

Taking the Pulse of Practice

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Case-in-Point:

From Ethnic Residential Segregation to Intercultural Integration - the Role of the Planner: The Case of Collingwood Neighbourhood House.

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Abstract

Social integration of a diverse population is both an on going process and a policy challenge in areas that are growing essentially by immigration. Many neighbourhoods formerly associated with one or two specific ethnic groups have become multiethnic neighbourhoods. Some might remain ethnically segregated, which might become a hindrance for social integration. Now are we able to say that urban neighbourhoods are sites for such social integration? The case of Collingwood Neighbourhood House might be an answer to this question in many ways.



Collingwood Neighborhood House is located in the city of Vancouver, East Downtown.

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Community Celebration

The story of Collingwood Neighbourhood House

The neighbourhood located in one of the major Canadian metropolitan areas “Vancouver”. The redevelopment of a 27-acre industrial area, adjacent to the Joyce Sky Train Station (East Vancouver), had gone through many initial stages. The most important one is that, the Social Planning Department in the City of Vancouver had carried out a study of services in the “Renfrew/Collingwood area”, which has helped shape the “package” of amenities that were to be included in the redevelopment of this site. The Collingwood Neighbourhood House was one of the amenities negotiated in the “Collingwood Village” redevelopment project.

Many neighbourhoods in the urban setting are in the process of continuous change. While some of these neighbourhoods accommodate many ethnic groups, others might accommodate only a few groups.

The CNH is an exceptional example to neighbourhoods with multi-ethnic groups. It is developed to accommodate a round 45,000 people. The mix of the ethnic groups is presented in the continuous demographic change within the neighbourhood. Although the Chinese population comprised 44% of the population, there are other ethnic groups including, Irish, Scottish, Portuguese, First Nation, German, Philippines, Italian and Vietnamese. Therefore, with the mix of the people who belong to different ethnic groups and the proper management that the neighbourhood receives, the neighbourhood has become one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in East Vancouver .

The neighbourhood survival in maintaining its vitality and prosperity is a key area of research.

Introduction

“Social integration of a diverse population is both an on going process and a policy challenge in metropolises growing essentially by immigration” . If planning for healthy multi-racial and multi- neighbourhoods is to be a reality, then the development of stronger evidence about the existence and maintenance of such diverse places is required. In this way, “Planning in multicultural

society requires planners to address issues concerning the multicultural use of space. This issue converts to one of planning for and accommodating racially and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods” .

Currently, multiculturalism has essentially played a very important role in providing guidance that reshapes our neighbourhoods. Such neighbourhoods are needed to be diverse and stable under conditions other than the massive infusion of energy and resources. This is because “creating a functional multicultural society requires an investment in human beings as well as bricks and mortar” . The challenge facing us today (planners, policy makers, residents and new arrivals) is to manage the increasing diversity of our cities; to strike a balance between the interest of long-established residents and those of recent arrivals. This paper examines the Collingwood Neighbourhood House project.



community activities

Elements of healthy ethno-cultural neighbourhood

In order for any ethno-cultural neighbourhood to survive, the existence of best practice guidance is essential. Therefore, our attempt in this paper is also to examine the situation in the CNH, and find out whether it possesses the strengths of healthy ethno-cultural neighbourhood or not.



Community involvement in the process

Public Consultation:

Effective consultation is essential and requires outreach to hear the voice of every community member. This will ensure that planning for any community or a neighbourhood is inclusive. Community involvement in the planning is a key element underpinning the planning process. Good public consultation can help to identify who is in the community in the first place, which should help planners understand their issues and interests. In the case of CNH, the planner involved in the process has adopted outstanding tools of inclusion, which helped to accommodate every citizen in the neighbourhood.

It included provision of translated materials in the public meetings. It also included interpretation for people who do not speak the English language. This has helped the presenters not to exclude or leave any interested group behind.



Public Meetings and Community Engagement

Recognizing diversity within the community

Planning for diversity is essential for planners, policy makers and community members to undertake when working in most neighbourhoods. To engage effectively with diverse issues, all those delivering the planning services need to have an understanding of what diversity and inclusion mean.

In order to foster understanding and respect for diversity within the neighbourhood, the CNH founders were trained at the Hastings Institute, an Institute designed to train civil servants in anti-racism and diversity work. This has provided a solid ground for the successful diversity mission of Collingwood Neighbourhood House. This would set forth, the policy makers in framing their policies and directions within any neighbourhood. Therefore, “If a community values and respects diversity, appropriate policies must be incorporated into the official plan”. This consideration of diversity should be at the heart of planning activities.

Different values and needs

One of the steps toward ensuring that the planning services deliver equality of opportunity is to recognize the values of the community in different neighbourhoods. Each group has characteristics that shape their unique identity, but also some of these are shared with others. Therefore, social inclusion and integration are very imperative to consider. “The first promotes equitable provision of opportunities and services for all, irrespective of ethnicity or class, and the second binds together divergent groups into a cohesive mosaic, while sustaining their identities. These two principles balance diversity with unity”

In this front, the CNH has adopted the techniques of active research method. It is normally used to train and support people who are involved in the community activities. It encourages them to go out and have table discussion with people to identify issues and concerns of the people and the types of services that are needed by the community. Youth were specifically targeted and given the opportunity to be trained on community issues.

Effective local engagement of ethnic minorities

Effective community engagement in the neighbourhood is very essential. This factor makes the responsibility of the development of the neighbourhood shared among residents. Community engagement includes those who are hard to reach and hard to communicate with. In this scenario, the planners involved in the CNH project have used different methods of communication that had increased the level of local engagement in the project. These steps included the following:

- Letters were sent to all households/businesses within the boundary of the proposed site.
- Public displays, in the form of series of displays at prominent locations in the community, where people were caught going about their daily lives (i.e. set up a big white tent in the parking lot of the largest neighbourhood grocery store for two days).
- Meetings/outreach with cultural groups – the intention was to meet with local groups (i.e. presentation at the regular meeting of seniors groups, Latino groups, and other ethnic groups).
- Advertised in print, radio and TV programming of Chinese, Punjabi and Spanish publications.
- To overcome language barriers, surveys were done in different languages, to give residents equal opportunity and accommodate every one in the community.

The Role of Planning In Managing Diversity

Managing and valuing diversity is a key component of effective planning activities. The significance of demographic changes occurring in our communities and neighbourhoods requires management practices, to review and develop new and creative approaches to managing diverse people and neighbourhoods, and therefore, support unity in diversity. The growing diversity necessitates that we strike a balance between the needs and interests of the newcomers and the host population. Thus, people should always be at the heart of the planning culture, if the outcome is to be neighbourhoods that are healthy and have vitality. Planning that is responsive to diversity will

contribute to social inclusion.

The CNH has also introduced exposure policy within the neighbourhood. This policy is designed to organize meetings, discussions, and classes that expose people to exchange ideas about various diversity issues with each other. It gives people the opportunity to express themselves in a very respectful way. This has helped the neighbourhood in changing the people's attitude and made diversity managed as celebration rather than competition within the neighbourhood. This is one of the tools that the CNH has used to manage conflicts in the neighbourhood.

Leadership and Local Community Engagement

Leadership has always played a very strong role in leading any community project to success or failure and in sustaining neighbourhood stability. The arts and techniques of using leadership skills to convert the community's collective effort into services and celebration is a real challenge. The CNH leadership has followed a grass root approach in training and recruiting from the local community. The training given to the youth in the active research, the volunteers pool that accommodates other community members and the ESL classes have been used carefully as sources to recruit staff members and board members from people of different ethnic groups.

In addition to that, the neighbourhood has introduced the Local Area Service Network, which has created a family of schools model. This model has become a lead by example to the city of Vancouver. It focuses on creating youth leadership by targeting youth between the transitional elementary school and the high school. It includes the Buddy Program, which matches elementary school students who are new immigrants with high school mentors, in order to support their social integration and enhances their adjustment to Canadian life.



Youth Awards are Celebrated



Community and Family Services
Immigration and Social Integration

The 230,000 to 250,000 arrivals annually are the main sources of growth in the Canadian population, equating to an 8% increase per decade (CIC2003). They make up of 35% of Vancouver's population. Therefore, immigration is the main force behind ethno- racial diversity.

Notwithstanding, the huge numbers of arrivals to Canada, the immigrants are very diverse in terms of culture, ethnic origin, skills and social status. Their concentration in the largest urban areas is a significant factor that contributes to the transformation of the big cities in different ways. Whether these urban areas with their fabric and their social compositions, are ready to accept these numbers is an enquiry that pauses itself to planners. Interestingly, " Cities that receive more immigrants are growing faster and becoming more diverse than those receive relatively few immigrants" . This means that big cities including Vancouver are on the way of changing towards better diverse activities, which accommodate new immigrants.

The response of the planners and the policy makers to this would be essential in supporting the openness of the Federal government policy towards immigration issues.

Although, within the Canadian multicultural

policy, "specific policies have addressed 'visible minority', and a practice has developed of categorizing immigrants in terms of ethnicity and providing ethno-specific programs and services", (Leonie Sandercock, 2004) it remains the society and neighbourhoods that decide the fates of these policies. Therefore, the management of cultural diversity within the local scale, where community takes the lead in translating these policies into practice, is a challenging factor.

In this front, it is observed that the CNH has established a settlement centre, which provides all needed services that are required by new arrivals (ESL classes, social orientation, volunteer opportunities, open discussion between host population and new immigrants).

These practices constitute an opportunity for immigrants to interact with members from other groups, which in itself facilitates inter-group understanding. In this way, the neighbourhood has taken a social integration path in helping the immigrants to socially integrate within the neighbourhood in specific and to the whole country at large.

Lessons Learned

Planners need to understand that recognition and consultation of the community, is a key factor in the success or failure of any planning services that are meant to serve the interest of the community. This could be found in situations where the community's participation would help to create the sense of ownership within the community and hence community would work hard to support its own neighbourhood.

The community saw the pre-existing industrial area as a negative environment that attracts negative activities to the neighbourhood. These activities could destabilize the neighbourhood and discourage new residents from moving to the neighbourhood. Therefore the community was willing to accept high-density residential development in their neighbourhood as long as it meant the redevelopment of the industrial area

and the provision of the amenities that would support the community. This way, the environment within the neighbourhood would be changed to a pedestrian and human scale rather than becoming a hard edge.

Public meetings with the availability of translated materials ahead of time, and interpreters if requested, had played an important role in the success of these meetings. It has eliminated the language barriers and significantly increased the number of participants into these meetings. It also stimulated more positive discussions that benefited the whole community. Therefore, the community welcomed the outcomes of these meetings, as it is part of its own ideas.

To make planning more responsive and valuable to people, local authorities and professional planners should develop policies and procedures that recognize and celebrate the diverse make-up of the communities they serve. This would happen only through proper public consultation, which is imperative for the success of such planning policies.

Creating and sustaining local leadership has its role in the success of the neighbourhood. This is reflected in the current community leadership that has been well trained and given the leadership for the past 10 years, which has created consistency in the policies and programs that were adopted within the neighbourhood. The leadership also follows a policy that trains and recruits local youth leadership.

Successful neighbourhoods are not filled with people who feel “they don’t belong” –rather a sense of comfort and belonging is key to successful neighbourhoods. Often these neighbourhoods contain relatively a large number of some of the ethnic groups (Chinese 44%). Therefore, social networks develop which are essential in assisting the integration of newcomers in their new community.

Challenges

The challenges of planning for diversity are many, with one of the essential questions being the use of policy, regulatory and procedural power to deal with diversity in the planning process for this neighbourhood. The mix of people and how that mix is changing in this neighbourhood was a key feature that should have been considered by involved planners. Unfortunately, planners did not aim at achieving mix along ethnic lines; instead their policy was designed in terms of ownership/rental mix, households with children/without and units for able or disabled people. This is very clear indication that, planners did not consider planning for multicultural use of space, which is one of the current challenges that needs planners to address.

Therefore, how to manage and response to immigration and diversity, although the CHN has done very well in this front, it will remain a practical challenge for planners, which will determine the success or failure of this great nation.

Conclusion

This project is innovative in its approach to creating a process that can be applied to similar situations in the future; specifically when planners are faced and challenged with rapid demographic changes.

The process and the guidance followed and adopted by the CNH, is a process that seeks to legitimize the views and the inputs of the stakeholders and acknowledge their individuality contributions, while searching for areas of compromise and common grounds that are acceptable for all.

In the CNH situation, by measuring the validity of the elements of healthy ethno-cultural neighbourhoods, it is found that, it has not only succeeded in managing its diverse population, but also sets a role model for other neighbourhoods to follow. If multi-ethnic neighbourhoods are to be socially sustainable, residents, planners, policy makers, and community leaders need to share this responsibility and work collaboratively on all social aspects.

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