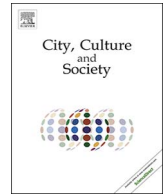




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Is diversity our strength? An analysis of the facts and fancies of diversity in Toronto

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ABSTRACT

A prominent characteristic of the city of Toronto is its increasing diversity, with half of the city's population being foreign-born. While the concept of diversity appeals to Toronto's reputation as a multi-cultural haven, the city's approach to managing diversity is becoming increasingly instrumentalist, i.e. diversity is considered an asset as long as its benefits are economically valuable. This is illustrated socio-spatially by the fact that inner-city neighbourhoods in Toronto are thriving due to development projects and services, while the most diverse neighbourhoods in the inner-suburbs are left in a dire state.

This article presents an analysis of how the concept of diversity used within policy euphemises systemic discrimination and inequality based on race, class and gender. It serves to reveal the mismatch between policy rhetoric on diversity and its materialisation in the daily lives of the inhabitants of a low-income Toronto inner-suburb, by juxtaposing policy discourses with inhabitants' everyday experiences. By illustrating how inhabitants reproduce negative essentialised stereotypes based on diversity markers, the article argues that talking diversity as an alternative to or an escape from problematising the intertwined systems of race, class and gender oppression, could potentially serve to perpetuate them.

1. Introduction

The concept of diversity has recently evolved into a post-multiculturalism policy catchphrase. From education and employment to insurance and healthcare, catering to a diverse public has become a point of focus. With urban diversity on the rise due to trends including intensified global migration, population mobility, and transnationalism, cities are adopting various methods of accommodating the increasing diversification of their populations. Similarly, within academic debates, there are increasing efforts to develop theories that address diversity in urban areas. Vertovec (2007) introduced the term 'super diversity' as a multidimensional perspective on diversity, referring to the interplay between social variables that pertain to the existence of social differences in urban areas. More recently, Tasan-Kok et al. (2013) have used the concept of 'hyper-diversity' to refer to an approach which goes beyond the unidimensional focus on ethnicity to address the complexity of diversity. Both the 'super-diversity' and 'hyper-diversity' approaches identify 'individual difference' and 'diversity within diversity' as central elements to the conceptualisation of diversity.

With over half of its population being foreign-born, Toronto is no stranger to urban diversity trends. Since 1997, the city has adopted the motto 'Diversity: Our Strength', which suggests the popularity of the

discourse surrounding diversity. The city's motto originally referred to the six constituent municipalities of the former regional municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, namely East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, York, and the City of Toronto, working together after the amalgamation of Toronto in 1998. However, in the recent years, the motto has increasingly become reoriented towards the notion of ethnic diversity, as diversity has evolved as an important component of the competitive city brand. While the city brands itself as a multi-cultural haven, recent research indicates that the increasing diversity has been accompanied by a growth in income inequality, characteristic of the city, and segregation along income and ethnic lines (see Hulchanski, 2010). Although the city seemingly capitalises upon its diversity in its self-promotion, many of the diverse neighbourhoods located on the periphery of the city receive little attention and funds from the planning apparatus (Joy & Vogel, 2015). Similarly, Boudreau, Keil, and Young (2009) contend that Toronto's approach to managing its diversity, although positive, is instrumentalist. The instrumental approach to diversity presents diversity as a 'marketable asset', as long as its contributions are measurable in economic terms. This is very much in line with Richard Florida's work on the 'creative class' (2002) whereby he argues that the existence of diversity, in particular a sizable gay and foreign-born population promotes creativity and innovation which in

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turn help attract investors. Florida even proposed a melting-pot index (2002), a measure of the foreign-born percentage of an area's population, arguing that immigrants help fuel economic growth. The approach fits well with existing entrepreneurial agendas in urban development which typically focus upon attracting high-end tourism and investments to the city (Leslie & Catungal, 2012). This approach to diversity merits criticism, due to its potential to exacerbate exclusion and inequality in the city, since it creates a subtle differentiation between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' forms of diversity. Those types of diversity that can be capitalised upon for profit and economic gains are deemed desirable and thus worthy of cultivating. In turn, the forms of diversity that do not seemingly contribute to the economy and those who embody them are rendered 'undesirable'. This is exemplified by the case of Jane-Finch, an inner-suburban neighbourhood in the North-west of Toronto, which reflects the highest levels of both diversity and poverty amongst all Toronto neighbourhoods.

While affluent Toronto inner-city neighbourhoods thrive as a result of investments and development plans (from both the city and the private sector), insufficient attention is accorded to diverse inner-suburban areas such as Jane-Finch, where policy interventions are most needed. A number of policy efforts in line with addressing Toronto's 'suburban decline' have emerged over the past years, the most notable of which is the 'Priority Neighbourhoods' strategy. Initiated jointly by the City of Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto, the priority neighbourhoods strategy geared investments towards building infrastructure in 'under-served' communities, while placing emphasis on community-based planning and citizen engagement (Cowen & Parlette, 2011). The strategy has received criticism for its exclusive focus on the neighbourhood scale whereby responsibility for structural issues such as poverty is placed solely on the residents of these neighbourhoods, while broader forces of segregation, income polarisation, and socio-spatial inequality are sidelined (ibid). The insufficiency and overall ineffectiveness of policy interventions addressing Toronto's highly racialised lower-income inner-suburbs suggests a disparity between the positive discourse surrounding diversity in Toronto and its manifestation in practice. This study sets out to address this seeming gap between word and deed concerning diversity in Toronto, by critically analysing how diversity is approached (in discourse and practice), particularly pertaining to those 'diverse' inhabitants who do not embody 'desirable' or 'marketable' forms of diversity.

In light of the mismatch between diversity rhetoric and action, the primary objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between the discourses of diversity in policy and those reproduced and perpetuated by inhabitants who experience diversity on a daily basis. This is achieved through the juxtaposition of the policy discourses (derived from interviews with policy actors and by analysing policy documents) with inhabitants' everyday experiences of diversity. The study focuses specifically on an inner-suburban neighbourhood, Jane-Finch, which is noted for both its demographic diversity and high concentration of poverty. The selection derives from the assumption that, if diversity is an asset, its positive contributions should pertain not only to affluent inner-city areas, but to all neighbourhoods including impoverished, peripheral areas like Jane-Finch. Does the discourse of diversity contribute positively to all neighbourhoods, or is a luxury commodity from which only a select group of affluent inner-city patrons can benefit?? Does positive diversity discourse go beyond rhetoric to guide behaviour of both policy makers and inhabitants? Answering these questions requires not only a close interrogation of the discourses surrounding diversity, but also grounding these discourses in concrete contexts i.e. exploring how diversity is experienced by inhabitants in practice. While multiple research contributions have highlighted epistemological paradoxes and contradictions in diversity, much of the research on diversity to date remains particularly theoretical in nature. The few existing empirical studies on critical diversity focus predominantly on diversity within organisational settings, management and higher education, rather than on inhabitant diversity at the urban scale (Ahmed,

2007a, 2007b; Benschop, 2001; Essed, 1991; Janssens & Zanoni, 2005; Litvin, 2002; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). Furthermore, existing research favours the narratives of diversity practitioners and policy makers over the narratives of those belonging to historically-disadvantaged groups (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop & Nkomo, 2010). The existing body of critical literature can thus benefit from deep empirical investigations of the discourse and practice of urban diversity, which take into account the perspectives, narratives and experiences of inhabitants (as opposed to the perspectives of policy makers and practitioners only). This is a goal to which this article seeks to contribute.

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, a brief overview of existing literature on diversity is presented. Secondly, the research approach and methods used to analyse diversity discourses in urban policy and in the lives of inhabitants are outlined. After a brief introduction to Toronto and the case study area respectively, the analysis is presented. Lastly, the results of the comparative analysis are discussed along with the implications of these findings for Toronto policy as well as for future research.

2. Diversity theory and discourses

2.1. Diversity

In academic literature, various approaches have been used to conceptualise diversity in urban areas. Some approaches are singular in their focus and concentrate on identifying the 'differences' leading to diversity. These include assimilation, neo-assimilation and cultural pluralism. Other approaches like multi-culturalism, post-multi-culturalism and cosmopolitanism address multiple dimensions of diversity. Although both sets of approaches have contributed significantly towards conceptualising diversity, they have been subject to criticism. The former category is criticised for its failure to capture the dynamic and multiple affiliations of individuals (Hollinger, 1997; Vertovec, 1999), while the latter tends to focus on ethnic and cultural identities, and does not sufficiently address additional factors influencing new diversities in the contemporary urban society, e.g. lifestyles, opportunities, attitudes and activities (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010; Vertovec, 2010). These criticisms make way for a third category of more recent theoretical developments and approaches to diversity, which address multiple dimensions of diversity as well as the interplay and interaction between them. Examples of these approaches include inter-culturalism, super-diversity and hyper-diversity.

Vertovec's (2007) concept of super-diversity refers to the interplay between the variables contributing to the creation of social difference and population diversity in urban areas, and is presented as a multi-dimensional perspective on diversity (Humphris, 2014; Vertovec, 2007). While super-diversity has broadened the understanding of diversity, the concept is fairly limited in its scope, focusing only on contemporary immigrant-based urban diversity. Tasan-Kok et al. (2013) further criticise the concept for its limited spatial focus on new patterns of segregation, particularly in relation to new immigrant groups, and on new experiences of space and contact. As an alternative, Tasan-Kok et al. (2013) introduce the concept of 'hyper-diversity'. Unlike super-diversity, hyper-diversity does not focus only on new immigrant communities, but on "a wider scope of a diversity that includes different lifestyles within and between groups, and spatial segregation in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic variables as well as including trends in the native population, and their impact on the relationships with newcomers" (18). At its core, hyper-diversity acknowledges that people belonging to the same ethnic group may demonstrate different attitudes, orientations, values, and activity patterns, and engage in different daily and lifetime routines. Thus, categories under which people are usually classified (e.g. class or immigrant groups) have less and less predictive power over these matters.

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