Names Versus Numbers:

Exploring how planning for social inclusion could help alleviate the stigmatization of poverty in a small town

By: Taylor MacDonald-Plummer

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Supervisor: Dr. Leela Viswanathan

Queen's University, School of Urban and Regional Planning

Department of Geography and Planning

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Executive Summary

Background and Context

While poverty is often measured and understood as a comparison of income or lack of material goods, literature reveals the importance in understanding intangible elements of one's well-being, such as happiness, self-esteem and social inclusion. However, considering the negative perceptions and stigma commonly attributed to poverty and other marginalized populations, such elements of well-being can be extremely difficult to attain (Chase & Walker, 2012; Porr & Olson, 2012). This often results in social isolation and exclusion from society, stemming from negative emotions of embarrassment, guilt and shame (Chase & Walker, 2012). The lack of emotional and material support creates further challenges for those experiencing poverty, such as navigating social services, obtaining information and receiving positive motivation (Collins, 2005; Chase & Walker, 2012). Given these challenges, it is important that poverty is understood through different lenses, not solely in regard to monetary factors.

Understanding how intangible elements of life can affect one's well-being is important from a policy and an urban planning perspective too. Orthodox physical planning tends to primarily consider physical space and the built environment, rather than the people within it (Davidoff, 1965). Over the years of planning history, there have been well-intentioned planning movements that attempted to combat social inequity and urban dysfunction; however these movements and theories often resulted in further social inequity. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, City Beautiful started to take shape (Reece, 2018). This movement attempted to overcome social ills throughout the urban core by way of physical determinism. If done effectively, it was believed that ordered design and aesthetically pleasing environments could tame social disorder of cities. Although well-intentioned, this movement was largely undemocratic and thus resulted in inequitable outcomes (Reece, 2018). Those who were already experiencing financial difficulty was not relieved of their burdens, but rather pushed further to the margins (Reece, 2018).

The essence of City Beautiful has been a reoccurring issue for the planning profession and social activism (Clavel, 1994; Reece, 2018). Whether through City Beautiful, Urban Renewal or New Urbanism, many planning notions believe establishing an aesthetically sound environment will change inner city morals and challenges for the better. Davidoff (1965) firmly believed "a city is its people, their practices, and their political, social, cultural, and economic institutions" (Davidoff, pg., 336, 1965). In this sense, he believed that planners who focused solely on physical determinants and land occupancy should not be considered a *city* planner but rather only a *physical* planner (Davidoff, 1965). A professional planner should be responsible for ensuring that physical plans benefit and enhance the lives of those who live within and around it.

While there have been some attempts for social equity through planning, the traditional practices continues to largely focus on physical determinants. Establishing social equity through urban planning has served as a point of contention, largely because it was (and often still is) believed that social activism would jeopardize the professionalism and technical proficiency of urban planning (Reece, 2018). However, advocacy planning and similar movements question this notion, and believe planners should not be considered the sole experts of planning related matter and cities (Davidoff, 1965; Reece, 2018). An abundance of research continues to demonstrate how the environment and sense of place one resides in significantly influences life outcomes, such as health, education, and social well-being. Considering this, it is time "traditional planning" routinely incorporated social activism within physical determinism.

Purpose of Study

The overall intention of this research is to contribute to the literature that examines the relationship between community inclusion and poverty stigmatization. This topic is important to study as it has been shown that increased knowledge of poverty-related issues can positively affect policy-making decisions that deal with bettering such issues (Lahat, 2018). By producing this research, more discussion and acknowledgement can be brought to the topic of small town poverty and stigmatization so positive change can happen.

Scope of Study

This study focuses on the relationship between poverty and social inclusion in the context of a small municipality. Port Hope is a municipality in Southern Ontario, and home to roughly 16,750 residents (Statistics Canada, 2016). It is located in the western end of Northumberland County and sits at the mouth of the Ganaraska River and Lake Ontario, approximately 100km east of Toronto, 150km west of Kingston, and 45km south of Peterborough.

Further, this report examines Green Wood Coalition (GWC) as a single exploratory case study to understand how a community program has incorporated social inclusion to help alleviate the stigma of poverty. GWC is a non-profit organization based in Port Hope that aims to help those who may be dealing with homelessness, mental illness, addiction and other vulnerabilities. The organization uses a community model of building relationships based on trust, communication and inclusivity. Their overall mission is to create friendships and an open space for community members to meet. By analyzing one organization, this research was able to compare the literature to real-life practice.

In the mid-twentieth century, marginalized populations were predominantly understood as females, people of colour, and economically disadvantaged (Davidoff, 1965; Reece, 2018). Today, the understanding of marginalized populations has expanded to include many more social identities and groups that are continuously excluded from decision-making processes and general opportunities in society. While this report focuses on *poverty* in smaller communities, literature has demonstrated that poverty can entail much more than one's economic status. Financial difficulty can certainly result in social isolation and exclusion; however, there are many other factors that may contribute to one's social well-being. For the purpose of this report, the terms 'marginalized' populations and people will mostly be used.

Research Questions

The main purpose of this report is to answer the following research question: *how can planning for community inclusion help alleviate the stigmatization of poverty in the context of a small town in Southern Ontario?*

To help answer this question, this report set out to meet the following objectives:

1. Identify the complexity and essence of each theme individually: poverty, stigma and social inclusion;
2. Analyze the relationships among the three themes and to understand how social inclusion can alleviate the stigmatizing effects of poverty;
3. Examine how Green Wood Coalition incorporates social inclusion in their social programming; and
4. Identify lessons learned from GWC and recommendations for other jurisdictions with a population of 25,000 or less.

Methodology

In order to address the research question and objectives of this research, a qualitative mixed-methods research approach was employed. This approach included: a literature review to establish gaps in the literature and understand the main themes of this research; semi-structure interviews and a focus group to gain a deeper understanding of key informants' perspectives of social stigmatization and poverty in small towns; and a single exploratory case study of Green Wood Coalition (GWC) that applies themes established from the literature to real life practice.

Key Findings

Chapter 3, 4, and 5 of this report consisted of a literature review, a background overview of Port Hope and GWC, and key findings from the interviews and focus group. Through these chapters, the first three objectives set out for this report were addressed. It was largely found that the concepts of poverty, stigma and social inclusion are incredibly interconnected. Through the literature and interviews, it presented itself as a linear relationship where misunderstandings of poverty generate stigmatizing experiences for marginalized populations, which ultimately result in social exclusion. This social exclusion is complex because it can be encouraged unintentionally through societal values, social service structures, and decision- and policy-making processes.

Overall, it was found that ignorance and unawareness are major contributors to the stigmatization of poverty. This was particularly evident in Port Hope, where poverty is often less visible than traditionally expected images of homelessness. It was found that when people are less aware, it is easier to make premature judgments and rash assumptions about others' lives. By encouraging social interaction and integration among income groups, people can become more familiar with walks of life different from their own. The social distance narrows as people come to realize how similar and relatable other people can be regardless of their financial situation or life experience.

In addition to visibility and awareness, other key findings included:

➢ Emotional Complexities: Poverty is a very individualized and complex experience, where a one-size-fits-all service model is not effective.

➢ Shame: The concept of stigma can be understood as internal negative self-assessments, or as external judgements from others. Either way, it often manifests as personally felt shame from embarrassment and guilt, or feeling shamed from external judgement.

➢ Spatial stigma: Concentrated areas of affordable and rent-geared-to-income housing are often associated with preconceived notions and premature judgements of the people living there. These areas create physical isolation from their geographical separation, and social isolation from the associated stigma.

➢ Voice: Marginalized populations often lack the opportunity to use their voice and perspectives, especially with regard to policy- and decision-making processes. Disregarding marginalized populations' perspectives is problematic because it misrepresents their experiences and it excludes them from contributing.

➢ Humanization: Bottom line, none of this matters if people are treated less than human. Ultimately, communities need to create structures and spaces where people feel welcomed and accepted for who they are. Through this, other elements of social inclusion such as trust, connections, capacity-building, and integration can be established.

Key Considerations

Chapter 7 addressed the fourth and final objective of this report. Lessons learned from GWC's program modeling and key informants' insights developed key considerations for other small municipalities that aim to better encourage social inclusion among its residents. These key considerations were organized into three groups according to its intended audience.

Audiences

Researchers:

This report largely explored the complex relationship between the concepts of poverty, stigma and social inclusion. However, further research could be conducted to explore:

- ➢ *Collaboration:* How social service delivery can collaborate with varying levels of government to foster greater social inclusion;
- ➢ *Public Engagement Barriers:* How regional and municipal levels of government can consider barriers related to poverty with regard to public participation and policy-making processes;
- ➢ *Integrated Housing:* How the integration of income groups through housing would affect social inclusion and poverty alleviation; and
- ➢ *Inclusive Urban Design:* What urban design elements encourage more physical social inclusion and interaction in public spaces.

Municipal decision-makers and staff:

The lack of visibility of homelessness and poverty-related matter was identified throughout the report as a major constraint for social inclusion in smaller communities. This concept was primarily addressed in regard to poverty; however, it should be considered for all aspects of community-development. Establishing additional visibility, relatability and familiarity between Council and marginalized populations can make people feel more comfortable and lessen the social distance between income groups.

- ➢ *Consider Barriers:* When contemplating public consultation techniques, consider potential barriers different populations may encounter, such as time, location and accessibility. This might include holding sessions in a child-friendly location to

account for child-care needs, providing flexible and multiple times of sessions, or using varying techniques such as online and in-person;

- ➢ *Become Familiar:* A major difference between smaller communities and larger urban centres is the smaller scale and familiarity aspect. Take advantage of this by making yourself familiar and visible to the greater community, not just municipal staff. Try not to rely on community connectors, such as GWC, to develop relationships with marginalized populations. This is especially important for public figures of municipal council, such as the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Attend community events regularly, especially those involving marginalized populations. This will help make your face more familiar and approachable, and help establish more rapport and relatability;

- ➢ *Include Marginalized Populations:* Try your best to ensure marginalized populations have an opportunity to share their perspective and opinion. Further than this though, make marginalized populations the experts in poverty. Consult with these populations in person to hear their stories and experiences when assessing poverty-related policy and social service delivery structures rather than focusing on professionals or academic 'experts' in the field.

Social Service Providers:

While there are structural and mandated processes required for some social service delivery, there are small changes that could help encourage social inclusion.

- ➢ *Authentically Listen:* When meeting a client or member for the first time, let them share their story and life experiences. While probing questions can be helpful, sometimes we do not know the proper questions to ask. By letting people share on their own terms, it can be empowering for them and end up providing more valuable information than we knew how to ask for.

- ➢ *Be Flexible:* Allow people to overcome and progress at their own pace. Do not discourage people because they are not handling their life challenges as expected. Remember that poverty is very individualized and an emotionally complex experience, and therefore people may experience and handle it very differently.

➢ *Humanize People:* Make small changes to your service's structural layout to encourage social inclusion and humanization. These can include taking names opposed to numbers, a seating area where service users can socialize rather than a line-up, and letting people choose their supplies rather than handing it to them. Lastly, be kind and remember that these are human beings just like everyone else.

Professional Planners:

➢ *Encourage Attainable Housing:* Utilize land use policy to encourage housing affordability and mixed-neighbourhoods. Moreover, when assessing development proposals, carefully consider how they may affect the community in the future. Ensure the development will not create spatial stigmatization or physical isolation of certain income groups.

➢ *Use Zoning:* Provide ample opportunity for social service uses through zoning by-law regulations. In line with attainable housing, municipal planners should encourage and promote the use of inclusionary zoning so mixed-tenant housing is more possible in smaller communities.

➢ *Think of People:* Remember, urban planning should not only consider the built form, but also the people within it. Consider how planning applications, development proposals and planning policy may affect marginalized populations.

Conclusion

Considering the daily struggles and stresses that accompany poverty, marginalized populations may not prioritize social inclusion in their lives; however, there are valuable and effective ways that social service delivery and community structures can encourage and foster social inclusion. Social inclusion can be promoted and developed in a number of ways. Urban planning and design practices can start by better integrating the housing of different income groups so there is less spatial segregation. If significant barriers prevent effective physical integration, social service delivery and community-building can further encourage social inclusion through minor structural adjustments. In addition to housing matter, planning practices should ensure adequate transportation is accessible to all income levels and neighbourhoods. This includes safe and accessible transit stops.

A community is comprised of a multitude of interest groups, cultures, income levels, and walks of life. While planning for every interest group may be challenging and tensions may arise, it is crucial that professional planners consider everyone that creates a community. Planning a visually attractive city or a well-functioned public space is important, but planning for social inclusion involves so much more. As planners, we need to consider how policies and practices may affect displacement and one's sense of place. Ultimately, treat people like people, not like they are invisible, numbers or clients. Do not disregard marginalized populations because they live a different life than you. Include them in the conversation. Listen to what they have to say. By planning a community not simply for ourselves, but for everyone within it, more people can have a place where they feel as though they belong.