

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE CITY: Considerations for Social Planning

A paper commissioned by:

Alternative Planning Group (APG)



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April 2003

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Alternative Planning Group:

CCNC Toronto Chapter, CASSA and HDC, recently joined by the ACSDC, have been working closely for several years for the purposes of creating and implementing collaborative strategies for inter-ethnic community planning and development, conducting integrative research and organizing joint community events. The purpose of this collaborative relationship is:

- ➡ To build individual capacity of each organization and, by extension, community through sharing of resources
- ➡ To create a new paradigm of social planning that reflects the demographic, racial, cultural and linguistic diversity of the new City
- ➡ To build social capital of racialized communities so that they can emerge on the policy platform as a legitimate player

This paper is an equitable and conscious product. The Executive Directors of the APG and the Researcher have deliberately designed a negotiated process of research methodology that translates their collective experiences and ideas of working together as members of APG and as community based planners/researchers into a mutually acceptable theoretical framework for this paper. As a collective of co-authors we are mutually responsible for the content.

African Canadian Social Development Council (ACSDC) joined the APG collective late 2002, as such their ideas are not reflected in the content. However, they endorse the intent of this paper. We thank Farah Khayre for his participation. The authors would also like to thank Amoy Ong for her comments on the initial draft of this paper.

Introduction

This paper provides a critical commentary on how social inclusion is conceptualized in the context of the city. We are a collective of four networks engaged in social planning in Toronto, within and across groups of South Asian, Chinese, Hispanic, and African communities. We have come to recognize that there are key factors evident in the characteristics and experiences of our communities, factors which have presented obstacles to the inclusion of our communities in the city. These factors include low incomes, racism, racial profiling, multiple barriers to gaining access to employment, and affordable housing, and meaningful mechanisms for participation in the civic and political life of society. We consider that ‘the city’ represents the *place* where we live and work as well as *a system* of governance and institutional structures with which we negotiate to build the capacity of our communities.

In this commentary, we will provide a brief overview of the context in which our collective engages in social planning work. We will then outline several definitions and descriptions of social inclusion as presented in the literature. We will show that by convention, inclusion is conceptualized as a linear progression that starts from a state of exclusion and ends at one of inclusion. In such a framework, social inclusion is presented as an outcome or a set of principles. We are concerned that this conceptualization of social inclusion does not clearly consider *how* social inclusion can be democratically constructed. We believe that *negotiation* among individuals, groups such as ours, and the city’s governance and institutional structures is vital to building an inclusive city.

We realize that we cannot fairly address the enormity and complexity of social inclusion by way of this critical commentary. However, just as our planning activities and organizational partnership have provided building blocks to social planning work in Toronto, this commentary is but one step toward identifying elements for building a better city.

Context

Since 1999, the Chinese Canadian National Council –Toronto Chapter (CCNC-T), Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and Hispanic Development Council (HDC) have been engaged in joint social planning activities in Toronto. In early 2003, the African Canadian Social Development Council (ACSDC) officially joined our partnership. Our organizational partnership is a result of the ‘Toronto experience’—a combination of our organizational history and the collective histories of our communities in Canada. Furthermore, transnational ties and cultural networks have informed our dynamic histories in Toronto. We have come together as the Alternative Planning Group.¹

As a collective we have negotiated various issues of local governance through processes such as making deputations to Toronto City Council, participating in consultations, and running joint community forums. As partners in an integrative settlement consortium, we produced a piece of research entitled *Re-visioning the Newcomer Settlement Support System*. We organized consultations with our communities and other ethno-racial communities in Toronto to give input into the City’s quest to develop social development strategies. We have made joint presentations to all levels of

¹ See the Alternative Planning Group’s website for more information: www.cassa.on.ca/APG

government on various issues of concern to our communities, such as how to make public institutions more inclusive. These are unique events in Toronto. For the first time, our South Asian, Chinese, Hispanic, and African communities have taken the opportunity to come together to discuss common issues emerging from our joint planning work, community development experiences, and community education activities.

While we recognize that inequalities of power exist as we engage in our planning activities and negotiations, we consider these negotiations as helping to redefine how planning can be done in our city. We recognize that embracing diversity entails recognizing our commonalities and our differences. In attempting to build capacity among our communities, we are building what can ultimately be a stronger, more viable city for all.

Social Inclusion and Social Exclusion

A number of definitions and descriptions of social inclusion and social exclusion are evident in the literature available on the topic. Beall (2002) points to origins of ‘social inclusion’ in French public policy. Beall credits social theorist René Lenoir (1974) for having popularized the term in France as well as for highlighting the historical disregard of *les exclus* or “the others” by the social contract of the French Republic. From the perspective of human development in the context of globalization, Sen (2000) has described inclusion as being characterized by societal elements that would include active participation by citizens, equality of opportunities, and basic levels of well being. According to Guildford (2000), the term ‘inclusion’ is about being accepted and being able to participate fully within the context of family, community and society. In each of

these descriptions, the definition of inclusion's related term, 'exclusion', simply refers to the conditions (i.e., barriers and processes) that impede inclusion. Exclusion, therefore, is presented as the problem and inclusion is the solution.

The term 'social exclusion' is used in France, The European Union and the United Kingdom (National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, 2000; Power, 2000). In Scotland, however, the term employed is 'social inclusion'. Economic factors and health factors are evident in the British Government's definition of social exclusion. According to the Social Exclusion Unit of the British Government (2002, Ch. 1, section 1.2): "Social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked [and 'mutually reinforcing'] problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown."

We recognize that factors impeding social inclusion have been explored by scholars and organizations in Canada (Jenson, 1998; Li, 2003; Luxton, 2002; Saloojee, 2003) . The reports have focused on factors such as poor quality of life, poverty, gender, disability, racism, and racialization that have had the effect of excluding individuals and groups from society. Li, for example, has shown how the 'social signification' (i.e., labelling and categorization) of individuals and communities, based on race "facilitates social exclusion and hinders social inclusion" (2003, p.14). Furthermore, Saloojee (2003, p.1) shows how racism must be recognized as an "important expression" of social exclusion before we are to discuss social inclusion in a meaningful manner and then to develop mechanisms to address it.

The perspectives of local planning organizations, based at the grassroots level, and representing groups in racialized communities, have so far been under-represented among those engaged in the exploration of social exclusion. Furthermore, the scope of literature on social inclusion does not go far enough in presenting racism as fundamental to the structural inequalities of society. In order to go beyond the definitions of social inclusion and the barriers reinforcing social exclusion, the discourse on social inclusion needs to be politicized. Only then can there be possibilities for discussing *how* to fully address power differentials and hegemonic structures that reinforce exclusion.

Social Inclusion and the City

In advanced liberal democracies such as ours, the state is considered to be largely monolithic, reluctantly cooperative, powerful, and in control of planning and policymaking. In this framework, community groups are deemed to represent so-called special interests and hold the position of being outsiders looking from their ‘insurgent spaces’ (Holston, 1998) into the activities of the state. This conceptualization renders asserting one’s right to be engaged in local governance structures as an activity that is at best, marginal and specific to a special interest community, and at worst, against the public good. In this conceptualization, the *public good* is a euphemism for the state. Thus, staking a claim to the city is not seen as an assertion of democracy and justice, but as a de-legitimized, partial, and possibly, an unconstitutional activity (Young, 2000).

We want to begin to address the dialectical relationship that is drawn in the literature between the state (either as ‘nation’ or ‘the city’) and residents by reflecting on our planning experiences in Toronto. We believe that rather than viewing the state as a

source of antagonism, we see opportunities for transformation as potential outcomes of our ongoing negotiated relationships with city governance structures. One possibility for addressing this dialectic is the development of a “productive politics of difference” in theory and practice—“a more democratic inclusionary process for planning...to start listening to the voices of difference” (Sandercock, 1998, p.109).

Young (2000) shows that to consider the politics of difference as solely ‘identity politics’ is to miss out on the opportunities and resources presented by diverse groups which publicly bring forward their concerns by using democratic means. According to Young (2000), theorists who reduce politics of difference into identity politics consider that the emphasis of ‘difference’ by social groups works against notions of the ‘common good’ (i.e., communitarian), puts universal national identity on the back-burner (i.e., liberal nationalist), and disregards the basic economic needs of people marginalized by society (i.e., radical socialist).

There are key difficulties in incorporating the concept of politics of difference into the liberal conception of democracy, whereby “those states pursuing an ethics of multiculturalism and the virtues of cultural pluralism as a desired political end, are experiencing the problems of reconciling these objectives to the basic tenets of liberal democracy” (Marden, 1998, p.950-1). The social inclusion literature assumes the notion of ‘differences as identities’ to be natural and not necessarily negotiable. This conceptualization has also been confronted in our social planning experiences. However, we believe that ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ when socially constructed from a so-called dominant norm, reflects a set of power relations in society where this norm remains universal and is hegemonic because it has the power to racialize others. Thus, **power** is

integral to how difference is constructed in society. The process of racialization involves the forcible identification of people, solely on the characteristic of their skin colour, and without the endorsement of the people in question. As expressed by Saloojee, “members of racialized minority communities are individuals who because of the colour of their skin encounter barriers and discrimination resulting in social inequality and unequal access to valued goods and services” (2003, p. 19). Citing his own previous research, Li (2003, p.6) has shown how ‘diversity’ as a concept and as a specific term has been articulated “in a codified language that appears benign on the surface but carries rich racial subtexts” as seen in discussions about immigration policies and cities, where ‘diversity’ is presented as a problem that needs to be managed.

We question whether social inclusion is an alternative to the historical exclusion of our communities from processes of decision-making and planning in the city when there is little to no consideration given in the social inclusion discourse for *how* institutional structures can be changed to address our exclusion in the city. We believe that it is worth asking whether the promotion of social inclusion is necessarily the answer to the social exclusion experienced by our communities—particularly when this would entail policy accommodations that potentially assimilate our communities into a *status quo* system of governance. Such an action could call to a halt the possibility for negotiations that could help in redefining the planning of our city. We are concerned that to promote inclusion equates to the acceptance of an existing template of procedures, established institutions and mechanisms for public exchange where groups, who have been excluded or marginalized, are incorporated without having effected change (Young, 2000).

Inclusionary policies such as employment equity policy and multiculturalism (Saloojee, 2003) assume that the definition of civil society is fixed and therefore there is clarity on who should or should not belong. We propose that in order to address social inclusion and social exclusion, the concept of ‘social inclusion/exclusion’ must be reframed. This reframing must recognize that power and structural differences are central to the politics of social inclusion and changes to procedures and processes in city governance structures and institutions need to be negotiated. We view histories and societies as dynamic, and constantly changing; therefore, our identities change too. We offer that the questions of belonging are largely practical problems rather than an academic ones. Given our understanding of our dynamic histories, we work hard to determine how we can promote a sense of belonging and engage individuals politically in the planning of our city. We consider that negotiation is integral to this process. Therefore, to us, social inclusion cannot be assumed to exist prior to negotiation taking place; it can only be facilitated through engagement. For us, this would represent the development of a critical notion of social inclusion.

Conclusion

We are engaged in social planning activities in Toronto to build the capacities of our communities and to revitalize our city. We worry, however, that we could fall prey to a syndrome of inclusion if we do not begin to ask the question: “Inclusion for whom, for what ends, and how?” What is still lacking in the social inclusion discourse is a discussion on the processes by which inclusive policy could be achieved and how this could involve developing processes of ‘political inclusion.’

In this commentary, we have presented social inclusion within our understanding of the city. Our next step is to look at our own social planning experiences, our history within the context of multiculturalism, and our negotiations *in* and *with* the city. This examination will result in the identification of processes for achieving inclusion our city.

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