

Context: The BC Recreation and Parks Association has termed the coming decade the “quality of life era” in planning and development – an era that focuses on a transition from the “delivery of services” to the “creation of individual and community benefits” (2007: 8). While research has long acknowledged the need to measure quality of life in ways that account for more than just economic indicators (such as Shea 1976; Diener & Suh 1997; Eckersley 1998), this shift is much newer in the world of municipal governance and urban planning. A preliminary analysis of documents from British Columbia municipalities (Abbotsford 2014, 2016; Chilliwack 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Langley 2016; White Rock 2013, 2014, among others), however, shows that a clear distinction can be seen over the past decade – these municipalities have increasingly moved from a traditionally thin (and economically oriented) “standard of living” measurement of well-being, towards a more holistic “quality of life” measurement. This, coupled with the idea of complete communities – communities that offer nearly all necessary economic and social amenities – has much potential for improving the wellbeing of marginalized communities. This focus on marginalized communities will form the foundation of my research.

Research Question: What differences, if any, have materialized because of the shifting emphasis on quality of life, and what impact has this shift had on marginalized community groups?

Theoretical Framework: The first question can be explored by looking for shifts in both ideas and attitudes as well as shifts in the way physical environments are being designed and constructed. This will be done through an analysis of a large quantity of municipal planning documents to understand shifting priorities. I have developed a method of coding these documents which will allow me to assess differing degrees of change, as well as acceptance of these changes. The second question consists of two parts.

First, how has the quality of life (QOL) shift affected marginalized groups *with respect to the planning process*? Are they, or have they been, sought out in consultative efforts? In addition to a push towards complete communities, the QOL shift has also included a greater emphasis on participatory planning processes through public engagement, which has been beneficial for a variety of groups. For example, over two decades ago, Healey (1992) showed how the democratization of planning has allowed traditionally marginalized groups greater access to voice their thoughts and ideas. There is a long line of critics who argue that public engagement is often tokenistic (such as Arnstein 1969; Beatley *et al.* 1994; Sandercock 1994; Wing-Shing, Lee & Ng 2011). However, while these critiques must be addressed seriously, there is nonetheless an important (and relatively new) opportunity here for marginalized communities to voice their concerns as well as their hopes (James 2013). Is there evidence that this has happened? **Second**, how does the QOL shift affect marginalized groups *in terms of their lived realities within physical and built environments*? Pangborn-Dolce *et al.* discuss the intersection of “race, class, underprivileged areas, and undeserved citizens” and the role that complete communities can play in combatting community isolation and improving wellbeing (2015: 31). As middleclass (and largely white) communities grew further into the suburbs, and streets increasingly prioritized cars, inner city communities became detached, and areas that were once bustling with people and businesses became largely desolate thoroughfares. Critical urban theory offers a helpful vantage point for this research, as it not only acknowledges but emphasizes the “continual (re)construction” of planning “as a site, medium, and outcome of historically specific relations of social power” (Brenner 2009: 198), and this power imbalance is evident in both planning processes and outcomes.

Significance: The way that cities and communities are designed is changing in a way that, ideally, should have a net positive outcome. However, while current scholarship has focused on complete communities and their contributive power to overall quality of life, as well as issues facing homeless people (Greene 2014; Somerville 2013) and Indigenous peoples in urban environments (Peters 2005; Belanger 2011; Shier *et al.* 2015), very little scholarship (if any) has paid attention to the overlap between complete communities and quality of life on the one hand, and the affects of urban planning on these marginalized groups on the other hand. My research seeks to fill this gap, while also adding to the body of literature on critical urban theory in ways that account for the intersection of planning processes, planning outcomes, and processes of marginalization.

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