

7 Synthesis

§ 7.1 Introduction

The starting point of this project was the 'paradox' in how the concept of urban diversity is evoked, in theory, in policy and in practice, as something which is simultaneously celebrated and demonised. Diversity is indeed a fashion word, it sounds celebratory, tolerant and harmonious, but not too confrontational (Essed, 2002). Diversity has gained popular appeal especially because it offers an approach that goes beyond 'dated' terms such as equality and anti-racism. Yet diversity workers often tend to experience this very paradox, working within organizations that claim to be committed to diversity but feeling as though they are 'banging their head against a brick wall' (Sara Ahmed, 2012, emphasis mine). The same paradox is evident in the manner in which the city of Toronto approaches its diversity. The premise that diversity is a strength which should be celebrated appears to be a popular notion within Toronto's city policy and mainstream public discourse. Yet, Toronto's most diverse neighbourhoods located at the edges of the city are scapegoated and criminalised. This is especially the tendency when ethnic, cultural and religious diversity coincide with poverty, welfare dependency and poor infrastructure.

This study set out to provide empirical knowledge of what living with and working towards diversity in urban areas looks like. Specifically, it raised the question: *How is diversity experienced at the neighbourhood level, as (a) discourse, (b) social reality, and (c) practice??* This question was broken down to four sub-questions which were investigated in four interconnected chapters (chapters 3 to 6). The present concluding chapter provides a summary of the findings of each empirical chapter and further discusses these findings in relation to one another. It closes with recommendations for both policy and future scholarship addressing diversity in our cities.

§ 7.2 Summary of findings

Chapter 3: Is diversity our strength? An analysis of the facts and fancies of diversity in Toronto

This chapter explored the relationship between the *discourses* of diversity in Toronto policy and those reproduced and perpetuated by Jane-Finch inhabitants. It did so through the juxtaposition of the primary policy discourses (derived from interviews with policy actors and policy documents) with inhabitants' everyday lived experiences with diversity. The analysis revealed that while there seems to be a resemblance between policy discourses and inhabitant discourses regarding diversity at the level of rhetoric (i.e. normalisation of and civility towards diversity), the way these discourses manifest in practice often does not match the rhetorical stance. The analysis of policy documents and interviews with policy makers made explicit an instrumentalist approach to managing diversity which signals a hierarchy between different types of diversities i.e. desirable and undesirable. The interviews with Jane-Finch inhabitants further revealed that diversity as a concept is celebrated, but tensions along the axes of class, gender, race, and religion still dominate residents' daily experiences with diversity. Therefore, civility towards diversity appears to go hand in hand with essentialisations and categorisations on the basis of different identity markers, as well as negative stereotyping of what is not considered to be acceptable or desirable diversity.

Chapter 4. Diversity and social cohesion: the case of Jane-Finch, a highly diverse lower income Toronto neighbourhood

This chapter shed light on the inter-relation between the two concepts of 'diversity' and 'social cohesion'. It specifically analysed the perceptions of the residents of a diverse neighbourhood regarding multiple aspects of social cohesion, namely common values, formal and informal interactions and neighbourhood attachment and provided critical insights into socioeconomic and political structures underlying inhabitants' perceptions and interactions in Jane-Finch.

The findings revealed that while there were instances in which diversity was perceived to have contributed to social cohesion, the contributions were implicit and required the presence of other factors such as commonalities, shared activities and experiences, and a sense of solidarity. Importantly, poverty, institutionalisation and the internalisation of gendered and class-based racism appeared to have played a significant role in

shaping residents' perceptions of and interactions with one another. The analysis further demonstrated that living with diversity often created opportunities for cultural exchange and increased recognition; however, existing hierarchies among cultures and income groups played an important role in shaping perceptions and interactions. The article ultimately problematised the positioning of diversity at the centre of the social cohesion debate, arguing that diversity can function to divert attention away from systemic, structural and political issues such as poverty, inequality and racism.

Chapter 5. Diversity, public space and places of encounter: unpacking perceptions of public space in a lower-income highly diverse neighbourhood

This chapter investigated the influence of diversity on inhabitants' perceptions and use of public space. It interrogated the perceptions of and interactions in the public spaces of Jane-Finch and the extent to which public space played a role in facilitating encounters between diverse groups and catering for diversity in Jane-Finch.

The empirical analysis showed that there is little evidence for encounters between diverse groups in public spaces, due to the lack of spatial infrastructure anticipated in the modernist design of the neighbourhood. Physical factors, such as the layout of the neighbourhood, public space design, location and accessibility, greatly influenced inhabitants' perceptions and use of public spaces in the neighbourhood. In addition, social factors such as surveillance and policing, poor maintenance, lack of appropriate symbols catering for different user groups, presence of gangs and violence, and loitering have resulted in residents' self-exclusion from public spaces and undermined their social encounters. The analysis further suggested that creating encounters in public spaces requires the adjusting of these spaces to meet the needs and preferences of their diverse users. In conclusion, the paper argued that facilitating social encounters in public space requires going above and beyond mere physical improvements to address wider structural inequalities in urban areas.

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

This final empirical chapter focused on the practice of diversity management and service provision in Jane-Finch. It closely investigated a sample of 10 community initiatives in the studied area so as to unravel whether they were successful in terms of achieving their goals and the factors which contributed to their effectiveness. It further discussed the relevance of the experience for other neighbourhood initiatives targeting diversity.

The assessment revealed that services currently available in Jane-Finch are still insufficient in relation to the overall scale of need within the neighbourhood. The effectiveness of the available programs, as well as their potential for collaboration are further limited due to a number of existing barriers. The most pressing barriers facing initiatives concern funding, e.g. lack of long-term funding, lack of funding for staff and administration, budget cuts, lack of organisational support, compartmentalisation of funding, and an overall environment of competitiveness, precarity and insecurity. In addition, the complexity and multiplicity of problems faced by Jane-Finch inhabitants restrict their participation and civic engagement. The article further brought to light the fact that initiatives often have to operate in the face of deep-rooted structural inequality which seriously undermines their efforts in line with improving the living conditions of inhabitants, arguing that systemic change is needed in order to bring about and sustain long-lasting outcomes.

§ 7.3 Reflections

Here I'd like to return to the research question posed at the beginning of this dissertation: *How is diversity experienced at the neighbourhood level, as (a) discourse, (b) social reality, and (c) practice?* Based on the findings of the empirical chapters, I herewith present the answer with respect to each dimension.

Diversity as discourse in Jane-Finch

The interrogation of discourses and narratives surrounding diversity in Jane-Finch (chapters 3, 4, and 5, in particular) shows that diversity is most often celebrated at the level of rhetoric. At the city level, we are increasingly witnessing the articulation of diversity as an asset, whereby diversity is presented as a marketable commodity which helps the city attract funds and capital in the competitive market of global cities. Likewise, within the city of Toronto itself, different neighbourhoods and communities often have to rebrand themselves in line with the city's image as an attractive hub of diversity so as to acquire funds and services in an environment of competition. Meanwhile, the findings show that implicit in this celebratory discourse is a clear-cut distinction between *desirable* and *undesirable* form of diversity. The celebration of diversity therefor belies a portrait of Toronto as a harmonious multi-cultural haven and has become a matter of political correctness. It is no longer appropriate or accepted to outwardly oppose the notion.

However, even at the level of rhetoric, there are contradictions evident in the way the celebratory narrative is shaped and reproduced. Chapter 3, in particular, brings to light the fact that Jane-Finch inhabitants are likely to reproduce negative stereotypes and essentialised categorisations even as they claim to celebrate diversity. The positive talk around diversity often does not go beyond lip-service to influence inhabitants' perceptions and daily interactions. Diversity as a narrative can thus present society as a space of value-neutral and power-neutral plurality. However, hierarchies among groups marked by culture, socio-economic class, gender, sexuality, ability (among various other intersecting markers) remain by and large intact. Diversity does not address these hierarchies and social relations of power. Nor is it concerned with socio-economic disparities. Rather it promotes a superficial account of social reality which essentialises differences between cultural groups while leaving unattended the underlying power structures.

Diversity as social reality in Jane-Finch

The analysis shows that diversity in Jane-Finch is often utilised descriptively to refer to socio demographic characteristics of the area. Moreover, when the term diversity was evoked by informants, focus remained by and large on ethnic and cultural difference. It is evident that the term diversity does not concern internal heterogeneity or hierarchies within and between categories, nor does it address the intersection of categories of difference. The empirical analysis of diversity in Jane-Finch, however, demonstrates that while two people may belong to the same ethnic or cultural category, their positioning in society (as well as how they are perceived) could vary significantly depending on other factor such as their class, gender, age, sexuality, (dis)ability and so forth. Therefore, when different categories intersect, they in turn become decentred and reconstructed. Likewise, people may have certain aspects of their identity privileged while simultaneously having other aspects marginalised. Markers of identity are not static 'boxes', rather dynamic and ever-evolving categories. The empirical analysis suggests that diversity often does not transcend its descriptive function to address these complexities. This, in turn, signals the analytical limitations of the concept.

Taking into account these limitations, the concept of diversity can be approached as a demographic reality (as opposed to an analytical toolkit) which could, in turn, be analysed using the lens of 'intersectionality'. Contrary to diversity, intersectionality posits power and position at the centre of its focus. Central to the approach is the belief that every individual in society is positioned at the intersection of multiple categories and is conditioned to social advantages and disadvantages accordingly (Collins, 1990). These categories together forge a hierarchical matrix of privilege and marginalisation in

society called intersectionality (Gopaldas and DeRoy, 2015). Intersectionality considers diversity across multiple dimensions, especially the trinity of gender, race and class, while acknowledging that these dimensions cannot be analysed without taking account of the interconnectedness of representations. If diversity advocates for the inclusion of all different categories of social identity, intersectionality stresses not only the inclusion of categories but also the intersection of categories., thereby addressing both social inequalities and histories of political struggle, which are pivotal to understanding social practice.

Diversity as practice in Jane-Finch

The analysis of diversity practices (chapters 6 and 3 in particular) shows that diversity is on the agenda of urban policy and community programs, in both implicit and explicit ways. As mentioned earlier, diversity is often a celebrated notion in city policy. However, this celebration has come without recognition of structures of power and inequality which fuel exclusion and segregation in the city. Underlying the management of diversity in Toronto, is further a philosophy fuelled by financial motives and competitive advantage. One cannot help but wonder whether diversity's popular appeal and frequency of usage in policy signals a loss of criticality (that is if the concept had a critical edge to begin with).

Furthermore, focus on diversity within Toronto's policy has emerged in the context of a broader shift towards neoliberal politics and austerity. Within this context, diversity is used to promote individualisation of policy and social issues since it focuses on the individual level at the expense of collective experiences. The focus is increasingly put upon the individuality of the members of society and what they can bring to the table, and diversity is often reduced to a consumable commodity. Meanwhile, a common thread among the four empirical chapters has been the impact of the underlying structural inequalities present in Jane-Finch on the conditions and perceptions of its inhabitants. Similarly, we can see that in the case of community based programs, issues such as poverty, institutionalised racism and internalisation of racist and sexist stereotypes play a significant role in undermining the effectiveness of services and programs that seek to improve the conditions of Jane-Finch inhabitants as well as inhabitants' participation in them. The analysis brought to light how diversity can have a concealing or depoliticising impact since it detracts attention from such systemic issues.

My suggestion here is not to do away with the concept of diversity entirely. In fact, diversity's premises for harmony and mutual co-existence remain timely and noble ideals. However, it is important to acknowledge that at a political level, the discourse

of diversity will, at best, promote 'recognition' (Bannerji, 2000). It might even bring about limited and tokenistic group rights, but it does little to achieve meaningful transformation of the structures that produce inequalities within and between groups in the first place. Naming and addressing structural barriers to justice, on the other hand, would be pivotal to fulfilling diversity's promise for harmony.

§ 7.4 Implications

I would like to conclude here by discussing the implications of the concept of diversity, with its analytical and practical limitations, for future scholarship, policy and activism.

From a research stand point, diversity is best approached as a more descriptive tool, meaning that it can be used to *describe* socio-demographic reality which can, in turn, be analysed through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality can provide a viable analytical framework for painting a more nuanced picture of social reality. The intersectional framework can particularly respond to two major analytical deficits of diversity, namely depoliticisation, and scale. First and foremost, Diversity risks depoliticization, as it often remains pre-occupied with recognition, promoting a superficial account of identity politics, while failing to sufficiently take account of issues of power, positionality and access. Intersectionality, on the other hand, goes beyond recognition of plurality to address axes of power, privilege, and oppression, by bringing to light how different members of society experience oppression or privilege based on their positioning at the intersection of multiple categories of difference. It further allows for the identification of intersections of multiply privileged identities as well as historically oppressed identities. The framework approaches identity markers not as rigid essentialised boxes, but as dynamic categories that get decentred and reconstituted by their intersections (Humphris, 2015). It also takes account of the historical struggles of marginalised groups, such as slavery, colonialism, the fight for gender equality and LGBTQA rights.

Second, issues around scale of analysis constitute another major limitation of the concept of diversity (see chapter 3). Diversity focuses on the individual level, arguing that every person in society is diverse. However, as diversity researchers we have yet to determine effective solutions for addressing structural forces and collective experiences when we talk diversity. Achieving this requires transcending the individual level, to address structures at both micro and macro levels. Intersectionality has a long-standing history of research and scholarship that address both the micro-

dynamics of everyday experiences and interactions as well as local and trans-local forces, histories and patterns of belonging. Future research on diversity in urban areas can benefit significantly from fine-grained ethnographic analyses informed by an intersectional framework.

Diversity further cannot function as an alternative to classic systems of categorisation such as race, gender and class. Sara Ahmed (2012) has similarly attested that in contemporary critical theory, *“there is a sense -sometimes spoken and sometimes not- that we need to get beyond categories like gender and race: as if the categories themselves have restricted our understanding. [...] New terms can thus be considered a way of ‘overring’, as if these terms allow us to get over the categories themselves”* (180, emphasis mine). Much of the appeal of the diversity narrative to corporations and Neo-liberal governance regimes lies in the way the concept provides a euphemism for discourses which have historically been tied to struggles for freedom and radical change. Earlier it was established that the language of diversity can allow us to look over the existence of deeply rooted structural barriers to justice such as poverty and institutionalised racism. Meanwhile, there is clear evidence for continued racial, class-based and gendered inequality in urban centres such as Toronto. This entails that we cannot forego these systems of categorisation as they remain persistent in grounding social existence, and therefore are essential for any scholarship addressing urban diversity or inequality (Berg and Sigona, 2013).

Moreover, from a policy perspective, the imposition of a top-down diversity agenda is arguably ineffective as it leaves unchallenged hierarchies and prejudices that are deeply internalised by inhabitants. The analysis rendered clear that just as we all embody diversity, we are all complicit, to varying extents, in reproducing stereotypes and essentialisations that perpetuate inequality structures. Diversity work needs to go beyond its current pre-occupation with recognition and representation, to address transformation of structures that produce inequality through rigorous anti-racist and feminist critique, mobilisation and activism. It requires what Paulo Freire (1970) has called ‘conscientisation’, i.e. a process through which subjects acquire a critical understanding of political reality and its paradoxes. As such, conscientisation will not be achieved through top-down policies and programs but context sensitive bottom-up pedagogical interventions.

Research on urban diversity is often pre-occupied with the ‘other’, and their inclusion, integration or assimilation into the mainstream. Future scholarship may bring to light the perceptions and experiences of the dominant group and how they contribute to the reproduction of material and discursive inequality structures. Subsequently, urban diversity literature can benefit from drawing from critical whiteness studies, which have traditionally sought to analyse the social construction of whiteness as a category

of privilege (see Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Roediger, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993; Rothenberg, 2005; Ahmed, 2007; among others). Critical research on urban diversity may further go one step beyond naming and examining structures of inequality to unravel new practices, interventions and forms of organising to tackle these structures. Engaging in diversity work that leads to such praxis would be the quintessential first step towards achieving transformative change.

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Strong
Women

Strong
Community

