6 Serving diverse communities: the role of community initiatives in delivering services to poverty neighbourhoods

Abstract

The recent decades have witnessed a shift from the traditional top-down model of service delivery led by the state to the provision and delivery of services by community organisations. This article explores the extent to which community initiatives in Jane and Finch, a highly diverse, lower income, inner-suburban neighbourhood of Toronto, were successful in achieving their goals, and the relevance of the experience for current neighbourhood initiatives targeting diversity. It discusses the factors which contributed to the effectiveness of 10 analysed initiatives in terms of reaching their primary objectives. The analysis shows that despite the efforts within community initiatives to improve conditions for inhabitants, their impacts remain limited due to underlying structural challenges such as poverty and institutionalised racism, increasing fragmentation within the over-all network of initiatives and precarious funding, which pit programs against one another and hamper effective collaboration and solidarity needed in order to achieve transformative change.

Keywords: *community initiatives, community participation, neighbourhood, Toronto*

§ 6.1   Introduction

Low-income households living in racially diverse poverty areas often face multi-faceted challenges. Diversity in such neighbourhoods tends to go hand in hand with high levels of inter-generational poverty, lack of physical and social infrastructure and poor quality of life (e.g. Hulchanski, 2010; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Sampson et al, 1997). Research has further shown that low-income households commonly struggle with meeting basic needs due to limited resources, low earnings and inadequate government support, and are

affected by their neighbourhood environment in terms of health, employment, criminal and drug-related activities (Austin and Lemon, 2006; Chow, Johnson, & Austin, 2004; Sampson ,2001). Poverty neighbourhoods are thus not only a symptom of disadvantage, but also a source of it since they negatively impact the opportunities of their inhabitants (Fitzpatrick, 2004). Kintrea (2006) further underscores that poverty neighbourhoods, which are commonly situated at the urban fringes, are often by-products of policy as well as the housing system, which translate labour market driven inequalities into spatial concentrations of poverty and segregation (see also Atkinson & Kintrea, 2002; Lupton, 2003). Furthermore, often in such neighbourhoods there is an inflow of households in extreme need and an outflow of upwardly mobile residents which exacerbates the challenges in service delivery and neighbourhood improvement (Kintrea, 2006).

Meanwhile, policy interventions have traditionally sought to tackle some of these challenges by implementing a range of programs intended to improve neighbourhood quality. Examples of such policy interventions include the new deal for communities in the context of the United Kingdom (e.g. Lawless 2011; 2006; 2004; Dargan, 2009; Wallace, 2007), and Priority neighbourhoods in Canada (Leslie and Hunt, 2013; Cowen and Parlette, 2011; Hulchanski, 2007). Community-based and grassroots programs and projects in the areas of neighbourhood improvement and regeneration have often been described as 'initiatives' (Kintrea, 2006). Neighbourhood initiatives fall in the area of third sector welfare organizations, referring to non-government, non-profit organisations operating in the interstices of formal state institutions, the market sector and the private spheres such as the household whose primary area of focus is welfare (Brown, Kenny and Turner, 2002). Seyfang and Smith (2007) further underscore that grassroots initiatives differ from market-based interventions in that (a) they embody diverse organisational forms including cooperatives, voluntary associations, informal community groups, and social enterprises; (b) Their resource and funding base is similarly diverse, e.g. grant funding, limited commercial activity, voluntary input and mutual exchanges; (c) They exhibit varying degrees of professionalisation and official recognition and support.

Brown et al. (2002) emphasize that third-sector community initiatives are increasingly relevant in the 21st century as an alternative to the traditional welfare state model which is highly centralized, standardized and bureaucratic. The traditional model often fails to take into account public input since it is grounded in patriarchal social relations, which render the decision of social 'experts' the objective truth in determining social needs, how they should be met and the methods through which they should be delivered (Culpitt, 1992). The result of this top-down model is an inherent paternalism in the relation between the provider and recipient of welfare which renders the latter as essentially passive with little will-power for self-determination. On the contrary, the relationships in third sector initiatives are often the inverse, reflecting the voluntary and self-governing nature of these programs (Brown et al., 2002). Community initiatives

can thereby provide an alternative method to service provision and further bolster bottom-up local leadership in disadvantaged communities (O'Conor, 2001).

This paper expands the body of work on community initiatives by providing findings from a highly diverse, poor inner-suburban neighbourhood in Toronto, Canada. It provides an in-depth analysis of how a selected sample of ten community initiatives in Jane and Finch have worked in practice, particularly in relation to two notions: funding and community involvement and outlines the lessons they carry for future initiatives. The paper is based on a wider evaluation of policies to address diversity in Toronto (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok, 2013) conducted as part of the DIVERCITIES project which investigates the impact of diversity upon social cohesion, social mobility and economic performance of inhabitants across Toronto in addition to 13 European cities. While the observations presented here are drawn from Toronto, many of the themes highlighted in the analysis of the community initiatives in this case have also been echoed elsewhere.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The following section will offer a brief overview of the theoretical background. Thereafter, the research methods and a brief introduction to the selected case study are respectively outlined. The data and analysis are then laid out. The paper concludes by presenting lessons and implications for future community initiatives and the research synthesis.

§ 6.2 The role of community in service delivery

In the context of the declining role of the state in the delivery of welfare and services and the shift from government to governance (Rhodes, 1996), especially its market and partnership-based forms (Jessop, 2002), the role of community organizations has gained increasing relevance. The traditional top-down mode of service delivery by the state has received criticism, from both the left and the right. The political left has criticized the top-down delivery of services for creating welfare dependency and undermining, active citizenship, political activism and autonomy (Oosterlynck, et al., 2013). Nancy Fraser (among others) criticises the liberal welfare state for leaving untouched the underlying socio-economic structures that create and maintain the unequal distribution of resources and class divisions (as opposed to changing the economic structure and transforming the conditions of existence for all) (1995). While the centralised welfare model does provide the poor with aid, it also targets them for stigmatization and hostility via creating essentialised antagonistic group differentiations (i.e. the demonization of the poor as inherently deficient, needy, and undeserving of the special treatment they appear to be receiving) (see also Fraser, 1999; 2003; 2012).

Within the right, a common argument has been that the delivery of welfare by the state undermines individual responsibility, advocating for a model of service delivery that centres on the market and private sector. Central to such model is the belief that the devolution of responsibility from the state to the private sector enhances efficiency and output in delivering services, by creating individual and organizational competition and reducing union protection. This entails the privatisation of public utilities and contracting out welfare programmes. The devolution of responsibility through privatisation has been on the rise in light of the growing hegemonic prominence of neoliberalism in many post-war Western societies. However, there is ample evidence for the failure of the market in meeting its premises in service delivery. The logic of the market model undermines ideals of social justice and collective responsibility, advocates for competition among service providers (a premise which it often fails to deliver since it produces monopolies and oligopolies instead) and prioritises quantity over quality. It further creates an acute distinction between the provider and receiver of services by constructing the latter as consumers who supposedly hold power over the quality of service. However, this is a false promise since in reality, service recipients rarely obtain the fiscal and human resources to dictate the market (Brown et al., 2002; Jessop. 2002).

Meanwhile, advocates of expanding the market economy and self-organisation of civil-society have responded to the inadequacies of the market model by increasing promotion of the notion of community over the past two decades. This is not to say that the language of the market has disappeared. Underlying these new communitarian alternatives remains the assumption that welfare states are costly, inefficient and likely to promote parasitic dependency as opposed to empowerment. State-provided monopoly services should thereby be minimized by contracting out services, promoting internal competition and increasing third-sector (i.e. agents located between state and market) and grassroots involvement (Jessop, 2002). Seyfang and Smith (2007) similarly advocate for 'grassroots innovation', referring to a network of activists and organisations which operate within civil society arenas and generate bottom-up solutions to sustainable community development. They further assert that such grassroots initiatives can deliver viable alternatives where top–down measures fail, by promoting community action which utilises contextualised experience and knowledge about what works in local communities and what matters to their members.

However, the promotion of community, as underscored by Jessop (2002) lacks explicit references to structures of power and authority, exploitation and domination (see also Taylor, 2011; Raco, 2016). Emphasizing human agency, local communities are thereby encouraged to empower themselves, create and sustain informal initiatives despite insufficient funds, support and infrastructure. Thus, there is an inherent contradiction in this model of community promotion which emphasises local contribution on the one hand while undermining the very conditions essential to it on the other. The financial

effectiveness of the downscaling of service provision to community welfare institutions has further been questioned since, in the context of funding precarity, research has shown that decentralisation does not serve the purpose of financial savings (Oosterlynck, et al., 2013). Rather, it results in a prioritisation of the interests of private investors, exacerbating competition and fixation on the economic outcomes of social programs. (Andreotti et al. 2012).

In light of the contradictions outlined above, the paper explores the question of how local community initiatives can work in practice. It specifically analyses a number of initiatives in relation to two primary notions: (a) funding and support, (b) community participation and input. Firstly, the issue of funding is highly relevant to the analysis of community initiatives since it makes explicit matters such as the role and function of the state in relation to the initiative and degree of autonomy. Brown et al. (2002) emphasize that the implications of state-funding are two-fold, underscoring that the concept of state responsibility is often invoked in community funding debates while acknowledging the co-optative implications of dependency on the capitalist state. While accepting state funding reinforces citizen rights to universal welfare, it may simultaneously undermine the right to autonomous action for community initiatives.

Secondly, community input and participation are relevant to the study of community initiatives in that they allow for the exploration of the degree of active citizenship as well as factors contributing to or undermining it, relation between service providers and recipients, and the perception of the beneficiaries within the initiative. Communities are increasingly perceived to have the capacity to improve service delivery and meet local needs through delivering their own services identified in a bottom-up manner, and respond to 'democratic deficit' through re engaging citizens with state institutions (Taylor, 2007). Meanwhile, the notion of community participation has received extensive criticism for presenting an 'idealised normative model' which renders the community a self-evident and unproblematic social category (Hickey and Mohan, 2005), fails to account for issues of power, agency and accountability (Newman, 2001), and can create privileged pathways for traditionally powerful actors (Taylor, 2007). Community participation encouraged from above is often biased in favour of selected interests and positions. Participation arenas can in fact be co-opted by the state so as to push forward neo-liberal agendas (Silver, Scott and Kazepov, 2010). Moreover, grassroots involvement is not always empowering, since the existing power inequalities among citizens can ultimately determine who gets involved and who gets excluded. Members of privileged groups have access to more resources for participation (e.g. time, money and political capital). For instance, marginalized voices may be rendered irrelevant in the participatory process by more affluent or educated groups on the mere basis of their use of language and style of expression (ibid). Thus, it is important to ground any understanding of community participation in the context wherein it takes place and the existing power structures underlying it.

Methods and context

The present article aims to explore a selected sample of ten community initiatives in Jane and Finch to outline how they worked in practice. Specifically, the initiatives were analysed in relation to two primary notions: (a) funding and (b) community involvement. The data for the article was gathered between 26 March and 5 April 2014 in Jane-Finch, Toronto by means of semi-structured interviews with 13 community workers, participant observations and a round table discussion. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Thereafter, the transcripts and other textual data (written documents, reports, evaluations and online resources) were classified and coded using the NVivo qualitative analysis software. The qualitative data were then analyses using the two aforementioned categories (namely funding and community involvement) as a basis.

Prior to each interview, informants were asked to provide written consent by signing a short (one page) informed consent sheet, which contained information regarding the aim of the project, the collection of data, its usage and storage. The one-on-one interview format provided the opportunity to engage in matters that went beyond the scope of individual initiatives, even though that was the primary point of departure. The Informants were specifically asked about their involvement, experiences and reflections vis-a-vis the diversity-related initiatives. The sample consisted of the following community initiatives: Black Creek Farm, Aging at Home, Black Creek SNAP, Jane-Finch Action against Poverty (JFAAP), The Spot; Women Moving Forward (WMF), PEACH, COSTI specialized housing programme; The Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF) and Youth Enterprise Network (YEN) Table 2 in appendix provides an overview descriptive information regarding each initiative, namely origin, mission, activities and components. All initiatives had in common a commitment to the recognition of the diversity of Jane-Finch residents and were selected on the basis of recommendations from policy workers and community actors who had been engaged in the previous stages of the DIVERCITIES research (see Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok, 2015). The size of the sample facilitated a close and in-depth investigation of the selected initiatives suitable for a qualitative study, while still allowing for a diversity of inputs to be taken into account.

The selected case study for this research was Jane-Finch, an inner-suburban neighbourhood situated in the northwest of Toronto, Ontario. Jane-Finch is a part of the Ward 8 district in Toronto. The area surrounding Ward 8 has been known as "Black Creek", "Elia", as well as "Downsview". However, it has become popularly known as "Jane-Finch" in the media and to the mainstream public, even though this is not the official name of the neighbourhood. Evidently, the area became colloquially known

as Jane-Finch after an article in Toronto Daily Star (Toronto Star), published in 1965, told the story of a single mother of eight being forced to move to a townhouse in the neighbourhood (Narain, 2012). Jane-Finch was developed in the 1960s based on Modernist planning and green cities principles with a large stock of public housing and still consists predominantly of blocks of residential towers (accommodating mostly lower-income households), wide streets and large green areas. The neighbourhood has since then experienced a considerable wave of immigration from the Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia, Africa, and South America. The area experienced a significant growth in its population in the 1960s. Meanwhile, city services and neighbourhood infrastructure did not grow sufficiently to address this population increase. The neighbourhood began to receive negative publicity from the media already in the 1970s (Richardson, 2008). By the 1980s, mainstream news outlets commonly presented Jane-Finch as "a concrete jungle of social breakdown" and "synonymous with trouble" (DiManno, 1986). Currently, the neighbourhood accommodates more youth, sole-supported families, asylum seekers, individuals without a high-school diploma, low-income households, and public housing tenants than any other neighbourhood in Toronto. As well, there is a diverse population living in middle class detached and semi-detached houses, townhouses, and high-rise tower blocks. (Ahmadi & Tasan-Kok, 2014)

The case study area is a highly diverse neighbourhood not only in terms of ethnic diversity, but also of age, economic background, and gender (see Table 1). Much like Jane-Finch, Toronto show-cases a high level of demographic diversity, especially due to increased migration over the past decades. However, arriving immigrants are increasingly facing issues such as discrimination in the labour market, limited access to resources and affordable housing, and low quality of life. Thus, Toronto continues to be characterised by inequality, income polarization, and segregation along the lines of race and class (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok, 2015; Hulchanski, 2010; Siemiatycki, 2011). Subsequently, lower-income racialized households are continuously pushed to the outer edges of the city. Thus, inner-suburban areas of Toronto such as Scarborough, North York, and Jane-Finch showcase high concentrated poverty, high resident turn-over, poor infrastructure, gang presence and gun-violence (Joy and Vogel, 2015). Jane-Finch is commonly labelled a high-need area in public and policy discussions and is home to a variety of community initiatives aiming to provide residential support and respond to existing issues. Not surprisingly the stigma surrounding the area prevails to this day, as Jane-Finch residents continue to be portrayed as passive recipients of aid, lazy, lawless and even dangerous in the media and public imagination. Its overall diversity on the one hand, and concentration of programs on the other make Jane-Finch an appropriate candidate for the study of community initiatives catering to diverse inhabitants in high need areas.

	TORONTO	JANE-FINCH
Area (km²)	632	21
Total population	2,503,000	80,150
Age		
0-19	16.1%	43.4%
20-64	69.9%	43.1%
>65	14.0%	13.6%
Percentage of population not born in Canada	50.0	60.0
Persons 25 or over without a school certificate, diploma or degree	18%	35%
Average household income	C$80,300	C$53,900
Unemployment rate	6.7%	9.2%

TABLE 6.1 Key characteristics of Jane-Finch and Toronto / Source: Statistics Canada, 2006

§ 6.4   Data and Analysis

INITIATIVE	FUNDING, AUTONOMY AND RELATION WITH THE STATE	COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INPUT
Black Creek Farm	- Sources: private foundation, City and government grants. - Tokenistic funding, difficulty in funding administration. - Staff time and resources increasingly spent on writing grant proposals.	- Staffed and supported by community residents. - Catering products and activities to the needs and backgrounds of residents. - Focus on basic needs, in particular food.
Aging at Home	- Source: State funding (ministry of health). - Limited but stable funding due to the program's sole focus on seniors.	- Programs are designed separately for each group and in direct consultation with its participants. - addressing basic needs by providing food and public transport tokens. - Offered at multiple locations and in different languages to ensure accessibility for seniors.
SNAP	- Source: State funding (City of Toronto), private foundation and corporations.	- Hiring assistants from the community. - Developed in collaboration with residents (top down involvement).

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INITIATIVE	FUNDING, AUTONOMY AND RELATION WITH THE STATE	COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INPUT
JFAAP	- No core funding. Material and non-material support from other community organisations. - Deliberate absence of public funding to ensure autonomy.	- consists of community residents and organization members in Jane-Finch. - No constitution or by-laws or organisational hierarchy. - Addressing basic needs by providing transit tokens, food and childcare. - Meetings organised outside of office hours to ensure possibility for attendance of working residents. - Door to door outreach.
The Spot	- Sources: State funding (citizenship and immigration Canada) and private foundation. - Competition with other youth centres/hubs over funding. - Precarious, short-term funding. - Reactive funding based on incidents such as shootings and gang violence. - Adjusting activities and programming to satisfy funders.	- A strong mandate to hire staff from the community to help youth earn a salary while gaining employment experience. - Enhanced identification of needs by hiring local residents. - Absence of hierarchy and divide between service providers and receivers. - Addressing basic needs by providing food and transit tokens. - Located in a mall to ensure accessibility for youth. - Involving youth's input directly in the design of programs and the space.
WMF	- Sources: State funding (city of Toronto), and private foundations.	- Following up, offering support and assistance to women after completion of the program.
PEACH	- Sources: State funding (municipal government and governmental program specific grants), private foundations, and corporations. - Lack of funding and support administrative costs from the state. - Cut-backs within programs due to lack of funding (inability to address basic needs by providing food and transit tokens). - Precarity in funding leading to employment precarity within the program.	- Cut-backs within programs due to lack of funding (inability to address basic needs by providing food and transit tokens) which in turns undermines community participation. - Following up with youth after making referrals.
COSTI specialised housing program	- Source: State funding (city of Toronto).	- Working on a one-on-one basis with individual clients. - The mobility of the service providers (e.g. visiting clients in their place of residence or preference instead of an office) enhances access to the program.
LEF	- State funding (the federal government and city of Toronto), private foundations, banks and corporations. - Programs are increasingly accountable towards funders (program design catering to funders as opposed to clients) which undermines holistic programming and collaborations. - Evaluation on the basis of numbers and statistics	- Mandate for hiring from within the program (internal hiring). - Addressing basic needs by providing food and child care.
YEN	- Sources: Private foundation and selling of products.	- The retail space is managed and run by community youth, mandate for hiring locals.

TABLE 6.2 Overview of analysis

§ 6.4.1   Funding and support

In regards to funding and support, the review of the 10 community initiatives reveals the following key themes: precarious funding; increasingly tokenistic state support (lack of funds for fundamental work such as administration); state support leading to co-optation and undermining of autonomy; short-term re-active funding (i.e. funds are allocated to specific programs after incidents such as shootings and violent out-breaks take place in the area) as opposed to sustainable preventive funding; compartmenlised funding (difficulty in funding holistic programming).

The first highlighted theme surrounds the precarity in funding community initiatives in the area in general, and holistic programs which cut across different fields in particular. This is especially relevant to smaller initiatives which don't benefit from large foundation and private sector support and rely predominantly on state funding. Informants unanimously agreed that insecurities around funding present the most serious challenge to the effectiveness and continuation of community initiatives. Some informants highlighted the increasingly tokenistic nature of public and private funding, meaning that funding is allocated to symbolic matters such as short-lived publicised events as opposed to fundamental issues such as staff time and administration. which is exemplified in the quote below, provided by the program manager of the Black Creek Farm on the challenges in funding staff and administration related costs:

"As with all NGOs it is hard to get them to fund what you actually need. It is hard to get them to fund staff-time. A community pizza-event, that kind of thing is e relatively easy to get money for, because you know, you can put a plaque up that says: This pizza-oven donated by this foundation. But it is hard to get money to pay somebody to write grants."

An informant involved with PEACH similarly echoes the concern raised around lack of administrative funding and its implications for prospective employees in terms of job security and employment benefits:

"From the government there were fewer and fewer places that would actually support administrative costs so everybody wants to support programming but nobody wants to pay my salary. It is a huge issue right now, how can you run an organization if you do not pay for its administration? [...] Right now we have had to let go of our full time child and youth worker and actually hire two part time child and youth workers so again we are contributing to that insecurity of employment for the labour market and we are not able to offer health benefits to the two part time positions so again it just compounds the issues that are out there in terms of insecure employment, not having full medical coverage, and yet we just can't manage it as much as we would like to."

A frequent theme in the interviews revolved around what one informant calls reactive versus proactive (or preventive) funding, meaning that funds are allocated to specific programs after problems occur. For instance, in the case of the youth drop-in centre 'The Spot', our informant explained how the initiative was funded in the aftermath of violent shootings among youth and suffered cuts when the subject matter appeared to have lost its appeal:

"Youth was a hot topic at the time. Youth had to be hot in order to get funding. So, if next year they decide that they want to focus on the elderly, then our funding will get streamlined and it is going to go into the elderly. [...] Funding comes out when things happen. It is very reactive, it is not proactive. And that is what the history of funding has been. Ten youth get shot and we need to put violence prevention strategies in the community. And they provide 3 million dollars for programs and services. Then when everything kind of gets stabilized, they pull the funding. When you see something is working, and you know what was happening prior, why not just maintain that? Like, how could you do, good community work in nine months? It takes nine months to actually get in the door and really start, you know."

Such reactive funding is often short-term and does not allow for sustainable solutions to community issues to take shape. The financial insecurity of initiatives due to the precarious, temporary and reactive nature of most funding available to them has resulted in many initiatives altering their programming in order to appeal to funders. A long term community worker in Jane-Finch who is also involved with the grassroots action group JFAAP shared how insecurities around funding can result in prioritising pleasing funders over meeting the needs of the community:

"All the non-profit sector right now is going through a tough time because of the shift towards more business type approaches, which is basically looking for short-term band aid solution. You have to spend so much of your time, writing proposals for governments and then report to them and all that. And then also you have to change your program so it eventually becomes something else. It becomes about pleasing funders as opposed to getting work done."

In fact, among the initiatives JFAAP is most explicit in its mandate against accepting state funding so as to not risk co-optation.

In light of increasing cutbacks and funding shortages, many initiatives end up prioritising funding over autonomy. Moreover, larger organisations with a diverse range of programming (such as SNAP and LEF) often rely on different public and private bodies for funding. This means that within one organisation, programs may have different funders. Each program would in turn be expected to report to its specific funder and organise its

activities and services so as to appeal to funders' demands rather than the objectives of the organisation. This results in programmes (which are often addressing interconnected issues) functioning in isolation and undermines holistic services (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok, 2014). One informant shares how increasing focus on funder satisfaction is undermining holistic work in larger organisations such as LEF:

"Increasingly we were seeing people who were feeling accountable to the funder, rather than the organization (LEF). That meant that people were so focussed on hitting that targets, they were not necessarily able to do other things. [...] We were worried that we were not actually working together and our services were starting to feel more and more co-located rather than integrated."

Protagonists often contended that the current climate of competition, precarity and shortage of funding further pits initiatives against each other and hampers collaboration among organisations that do similar or interconnected work. This is echoed in the quote below by a community worker involved with SNAP:

"There are literally hundreds of organisations working here. Most of the time no one knows what the others are doing and there is a bit of duplication of work and competition for funding too. People sometimes don't say what they want to do because they want to apply for some grant and they don't want the other organisation to apply for it."

Thus, issues around funding pose a serious barrier to the effectiveness and sustainability of community initiatives in Jane-Finch. Among the reviewed initiatives, those that had a singular focus (e.g. seniors) were more successful in securing stable funding. Informants often shared concerns regarding difficulties around funding programs that were cross-cutting and took account of the complexity of residents' issues in the area. The compartmentalisation of funding has had negative impact on addressing the multi-faceted and structural nature of many issues in programs such as LEF:

"We start to analyse the problem, so that we don't have to deal with the systemic issue. So if the problem is black boys and I open a black school, I have dealt with the problem, there is nothing wrong with this black school, right? And as long as it is them, I don't have to do anything politically about it. Because you end up getting caught up in just solving the problem for this group. It is classic Machiavelli, right? Divide and concur. And God help you if they ever come together. "

The interviews in fact revealed a vast knowledge of the complexity of the problems in Jane-Finch. All commentators agreed that interconnected multi-faceted problems require matching multi-faceted cross-cutting solutions and that efforts to address singular problems were often compromised by the failure to deal with wider problems.

However, the realities of funding and support, in particular fragmentation and discontinuity, make the realisation of comprehensive approaches as such hardly possible.

Community participation and input

Regarding community participation and input, the following important common themes were elicited from the views offered by the informants throughout our discussions: the importance of addressing common barriers, bottom-up vs. top-down involvement, hierarchy within programs and perception of the beneficiaries, disengagement and mistrust. Participation here referred to both contribution of local residents to the programs (through volunteering, attending meetings and providing input) and making use of the services provided by these programs.

Emphasizing the high concentration of lower-income households in Jane-Finch, informants unanimously highlighted the importance of addressing common barriers faced by inhabitants within community programs. Lack of time due to working multiple jobs, limited access to services such as child care and transportation were among the most commonly identified factors which prevent inhabitants from both making use of the programs offered within the community and contributing to them (through volunteering or providing input). All initiatives were thus aware that the inability to meet basic needs undermines participation, and thus adopted a range of strategies to address fundamental issues regarding accessibility, availability, child care, and food (e.g. providing on-site child care, organising events and meetings outside of working hours, providing participants with transit tokens and food).

An informant contended that cutbacks within the program funding have resulted in cutting back on basic services such as transit tokens and food, despite recognizing that not offering these services negatively impacts participation rates.

"We haven't cut back our services but we cut back within the service itself. So whereas we might have given out TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) tickets in the past to enable people to get to us both ways, we are now able to give one ticket only. Access. The programming would have always offered dinner because the young people come in here in the evenings and so now we have to scale that back and we can just give snacks. And knowing that the young people that come to us generally maybe eat one meal a day, we know that food is important."

Bottom up identification of needs through the direct involvement of community members was often highlighted as an important factor influencing the effectiveness of community initiatives. In the larger initiatives, the involvement of local inhabitants in decision making and program design was often top-down, through hiring staff or interns from the community while maintaining internal hierarchy. One informant from SNAP, for instance underscored the advantages of hiring advisors from the community in understanding the neighbourhood. The program staff, however, consisted predominantly of non-local 'experts'. The involvement of members of the community in the program was thus selective, initiated and monitored by the organisation. The distinction, furthermore, between professional service providers and local recipients remained clear cut. Involvement here was therefor rather a matter of internal organisation of the initiatives which was carefully managed through recruitment mechanisms, outreach strategies, and distribution of tasks within the organisation.

Some smaller initiatives, on the other hand, were comprised entirely of current or former residents and one (the autonomous action group JFAAP) even had an explicit mandate for no internal hierarchy. Bottom-up initiatives which were set up by residents often demonstrated less hierarchy and differentiation between service providers and recipients. One informant highlights that having local staff who share experiences with service recipients results in better identification of needs:

"A lot of us, like a lot of people that are working in the space, either grew up in this community, or grew up in similar communities. So, we all knew what we wanted in our own communities. We all knew what we wanted to do in order to, you know, help a lot of these kids get out on the right path. And support their process."

Lastly, a crucial undermining factor vis-à-vis community involvement is a deep-seated sense of mistrust towards the system resulting in disengagement from the community. This is exemplified by the quote below provided by the director of the youth education program PEACH, in which she contextualises disengagement from education among youth in the school system's teachings and failure in addressing diversity. She further emphasises the importance of finding new approaches to outreach and engagement so as to counter the scepticism.

"We are really looking at alternative forms of engagement. Because the young people that we see are disengaged. The school system is from the industrial age with a very colonial curriculum that is not responding to the changes in diversity and multi-culturalism that are here to stay in Canada. So they are disengaged from it. Why do I need to learn about the treaty of Versailles, what impact does that have on our lives? So they don't go to school. And you know there are all these other social issues that prevent them."

Another informant highlights the issues of scepticism and mistrust by pointing out the so called 'self-exclusion' of inhabitants in Jane-Finch referring to the lack of information and involvement in the community.

"Self-exclusion happens when people give up on the system. So, we are not talking about inclusion here we are talking about the fact that there are many families and individuals and people who feel that there is nothing in there for them and therefor keep withdrawing back into their small spaces."

The term 'self -exclusion' is invoked here to shed light on the internals motives for withdrawing from involvement in community matters (whether that be in the shape of participating and contributing to programs or simply making use of the services they offer). Thus, while initiatives may adopt a number of external measures to promote 'inclusion' (e.g. diversifying methods of outreach, providing transit tokens and food), residents' internal motives for self-exclusion remain intact. The informant further noted that despite the efforts within community initiatives to achieve bottom up input, community involvement remains top-down due to the centralised power structure. This means that issues regarding which power is delegated to the community are still dictated from official sources. This is especially done through the provision of funding and support (or the lack thereof), and exemplified by the multiplicity of recreational programs addressing youth such as music studios, while programs that seek to provide skill-training and employment services remain scarce and under-staffed.

"We work in this system with the supply side in which there is a menu of options that community groups can choose from, but in reality we have not really transcended the historic model of power and privilege on the what hand and on the other hand communities trying to survive and make it. The community is the object not the subject of development."

Ultimately, community involvement in Jane-Finch happens in spite of deeper structural and material forces that impede participation.

Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of ten community initiatives in Jane-Finch reveals that the investigated initiatives often face similar barriers and challenges in providing services to Jane-Finch inhabitants. There is unanimous agreement that the most pressing issues facing initiatives are related to funding and support, most notably lack of sustainable long-term funding, lack of funding for staff and administration, constant budget cuts, lack of organisational support, and the general environment of competitiveness, precarity and insecurity resulting from the formerly outlined issues. In addition to financial limitations, cutbacks and uncertainty, funding for programs are often streamlined in the aftermath of events (such as violent outbreaks) and was not sustained long enough to prevent them from happening again.

Moreover, compartmentalisation of funding has often resulted in subject-specific funding, hampered comprehensive programming and caused fragmentation within larger organisations. This means that within larger organisations with multiple sources of funding, programs often end up prioritising funder satisfaction over the collaboration necessary to achieve the over-arching comprehensive goals of the organisation. Providers often showcased a thorough understanding of the complexity of issues but contended that the current environment did not allow for holistic programs to take shape, often leaving them feeling that they were 'swimming against the tide' (Power & Tunstall, 1995). Funding insecurities further exacerbate competition across (and within) initiatives and output pre-occupation which in turn undermined the quality of programming and services. In addition to competitiveness, collaboration across agencies and initiatives have further been undermined by lack of an umbrella organisation to coordinate the large body of diverse (but overlapping) initiatives (See Ahmadi and Tasan-kok, 2014).

Notwithstanding these challenges, within the current context of unequal distribution of power and resources community initiatives still seem to provide inhabitants in poverty neighbourhoods with minimum means to manage their worst problems and maintain better living conditions than they might otherwise. The analysis of the community initiatives in Jane-Finch carries a number of lessons for effective community service provision in poverty neighbourhoods. The first set of lessons especially address policy makers and community planners and include the following: Firstly, service provision needs to be approached as part of a comprehensive, multi-faceted, cross-sectoral strategy involving a range of agencies and scales of intervention. Secondly, sustainable and preventive programming needs to be developed that can survive in the face of issues such as funding precarity and cutbacks. Furthermore, long-term strategies that go beyond short-sighted goals and focus on community capacity building can be combined with short-term strategies that provide resources to community members.

Another important set of lessons concerns grassroots initiatives and community service providers. Firstly, common barriers to participation need to be properly addressed within programs. These barriers include child care, transportation problems, limited access to resources; and improving accessibility by adopting simple strategies such as choosing convenient times and locations for gatherings and programs. General program characteristics such as location, size, interior design, language, and outreach should cater to the particular needs and preferences of their target audience. Flexibility in the design and content of programmes can further ensure that the changing needs of community members are addressed and that programming reflects the visions of inhabitants.

Secondly, creating strong collaborative networks and effective partnerships with other agencies and service providers in the community can help to enhance access to funding and support, and improve service provision by linking the beneficiaries to needed services through making referrals. Thirdly, serving individuals with exceptional circumstances (e.g. isolation, mental health problems) may further require adopting intensive case-specific approaches so that the beneficiaries are provided with individualized plans to overcome barriers or reach goals. It is further important to follow up and maintain contact with the beneficiaries beyond the duration of the program so as to make sure they do not bounce back into isolation. Lastly, the analysis suggests that challenges to community participation in disadvantaged areas (e.g. disinvestment, mistrust and with-drawl) can be partly addressed within community-based programs by adopting creative outreach strategies and out-stationing specialised and expert staff at alternative locations such as schools, malls, libraries and religious facilities to improve access and information about services. Also hiring well-stablished community members can help increase employment opportunities for inhabitants, facilitate access to the local community and bottom-up identification of needs

While the sum of existing programs in Jane-Finch may appear large at first glance, many are disconnected, fragmented, and doing overlapping work. Current services are still insufficient in relation to the overall scale of need within the neighbourhood and their potential for interaction in service design, operation and outcomes is limited. More importantly, initiatives seeking to improve the conditions in Jane-Finch have to operate in the face of deep-rooted structural inequality which brings about fundamental challenges in achieving long-lasting results in regards to improving conditions for inhabitants. In other words, systemic change is required to create and sustain long-lasting outcomes (Fleischer, 2001). The complexity and multiplicity of problems faced by Jane-Finch inhabitants further restrict community participation and civic engagement.

It is thereby important to emphasise the importance of accounting for political and social dimensions of community engagement in service delivery. In neighbourhoods where most households live in poverty, have limited access to basic resources such as healthcare, decent housing and education, participation cannot be regarded merely as a matter of political will detached from socio-economic conditions. This echoes the findings of previous studies urging us to take account of structural barriers to community participation and development (Fraser, 1995; Phillips 2004; Wilson 2008; Giuliani & Wiesenfeld, 2010; Rashid, 2014). The overall assessment of this paper, thus, may not appear surprising. To achieve permanent success in improving conditions in poverty neighbourhoods, basic obstacles such as inequality and institutionalised racism must be overcome. It is thus crucial to problematise and combat structural causes of poverty so as to ensure all inhabitants have equal opportunities for achieving better living conditions.

Notes

List of the interviewed persons: Farm Manager, "Black Creek Farm"; Executive Director, "The Learning Enrichment Foundation"; Research Steward, "The Learning Enrichment Foundation"; Coordinator, "Youth Enterprise Network"; Programme Manager, "Women Moving Forward"; Project Manager I, "Black Creek SNAP"; Project Manager II, "Black Creek SNAP"; Community Development Worker, "Jane-Finch Action Against Poverty"; Project Manager, "Aging At Home"; Project Manager, "COSTI Specialized Housing Programme"; Project Manager, "The Spot"; Project Manager, "PEACH".

Appendix

INITIATIVE	ORIGIN	MISSION	ACTIVITIES AND COMPONENTS
Black Creek Farm	Officially started in 2012 by the farm-based charity Everdale, involved in growing food and providing food and farming education to children, youth, and aspiring farmers.	Engaging, educating, and empowering diverse communities through the growing and sharing of food. Promoting food security, providing affordable fresh produce to the community.	- Focus on career building through offering an extensive internship program which provides a number of local residents with food-based career training. - Promoting diversity via workshops on storytelling through agro-ecology and native and cultural plants relevant to people in the community.
Aging at Home	Founded in 2009, led by the Jane-Finch Community and Family Centre and created in response to high rates of early admittance of seniors to long-term car, and lack of services available to seniors in the community.	Supporting seniors from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in living independently in their homes for as long as possible.	- Ten different weekly programs offered in different languages to connect seniors, offered at 8 separate locations to ensure accessibility. - Provides participants with free public transport tokens. - Helps seniors establish social ties, reduces isolation, increases access to health care information and services, and lowers number of hospital visits and length and frequency of hospitalization.

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Serving diverse communities: the role of community initiatives in delivering services to poverty neighbourhoods

TOC

INITIATIVE	ORIGIN	MISSION	ACTIVITIES AND COMPONENTS
SNAP	Launched by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority in 2009 after a social analysis on the physical and societal characteristics of the area.	Improve environmental health, climate change adaptation, enhance food security by increasing local food production opportunities, and create greater job skills training and employment.	- Organizing community barbeques and gatherings, referring clients to other service providers in the community, urban agricultural events, beautification, and creating balcony gardens in high-rise buildings. - Connects home owners to high-rise residents by starting collaborations wherein homeowners open their gardens to other residents for farming. - Focusing on local job creation.
JFAAP	Formed in October of 2008 as a resident-led action group.	Fighting poverty in Jane-Finch, promoting social justice & capacity building.	- Organises regular monthly meetings, community events, rallies, consultations and workshops.
The Spot	A youth drop-in centre established in 2006 following an assessment of the needs of the youth in Jane-Finch, revealing a lack of a space for youth as well as interactive programming and youth services.	Prevent violence and drug misuse, promote healthy lifestyle choices for youth, increase and build leadership skills.	- Offers social, educational, art & recreational programming, newcomer youth settlement, after-school programmes, leadership and mentoring programmes, drop-ins, outings, volunteer and employment opportunities. - Offers resume-writing workshops, summer job programmes, leadership programmes and referrals different employment agencies in the community.
WMF	Established in 2005 by the Jane-Finch Community & Family Centre in response to the lack of support or career-focused programmes for single mothers over the age of 20.	Support and assist young sole-support mothers in the Jane and Finch community in their process of transitioning from poverty to economic self-sufficiency.	- Offering two phases of programmes. Phase I: self-assessment and goal-setting which focuses on life skills, career planning, citizen participation, counselling and literacy. Phase II: Professional Development and Training. - An integrated cross-cutting approach with focus on education, life skills, employment, & civic participation.

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INITIATIVE	ORIGIN	MISSION	ACTIVITIES AND COMPONENTS
PEACH	Established in 1993, as a youth-centred program originally created with an anti-drug focus. Since 2000, the core focus has changed to education or alternative modes of engagement.	Building relationships and partnerships that guide youth in crisis and their families to the supports they need to re-imagine their future and achieve success.	- An integrated model incorporating education, mentoring, and social programmes for youth. - Includes a space where assigned teachers supervise youth at risk of falling out of the school system; a supportive network of relatives and service providers; a music Studio with workshop on theory of music and entrepreneurship; organisational partnerships.
COSTI specialised housing program	Established in 2011, the as a response to a high need for specialized client-specific services for 'vulnerable' seniors.	Provide isolated seniors with support to have easy access to services, fight evictions, relocate to specialised housing with on-site care.	- Works with individuals on a one-to-one basis to identify their needs based upon conditions, mental health state, physical ability, and mobility levels.
LEF	Established in 1978 by the York Board of Education, one of the largest community economic development organisations in Toronto.	Restore self-sufficiency; support an inclusive community focus; celebrate diversity; respond to community needs.	- Offers programs such as settlement services for newcomers, employment services, skills training, language training, child-care, youth services, and entrepreneurship. - Has an on-site open space, which includes a sitting area, a cafeteria, market stands, and a kitchen.
YEN	Created in 2009 by the Black Creek Community Collaborative as a response to concerns around youth employment issues in the community.	Community economic development	- A youth store called Ascend, established in 2012 where products developed by local youth are sold. - Offers workshops which comprise of two phases: training and implementation, arranges community events, gatherings, and flea markets. - Connects youth to micro-credit loan initiatives.

TABLE 6.3 Overview of descriptive information about the initiatives

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