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Are There Limits to Gentrification? The Contexts of Impeded Gentrification in Vancouver

David Ley and Cory Dobson

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Abstract

This paper examines conditions that impede inner-city gentrification. Several factors emerge from review of a scattered literature, including the role of public policy, neighbourhood political mobilisation and various combinations of population and land use characteristics that are normally unattractive to gentrifiers. In a first phase of analysis, some of these expectations are tested with census tract attributes against the map of gentrification in the City of Vancouver from 1971 to 2001. More detailed qualitative field work in the Downtown Eastside and Grandview-Woodland, two inner-city neighbourhoods with unexpectedly low indicators of gentrification, provides a fuller interpretation and reveals the intersection of local poverty cultures, industrial land use, neighbourhood political mobilisation and public policy, especially the policy of social housing provision, in blocking or stalling gentrification.

What is it that caused one neighbourhood to go through rapid change and one neighbourhood not? Well, I think partially city policies ... I really think that what a city does, or doesn't do, has a big impact (Vancouver politician, interview, 2007).

There is considerable truth to Neil Smith's (2002) claim that gentrification has gone global and is now a habitual central-city redevelopment policy, subject to local variation (Bridge, 2007) and often concealed behind terminology like regeneration, social

mixing or even urban sustainability. Recent studies have shown the process moving beyond the familiar world cities of the global North to small urban centres (Dutton, 2005) and to Western-oriented enclaves in the large cities of developing nations (Islam, 2005; Rubino, 2005). What in the 1970s was aberrant and risky enough to attract primarily owner-occupier sweat equity and small niche builders has become mainstream, attracting the largest global developers and major financiers. A striking example in Vancouver,

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Canada, is provided by the large redevelopments on the former brownfield lands along the two sides of False Creek, an ocean inlet slicing downtown Vancouver into a peninsula. When the south side of False Creek was redeveloped by the City in a joint public–private partnership in the 1970s, financial institutions were unwilling to invest in such an untried and risky location, while the first builders to join the project were small local firms operating on intuitive hunches (Ley, 1987). In contrast, when the publicly owned north shore—the setting of the world’s fair, Expo 86—was privatised by the province in a 1988 land sale following the fair, it was bought in its entirety and renamed Concord Pacific Place by the wealthy Hong Kong property developer Li Ka-Shing, who planned a vast redevelopment of condominium towers over a 20-year horizon (Olds, 2001). With this redevelopment successfully underway, it was imitated with look-alike towers by the Li family in Toronto in Concord CityPlace, another mega-project once again on a brown-field site of former railway lands on the edge of downtown.

The scale and replication of contemporary market-driven gentrification, embedded within a facilitating neo-liberal public policy, presents an increasingly conventional landscape in central cities. As with all taken-for-granted realities, a sense of coherence and momentum sustains a process of naturalisation, suggesting that events could not be different. As a result, contemporary gentrification presents a formidable assembly of material and ideological power. Small, fragile, even adversarial residential transition processes in the 1970s are now proven, generally successful and riding the crests of the business cycle. Little wonder that, dazzled by business performance, real estate inflation, the buzz of marketing literature and the prophets talking up economic growth in creative cities, the unjust impacts of gentrification are less visible, less discussed and less resisted than they once were, as Tom

Slater (2006) has recently reminded us. The old message that the poor are always with you has become less a motive for action than yesterday’s news, a sign of a moral amnesia as we move ever closer to the society of the spectacle.¹

Yet as Katharyne Mitchell (1996, 2004) has stated, hegemony is never as monolithic as it seems, while material power can be contested in the courts, the streets and at election time. Neo-liberalism is not the end of history and its rules and directions are open to challenge in the city as elsewhere (Leitner *et al.*, 2007). In this article, we explore vulnerabilities in the map of gentrification. Given market conditions we have usually asked, where does gentrification take place? Instead, our question here is, where has gentrification *not* taken place? What islands of affordability remain in the sea of gentrification that has engulfed the inner-city housing market of so many post-industrial cities? What combination of location, land use and resident occupancy defines them? Can we identify social and political processes and practices that delay, divert or even block gentrification? And what role has public policy played in impeding gentrification and its impacts? Our laboratory is the City of Vancouver, but we have an eye for comparative studies elsewhere, guided in part by Kate Shaw’s (2005) valuable review of local limits to gentrification. Following a selective examination of the literature on barriers to ‘revitalisation’, we shall consider, first, census-derived correlates of the geography of impeded gentrification in Vancouver and then examine more deeply two inner-city districts where reinvestment has lagged well behind predicted levels.

Impeding Gentrification: Precedents from the Literature

In part the policy response to gentrification depends on its magnitude and here issues beyond the reach of local factors are often

uppermost. Regional growth trends and the functional base of the economy separate cities like San Francisco or London from Detroit or Liverpool. In the latter group, de-industrialisation has restricted economic growth and left only weak housing demand for usually low-amenity inner-city sites, resulting in limited gentrification. However, in the former class of city, the transition to a post-industrial economy is advanced, amenities have been restored or created to enhance inner-city locations and residential demand from growing numbers of white-collar professionals and managers is usually strong. However, even if we allow for a moderate or strong level of demand by the middle class for inner-city residential property, three sets of factors might still impede gentrification in certain neighbourhoods: impaired supply, policy responses and community resistance to change.

Impaired Supply

A first set of factors impeding gentrification includes deficiencies in the supply of property acceptable for gentrification. These deficiencies are more likely to exert effects where demand is moderate; where it is strong, middle-class purchasers or renters may be persuaded to accept lower-quality housing or riskier sites, while developers may remake the built environment through new construction of property and infrastructure—London's Docklands are an obvious example—thereby enhancing formerly unfavourable local externality fields.

Housing quality is a first concern (Beauregard, 1990; Shaw, 2005). Quality is not a matter of plumbing, fixtures or internal room arrangements—renovation can take care of these imperfections—but rather concerns the aesthetics of heritage structures, with demand requiring interesting or socially approved architectural signatures that provide landscapes of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984;

Jager, 1986): Victorian bay windows in San Francisco, Manhattan brownstones, artisan detailing on 'honest' Melbourne or Toronto brick terraces, Georgian design elements in London mews, clever post-modern idioms in new condominiums of the 1970s and 1980s (Mills, 1988) or the exposed brick and timber of loft renovation in the 1990s and since (Zukin, 1989; Podmore, 1998). If such character architecture is valued, then its absence is devalued: bland, non-iconic structures, notably the characterless mass construction of the early post-1945 decades, are typically places with a spoiled identity for a cultivated taste.

In addition to the house, the neighbourhood and its externality fields matter a good deal. Access to downtown is significant and nearby amenities such as a park, leafy streets, a waterfront, views, an art museum or a theatre are esteemed. Their absence depreciates the value of a site. In a sample of American cities, almost 90 per cent of gentrifying districts were near an environmental amenity or significant cultural institution (Clay, 1979). In London, early gentrification often proceeded outwards from Georgian and later Victorian squares arranged around small parks. Waterfront sites have been a major focus of renovations and redevelopment in many cities, spectacularly along the Thames in London (Davidson and Lees, 2005) and in the condominiums of River City 21 and other island developments in Tokyo Bay with easy access to the central business district (Cybriwsky, 1991). High-quality private or state schools within reach are significant for inner-city middle-class families with children (Butler and Robson, 2003). In contrast, working industrial sites are disamenities, with truck or train traffic and unpleasant externalities including pollution, noise and even odours. However, obsolete or non-working industrial sites, with SoHo in New York the pioneer (Zukin 1989), may be attractive for artists and for housing conversion to loft living.

It follows that blue-collar neighbourhoods adjacent to working manufacturing districts may not be attractive sites for gentrifiers. Typically such districts are also home in many large cities to immigrant workers, who provide replacement labour in older and sometimes precarious manufacturing sectors. In addition, as Shaw (2005) points out, frequently high levels of homeownership in immigrant areas mean limited turnover, while house sales and rentals often occur within semi-closed ethnic networks, providing a double barrier to middle-class entry. The outcome is that, contrary to an implicit understanding in parts of the literature, gentrification initially impacts not immigrants but native-born districts, usually of lower-paid service workers. Two such groups are artists and students who typically feature prominently in accounts of the early stages of neighbourhood change in the classic stage model of gentrification (Ley, 1996, 2003; Lloyd, 2006; Smith, 2007). Even more counter-intuitive to a conventional gentrification narrative, transition typically occurs first, and over time most deeply, in areas that are of modest income, avoiding at first very-low-income areas. Such a statement seems to fly in the face of the rent gap argument that draws attention to seriously devalued locations as promising sites for gentrification—the evidence in Australian, Canadian and European cities indicates that proximity to existing high- or at least middle-status areas, often at or near their declining fringes towards downtown, is an early and continuing site for middle-class reinvestment (Badcock and Urlich-Cloher, 1981; Horvath *et al.*, 1989; Ley, 1996; Hamnett and Williams, 1980). The sectoral outward movement of elite areas leaves older districts on their trailing edge vacant and available for renovation or up-market replacement. The key issue here, following the real estate belief in ‘location, location, location’, is that proximity to existing and proven middle-class and elite markets lessens reinvestment risks.

It is only after the inner-city market for the middle class has been well tested that more adventurous investment will occur further afield.

The converse of this argument is that indicators of deep poverty are not generally sites coveted by gentrifiers. Public housing is commonly a disincentive; in Clay’s (1979) sample of American gentrifying districts, not one was adjacent to public housing. In addition, of course, any form of state-subsidised housing removes the units out of the local private market, substantially detaching the stock from the reach of gentrification processes.² Areas with a poverty culture of high crime levels and disruptive street life will also be avoided where possible (Hamnett, 2003). Only in an overheated housing market will they be selected once more secure and affordable locations are no longer available. The tolerance of the middle class for living with social and cultural diversity in the inner city is variable. In the early stages of gentrification when immigrants have much higher cultural capital than economic capital, there has often been evidence of an ‘emancipatory city’ (Lees, 2004), a left-liberal political ideology welcoming of difference and supporting policies for social mixing in neighbourhoods (Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1994, 1996). However, with the inflation of local property prices, in-migrants with higher levels of economic capital become more protective of their investment, less enthusiastic about social mix and more likely to be socially exclusionary. This nuance was captured perfectly in a 1984 interview with the reform councillor for the gentrifying district of Don Vale in Toronto

The first wave consisted of young professionals committed to downtown mixed neighbourhoods. They didn’t have much money but were self-reliant. They fixed up houses, made connections with neighbours, and joined in community action. They were social workers and in other social services, in the arts, academics, some doctors and lawyers.

They were progressive but not necessarily far left. Reform leadership consisted of first-wave gentrifiers. What they shared in common was a concern for neighbourhoods and the quality of life. The second wave were those drawn by real estate deals and a spicy neighbourhood. They wanted to hasten the rooming-house transition and gentrification (quoted in Ley, 1996, p. 290).

In summary, then, from a scattered literature we can state some expectations concerning the attributes of districts in growing post-industrial cities where gentrification would be impeded even under free market conditions—although, in expensive and tight housing markets, choice might be so constrained that middle-class buyers and tenants are obliged to consider them. Districts with impeded gentrification would have a minimal stock of older or newer residential properties with architectural character; they would have limited access to environmental amenities or desirable cultural institutions, but could well be near working industrial sites; and generally they would be lower-income and often immigrant neighbourhoods, including districts of deep poverty, some distance from existing elite areas. We shall shortly test these expectations against Vancouver census and land use data.

Policy Responses

A second impediment to gentrification is a political response that interrupts the logic of market processes. Government policy introducing welfare objectives as of primary importance plays such a role, although in a neo-liberal era state intervention is far more muted than in the early days of gentrification (Marcuse, 2004). With its local jurisdictional mandate, municipal government may be attentive to welfare objectives, but simultaneously it has limited fiscal authority, so that significant involvement—for example, removing property from the private market through land purchase and building subsidised

housing units—will commonly require the joint will of the local state and a senior level of government. State intervention may be encouraged by the impacted community itself through political mobilisation that draws attention to the injustice of gentrification, notably the displacement of vulnerable poorer populations. Alternatively the state may be motivated by the belief that gentrification is not in the self-interest of the entrepreneurial city. This latter argument has sometimes been used to defend spaces for artists, regarded as catalysts in the creative city, but occasionally defence is mounted for a broader public from unexpected allies. An instructive business case, for example, has been made by the Toronto Board of Trade, stating that affordable housing is essential to “a competitive and vibrant Toronto” (Allan, 2004, p. 231; Toronto Board of Trade, 2003).

Over the past 40 years, a wide range of policy instruments has been employed by the state to mitigate the effects of the private market in removing affordable housing units as neighbourhoods gentrify. In general, those policies were enacted with much more conviction in earlier decades when the welfare state had greater capacity and a stronger will to intervene in market processes. Demolition controls are weak in Canadian cities, although conversion of rental stock to condominiums has been largely blocked in Vancouver and some other Canadian cities. Rent controls, more prominent in the 1970s, are now much attenuated. In contrast, while some erosion of tenure security has occurred, in New York some two-thirds of the housing stock still have some form of regulation, although pressure to deregulate legally or illegally is intense in some districts (Newman and Wyly, 2006). A common and much easier strategy for the local state is to mandate protective zoning changes, as Marcuse (1985) recommended some years ago, although in Canada over time zoning revisions have usually proven too blunt to block gentrification and have even

proven counter-productive. In the 1970s, and in response to community pressures, reform councils in a number of Canadian cities, led by Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa, down-zoned inner-city districts to halt the seemingly relentless march of high-rise apartment redevelopment, then seen as an advancing front of gentrification. Typically, the pressure for policy action came from districts where redevelopment was anticipated or underway, such as Don Vale in Toronto, Centretown in Ottawa and Kitsilano in Vancouver. Argued in order to preserve affordable housing, and explicitly in the cases of Centretown and Kitsilano to block gentrification, in the long term such down-zoning often perversely facilitated gentrification, by creating lower densities and a higher quality of neighbourhood life, thereby improving the attractiveness of districts to those who could afford them. Their desirability was also enhanced by government preservation and enhancement policies that replaced 1960s urban renewal with loans and grants to aid housing renovation and a separate programme to fund neighbourhood improvements. The programmes were deployed selectively, and not infrequently to inner-city neighbourhoods that were the most mobilised and under the greatest risk of transition. Vancouver's housing planner acknowledged that

Community resistance to change was sufficient to stop extensive redevelopment. New zonings to encourage retention of existing residential structures, to maintain a family emphasis and to ensure that redevelopment is at a scale in keeping with the existing character of the neighbourhood were introduced. The rezonings combined with neighbourhood improvement funding and privately and federally funded rehabilitation have stabilised the neighbourhoods and enhanced liveability. Public priorities have been highly successful in retaining liveable inner communities ... [But] our strategies are retaining and improving communities for a few higher income households (McAfee, 1983).

A Toronto Planning Commissioner concurred: "Neighbourhood planning policies like historical preservation, through traffic controls, low density zoning designations and environmental protection often accelerate the process of gentrification" (McLaughlin, 1985).

Far more successful in checking gentrification and sustaining affordable stock has been the state's active policy of constructing and subsidising social housing which removes housing from the private market (Levy *et al.*, 2006). Welfare objectives have been uppermost, with the normal logic of market succession set aside. In the halcyon years of the 1970s, even city-based housing departments flourished, none more so in Canada than Cityhome, Toronto's non-profit housing corporation, established by a reform council in 1974 and, by 1998, managing almost 7500 units of low- and moderate-cost housing, located especially in older neighbourhoods facing private reinvestment pressures. However, new commitments steadily tailed off in the 1980s with a growing state fiscal crisis and ended in the early 1990s when the federal government terminated new social housing construction, downloading the responsibility to the 10 provinces, few of whom took it on board.

Effectively the buck has stopped with the cities, which have in some cases shown ingenuity with limited resources. Vancouver, for example, has slowly released sites from the city's property endowment (land bank) to subsidise social housing construction and has also exacted a public benefit tax from the private sector for large projects by requiring developers to set aside 20 per cent of the site for social housing. Stewarding resources, a more limited programme of social housing in Vancouver has been concentrated in poorer districts, both to meet local demand and to maximise the number of units that can be developed by building them on cheaper sites. In the spirit of the times, planners have more recently tried to work with the private sector—for example, permitting very small apartment

units of under 300 square feet to be constructed in order to ensure affordability.

A particularly bold strategy of senior government in the 1970s and 1980s was to work directly with certain neighbourhood organisations to produce subsidised housing. In Ottawa, the Centretown Citizens' Corporation was established in 1974 as a non-profit housing association in a neighbourhood where a residents' plan had called for housing preservation and new social housing to counter gentrification and displacement. By the mid 1980s, the Corporation had provided 450 units of affordable housing in Centretown (Ley, 1996, p. 243). The most celebrated case of local devolution was the success in the 1980s and early 1990s of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), a neighbourhood organisation in Vancouver's poorest district, in securing assistance from local and senior governments to consolidate its anti-gentrification strategy by constructing social housing units; by 1992, its portfolio amounted to some 640 new and renovated units (Hasson and Ley, 1994).

Community Mobilisation and Resistance

In part, public policy responses to gentrification have been prompted and consolidated by political mobilisation at the neighbourhood level. Such activities have run the gamut from community participation in formal planning processes to street demonstrations and even informal harassment of gentrifiers. Their success has depended on an ability to find sympathetic allies in the larger community and government (or the courts).

Pressures for inner-city change are greatest in cities with a vigorous post-industrial economy downtown. In San Francisco, an early example was opposition to the Yerba Buena project which carried the expansion of the CBD south across the historical Market Street divide, displacing many SRO-dwellers and preparing the way for the gentrification of the larger Mission district. Chester Hartman's

detailed chronology and analysis told the story of sustained opposition that delayed the huge urban renewal project for a decade and exacted some housing concessions (Hartman, 1974, 1984). Manuel Castells also detected widespread Latino mobilisation in the Mission—political activism, he observed, that “discouraged many realtors and developers from risking investment in an overly volatile, although desirable urban spot” (Castells, 1983, p. 132). One visible and confrontational response was the ‘Yuppie Eradication Project’, where posters declared the district a no-go area for gentrifiers, with the threat of ‘class war’ that would include vandalism to vehicles and property (Solnit, 2001; Lees *et al.*, 2007). At the north-eastern edge of downtown, similar pressures on the Tenderloin district stimulated more restrained resistance to protect SROs and won some modest concessions to mitigate displacement effects (Robinson, 1995).

Part of the challenge of community response to gentrification is a discursive one, to demonstrate to a broader constituency that the neighbourhood is not a slum that needs renewal but has qualities worth protecting. Wilson *et al.* (2004) examined the attempt by residents in the working-class Pilsen district of inner Chicago to ward off gentrification by publicising the community basis of resident identity in contrast to the destructive intent of the development industry. More informally, this message was reinforced on the streets by the harassment of middle-class outsiders. While the battle is far from won in Pilsen, or any other district confronting gentrification, the authors concluded that “effective leadership applying nuanced discourse can impede developers and growth coalitions” (Wilson *et al.*, 2004, p. 1188). However, the development industry also has considerable discursive sophistication in marketing ‘edgy’ urban environments and can absorb past tropes of resistance to advance its own pursuit of profit (Mele, 2000).

As long as the logic of the market holds sway, pressures for reinvestment swell with every new upturn of the housing cycle. So although the battle for the Lower East Side in New York was won in the early 1990s by resistance to gentrification, success was aided by economic recession (Abu-Lughod, 1994; Smith, 1996) and in the inevitable upturn that followed inflationary pressures returned, with a new round of destabilisation for low-income tenants. It takes unusually resolute and resourceful neighbourhood opposition to parry such repeated surges in the housing market.

More than one-time success for community advocates will normally require a broader body of public support plus endorsement by a sympathetic level of government. It is no accident that gains by inner-city neighbourhood groups resistant to gentrification have been registered particularly during periods of left-liberal or reform government, in both Canadian (Ley, 1996) and Australian cities (Shaw, 2005).

Gaps in Vancouver's Gentrification Map, 1971–2001

The preceding discussion gives some direction concerning where we might expect to see breaks in the housing reinvestment surface. Gaps in the gentrification map might include districts adjacent to working manufacturing sites and distant from environmental amenities, subject to deep poverty and in particular an imputed culture of poverty, and including properties devoid of architectural merit. They might well have a working-class population and, in some cities, this would be disproportionately an immigrant population. The role of neighbourhood resistance to change could be a significant factor, particularly during periods when there has been sympathetic government at the municipal or a senior level with an active social housing policy and other forms of service

delivery. This section will test land use and census-derived demographic associations with the geography of gentrification in the City of Vancouver from 1971 to 2001. Political and policy effects will be examined in a qualitative analysis to follow.

Like earlier work, gentrification is defined here by change through time in the value of a social status index for census tracts, computed by averaging the percentage of professional-managerial employment and post-secondary education, and adjusting for census tracts as they existed in 1971. Validation of this index as a measure of socioeconomic status has been demonstrated in earlier research, showing strong correlations with other diagnostic variables like household income and monthly rent (Ley 1996, p. 88). Subtracting the 1971 social status index from the 2001 index gives a measure of social status change in each census tract over the 30-year period, a change that we identify as an index of gentrification. The gentrification scores are divided into quintiles to give a sense of the level of socioeconomic transformation that has occurred.

The spatial imprint of a generation of gentrification in the City of Vancouver appears in Figure 1. The pattern is strongly regionalised. The highest quintile of gentrification scores runs in a sector west from downtown and the shores of the False Creek inlet along the coastline of English Bay. This coastline includes beaches and marinas, with the barrier to the west occupied by Pacific Spirit Park, a large forested area with woodland trails. This western sector includes the quintessential gentrified inner neighbourhoods of Kitsilano and Fairview, and is adjacent to long-existing higher-status districts, notably the in-town elite area of Shaughnessy, for a century Vancouver's premier address. What is striking about the geography of gentrification is the marked concentration of change in these districts, together with the sharp north–south divide that separates the western from the eastern half of the city, aligned along the Main

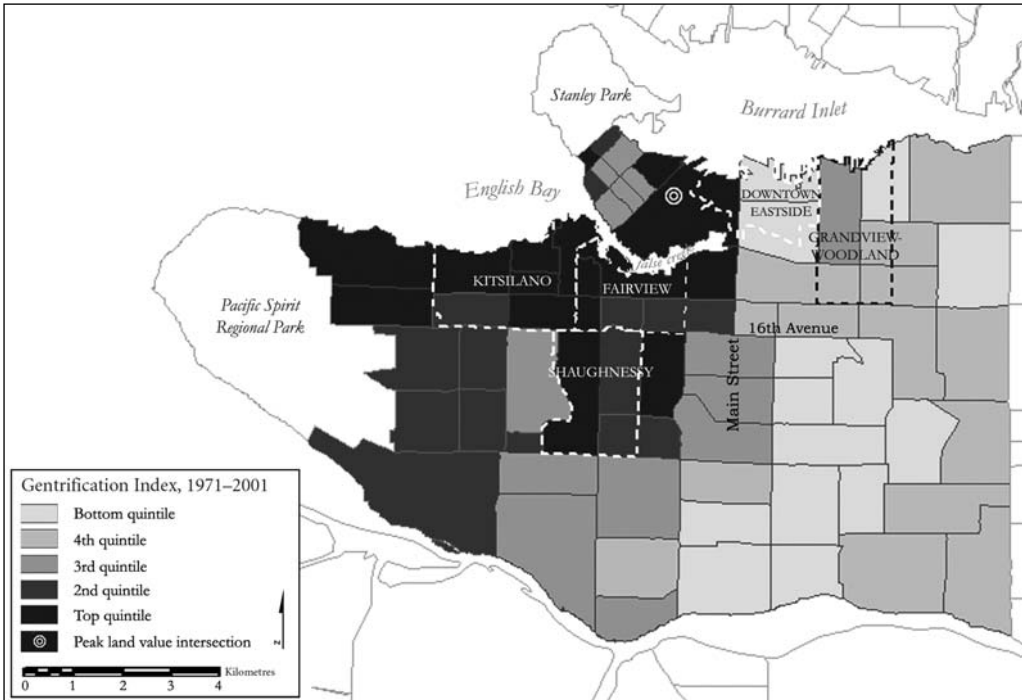


Figure 1. The map of gentrification in the City of Vancouver, 1971–2001

Street axis, although south of 16th Avenue the precise boundary is obscured by tracts that straddle the divide. While there has been scattered gentrification east of the divide, social change there has been overwhelmed in magnitude by transition on the west side. Main Street is the historical division in Vancouver between a blue-collar, non-Anglo eastside and a white-collar, middle- and upper middle-class, Anglo-Canadian westside; prior to amalgamation at the end of the 1920s, these two urban regions fell in separate municipalities. This divide has symbolic as well as census characteristics. A typical westside construction would place the eastside on 'the wrong side of the tracks' with all of the cultural and material weight that such a distinction bears. The encroachment of gentrification over a 30-year period has seemingly obeyed well-established class and ethnic gradients.

These visual observations are sharpened by simple correlation that tested for associations

between the gentrification index and locational, land use and population characteristics in the 68 census tracts that existed in the City in 1971 (Table 1). Rather than seeking to explain where gentrification took place, we are now interested in where it tended *not* to occur. The correlation in Table 1 shows, for example, that gentrification between 1971 and 2001 increased as the distance of census tracts to a beach decreased ($r = -0.77$). Therefore the same correlation also indicates that gentrification declined as distance *rose* from the amenities of a beach. Similarly, gentrification scores fell with growing distance from an accessible public waterfront (-0.63), from a major park (-0.45) and downtown (-0.46), but in contrast gentrification fell with *diminishing* distance from industrially zoned land (0.43).³ Lower-scoring tracts on the gentrification index did not contain the oldest housing in 1971, but they were likely to be disproportionately the location of housing of lower median dwelling value (0.50) and

Table 1. 1971 correlates of 1971–2001 gentrification scores, City of Vancouver ($N = 68$ census tracts)

| <i>Variables</i> | |
|--|-------|
| Distance to district park | −0.45 |
| Distance to peak land value intersection | −0.46 |
| Distance to nearest industrial land (in 2001) | 0.43 |
| Distance to nearest beach (in 2001) | −0.77 |
| Distance to waterfront pathway system (in 2001) | −0.63 |
| Median dwelling value | 0.50 |
| Constructed between 1946 and 1960 | −0.53 |
| Constructed prior to 1946 | 0.24 |
| Married (>15yrs of age) | −0.48 |
| Children per household | −0.50 |
| Single detached housing | −0.42 |
| Multiple family household | −0.68 |
| Owner-occupied | −0.39 |
| People who are non-movers | −0.35 |
| Education >15 years, less than grade nine | −0.64 |
| No income claimed | −0.65 |
| Average income | 0.32 |
| Distance to nearest elite tract | −0.60 |
| Born outside Canada | −0.21 |
| Asian-born | −0.45 |
| Buddhist | −0.51 |
| Roman Catholic | −0.39 |
| Anglican | 0.61 |
| Home language one of official languages | 0.64 |
| Born in the US | 0.79 |
| Born in the UK | 0.63 |

constructed during the 1946–60 period (−0.53). At the beginning of the period, in 1971, districts where limited reinvestment would occur over the next 30 years were also more likely to include married families (−0.48) and children (−0.50), to contain detached houses (−0.42) and show signs of some crowding ($r = -0.68$ with multifamily households). Residents in tracts with limited gentrification were also more likely to be owner-occupiers (−0.39) and relatively stable in their mobility, with a tendency towards non-movers (−0.35). Education

levels were likely to be low ($r = -0.64$ with less than grade 9 education) and several income measures indicate a weak income profile ($r = -0.65$ with no income, $r = 0.32$ with average family income). Low gentrification scores were also associated with rising spatial separation from the city's elite districts (−0.60).⁴ In 1971, their populations were likely to be immigrants (−0.21), especially from Asia (−0.45), and of Buddhist (−0.51) or Catholic (−0.39) faith, but not Anglican (0.61); their mother tongue was typically neither English nor French (0.64). These tracts did not usually contain immigrants of Anglo-Canadian ethnicity, with few American-born (0.79) or British-born (0.63) in 1971.

If instead of considering tract profiles at the beginning of gentrification in 1971, we consider them at the end of the period in 2001, correlations shift somewhat. Limited gentrification continues to be associated with the 2001 distribution of the nuclear family and ownership of a detached home, but the correlations are lower. On the other hand, correlations with socioeconomic and cultural characteristics are much stronger. Weak gentrification gains are strongly associated with 2001 concentrations of Asian-born immigrants, with households of very low income and with residents who do not speak English.

This analysis indicates that prior expectations have been largely borne out in predicting districts unfavourable to gentrification, in terms of census and land use characteristics. Low gentrification scores between 1971 and 2001 fell in districts more distant from environmental amenities and elite census tracts, but closer to industrial land use. They coincide with early post-war housing of modest value and tend to be occupied by home-owning non-anglophone families with relatively weak income and educational profiles.

We now identify two neighbourhoods where limited social change has occurred and

provide a fuller interpretation of gentrification's relative absence on the map, and on the ground—an explanation that includes also the role of public policy and local political interventions. Our data are derived from fieldwork, databases, archival and secondary sources, and interviews. In the Downtown Eastside, we will see that gentrification has been significantly blocked to date by local protest, accompanied by a public city discourse that has included removal of land from the private market and into social housing, and a street scene that has proved too raw for most middle-class sensibilities. In contrast, in the lower-density district of Grandview-Woodland to the east, separated from the Downtown Eastside by a band of industrial land, gentrification, long anticipated, has been stalled by noxious industrial plants, a local left-wing political culture that is tolerant of unpredictable public behaviour and poor residents whose presence is sustained by a significant stock of social housing.

Blocked Gentrification in the Downtown Eastside

Conventional expectations would project rampant gentrification onto the Downtown Eastside. The district is less than a kilometre from Vancouver's financial district and, unlike most neighbourhoods, does not require a congested bridge crossing to reach the CBD (Figure 2). Moreover, as the City's original town-site it includes the highest concentration of listed commercial heritage buildings, providing character stock available for renovation and conversion to lofts or condominiums. Some of these heritage structures are on the waterfront or have waterfront views. Moreover, the district's land values are heavily depressed, opening up a significant rent gap compared with other inner-city districts.⁵

However, as Figure 1 shows, the Downtown Eastside east of Main Street falls in the lowest quintile of neighbourhood social change.⁶ As

we shall see, deep poverty, street crime, vigorous political mobilisation and public policy have slowed gentrification substantially. The Downtown Eastside is the poorest district in the metropolitan area, while its postal code is reputed to be the poorest in urban Canada. Originally its population comprised middle-aged and elderly men living in SRO hotels, many of them retired or between jobs in resource industries in remote parts of British Columbia and including some who were handicapped from work-related injuries (Sommers, 1998). This earlier group has been joined by an aboriginal population, some of whom move seasonally between the city and their reserve, by mentally handicapped patients living in the community, by some new immigrants and by troubled youth (Benoit *et al.*, 2003; Blomley, 2004; Hasson and Ley, 1994; Robertson, 2007; Shannon *et al.*, 2006; Smith, 2003). Substance abuse is rife, although not all of the addicts are local residents. The local population suffers from startling levels of hepatitis C, syphilis and HIV-AIDS; 10 per cent of its residents are estimated to be HIV-positive (Sandborn, 2006; Woolford, 2001), while tuberculosis too has made a return. Homelessness is mitigated by a number of emergency shelters, while chronic addictions have been partially addressed by a detoxification centre, needle exchange and North America's first drop-in safe injection site; a quarter of the neighbourhood's population are believed to be injection drug users (Adilman and Kliever 2000; McCann, 2008).⁷ Street crime and prostitution are means to survival and support addictions. The area has become notorious through the disappearance of many women in the sex trade (Pitman, 2002); a suspect from the Vancouver suburbs has been charged with the deaths of 26 women. The Downtown Eastside is by far the most dangerous district in the city with a rate of violent crime 20 times higher than most other census tracts (Andresen, 2006; Sinoski and Bohn, 2008).

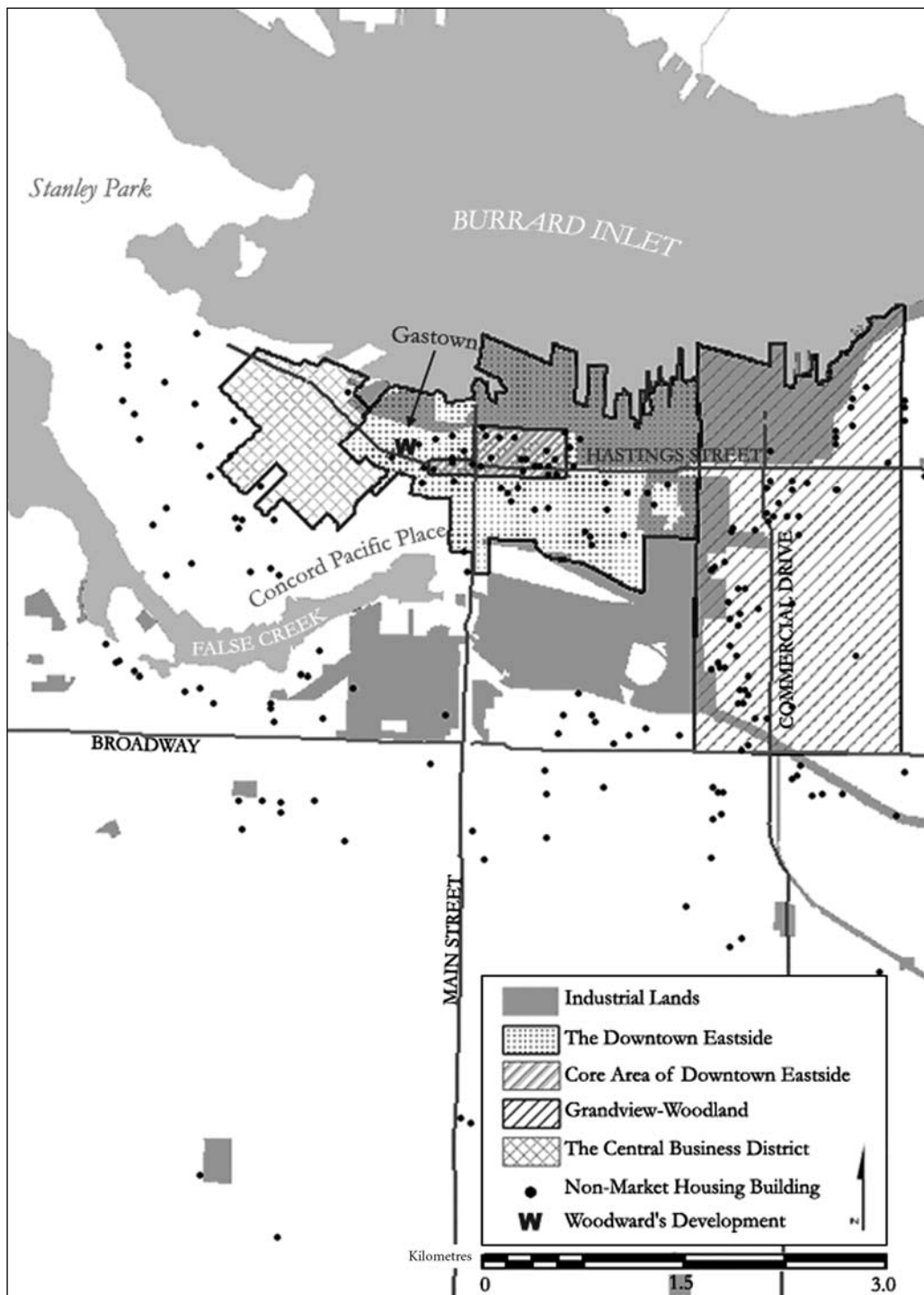


Figure 2. The Downtown Eastside and Grandview-Woodland neighbourhoods

Long tarred with the stigmatised title of skid row, yet with a superb location and significant development potential in the city with Canada's most expensive real estate, the Downtown Eastside might be expected to be a prime target for public renewal plans and private redevelopment strategies. Indeed after long neglect, when municipal government attended to the area in the 1960s, it was with the rhetoric of 'skid row' and the ominous language of 'tax sinks', with the City's Planning Director noting that municipal expenditures exceeded revenues by a ratio of 20–25 to 1, normally a precedent for slum designation and urban renewal—and indeed the Planning Department had a massive renewal strategy up its sleeve (Hasson and Ley, 1994). Yet due in large part to persistent community mobilisation, beginning in the liberal decade of the 1970s, the neighbourhood has continued to be a prime example of what Michael Dear has called the public city, a neighbourhood with a strong welfare state imprint, including a substantial social service infrastructure (with over 35 per cent of social service offices in the entire city), religious and self-help storefront services and an on-going commitment to providing subsidised housing. In large measure, policy intervention has occurred to such a degree in the Downtown Eastside because the district itself has been so intensely politicised. Even the neighbourhood's boundaries have proved contentious (see Figure 2), with some city maps shrinking it to a core area around Oppenheimer Park, while others agree with local activists that a much larger expanse of older contiguous sub-districts falls within its borders (Blomley, 2004).

The district is the oldest in Vancouver, part of the original town-site behind the port, railway yards and industrial and wholesaling activities of the waterfront (Figure 2). With its long history as a space of male labour, the neighbourhood has a mythical tradition of conflict, dating from pitched battles with the police during difficult years of unemployment

in the 1930s. Its labour history provided a political context that was astutely employed by local organisers who founded the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association (DERA) in 1973 (Hasson and Ley, 1994). DERA already claimed 2000 members by 1976 and 4500 in 1989, and as a protest organisation it used the strength of large numbers to prod and push first City Council then senior levels of government, as former and current union members translated a strike mandate in labour conflict to a protest mandate in community conflict. Through persistence and luck in finding sympathetic government decision-makers in the liberal 1970s, DERA assembled an impressive track record, particularly in arguing for enforcement of housing by-laws in local SROs. Having endorsed social housing to be built by others, it became a provider itself in the 1980s. Its credibility spread and, for 10 years after 1982, two DERA leaders were elected to the 11-person, at-large, City Council, encouraging conformity between local and city objectives. Through the electoral process, community mobilisation was readily transferred to city policy positions.

The organisation tirelessly challenged the discourse of skid row, widely held in Vancouver, with the language of community. As a community, there was much to preserve and enhancement was a viable public response, whereas for a 'sink', public and private renewal was the only option. Significant markers of neighbourhood improvement to benefit existing residents were achieved: a waterfront park, a community centre, a neighbourhood bank, closure of a troublesome liquor store, blockage of a proposed large waterfront casino, enforcement of SRO by-laws and, by 1992, a DERA social housing portfolio of 640 units (Hasson and Ley, 1994). DERA was well aware of the dangers of gentrification and sought to locate its housing projects near the boundaries of the district, thereby establishing its territorial claim in a politics of turf. Aware, too, that new social housing

might upgrade a landscape of run-down residential hotels and encourage private reinvestment, a raw, non-aesthetic building style was preferred for housing projects.

DERA's star faded in the 1990s, but other organisations have maintained active politicisation and when necessary protest. Government support for social housing has continued and by 2007 in the narrowly defined Downtown Eastside half of all units were non-market units (City of Vancouver, 2007). With a population of less than 5000 (less than 1 per cent of the City's population), 10 per cent of all City non-market housing units are in this small district, with another 11 projects in the pipeline. With the more expansive definition of the Downtown Eastside, the number of non-market housing units rises to over 5200, almost a quarter of the City's total stock and over 40 per cent of all local dwelling units, plus another 16 projects in production. The result is an immense withdrawal of land from the private market, denying the opportunity for gentrification to occur on these development sites.

Yet while commitment to social housing will continue, the emphasis in recent years has been, in the words of the Vancouver Agreement, a tri-level government planning and servicing programme running from 2000 to 2010, "revitalisation without displacement" in Vancouver's inner city, notably the Downtown Eastside (Vancouver Agreement, 2007). Part of an integrated approach to the district's social problems is to encourage social mixing, with some housing for middle-class residents on selected available sites while at least maintaining the level of affordable housing as new non-market units take up the dwindling SRO stock. Gentrification has been slowly encroaching, more rapidly in the historic Gastown sub-area west of Main Street, where preservation and renovation through public heritage designation since the late 1960s led to significant loft development in the 1990s (Smith, 2000). The advance of reinvestment

has, however, been constantly challenged by street crime, public nuisance and the shortage of available sites. A large shopping mall, Tinseltown, built to service customers in the thousands of condominiums built on the nearby Concord Pacific site on False Creek, has failed commercially because of its location on the edge of the Downtown Eastside, with the mix of cultures in public space that ensued undermining its attraction to middle-class patrons.

In this context, a pivotal issue has been the resolution of a development conflict over the Woodward's Building, a large former department store occupying a whole block that closed in 1993, stranded by the out-migration of its market and the deterioration of its site on Hastings Street (Figures 2 and 3). According to an earlier newspaper headline, its closure "turns downtown area into a ghost town" (Aird, 1993; Smith, 2000). Sometimes-rancorous debate about redevelopment of the site, often defined on the community side by arguments advancing a place-specific ethics of care (Smith, 2005), continued for over a decade with the location and size of the Woodward's project strategic for the future of the entire district. After changes of ownership, vigorous politicisation that included a protracted squat and sustained rounds of negotiation, the eventual plan, presently under construction, is for a joint public-private partnership that would include over 500 market units and 200 social units with shopping and other community services (Blomley, 2004; Lees *et al.*, 2007, ch. 7). The balance has caused considerable trepidation, particularly as in the city's tight market the private units sold out in a single day, buyers responding enthusiastically to an astute sales pitch to "Be bold or move to suburbia" (2006 marketing brochure, Rennie Marketing Systems). Yet among some seasoned campaigners, there is a sense that the outcome after many years of struggle is as good as it gets in a neo-liberal era. And as we



Figure 3. The abandoned Woodward's site and the Downtown Eastside

were told, with the current dystopian street scene, “Nobody wants to keep the *status quo*” (interview with community writer).

Conditions today are far less propitious for active diversion of private redevelopment impulses than in the first half of the 1970s, when DERA was established, and all three levels of government were led by left-liberal administrations largely free of revenue anxieties. Today, however, with significant public debt loads, municipal, provincial and federal government are all conservative and market-oriented. Yet it is our thesis that local need and local activism together have created a moral culture in the Downtown Eastside legitimating sustained public involvement despite active forces promoting gentrification. In April 2007, the provincial government announced expenditures of \$80 million to purchase and upgrade the housing units of 15 Vancouver-area SROs under risk of redevelopment and build up to 300 additional social housing units. Despite right-of-centre governments in the city and the province, the need to address homelessness voiced by activists was heard, in part because of the approaching 2010 Winter Olympics and the desire to limit the embarrassment of urban homelessness before a global audience. A convergence of progressive and conservative objectives can lead to a desirable anti-gentrification outcome.

Ten of the SROs have been purchased in the Downtown Eastside, where the acquisition will aid protection (and upgrading) of affordable units from the sea of 84 000 condominium units that has washed over Vancouver neighbourhoods between 1970 and 2006 (Harris, 2008). As we have seen, over this longer time-period the current SRO purchase is not an isolated event, but part of a continuing public strategy to maintain low- and moderate-cost housing in this district. The politics of resistance have created a political space where arguments for the highest and best use are challenged by an alternate ethical discourse of preservation and

public investment that has its own legitimacy in this district and has frequently prevailed. The current local housing plan promises to maintain the existing number of affordable units, with non-market housing gradually replacing many sub-standard SRO units (City of Vancouver, 2005). Yet at the same time, the Woodward’s project shows the new face of the district, with the plan’s intent to double condominium units to establish social mix and “revitalization”. Whether this is a bold or an uneasy synthesis remains to be seen. Yet what is quite clear is the central role of public policy reacting to neighbourhood activism as well as the market in setting the terms of reference.

Stalled Gentrification in Grandview-Woodland

To the east of the Downtown Eastside, and separated from it by a barrier of industrial land, lies the old neighbourhood of Grandview-Woodland, long a working-class area of single-family dwellings and apartment units adjacent to the Port of Vancouver (Figure 2). Like the Downtown Eastside, it is close to downtown and also has the advantage of no bridge crossing to detain commuters. While there is a good deal of land use mixing, in general the western part of the district has a considerable stock of three-storey apartments, while the eastern half comprises mainly old wood-frame houses, often on attractive tree-lined streets (Figure 4). Incomes in 2001 were about two-thirds of the city average, and rent prices some 20 per cent lower, creating a margin of relative affordability. The district has been multicultural for decades as successive waves of new immigrants have passed through. A residual southern European presence remains, with a more recent Chinese minority; some 10 per cent of the population is aboriginal. The main north–south retail street, Commercial Drive, is known for the quality and diversity of its restaurants and coffee shops.



Figure 4. Gentrified frame house in Grandview-Woodland

There is a well-established counter-cultural, lesbian and leftist presence, while the neighbourhood ambience, cheaper rents and old industrial spaces have attracted artists. Grandview-Woodland is a socially and culturally diverse neighbourhood with a reputation for social tolerance, although as a local retailer told us, its tolerance may be selective: “it is really intolerant of corporations and stuff like that. It’s the only neighbourhood I’ve ever seen where a Subway and a McDonald’s went out of business”. In this understudied district, our data come primarily from 25 interviews with a range of knowledgeable neighbourhood figures with long memories, including local realtors, business people, NGO leaders, politicians and city housing staff (Dobson, 2007).

Gentrification has been long anticipated in Grandview-Woodland. One writer observed in 1974 that “The whole area is in a transition stage. It could become another Kitsilano” (John Bower, quoted in Hanson and Daniels, 1974).

In 1976, another commentator considered that it was “an inner-city neighbourhood on the verge of becoming fashionable” (Smith, 1976), while at the end of the decade a third judged that “the pressures for change have never been more unrelenting” (Bulhozer, 1979). Similar sentiments were repeated throughout the 1980s: “the neighbourhood is being transformed by a new ethnic wave—people whose mother tongue is neither Italian, Chinese nor Punjabi. The newcomers are White, many of them young professionals with few or no children” (Bohn, 1981). A thesis in 1984 concluded that “the area may currently be experiencing some ‘incipient gentrification’ ... Grandview may well be on the verge of quite substantial residential change” (Jackson, 1984, p. 92). The view was recycled a few years later: “the area is threatening to turn trendy and some say it may be on the verge of a real estate boom that will transform it into Kitsilano east” (Stainsby, 1989). Yet if we move forward to 2005, the verdict has changed little: “the

neighbourhood today is feeling the early effects of creeping gentrification” (Berson, 2005). Grandview-Woodland appears to present a prime case of stalled gentrification, where great expectations have been invariably followed by more limited consequences.

Why were these confident early predictions in error, particularly in a post-industrial metropolis with sustained downtown and regional growth, where demand and supply in an expensive housing market should have directed gentrifiers *en masse* to this relatively cheaper district of tree-lined residential streets, and where the business spine of Commercial Drive has experienced pronounced retail gentrification for at least a decade?

In interviews, several explanations emerged that could not have been discovered through census data, although in part they reinforce census trends. The east–west perceptual boundary in Vancouver, noted earlier, did matter and counteracted the greater affordability of Grandview-Woodland that brought it to the attention of failed westside buyers

Our first place that we bought was in Kitsilano, and then we decided we wanted something bigger and we went through the whole process of looking on the westside and the affordability question came up ... then we found this wonderful brand-new duplex in East Vancouver in an area that is still very much going through change (politician).

Yet despite repeated comparison with the gentrified and expensive westside neighbourhood of Kitsilano, Grandview-Woodland has not been a fully satisfactory substitute. A realtor observed that many buyers priced out of the westside market would have typically selected an adjacent suburb rather than cross the divide to the eastside despite cheaper property there. There were disamenities they wished to avoid: as a housing planner told us, “it’s not Kitsilano in terms of access to beaches, and all that sort of yuppie stuff”. Instead, Grandview-Woodland has a working

industrial waterfront that brings truck traffic through its main streets. Manufacturing is a local disamenity, including the stench of one plant, West Coast Reduction, a meat- and fish-stripping operation that one respondent told us had made him a vegetarian (Figure 5)!

Another contrast is danger or at least the perception of danger

I knew people who wouldn’t even consider coming east of Main Street, it was like too scary for them, too dangerous. And there are still people who have that feeling, that it’s too dangerous over here (gallery owner).

Grandview-Woodland is adjacent to the Downtown Eastside and undoubtedly some overflow of street crime and nuisance has brought an unwelcome edge to the district. The district ranks third after Downtown and the Downtown Eastside among Vancouver’s 24 local areas in terms of criminal assaults (Sinoski and Bohn, 2008). The local station on the Skytrain rapid transit line is regarded as a source of undesirable outsiders who hang around the transport hub, often engaging in drug trafficking. A politically leftist book-seller repeated a common refrain, observing how

we always get those pressures from the Downtown Eastside: the derelicts and the drugs and the hookers and drug use and thugs and all that and they’re so close they always get stuck here all the time and that creates just enough discomfort, so that people with intentions of climbing the economic ladder get out of here and leave as quick as they can.

The culture of tolerance in the district is strained, as newcomers have higher expectations of public order. Several respondents gave us accounts of newcomers complaining about neighbourhood nuisances and then eventually giving up and leaving: “We’ve had a number of people who complained, complained, complained, and then left”. A realtor noticed a number of temporary liaisons with



Figure 5. West Coast Reduction, example of a noxious local facility

the district as professionals move out of their downtown condominiums, touch down with a short-term purchase in Grandview-Woodland, gain equity and then hop over to an inferior property on the westside. A second realtor concurred

I get the young couple that is just married and want to buy a home, but they can't afford to buy on the westside and they see Commercial Drive is a nice area and they've heard it's really good and they'll move in. But at the same time they don't appreciate that Commercial Drive is nitty gritty, and a lot of people like that vibrant part of it, and for other people who move in, within a year to two years they go 'We don't like it. As much as we like our house and our street, we don't like the whole atmosphere around here'.

The birth of children accentuates such anxieties, for public schools in Grandview-Woodland fall some way behind schools on the westside in standard educational tests and university entrance rates. Currently, 20 per cent of eastside youth cross school catchment boundaries daily, but only 3.5 per cent on the westside (McMahon, 2007). Either children are driven or take the bus to special programmes in westside schools, or the perceived educational deficit prompts family out-migration. A realtor considered his own experience to be compatible with that of some of his clients

We lived right behind the school. It was so convenient. Both my kids could just walk to school, it was a block away. But then after attending that school, we found it wasn't up to par ... so we had to leave.

Such accelerated departures would cause a flow-through of potential gentrifiers, limiting their overall housing market effect. Moreover, for middle-class sensibilities, there are other gauntlets to run. People who object to "having their car window smashed in every now and then", the book-seller continued,

"they just wash through". Occasionally such informal actions are deliberate provocations to subvert gentrification and unnerve gentrifiers (Figure 6). There are only two corporate retail entities on Commercial Drive and one of them, Starbucks, had its windows smashed regularly in its first months of business. As a result "resistance and anger towards evidence of gentrification is one of the things that keeps gentrification away". Such informal harassment has largely replaced formal political mobilisation. While there have been neighbourhood associations in Grandview-Woodland (Jackson, 1984), they have never had the local or city-wide prominence of the protest groups in the Downtown Eastside.

Some of the street annoyances are associated with residents with mental health challenges. The mentally ill are one cohort of a large number of residents living not in austere public housing but in neighbourly social housing, subsidised rental units and housing co-operatives. Grandview-Woodland has a large number of social housing properties (Figure 2), some 70 projects with over 2100 subsidised units or 15 per cent of the neighbourhood's housing stock, including 22 buildings dedicated to urban natives, almost 70 per cent of the City's total (City of Vancouver, 2003, 2007). As in the Downtown Eastside, the large supply of social housing puts an upper level on potential gentrification, guaranteeing that poor people will have a continuing presence in the district. In addition, the occupants of social housing may, in some instances, be a deterrent to middle-class reinvestment. A city housing planner observed that

Grandview-Woodlands has quite an eclectic range of social housing ... [it] has the largest chunk of aboriginal social housing, it has a large chunk of housing for people with mental illness, so it has housing for these two groups which are seen as problematic in the city and other neighbourhoods.



Figure 6. Stopping gentrification: informal politics in Grandview-Woodland

There is some evidence from significant inflation of house prices and commercial rents since 2001 that gentrification at last is consolidating in Grandview-Woodland. We heard many examples like the following: “It’s a slow process, but I know that the house across from my condo just sold for a million dollars. That’s pretty Kits-like numbers” (gallery owner). Yet it has taken over 30 years since the first predictions were made. The clash of cultures that has stalled gentrification for so long is worked out most clearly in public spaces, the street, local parks, the schools. One of many small vignettes that exposed the deep neighbourhood divisions involved a weekly food distribution that had continued in Grandview Park, just off Commercial Drive, for about 15 years

A woman bought a house across from Grandview Park ... it was a beautiful big house and

it had a second-floor porch and a suite up there and stuff, anyway, she buys the house and the same thing, every Tuesday night, this guy Gordon, from the Vineyard Church, comes and feeds chili to a few hundred people who line up, they’re poor, some of them are addicted, some of them are drunk, they don’t always behave well, they throw their bowls around, you know whatever, and after a few weeks she came in here to say that she wanted, she had moved in, that she was charging \$1500 for her upstairs suite and how could she ask \$1500 when across the way is this collection of homeless people you know, making a mess every week, and she felt we should support her, go to the City, and make it stop. You know, get it out of there. And I said, well no, this is an institution in this neighbourhood, and she said to me ... ‘You could call it that, but this neighbourhood is changing, and this stuff has got to change too, it’s got to stop’ (long-time resident and volunteer).

We heard much of this conflict of expectations, for example from a politician: “You clearly have two different views who are both quite activist around the community and there is a push and pull that goes on”. The resolution of such a conflict in expectations of appropriate public behaviour will have much to do with the evolution of the local balance of power between recent gentrifiers and the older, more tolerant, public culture of Grandview-Woodland. A striking current example is the escalation of complaints directed at the

noxious fumes emanating from West Coast Reduction, the meat- and fish-rendering plant (Figures 5 and 7). Low-level protest up to the early 1990s gave way to concerted complaints in 1991–92, causing the company to install a thermal oxidiser to offset emissions (O’Connor, 2008). Complaints dropped off immediately, but picked up again in 2004 during a housing price boom. Despite the installation of a second oxidiser in 2006, over 600 complaints were registered with the regional planning office in 2007, by far

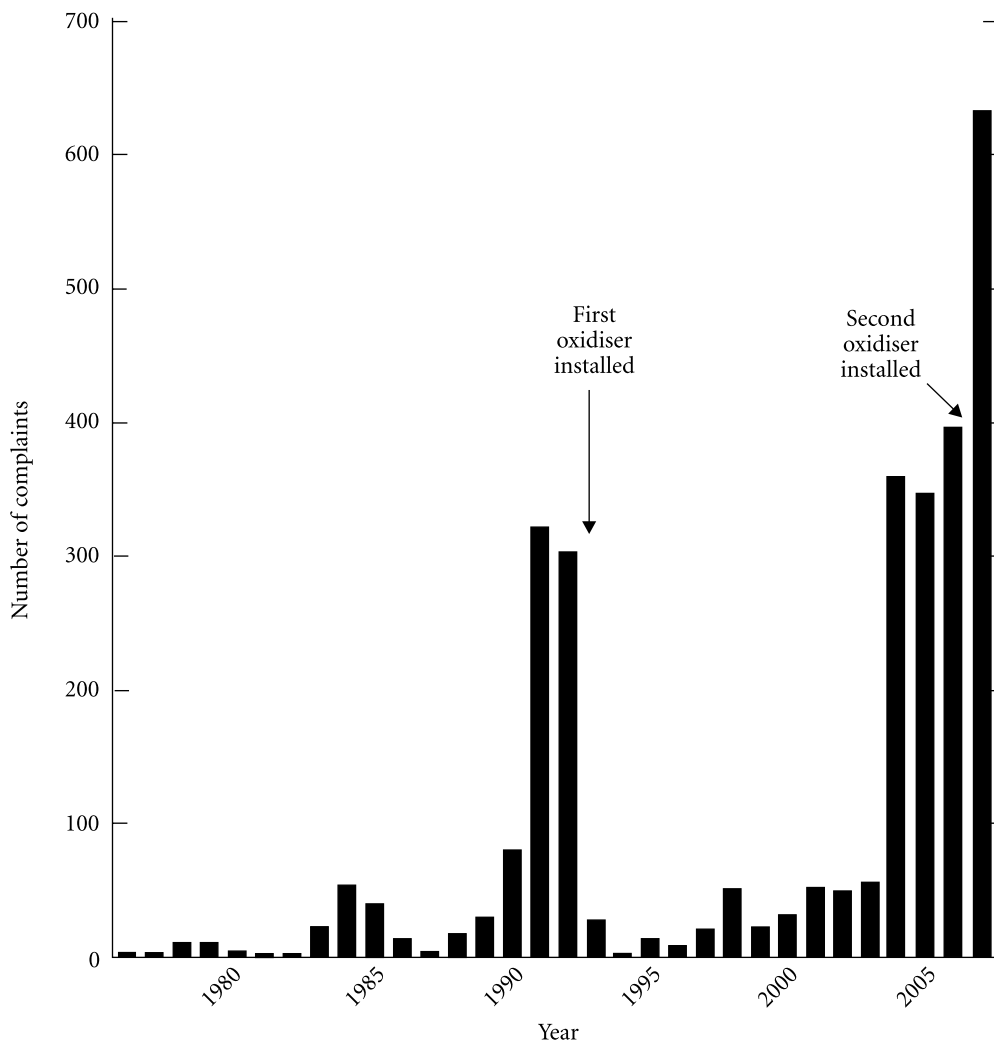


Figure 7. Neighbourhood complaints registered against West Coast Reduction

the highest annual figure on record (Metro Vancouver, 2008). Here is the classic attempt of gentrifiers to consolidate their advance through the enhancement of the neighbourhood externality field and, significantly, environmental planners are tightening the screws on West Coast Reduction.

The stakes are rising in the district as property prices inflate and street people seem to be more visible (Sinoski, 2008). Polarisation is intensifying

People feel like they are caught between gentrification on the one hand and this kind of street scene that they see spinning out of control ... houses selling for a million and *this* street scene! (long-time resident and NGO leader).

How will government respond to growing demands for the control or removal of social and environmental disamenities? In such conflict resolution over the management of public space, front-line staff including police, social workers and environmental and land use planners will be significant arbiters of the future of gentrification as they execute public policy. If more subtle than in the Downtown Eastside, the state will continue to shape the conditions for the expansion or continued stalling of gentrification in Grandview-Woodland.

Conclusion

From our study, there is clearly no silver bullet to impede gentrification and prevent residential displacement in the context of today's neo-liberal urban agenda. Yet this is not to say that losses of affordable housing are inevitable, for it is clear that politics still matters very much in contemporary cities and, despite locational advantages, gentrification's advance may be impeded. Indeed, even under unregulated market conditions, certain groupings of populations and land uses are

unattractive to gentrification and can stall its arrival.

The Downtown Eastside, on the edge of the central business district, is a landscape where poverty cultures that gathered in cheap SRO housing have grown and diversified in response to the state's service delivery and social housing strategies, themselves substantially responding to active neighbourhood politicisation. As a result, almost half the existing residential units have been removed from the vagaries of the private market, blocking gentrification's advance into these spaces. Events have been less politically orchestrated in Grandview-Woodland. Gentrification, long anticipated, stalled before a lack of local amenities compared with the westside neighbourhoods and a sometimes gritty street scene, due in part to overflow from the Downtown Eastside and in part to a high concentration of local social housing units. Yet the loss of affordability elsewhere has drawn in the middle class in larger numbers in the past five years, creating significant conflicts about the definition of liveable environments and tolerable behaviour in public spaces. As planners, police, social workers and politicians are appealed to as intermediaries, the role of public policy in guiding the neighbourhood's trajectory continues to be significant (see Slater, 2004).

Case studies are inevitably exercises in particularity where local context matters, but some broader themes may be extracted from the impediments to gentrification over a 35-year period in these two Vancouver neighbourhoods. The market mechanisms of demand and supply exercise a significant hold over housing affordability in the inner city and, in Vancouver, with the highest housing costs and frequently the tightest big-city rental market in Canada, these pressures would be expected to shrink capacity for policy manoeuvring, let alone successful community politics. Of course, investment will move faster into some sub-markets than

others and correlation over the 1971–2001 period shows that inner-city districts distant from environmental amenities and proximate to industrial land use will be much less attractive to the incursions of gentrification. It is important to reiterate, since it is often not recognised, that lower-income areas with limited human capital, including districts of non-Anglophone homeowners, were not a primary choice for middle-class reinvestment (see Shaw, 2005).

Yet politics have also mattered in both these neighbourhoods. Responding to marked neighbourhood politicisation, policy-makers since the liberal 1970s have endowed the public city in the Downtown Eastside, providing abundant (if presently insufficient) public services, including 5200 units of social housing that have diverted gentrification away from these development sites. While the current policy of ‘revitalisation without displacement’ opens the door to the perils of social mixing, it has been accompanied by another 16 social housing projects in production. We have argued that sustained neighbourhood mobilisation has led to a distinctive local moral culture that accepts the right to the city for poor people.⁸ In contrast, gentrification in Grandview-Woodland, anticipated in the 1970s, stalled for 30 years despite the absence of an equivalent level of formal activism or state endowments. Here, the noxious externalities of an industrial area plus a well-established stock of social housing have provided pre-existing land uses less agreeable to some middle-class sensibilities. In addition, a long-established local political culture of leftist tolerance to unconventional public behaviour and petty street crime together with intolerance towards neighbourhood *embourgeoisement* have provided a less-than-perfect nesting area for some gentrifiers.

A question in Grandview-Woodland is whether this antipathy to gentrification can be sustained much longer as reinvestment

pressures become ever more formidable. The same question may be levelled at most impediments to gentrification. Are barriers a temporary or permanent safeguard against gentrification and displacement? We conclude, that aside from the permanent removal of land from the private market, no barrier has a long-term guarantee, so that local contingencies—of the kind we have described in this paper—must rule.

Notes

1. This is not the hyperbole it might seem, for increasingly the arts centre, the sports stadium and the hallmark event (an international exposition or sports festival) are spectacles that ignite inner-city redevelopment, promoting gentrification. In recent years, world’s fairs located in inner-city districts have invariably triggered subsequent gentrification (for example, Vancouver 1986, Brisbane 1988). The 2012 Olympics are igniting a huge regeneration effort in east London, downstream from Canary Wharf and the current limits of regenerate Docklands. With reinvestment, the Docklands model of *embourgeoisement* and displacement (Butler with Robson, 2003) is likely to be repeated.
2. The removal of housing units from reinvestment pressures is not complete, with some state programmes that require social mixing and/or variable subsidy levels within single housing projects. It has been argued that co-operative housing in Canada including both of these features may have prompted local private reinvestment in poor districts.
3. Distance was assessed by a straight-line measure from the centre of each tract to the closest location of one of the specified features (such as a beach).
4. The top 10 per cent of tracts by median dwelling value were identified as elite tracts and the distance from the centre of each of the 68 tracts to the centre of the closest elite tract was measured by straight-line distance.
5. Blomley (2004, p. 35) reports that land prices were less than 10 per cent the level of downtown real estate less than a kilometre away.

6. West of Main Street a high gentrification score appears. This is due in part to the large 1971 census tract west of Main, where significant condominium redevelopment has occurred on brownfield sites outside the Downtown Eastside since 1971, notably at Concord Pacific Place (Figure 2). Yet at the same time, gentrification is also encroaching directly upon the Downtown Eastside, notably in loft development in Gastown (Figure 2; Smith, 2000). Other sub-areas west of Main, notably the Hastings Street strip, remain the site of disinvestment and an abrasive street culture.
7. The safe injection site as part of a harm-reduction philosophy has lowered deaths through drug overdoses which had reached extraordinary levels, symbolised by the temporary memorial of a thousand crosses planted in Oppenheimer Park, a small open space in the heart of the district. See the poignant reflection by Bud Osborn, a local poet, 'A thousand crosses in Oppenheimer Park' in Osborn and Tetrault (1998).
8. See, most recently, 'Common vision' (Bula, 2008)—an attempt by an alliance of savvy activists and a sympathetic private sector to maintain a socially mixed neighbourhood.

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