of order that is progressive and democratic rather than repressive and oppressive" (Kern,2010:12) We are reminded that the city is "a terrain of spatially informed politics" (Didek,2002:96). In opposition to progressive urban politics are the politics of neo-liberalism, argued by many to demand the redistribution of the resources of the city to a small political and economic elite (Harvey, 2008:38). This makes the city a key cite for the struggles of the dispossessed. And, local politics around housing development and planning become central sites for contestation of different visions of the distribution and redistribution of resources that housing allocation occasions.

Cities, moreover, provide concentrated illustrations of inequality and of citizens' responses to injustices as everyday practices of power (Sassen, 2002:104). The destabilization of categories and identities of citizens catalyzed by recent changes plays out most pointedly in cities. Cities are 'strategic terrain' (Ibid.: 19) for the conflicts, contradictions, and openings of global capitalism, new transportation and telecommunication technologies, and the fracturing and multiplying of identity. As such, theorists also see the development of new progressive citizenship practices in the spaces of cities. Cities locate institutional innovation and creative individual and group agency (Ibid.:104). New political actors emerge, with fresh public practices (Kern, 2010). It is, in the words of Peter Marcuse, "the point at which the rubber of the personal hits the ground of the societal, the intersection of everyday life with the socially created systemic world about us" (Marcuse, 2009:185). Young (2000) sees these protests as an important narrative that broadens communication to a more inclusive form of engagement in democratic politics that recognizes the biases of gender, race and class in the process. It is through these actions that justice in the public sphere and civil society is enacted and defined (Young, 1990).

AN ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING COMPLEXITY

Housing provision has long been recognized as a "wicked problem." Policy makers have limited manoeuvrability to address the issue (Adams, 2011). This is increasing true in the last thirty years as governments worldwide have, to varying degrees, relinquished their housing responsibilities to the private sector. Left in place is a patchwork of policies that barely stems the housing crisis emerging in many cities.

The disadvantages and harms of inadequate housing are not isolated in their configuration from the complex web of social and economic relations that shape any society. Consequently, to understand the configuration of the housing crisis in Canada requires employing a prismatic approach; one that allows the general picture to be fractured into distinct images of housing as the various marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Canadian society experience it. Two examples suffice to make this argument more concrete: gender and indigeneity.

WOMEN AND GIRLS

How women are affected and how they cope with inadequate housing reflect the options, limitations, and structures of 21st century Canada. "Housing systems and opportunities are embedded within structured and institutionalised relations of power which are gendered" (Chan and Kennett, 2011:1). These gendered relations of power shape policy, standardize institutions, and calibrate social programmes. In 2009, the United Nations Special Reporteur on Adequate Housing wrote that "the lack of adequate and secure housing particularly impacts women who are disproportionally affected by poverty, homelessness, housing affordability problems, violence and discrimination in the private rental market."[26] The Special Rapporteur heard evidence from women about inadequate living conditions, insufficient social assistance, and the lack of shelter spaces for homeless women and women fleeing violence. Sexual abuse figures as a significant cause and consequence of housing insecurity, particularly for young women.[27] Women also encounter discrimination in the rental market, reflecting women's disproportionate poverty, receipt of social assistance, race, marital status, and vulnerability to intimate violence. Thus, any plan or solution to women's poverty and homelessness, "must attend to the particularities of women's experiences."

Vancouver, in many ways, gives a useful snapshot of women's equality issues in a large Canadian city. Roughly equivalent to the national average, Vancouver's employment rates show 66 percent

26 **Women's Housing Equality Network, Submission for the Universal** Periodic Review of Canada, September 2008, retrieved August 18, 2014 from
27 **The Street Health Report 2007**, Toronto: September 2007, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.streethealth.ca/ Downloads/SHReport2007.pdf.

of men and 58 percent of women employed. Around 42 percent of working women hold full-time jobs. The wage gap between women and men, however, is among the biggest in Canada's urban centres; women earn 30 percent less than their male peers (McInturff, 2014: 43).

Aboriginals

Aboriginal communities have some of the worst housing in Canada.[28] Aboriginal people are homeless more than other groups and housing both on- and off-reserve is in dire need of attention. There are approximately 63,870 Aboriginal households residing off-reserve in BC, of which more than 28% are in "core housing need" (Palmer & Associates, 2007). On-reserve housing is often poorly constructed and maintained. About 40 per cent of indigenous housing is in need of major repair. The provision of on-reserve housing cannot keep up with the growth of the First Nations population.[29]

The context for the Oppenheimer Park protest provides illustration. Aboriginal people make up about one-third of the homeless in Vancouver.[30] Yet, the indigenous population in Canada is roughly only 4 percent of the total population.[31]

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28 Amnesty International, Indigenous Peoples in Canada, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indige-nous-peoples/indigenous-peoples-in-canada
29 Evaluation, Performance Measurement, and Review Branch, Audit and Evaluation Sector (2010), "Evaluation of INAC's On-Reserve Housing Support." Indian and Northern Affairs Canada: Ottawa ONT. Sept. 29. retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/policy_forum/ncr-%233242612-v4-on_reserve_housing_report_sept_24_2010.pdf.
30 First Nations people make up 30 per cent of Vancouver's homeless But aboriginal people make up only two per cent of city's entire population, Vancouver Courier, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.vancourier.com/news/first-nations-people-make-up-30-per-cent-of-vancouver-s-homeless-1.660225.
31 Canadians in Context - Aboriginal Population, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=36.

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

The right to the city represent claims to urban citizenship — to inclusion, justice, and respected identity as part of a civic population. It is exhortation to shape and occupy the city in ways reflective of diverse needs and circumstances. Harvey (2008:96) in an influential New Left Review article describes this as "the right to change ourselves by changing the city". Formulation of such a collective right rests on the understanding that it is through the city — the process and outcomes of urbanization — that we "make… ourselves" (Ibid:96). The concept imagines rights to access of essential services, to housing security, to liveability, to mobility, and to participation (Shaw,2013:8). The city, "its special forms, social practices, and power relationships, is integral to the construction of citizenship and of the public" (Staeheli and Dowler, 2002: 73).

Lefebvre's 1967 essay, "The Right to the City, is inspiration for this idea of civic struggle. The Right to the City is not a right to fit into the existing city but a demand for the democratization of urbanization processes to allow for new ways of being in physical place. The city is an *oeuvre*, or a work, reflective of practices of inclusion and exclusion, and of legitimized and illegitimated actors. It is a "production" — of spaces and a public (Staeheli and Dowler, 2002:75). And the notion of the right to the city, in the words of Isin, is "the right to claim presence in the city, to wrest the use of the city from privileged new masters and democratize its spaces" (Isin, 2000:14). It is, simply, the right not to be marginalized in the city's governance structures and in relation to the development and use of the spaces of the city (McCann, 2002:122). It is a claim to a "city of centrality" — where diverse groups are included in core processes and structures, recognized as

central to the city's constitution (Ibid.: 78).

The concept of the "right to the city" has considerable circulation internationally. The World Charter on the Right to the City was enacted in 2004 and has been endorsed by a number of cities and countries (Shaw, 2013). In Canada, the City of Montreal's *Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* endorses the underlying notion.[32]

This is far from a simple call. The political message risks meaning everything, and thus nothing. The idea has not been sufficiently articulated by theorists though the notion of the right to the city perhaps offers "promise as a way of responding to the problem of urban disenfranchisement" (Purcell, 2002:106). It is a conceptual device for thinking about the importance of the urban environment to the justice in our lives and to how the salience of the notion of rights can invoke that importance.

SPATIALIZATION OF RIGHTS

Thinking of housing as a right involves recognizing the spatialization of rights. Many specific and traditionally formulated rights exist in and are recognized through spatial, geographic ordering (McCann, 2002: 78; Davy, 2007). Resolution of the issues faced by the rights claimants in these cases involves thinking "spatially about questions of citizenship, democracy, politics, and (in)justice" (Dikeç, 2002 : 95).

City spaces are the sites for articulation and struggle over "identity politics, citizenship, and alternative political agendas" (McCann, 2002: 77). Allocation of space communicates moral and political judgments (Blomley, 2004: 76). Thus,

32 "Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities," retrieved August 18, 2014 from: Ville de Montréal http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=3036,3377698&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.

"citizenship rights and urban space are produced in relation to each other" (McCann, 2002: 78). Spatial dynamics like social dynamics produce and reproduce injustices (Ibid.: 93). In addressing housing, it is the recognition that lack of housing affordability is not inevitable but a policy choice that can be changed. Social justice is not merely a political concept but also a practice that requires a space of representation and struggle (Mitchell, 2003).

Rights claims not only entail a claim for metaphorical political space but also, often, for material or physical space. Rights open up space — clearly a kind of metaphorical room for assertion and attentiveness to interests and clams, but also many rights demand access to physical, material space. Rights, in these cases at least, represent a "moment in the production of space — especially material, physical space" (Mitchell, 2003: 28). The struggle for rights "*produces* space" (Ibid.: 29, emphasis in original). The struggle over space changes the meaning of the space and how that space folds into community memories, associations, and understandings.

We are seeing the right to the city, and the struggle over space, played out in Vancouver in two very different socio-economic contexts. While in Oppenheimer Park, the struggle is complicated by the very different world views that the protesters and the City have of their rights to the very land the protest is on, their struggle over their rights to the city as dispossessed citizens is explicit and poignant. They are not only struggling for themselves but for all homeless people. For the Dunbar residents, whose rights are upheld by legal tenure to property, their struggle is for themselves and their immediate neighbours, a far more myopic world view.

RE-IMAGINING POLICY RESPONSES TO HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing policies to address inequality and lack of affordable housing needs to recognize the disruptive role that the neoliberal economic agenda has played in their formation. The central role of cities in reforming these policies is critical. But this cannot be done without significant public investment in improving housing access. It will also require a more nuanced understanding by policy-makers of the complex interactions between the economy and the provision of housing.

The right to the city as outlined above is a call to inhabit the city despite the exclusion that lack of adequate housing and legal tenure instantiates. What is possible within the limited policy responses available, and where do disenfranchised residents fit into these policy responses?
A wide range of housing options are required to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population. A housing strategy will likely need to include a range of tenure models, building typologies, and amenities/support services. The Urban Land Institute notes a number of common features that are shared among successful affordable housing programs including flexible and adaptable approaches; use of public resources to leverage private investments and create partnerships; and supporting the development of mixed-income communities (Urban Land Institute, 2006).

While some of these features are open to debate, especially the focus on mixed-income communities to solving housing affordability (Joseph, 2006), what is evident is that partnerships are key. Of critical importance is the necessity to address the lack of rental housing and the difficulty that many renters face in affording their rent. Vancouver has implemented some programs to induce developers to build rental housing but more is needed to maintain existing rental housing stock.

Municipalities, recognizing the difficulty renters are facing, have started initiatives such as the Vancouver Rent Bank[33] funded by the City of Vancouver and other partners that give one-time loans to prevent evictions or loss of essential utilities. Charitable foundations are also getting involved in housing. The Streetohome foundation,[34] modeled after foundations in Toronto and elsewhere, brings business, government and community leaders to work together on Housing First[35] solutions to address homelessness. This foundation does not develop housing but provides the seed funding for other non-profit housing organizations. These initiatives while doing what they can, do not address the fundamental dilemma of homelessness in an affluent society nor how to the homeless (and those in danger of being homeless) can engage meaningfully in addressing this problem.

In BC, non-profit housing societies manage a significant portion of affordable housing stock in BC and any discussion of strategies to address housing affordability need to include them. Models of housing provision are needed that extend the potential and effectiveness of the non-profit housing sector. Models from various parts of Canada illustrate the importance of partnerships and collaboration to address the

33 See, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/financial-aid.asp
34 See, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://www.streetohome.org/about-streetohome/streetohome-plan.
35 Housing First is based on the concept that the primary need of the homeless is stable housing. Other issues facing the household should be addressed after housing is obtained.

diversity of populations [36] [37] [38] and share common features such as mobilization of community assets; leveraging of city assets; multi-agency partnerships; creative funding agreements; and diversity of tenures and target populations:[39]

These models are designed to focus on what non-profit housing organizations can do in partnership with cities (and sometimes Provinces) in recognition of the current limited involvement of the federal government. While these models should be emulated, it is the Oppenheimer Park protest that is making visible the people most affected by the housing crisis, and are a mirror we need to put up to our faces to see why resistance

to much-needed change in neighbourhoods such as Dunbar is so tragic. Without the political will to address the housing problems plaguing Vancouver the disparities will only increase.

Conclusion: Just Housing Provision

To understand the inequality and the hierarchies of power manifest in Canadian society, in our cities particularly, it is important to think about the pattern of our built structures, the organization of public and private spaces in the city, and the distribution of people among these buildings and spaces.[40] The struggle for justice must be configured by social context and necessary reference to social conceptions of citizenship, institutions, community membership, and institutional structures. The notion of social justice has considerable political content — for example, a concern with social justice could speak to the alleviation of poverty and social and political exclusion, and to the reduction of inequalities as matter of justice, not merely charity, and as a matter of state, not individual, responsibility (Brodie, 2007: 97).

A just housing provision would need to be reframed within our rights as citizens. Housing as a right would ensure that adequate housing be refocused as a societal responsibility will all levels of government involved in its ensuring its provision. The Oppenheimer Park Homeless protest is only one of hundreds around the world demanding their rights to be counted as citizens. They need to be listened to.

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36 The Collaboration and "Future Proofing" Model from Quebec brought together a non-profit and a co-operative. Key to this housing project were high environmental standards. This collaboration led to the construction of 95 co-op family housing units and 60 affordable housing units near a metro station in Montreal. The tight collaboration between the two organisations and other partners (including the City of Montreal, CMHC and Société d'habitation du Québec) enabled attainment of important objectives focusing on quality of life and sustainability.

37 The Multi-Agency Model from Richmond, BC is a first in BC, bringing together six non-profit agencies to provide and manage 129 units of affordable housing for low to moderate income residents, including those with multiple barriers, with community amenity space co-located on site. The project is attracting significant attention because of its multi-agency model - the completed building will be strata titled and each agency will own and manage its own units within the building. Key factors in the initiative have been the combined equity of non-profit and government partners, and, in particular, the City of Richmond's use of inclusionary zoning and density bonusing to transfer the value of built units from two specific developments to a significant capital contribution to the project.

38 The Community Land Trust and Portfolio Model from Vancouver, BC involves a Community Land Trust Foundation that has brought together a group of co-ops and non-profit organizations to work together to create 355 affordable housing on four city-owned sites. This new development will provide homes for low-income individuals, people living with mental illness, and low and middle-income families. The City has leased the land to the Land Trust for free, greatly reducing the cost of the project. The housing projects themselves will be financed by money raised by the non-profits, by generating income from some units renting at just below market rate, and from selling leasehold interest to commercial spaces. The Community Land Trust model has the potential to create more sustainable affordable housing stock in the city by allowing housing built to be permanently affordable.

39 Housing Justice, retrieved August 18, 2014 from http://housingjustice.ca/resources/housing-case-studies/.

40 Gilbert asserts that "[p]overty practices are not only socially constructed but also spatially constructed

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