SOWK 699.21 Term Project

The Housing and Anti-Gentrification Movement in Vancouver's

Downtown Eastside Community

SOWK 699.21

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The Downtown Eastside (DTES), located on Coast Salish territory, is Vancouver, BC's oldest community and is also one of Canada's poorest communities (Robertson & Culhane, 2005, p.16; Asfour & Gardiner, p.1).  This area used to be known as Vancouver's notorious 'Skid Row' prior to becoming recognized as the residential community of the DTES in the 1970s through the efforts of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) (Cran & Jerome, 2008, p.9).  Organizing efforts through social movements have continued on in the DTES throughout the decades into the present day and in this paper, I will be exploring the housing and anti-gentrification movement in this Vancouver community.

First I will look at the wider context that this movement is located within as well as the history of the movement.   I will then investigate the identities and the short term and long term interests of the actors that are involved in the movement.  Next I will look at the competing actors and forces that the community is pitted against and their short term and long term interests followed by a short discussion on whose interests are being served by the status quo.   I will then discuss the conjuncture of the period leading up to the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.  Following, I will discuss my perspective on the issue and what informs my practice.  Finally, I will conclude with an exploration of various social work responses to this movement including alternatives, strategies for arriving at goals, a community worker's relationship to the group, use of self, and evaluating effectiveness as well as an end note on sources.

**Context: Wider Background**

  Before looking specifically at the housing and anti-gentrification movement, I will first look at the context of the city and the community in which it operates.  Vancouver is the province of British Columbia's largest city as well as its business and finance centre (Harris, 2011, p.697).  The DTES area of Vancouver comprises roughly 202 hectares and includes the neighbourhoods of Gastown, Strathcona, Victory Square, Chinatown, as well as industrial lands and the Oppenheimer and Thornton Park  (City of Vancouver DTES Local Area Profile, 2012).  About 18,790 people work in the DTES which accounts to about 6 percent of all jobs in the city and around 18,000 people live in the DTES (City of Vancouver, 2012).   There has been significant growth in the population of the DTES in recent decades.  It is estimated that in the relatively short span between 1991 and 2007, the population of the DTES has increased by 140 percent (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, p.255).

The DTES has been consistently depicted as an area that is characterized by poverty, homelessness, crime, addiction, housing issues, survival sex work, mental illness and unemployment (City of Vancouver, 2012).  Expanding on this, it can be argued that the DTES has been, and still is for the most part, the “public location for the socially marginal” in Vancouver and is a place for “whichever group is stigmatized and shunned by contemporary mainstream society” including people live in poverty, drug users and Indigenous people (Roe, 2010, p.81).  While only 2 percent of Vancouver's population is Indigenous, the Indigenous population of the DTES is 20 percent and comprises a disproportionately high 40 percent of the population that is living in poverty in the DTES (City of Vancouver, Local Area Profile, 2012; Robertson & Culhane, Eds., 2005, p.26).  High incidences of poverty are a central issue in the community.  The DTES has an unemployment rate of 11.3 percent, has the “lowest per capita income of any urban area in Canada, with 63.3 percent of the population considered as low income,” and has a significant population considered to be 'working poor' (City of Vancouver, 2012). According to Statistics Canada, in 2006, the average annual household income in the DTES just hovered around $25,000 which is significantly lower than the reported $68,000 for Vancouver as a whole (Jang, 2012).

Unsurprisingly, the higher incidences of poverty in the DTES result in higher numbers of these residents not being homeowners.  A relatively high percentage of DTES residents are renters compared to the city average with about 88 percent of residents renting their homes in 2006 (City of Vancouver, 2012). The main form of rental housing available to low-income residents in the DTES are single room occupancy units (SROs), which were historically where seasonal workers used to stay in, and are now considered to be the “last resort” in housing for low-income people (Geddes, 2012, p.11; Smith, 2003, p.503).   These units were never meant for people to live in long-term and hence have either inadequate or a complete lack of food storage facilities such as refrigerators and inadequate wiring for the use of electrical appliances (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, p.31).  Renters living in SROs most often have to share bathrooms and kitchen facilities with units usually measuring only ten-by-ten feet (City of Vancouver, 2012; Geddes, 2012, p.11).

Considering these sub-standard living conditions, the rental costs of SROS can be considered significantly overpriced.  In 2006, the City of Vancouver's Low-Income Housing Survey found that the average cost of rent for a room in a SRO is $416 and more than half of DTES renters were paying over 30 percent of their income on shelter costs (City of Vancouver, 2012).  Also, it is estimated that the number of SRO units had significantly dropped from 13,412 in 1970 to 5,985 in 2007 (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, pp.244-245).  However, between 2007 and 2008, the provincial government purchased 17 DTES SRO hotels, with a total of more than 1000 units, which were to be renovated and run by local non-profit agencies (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, p.248).  As of 2011, there were 1,522 non-market and 3,975 private SRO units in the DTES (City of Vancouver, 2012). Despite this, Pederson and Swanson (2010) content that low-income DTES residents can actually afford to live in only 12 percent of the  SRO units in the community as there are an estimated 10,000 residents who cannot afford more than $375 a month for rent (p.2).  Overall, when including residents living in SRO units that need replacing and an estimated 700 homeless people are living in the DTES, it is argued that there are about 5,700 low-income residents who require decent housing (Pederson & Swanson, 2010, pp.2, 4).  Looking at the numbers that are presented it is clear that the need for more low-income housing in the DTES is a very pressing issue.

Beginning in 1995, the City of Vancouver began preparing a housing plan for the DTES with the gentrifying objective of introducing social mixing, meaning mixing housing types, households and socio-economic classes, into the community (Smith, 2003, p.504). The gentrification concept of social-mixing has recently experienced a resurgence of interest among local governments and urban policy makers (Lees, 2008, p.2451).   It should be noted that a critical analysis of social-mixing may include the argument that it is masked social cleansing, for example that it is being used in the DTES to 'cleanse' the area of poverty and related issues (Lees, 2008, pp.2451-2452).  Research on gentrification has shown that social-mixing with disadvantaged communities, such as the DTES, can in fact worsen quality of life for current residents as social-mixing essentially “destroys one kind of social capital to try and create another” (Lees, 2008, p.2461).

Despite such critiques and though the DTES is clearly marked by serious issues related to social inequities, the area became increasingly desirable for middle- and high-income people.  For one, the DTES is located less than a kilometre from Vancouver's financial district and has the favourable aspect of not being separated from the central business district by a bridge like most other Vancouver communities (Ley & Dobson, 2008, p.2481).   Also, the DTES was originally the historical heart of the city and so it has the highest concentration of commercial heritage buildings, some of which have prized waterfront views, that are seen by developers as prime sites for renovations or new developments for condominiums and lofts (Ley & Dobson, 2008, p.2481).  Due to these favourable conditions combined with the push from the real estate boom of the 2000s, people who were seeking affordable housing in Vancouver increasingly flocked to the DTES where land values are considerably lower than in the rest of Vancouver (Roe, 2010, p.89; Ley & Dobson, 2008, p.2481).

In order to facilitate, as well as accommodate for, the influx of middle- and high-income people into this predominantly low-income community, gentrification was key.  Gentrification, often under the guise of terminology like 'urban renaissance,' 'urban revitalization,' and 'urban regeneration', can be described as the “social, economic, and cultural transformation of a predominantly low-income neighbourhood through the deliberate influx of upscale residential and commercial development”(Less, 2008, p.2452; Walia & Diewert, 2012).  It is argued that gentrification “has become a strategy within globalization itself; the effort to create  a global city is the effort to attract capital and tourists, and gentrification is a central means for doing so”(Walia & Diewert, 2012).  For example, the Gastown neighbourhood of the DTES has already been heavily gentrified and transformed into a popular tourist destination (Walia & Diewert, 2012).

Central to gentrification in the DTES has been the development of condominiums.  Starting in the 1970s, condominiums became the “legal architecture for the remaking of Vancouver” and beginning in the 2000s, rising property values due to the large influx of new migrants and overseas capital has spread condominium developments and gentrification eastwards in the city towards the DTES  (Harris, 2011, pp.695, 720, 715).  Gentrification of the DTES has been increasing not only due to the condominium boom and the desire for more land in the downtown area to 'develop', but also significantly the 2010 Olympics held in Vancouver (Kun, 2007).  It is argued that in Olympic host cities, the “stakes of long-term urban revitalization are acutely high” resulting in “intensive efforts to regulate poverty, homelessness and other visible signifiers of inequality” (Boyle & Haggerty, 2011, p.3185).  As such, with gentrification of the DTES, there have been hotel room rent increases, hotel closures, increased policing, displacement of low-income DTES residents and increased homelessness (DNC, 2012, PovNet, 2012).  Additionally, property values in the DTES have increased anywhere from 31 percent to 105 percent (CCAP, 2012).

**Context:  History of the Movement**

In order to best understand the housing and anti-gentrification movement in the DTES in recent times, it is important to reflect first on its long past (Barndt, 1991, p.8).   The movement has a history that spans decades as groups in the community have “long struggled to control the definition of the area's social problems and to gain local control over government funding to address them” (Roe, 2010, p.80).  In the very beginnings of the movement, DTES residents Bruce Eriksen and Libby Davies formed the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) in 1973 to fight for improved living conditions in the DTES (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, pp. 19, 20-21).  DERA's first campaign was to lobby the City of Vancouver to enforce fire and building regulations in DTES rooming-houses and hotels after a series of deaths caused by  fires in these accommodations (Roe, 2010, p.83). While DERA was the dominant actor in the beginnings of this community-based movement, over time individual advocates and various other organizations also became established (Roe, 2010, p.87).

I would argue that there are three significant marked periods of time in the history of the movement and these are Expo '86, the development of the Woodward's building, and the Winter Olympics in 2010.  In 1986, Vancouver hosted the Expo '86 world fair event and the movement could not prevent all the evictions of residents from the SRO hotels (Roe, 2010, p.85).  As Smith (2003) explains, beginning in the early 1980s, the SRO hotel owners began upgrading their buildings and converting them from residential to tourist use in anticipation of the Expo and the result was the “displacement of several hundred-long term tenants ”and the “loss of approximately 2,000 low-income housing units” (p.499).

Then came the second significant period which is that of the contested development at the site of the Woodward’s' department store which closed in 1993 (Geddes, 2012, p.1).  The Woodward's building was purchased in 1995 by a real estate development company with plans for an upscale condominium project and this was met with protestors proclaiming that the Woodward's building belonged “to the people” as they painted “Public Property” and “Give It Back” on the boarded up building (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, pp. 74, 75). The development company never went through with their plans and in 2001, the NDP provincial government purchased the site which then sold it in 2003 to the City of Vancouver (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009 pp.187-188).  When condominium development deals began being proposed in 2002, movement members held a 92 day protest which included the construction of a tent city of about 6o people on the sidewalks around the Woodward's building (Geddes, 2012, p.10; Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, p.187).

In 2006, construction began at the Woodward's site on a large mixed social housing development that would include 536 condominium units and 200 social housing units (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert 2009, p.253).  The Mayor at the time argued that the upscale condominium units would subsidize the low-rent units (Campbell, Boyd & Culbert, 2009, p.190).   The Woodward's site has since been transformed into mixed social and market housing, the Simon Fraser University art school, the W2 Community media Arts Centre, and retail stores (Geddes, 2012, p.11; Walia & Diewert, 2012).    As Kun (2007) argues, the “recent Woodward's development, [previously] celebrated as a victory by housing activists when the city of Vancouver bought it and slated 200 units for social housing, is now seen as the flagship of gentrification that will change the face of the area...Woodward's has become the symbol of the rapid shift in the area from low-income rental suites to upscale ownership.”

Indeed, the development of Woodward's is viewed by residents as “a wedge that drives gentrification in that area” as it “set off a tidal wave of gentrification within a few blocks, with four new condo developments...and countless restaurants and bars, overpriced coffee shops, and designer stores” (Geddes, 2012, p.10; Walia & Diewert, 2012). Actors in the movement had wanted the Woodward's building to be converted into 100 percent social housing and now view the site as evidence of how condominiums cause higher property values, higher rent prices and displacement of low-income residents (Anti-Poverty Committee, 2006; DNC, 2012).  For example, the Carnegie Community Action Project (2012) states that Woodward's was a lesson that “low-income people could be pushed out of nearby hotels and the street level retail area could become another zone of exclusion for low-income people.” On the other hand, those that support gentrification of the area noted that the “turning point” for entrepreneurs and businesses to head to the DTES was 2009 when the “Woodward's housing development opened to breathe new life into the neighbourhood” (Jang, 2012).

In most recent years, it can be argued that there have been “unprecedented high levels of cooperation and collective militancy among community groups” that are organizing for  housing and anti-gentrification, especially with the coincidence of the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver in 2010 (Crompton, 2010).  The Olympic Games, which I view as the third significant period of time in the history of this movement, will be discussed later on in greater detail as a conjunctural analysis piece.

**Analysis:  Identities and Interests of the Actors in the Movement**

The identities of the main actors in the housing and anti-gentrification movement have shifted with time.  However, it can be said that over the years, the movement has comprised of a network of low-income residents of the DTES, anti-capitalism and anti-neoliberalism activists, and organized groups, including the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), the Carnegie Community Action Project, the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC), the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council (DNC), and the Save Low Income Housing Coalition (SLIHC), and their allies.

The movement is based on the sentiment that the DTES is “not for developers to make millions” but rather it is for the existing “vibrant and vital low-income community” of the DTES (PovNet, 2011).   As such, the movement does not want their community to be used for profit but rather wants it to be used for the benefit of the existing residents such as through the provision of adequate housing.  The DNC (2012) expands on this, arguing that gentrification forces people out of their neighbourhoods and “produces a kind of internal displacement for low-income residents by creating zones of exclusion.” 'Zones of exclusion' are described as “spaces where people are unable to enter because they lack the necessary economic means for participation” and are produced through gentrification, as “wealthier people move into the neighbourhood, more spaces are devoted to offering amenities that cater to them” (DNC, 2012).   It is also  argued that gentrification transforms the area into an “unfamiliar, alienating and hostile space for low-income people” and resultant displacement of residents is “reaching crisis levels” (DNC, 2012).  Additionally, the Anti-Poverty Committee (2006) argues that homelessness is a form of structural violence and that the “solutions to end homelessness will come from a movement for social justice that is led by the people.”

As Barndt (1991) argues, it is important to be able to define short-term and longer-term goals for a movement in order to understand better why a certain issue is being addressed as well as to ascertain the degree of support that can be expected from allies (pp.33, 38).  The short term interests of this movement include increasing low-income housing, addressing the regulation and policing of individuals who are homeless, increasing the community's control over community planning, policy and development, and stopping gentrification including development of up-scale condominiums in the DTES (DNC, 2012).   While current housing options are often unsafe and overpriced for the decrepit conditions they are in, they are generally the only options the DTES residents have so protecting existing housing is one of the most important immediate struggles (Kun, 2007).  Additionally, there needs to be renovations to existing as well as development of new low-income housing (Kun, 2007).

The DNC (2012) argues that the DTES requires “at least 5,700 units of self-contained resident controlled social housing” and wants the City of Vancouver to purchase 50 DTES sites for social housing “in order for it to be easier to pressure provincial and federal governments to build new social housing on these sites.”  The Carnegie Community Action Project also echoes the call for 50 sites for social housing and recommends in a report that the City of Vancouver should purchase five sites per year for ten consecutive years to be turned into social housing and that the City should cease condominium development for those ten years until new social housing is secured (Pederson & Swanson, 2010, p.5).  It is figured that every site that will be designated for social housing will also be a site that is secured against condominium development and the movement plans to “stop gentrification project block by block” (DNC, 2012).  For this movement's short-term agenda, the municipal Vancouver government is the “logical focus” as it is the municipalities that can make decisions surrounding housing and city planning (Kuyek, 2011, p.160).

The longer term interests of this movement include decolonizing the area, ending homelessness, strengthening solidarity within the community, and addressing and resisting systemic capitalist oppression.  Decolonizing the community would be important because colonization is understood as the reason why there is such a significant population of Indigenous DTES residents living in poverty and why people have been “taught to be dependent on the state and on welfare” (Kun, 2007).  In regards to capitalist oppression, movement actors argue that neoliberal restructuring has already yielded so many negative impacts, such as cuts to welfare and legal aid, and so long term goals need to somehow address the domination of neoliberalism  (Kun, 2007).  Overall, it can be argued that the movement's ultimate goals are to attain the “basic human right to decent housing” and “real justice and dignity” for all members of the DTES community (Kun, 2007; Pederson & Swanson, 2010, p.5).

**Analysis:  Identities and Interests of Competing Actors and Forces**

  The competing actors in regards to this issue include middle- and high-income residents and homeowners, entrepreneurs and business owners, realtors and real estate developers, and the City of Vancouver.  The short term interests of these competing actors are decreasing visible homelessness and poverty and dispersing the low-income residents of the DTES to make the community more attractive to higher-income residents and businesses while the long term interests include further introducing social mixing into the TES, gentrifying or 'revitalizing' the area, and maximizing profit (Cran & Jerome, 2008; City of Vancouver, 2012).

     An increasing proportion of people in Vancouver live in condominiums and for middle- and high-income Vancouverites, condominiums offer them the possibility to be homeowners as land values rise in the city (Harris, 2011, p.719).  In North America, I think it goes mostly undisputed that it is instilled in people that homeownership should be an aspiration and so it is not surprising that people who would not be able to afford the high prices to own property in other parts of Vancouver would be drawn to condominium-living in the DTES.  It can then be argued that while land prices push people to living in new developments in the DTES, gentrification projects such as new amenities draw them to the area (Harris, 2011, p.720).

     While I view the middle- and high-income residents and homeowners as competing actors regarding this issue in that they benefit from gentrification of the DTES, I do not see them as strong proponents for gentrification in the sense that entrepreneurs and business owners are.  Entrepreneurs and business owners encourage further gentrification of the DTES as, for example, one co-owner of an upscale cheese shop argued that, ”'More residents, small businesses and an improved streetscape would be positive additions to the neighbourhood.'” (Stueck, 2012).  Importantly, this high-end shop is “located on commercial property [in the DTES] that the company would not have been able to afford on the west side of Vancouver” (Stueck, 2012).   Besides the affordability of commercial space in the DTES, entrepreneurs and business owners consider the community as an “'up and coming' neighbourhood” where “retailers have [managed to lure] shoppers from across Vancouver by offering everything from designer clothing to $3 doughnuts” (Jang, 2012). Therefore, the combination of property lease affordability and the push for a new identity for the DTES as being trendy and up-scale draw entrepreneurs and business owners to the area who in turn further push for gentrification to ensure the success and profitability of their business ventures.  It should also be noted that one of the new business owners in the DTES believes that entrepreneurs have in fact made a “positive impact” in the community and argues that he “gives back to the community by providing meals to the SROs” (Jang, 2012).

    Those in the real estate industry also push for gentrification for the desired outcome of making profit.  That the DTES is now 'hip' and 'edgy' is also used by realtors to market the area (Kun, 2007).  Real estate developers are drawn to the DTES as the “last urban frontier in which to build high-density housing” in a city that is “consistently named one of the most unaffordable cities in the world” (Walia & Diewert, 2012).  These actors argue that the relatively high concentration of non-market housing in the area results in “an immense withdrawal of land from the private market, denying the opportunity for gentrification to occur on these development sites” (Ley & Dobson, 2008, p.2484). This line of thinking that non-market housing for low-income people is a deprivation of developable land for profit is clearly in direct opposition to the viewpoint held by the actors in the movement.  It was also noted that developers appreciate Vancouver's “business-friendly tax climate” where investors receive incentives in the form of tax exemptions (Walia & Diewert, 2012).  Interesting to take note of is that in the past two municipal elections, the funding for Mayor Robertson's Vision Vancouver party came predominantly from real estate developers (Walia & Diewert, 2012).

   There is thus inter-mixing of interests between real estate development and municipal government. For one, the processes of gentrification are generally encouraged by “municipal development policies [and] economic incentives for investors” (Walia & Diewert, 2012).   Then there is the argument that the “mechanisms of gentrification are shifting as state and city planners increasingly emerge as key organizers in local processes of gentrification” and these “new processes increasingly depend on a planned logic of development” (Crompton, 2010).   The City of Vancouver, including municipal government members, city planners, and policy-makers, therefore comprises a strong opposition to the movement.

     For city planners and policy-makers, Boyle and Haggerty (2011) argue that popular civic wisdom regarding 'livability' is that “cities only flourish in the post-industrial age if they can attract the young, highly educated and mobile 'creative class' of the new knowledge-based economy” (p.3188).  This basically implies the need to gentrify low-income areas such as the DTES to allow for the development of “cultural or professional districts that cater to the interest of the creative class” (Boyle & Haggerty, 2011, p.3188).   It could be argued then that catering to the middle- and higher- 'creative' classes is important for the 'success' of the city even if it means displacing the lower-class residents such as those in the DTES.  It is clear that people are not being valued equitably when coming from such a standpoint.  Additionally, despite lack of evidence, gentrification is “increasingly promoted in policy circles on the assumption that it will lead to more socially, less segregated, more liveable and sustainable communities ”which will in turn increase social capital (Lees, 2008, pp.2550, 2449).   A prime example of how the City is a serious competing actor  include the City's new Local Area Plan to attract investment to the DTES and develop a “thriving economic environment” in which “key growth sectors” include “high technology and creative industries the growing digital economy; tourism, hospitality and retail; finance, insurance and real estate” (City of Vancouver, 2012).  The underlying premise to these goals of course is the necessity to gentrify the DTES.

     In addition to these competing actors, the movement also faces strong opposition in the forces of marginalization and neoliberalism.   It is reality that the low-income residents of the DTES, whom are at the centre of the housing and gentrification issue as well as actors in the movement itself, are highly oppressed by stigmatization and marginalization.   It can be said then that certain low-income populations of the DTES, such as Indigenous peoples, the homeless, people with addictions, sex workers, and people who are unemployed, have been systemically marginalized by society.  As such, this movement is faced with the barrier of needing to overcome the marginalization of the very people whose interests are to be served by the aims of the movement in order to gain support for their cause.

     Intertwined with the marginalization of these groups is the capitalist neoliberal ideology that is pervasive in our society.  Therefore the overarching competing force that I would argue is the most powerful opposition to this movement is the greater context of neoliberalism, the dominant ideology that assumes “that the rules of the market should govern societies, rather than the other way around” (Wilson, Whitmore & Calhoun, 2011, p.11).  The market and profit are most valued here.  In the “global restructuring of profits before people,” the individual is valued over the collective and the “poor get blamed for poverty, rather than the structures that perpetuate it” (Barndt, 1991, pp.ii, 11). This ties back in with the marginalization of those residents in the DTES who are viewed as not contributing to the market economy and therefore do not deserve as much value and are therefore to blame for the poverty and oppression that they experience. Also, Roe (2010) argues that under neoliberalism, “those collectives that act in economically rational ways are favoured [while] [t]hose without power or resources, or those who advocate 'unreasonable' fundamental change, are devalued as irrational” (p.76).  Under neoliberalism then, the competing actors are normalized while the movement actors are those deemed 'irrational.'

**Analysis: Whose Interests are Being Served?**

I would argue that the interests of the competing actors in the issue of housing and anti-gentrification are being served by the status quo.  The competing actors are those who are benefitting from the current neoliberal structures and it is in their interest if gentrification, which is fine-tuned with the aims of neoliberalism, in the DTES proceeds.  The housing and anti-gentrification movement, on the other hand, can be viewed as challenging the status quo.  Therefore, the alternative of ceasing economic profitability resulting from gentrification in the DTES and instead increasing social-housing for low-income people that are marginalized would serve the interests of the movement.

**Analysis:  Conjuncture of the 2010 Winter Olympics**

As the movement comprises diverse peoples and groups, central concerns held within the movement are also diverse as they range from issues of 'stolen land' from the Indigenous peoples, to the criminalization of poverty and homelessness, to larger issues of overall social justice.  Additionally, with such diverse interests, the tactics and actions that some actors may view as ideal may be frowned upon by others.  Indeed, members of the movement have noted that more effort needs to be put into being allies with one another as there serious issues of egoism and lack of respect for different tactics and ideologies, resulting in a lot of divisiveness within the movement itself (Kun, 2007).  As one activist noted, due to divisions within the movement, members lose sight of what they are fighting for and the “issues get lost in these bad group dynamics” (Kun, 2007).  Interestingly, Kuyek (2011) argues that “[m]ore attempts at change and community-building fail because we can't get along with one another than for any other reason” (p.58).And so, actors in the movement tried to view the Olympics as an opportunity to build solidarity within the movement because it was understood that all the various groups would be heavily impacted by this event (Kun, 2007).

     The event of Winter Olympics held in Vancouver in 2010 is the third significant period that I noted in the history of the movement and is a 'critical moment' that deserves more in-depth analysis (Barndt, 1991, p.16).  It is informative to look at this key event through the process of conjunctural analysis which involves examining “the balance of forces and events in a given moment (conjuncture) for opportunities or constraints to action at a given point in time” (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.17).  The cost of the Olympics is highly disputed with a 2006 provincial auditor's report stating $2.5 billion and Olympic critics claiming it is $6 billion (Dowd, 2010).

The combination of the outstanding amount of money that was to be placed into the Olympics combined with the immense international media coverage that the city would receive made for this moment to be a prime circumstance in which the movement actors would most certainly clash with the  competing actors and forces. In addition, the history and the context of the DTES had already paved the way towards this specific moment.  Both the actors of the movement and the competing actors were able to recognize through conjunctural analysis that the time frame leading up to the Olympics would be a prime opportunity for them to take action for their respective causes.  Reflecting back on the history of gentrification in the DTES in the previous decades, both sides of the issue could inform how they viewed best to proceed with their courses of action. The presence of the media would provide an ideal platform upon which both sets of actors could elevate their actions and reach a wider audience.

     The housing and anti-gentrification movement actors used the period leading up to the  Olympics as an opportunity to “publicize their complaints of government inaction to the international media that...descended on Vancouver for the Games”(Dowd, 2010).  As Kuyek (2011) explains, success in utilizing the media depends on the ability of the group to translate their information and activities into being stories deemed news-worthy such as by including elements of conflict, novelty and human interest (p.52). As such, the Anti-Poverty Committee noted that they seek opportunities to create “maximum disruption” and “escalation is an important tactic” as they have “always operated with the understanding that the political power of poor people is in the politics of disruption” (Kun, 2007).    There were various campaigns, rallies, occupations, disruptions at public speeches, public graffiti, street theatre, squats, leafleting and poster campaigns, protests at Olympic countdown events and vandalism of Olympic symbols such as the Olympic Countdown Clock (Kun, 2007; DNC, 2012).  Examples include 'RESIST 2010 Olympics' leaflets and posters that were circulated for a rally and march with a call to boycott the Delta chain of hotels “because of escalating resort development on native land” (The Anti-Poverty Committee, 2006).  One prominent campaign was 'Home Not Jails' which protested the increased policing of the homeless in the DTES as part of the gentrification of the area in anticipation of 'favourable' international media coverage of the city when the Games arrived (Kun, 2007).  Also, a large rally with over 500 DTES residents called “No More Empty Talk, No More Empty Lots” was held with a five-storey high banner bearing the slogan “Homes Now: Tent to End Homelessness, gentrification and criminalization of poverty” (Kardas-Nelson & Samur, 2010).

     This led to one of the more notable tactics used during this period which was the formation of the Olympic homeless tent village, supported by almost 100 organizations, on property in the DTES that was to be a designated parking lot for the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the Olympics (Pablo, 2010).   Kuyek (2011) argues that such occupations are a very useful tactic for getting media attention and public awareness for such specific causes as housing issues and indeed the tent village drew a lot of media attention (p.157).   Signs put up at the tent village included slogans like “homes for all,” “homes not games,” and “people not profits” (Pablo, 2010). An organizer stated that the movement recommended for either the municipal or provincial government to buy the property for an estimated $10 million, half of how much the federal government provided for the Olympics opening ceremonies, for the construction of 200 federally-funded social-housing units (Pablo, 2010).

     However, arguably the largest and longest-term project by the movement during the Olympics period was the annual 'Poverty Olympics' with the aim of “shining the international spotlight on the dark side of [this] prosperous city and province” in the hopes that this would “convince [the] governments to take action” (Poverty Olympics, 2010).  The first of the three Poverty Olympics was held in 2008 in the DTES and included a Poverty anthem torch relays, mascots such as 'Itchy the Bedbug', opening ceremonies, skits, and games such as 'welfare hurdles' and 'skating around poverty' (Poverty Olympics, 2010).  It was proclaimed that while the “'official' Olympics cost more than 6 billion dollars, the Poverty Olympics, with an equal spirit and pride, produced their version on a budget of 'about 6 dollars'.” (Elliott, 2010).  I would view this statement as a jab at the intense capitalization of the sporting event and neoliberal values in general.  The second annual Poverty Olympics drew about 500 DTES residents and activists (Ryan, 2009).  Some of the demands of the Poverty Olympics included wanting the municipal government to stop closures of residential hotels, the provincial government to build 2,000 new units of non-market housing per year, and the federal government to crate and fund a national homelessness strategy (Poverty Olympics, 2010).  Their website also provided a chart that showed how much money was spent on certain Olympics venues and how many housing units that money could have created instead.  For example, the Olympics skating oval cost $178 million which could have instead be used to create 890 housing units (Poverty Olympics, 2010).

     On the other side of the issue, for the competing actors, development of the DTES as well as the rest of Vancouver into space that is conducive for “market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices” is a continuing goal and the 2010 Winter Olympics was understood as a prime opportunity to “accelerate” this objective (Boyle & Haggerty, 2011, p.3186).  Local businesses were concerned that the issues attached to the DTES such as homelessness and visible poverty would “dominate visitors' perceptions of the city over more selectively stylized representations” with the Vancouver Board of Trade arguing that their concerns were also shared by Vancouver residents and also tourists (Boyle & Haggerty, 2011, p.3188).  In other words, there was a push for further gentrification of the DTES in order to basically hide the prevalent inequality issues of the DTES from public scrutiny.  I would argue that inherent in this is the discriminatory shame that these actors have of the low-income residents of the DTES and the sentiment that these people do not belong in their city.  Supporters of the Olympics argued that the Games would benefit “the Downtown Eastside by promoting economic development and spurring job training programs to get residents involved in Olympic-related construction” (Dowd, 2010).  Overall, I would say that economic gain for the city as a whole before, during and after the Olympics was a main goal.  Summing up the motives of the competing actors, it is evident that capitalist gain and maximizing profit were the order of the day.

     Critically looking at this particular 'moment' of the Olympics, I would argue that the movement was met with incredibly strong opposition as, in addition to the discussed competing actors and forces, the majority of the City had already previously voted in support of hosting the Olympics.  If it were to be boiled down to the movement versus the Olympics, then I would say that it is evident that the most Vancouverites had already demonstrated their alliance with the opposing side.  However, I would argue that the movement was incredibly successful in getting a lot of media coverage both locally and internationally in order to draw attention to their causes.  While they could not stop the Olympics from being held, they did make the concerns of a single community heard  around the globe and that is a large achievement.  The issues of housing and gentrification, during the Olympics and in general, is just one issue that is “situated with a large struggle” towards “some vision of social justice well beyond the local community” and so bringing awareness to what is happening in the DTES can be understood as just one piece of the larger struggle against neoliberalism and for social justice (Kun, 2007).

     Since the Olympics, the Historic Area Heights Review (HAHR) was passed which allows for increased building heights in the Chinatown area, paving the way for further condominium development (DNC, 2012).  The HAHR plan process involved five public hearings and 167 people spoke at these hearings in opposition to the plan with the majority being low-income residents of the DTES and other supporters of the housing and anti-gentrification movement (DNC, 2012).  However, divisions within the movement are still a weakness which can be used against them as the Vancouver Mayor Robertson supported the plan stating that, “'Saying no to the Chinatown neighbourhood who has brought this forward will only increase divisions in the DTES'”(DNC, 2012).  The 'Save the Pantages Site Coalition' has been formed by nine local organizations to protest the development of the recently bought Pantages Theatre site in the DTES into a new condominium project called 'Sequel 138' that would include 20 percent social housing (DNC, 2012; CCAP, 2012).  Their campaign calls for the City of Vancouver to stop the Pantages development permit application and for the City to buy the property and designate it for 100 percent resident-controlled social housing (DNC, 2012).

Currently, condominiums are outpacing social housing that is affordable for low-income DTES residents by 11 to 1 (DNC, 2012).  This campaign has found strong alliances in academia as a letter was penned to the City from professors at various local universities and colleges requesting the denial of a permit for the Sequel 138 project (CCAP, 2012).  There has also been a community resolution calling for the property to be sold to the City signed by over 200 individuals and 45 organizations (CCAP, 2012).  And most recently, in October 2012, Vancouver City Council approved rezoning for another condominium project backed by Wall Financial Corp that would include 70 social housing units owned by the City out of the 353 residential units (Stueck, 2012).   Ley and Dobson (2008) argue that as “long as the logic of the markets holds sway, pressure for reinvestment swell with every new upturn of the housing cycle” and so the path this movement is taking in the hopes of stopping, or at the very least slowing down, gentrification while achieving more low-income housing is likely destined to be a long one filled with both small successes and large barriers (p.2478).

**Analysis:  My Perspective on the Issue and What Informs My Practice**

I was born and raised in Vancouver and remember always hearing while I was growing up that the DTES is 'unsafe' and a 'bad neighbourhood'.  As a first-generation Chinese-Canadian from an upper-middle income family, my only interaction with this community in my early years was that my family and I went occasionally to Chinatown for groceries.  While I was studying Sociology at the University of British Columbia, one of my professors encouraged us in the class to volunteer in the DTES and I began volunteering for Quest Food Exchange in a soup kitchen. That was my first real experience interacting with, and volunteering alongside, residents of the DTES and had the opportunity to hear all their stories.  Later on in my life, I volunteered as a tutor at the Carnegie Community Centre and as a peer support worker at the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre.  Reflecting back on my life decisions, I can say that it is my experiences volunteering in the DTES that led to social work as my career path.

     While I feel on some level a strong connection to the DTES, I actually attended the Games and Olympic events with my family so I cannot say then that I was actively supportive of the housing and anti-gentrification movement within this particular context. It was interesting because, at the time, I was in my Bachelor of Social Work program in Victoria, BC and the majority of my classmates were all attending anti-Olympics rallies and demonstrations.  It felt as though, as a social worker, it was only 'right' to be anti-Olympics but I did not particularly feel aligned with this stance.  Reflecting back, I have very complicated feelings about the Vancouver Olympics in that I support the right for all people to have decent housing no matter what their income level and am opposed to the gentrification of the DTES.  However, at the same time I have to say that I enjoyed the 2010 Olympics and, more importantly, my mother, who passed away shortly after, was a massive fan of Olympics Games and was completely enthralled with the event being in our city.  Therefore, while I appreciate that the Olympics was a great opportunity for both the movement and the opposing actors to further their respective agendas, I feel that the movement's condemnation of the Olympics was too polarizing for many people such as myself.  Also, it is my belief that the money put into the Olympics by the governments was ever only going to be for the sole purpose of the Olympics and was never otherwise going to be allocated for low-income housing.

     Overall though, I adhere to an anti-oppressive, strengths-based, and person-centred approach when it comes to my practice.  As such, I believe in the importance of non-judgement, empathy, active listening, focusing on successes and strengths, and the understanding of the ‘client’ as the ‘expert.’  Looking at the housing and anti-gentrification movement through this social work lens then, I feel that no matter what my own evaluation of the movement and their actions is, it is significant that this movement is based on the issues that are identified as needing to be addressed by those that are part of the movement and not by some other party.  I would argue that it is the community of low-income residents of the DTES that can best identify what issues they are faced with and what solutions they would like to see made reality.  It is important that these people who are already incredibly oppressed by neoliberal capitalist structures and marginalization do not become further marginalized and devalued by losing their community through gentrification.

**Social Work Responses: Alternatives**

     I feel that a social work 'intervention' should be coming from an anti-oppressive, strengths and person-centred approach where the social worker does not address the issue as an 'expert' but rather provides space for the community and group members to address their identified goals.  However, if I had to propose alternative actions I would suggest that it would be beneficial to foster relationships with people in the wider Vancouver community in order to gain allies.  While the movement has created a strong network of relationships within the community of the DTES, I think that it would be to their benefit to have more allies that are outside of their immediate community as well as it make the movement stronger in both number and voices heard.  An interconnected alternative is to have as a goal the increasing of awareness surrounding the broader issues that are faced by DTES residents such as colonization and marginalization.  I feel that people outside of the community often do not have a strong understanding of why low-income DTES residents are experiencing social inequities such as poverty and with better understanding there would be less incidences of 'blaming the victim' so to speak.  Also, with greater awareness, people in the greater Vancouver community as well in government may become more empathetic towards the movement and thus be more inclined to be allies.

     As Ley & Dobson (2008) argue, the success success of mobilizations against gentrification is heavily dependent on the ability of the movements to acquire allies both in the greater community and in the government and to demonstrate that the area has qualities that should be protected (Ley & Dobson, 2008, p.2477).  Another alternative then is to emphasize the positive qualities of the DTES that should be preserved such as the strong sense of tight-knit community that is found amongst the low-income residents.  Finally, another alternative I propose would be to aim to address the overarching neoliberal context in addition to addressing solely decision-makers.  The noted main issue with most organizing efforts is that is that “it rarely gets at the systemic relationships of power” and seek only to “influence decision-makers, not to change the structures in which they operate” (Kuyek, 2011, p.141).  At the same time, gentrification does not address “the whole host of complex social, economic and cultural reasons as to why there are concentrations” people living in poverty in cities such as with the concentration of low-income residents in the DTES (Lees, 2008, p.2463).  It is therefore important to critically look to the overarching structures that have created the social inequities that make housing and gentrification such contested issues.

**Social Work Responses: Strategies for Arriving at Goals**

     Useful strategies for arriving at goals for the movement would be the use of participatory action research (PAR) and appreciative inquiry which are both processes very much aligned with a person-centred, strengths-based and anti-oppressive approach. PAR as a methodology is a complementary fit for this movement's purposes for it emphasizes social justice change and empowerment and involves equal collaboration with the actors in the movement to explore possible solutions and actions in order to address the concerns that they identified (van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011, p.65).  This research method  can thus be used to seek out viable actions and solutions to achieve the goals of increased low-income housing and the ceasing of gentrification in the DTES.

     Appreciative inquiry, which also emphasizes collaboration and inclusion, can be used as well as it celebrates the small successes and emphasizes what the movement is doing well so that it can further build upon these actions and tactics (Whitmore, Wilson, & Calhoun, 2011, pp.24, 23).  An interview guide to prompt narrative may include questions such as, “Could you share a story about one experience you have had in campaigning for housing and against gentrification in the DTES that you feel has been successful?”; “What would a short-term success for this movement look like?”; and  “What do you feel are some strengths that this movement has?”  It could also be beneficial to, alongside actors in the movement, create some cause-effect program logic models which “specify the changes activists expect to result from the activities” (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.22).

**Social Work Responses:**

**A Community Worker's Relationship to the Group and Use of Self**

     Various roles a community worker can take on in relation to this movement include being an advocate for the cause, an ally or even member of the movement, and a research partner for actors the movement.  A community worker can advocate on behalf of those who least often have their voices heard which is especially the case with many of the marginalized groups that comprise the low-income population of the DTES.  As an ally or group member, a community worker can help bridge and strengthen relationships between the movement's various groups, activists and organizations and help foster greater solidarity.  A community worker as an ally could also help build relationships with the greater Vancouver community to further strengthen the movement.  And as a research partner, a community worker can foster the process of evaluating the effectiveness and goal attainment of the movement with the various research methodologies discussed.

     In regards to the use of self, I would argue that it is imperative for a community worker to utilize the social work practice skills of active listening, coming from an anti-oppressive foundation, and encouraging the bottom-up approach within the movement, and advocacy on behalf of the movement to wider society.  Important personal qualities would include empathy and passion for basic human rights and social justice.

**Social Work Responses: Evaluating Effectiveness**

     As part of an action reflection cycle, continuous critical reflection on utilized tactics and what is deemed as an asset or a success would be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the movement.  Certain actors in the movement already use such critical reflection as, for example, the DNC holds monthly meetings to discuss what people thought were the best campaigns and actions of the previous year and compare them with the present year in order to help inform their plans for the following year (DNC, 2012).  Indicators of effectiveness can include "concrete changes in policies, practices or laws; citizen engagement; aspects of the functioning of the activist group themselves; raising awareness or changing the attitudes of politicians, decision-makers and the general public" (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.134).

     Using these indicators, in terms of citizen engagement, “level of success...is seen as evidenced in the numbers of people participating, in who those participants are, and in the nature or quality of that participation” (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.135).  Successes of the movement in this regard would include gaining petition signatures, drawing large numbers of people out to demonstrations such as the Poverty Olympics, and the movement's consistent use of nonviolence protest even when using risky tactics such as occupying private property with a 'tent city.'  Also, the movement engaged the attention and responses of people who may hold opposing views and utilized local and international media coverage to raise awareness for their causes.  Indeed, attracting media attention in and of itself can be considered a success (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.138).   In raising awareness, the movement has been active in disseminating information to educate people about the issues of housing and gentrification by using as websites and publications.  For example, the Carnegie Community Action Plan website regularly posts thorough information about what is currently happening in the community and the DNC publishes the DT East newspaper.  The DNC also has various campaign projects with associated websites including 'Zones of Exclusion: Where poor people are not welcome in the DTES,' 'Stop the DTES Condo Tower Plan!', and 'The DTES is not for Condo Developers'.  The 'Zones of Exclusion' website, for instance, tracks zones of exclusion such as condominium projects, shops and restaurants in Chinatown  (DNC, 2012).

      In influencing government thinking, the City's Local Area plan for the DTES is currently being developed in partnership with actors who are part of the movement so this is a positive step forward.  Therefore, even though at the heart of this plan is gentrification of the DTES under the objective of “[improving] the quality of life” in the area, at least there is an effort by the competing actors to collaborate with the movement actors.  Additionally, Whitmore, Wilson and Calhoun (2011) argue that“[b]uilding networks and collaboration among organizations was seen as essential to what effectiveness means” (p.139).  Solidarity within the movement was a goal during the Olympics and with the example of the Save Low Income Housing Coalition, “there is a concerted effort to use the strengths and different networks, strategies and tactics of each group in a respectful way” (Kun, 2007).  Indeed, “[b]uilding relationships and networks among activists and organizations and with decision makers can consolidate efforts and increase effectiveness” (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.22)

     Having fun and a good sense of humour should also be valued when evaluating the success of a movement and it would seem evident that this movement successfully purposely incorporated elements of fun, creativity and a sense of humour in their tactics, none more evident than the case of the Poverty Olympics (Whitmore, Wilson & Calhoun, 2011, p.141).  Even small activities such as a having a potluck to “celebrate [the] community's fight against gentrification and displacement” can be significant (DNC, 2012).  As Whitmore, Wilson and Calhoun (2011) point out, “[t]here is growing recognition that, what might appear to be a failure, such as no new legislation is passed, may [still] have other positive effects such as the excitement and commitment generated” (p. 21).  The movement seems to be very mindful of the importance of having fun and keeping its actions invigorating for its members so I would be inclined to think that this movement still has a lot more to offer.

**Sources**

     I utilized a large range of course readings, books, peer-reviewed journal articles, media articles and websites to inform the analysis of this paper.  In terms of the course readings, Kuyek (2011) provided a solid knowledge background on community organizing.  Barndt (1991) was helpful in laying out the process for conjunctural analysis and furthering my understanding of the movement according to the four proposed phases of 'naming the moment.'  Also, Whitmore, Wilson and Calhoun (2011) were particularly useful in informing the discussion on social work responses. Though a few articles were found, a major gap in the literature is the lack of peer-reviewed journal articles on this interesting and important subject.  It would have been informative to have reviewed articles that specifically discuss the housing and anti-gentrification movement, or even more broadly the anti-poverty movement, in the DTES area.  It would also be interesting to critically compare this movement with movements in other communities that act around the issues of housing and gentrification.

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