

School of Cities Fellowship Report

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Submitted by

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Research Abstract

Working with Innovate Youth Scarborough, we will host co-design titled “a city for everyone” – a research project which will capture a suburban perspective co-designing with youth (ages 16-27) who live, work, play in East Scarborough. The theoretical framework of this codesign is community-based participatory action research (CBPAR), CBPAR focuses on co-research with communities, rather than the study of a community, with the acknowledgement of the community as a partner rather than participant of research. This approach allows for more community building, advocacy and agency to situate the youth as most knowledgeable and the expert of the community. While suburbs have received greater scholarly attention as a key site for understanding processes of urbanization, little has been said or events have not taken into consideration, discussions about collaboration and city-building with youth in the suburbs to co-design a more inclusive, diverse Toronto.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this co-design to provide unique insights and answer the questions of (1) what makes a city thrive and their citizens – what supports are needed to be “inclusive” (2) insights on how to co-design a city for everyone with approaches unique to urban-core; and (3) envision a future city of Toronto that is inclusive to everyone.

Research Design

Through this research project, we plan to use informal and innovative method of co-design to tackle critical challenges and questions above. The co-designs will facilitate conversations on what makes citizens thrive in a city and discussing how cities be more inclusive in terms of diversity, accessibility, youth and geographically. This project will bring diverse communities and stakeholders who prioritize their involvement in community building process and engagement, an aspect often underrepresented in city-building discussions.

Ethical Research Considerations

In developing a framework of creating an inclusive city, through youth-friendly activities - it was crucial to receive approval from the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board. Due to risks and vulnerability of working with youth without a research ethics approval, this research will be continued during my masters program as discussed in the Forthcoming and Next Steps section.

Research Framework

Prior to hosting the co-designs, a theoretical framework was crucial to provide grounding in the co-designs. During the summer of 2019, a theoretical framework was conceptualized and created through conducting a literature review, media analysis and interviews.

(1) Literature Review

The literature review consisted of two (sometimes overlapping) themes which supported the development of a theoretical framework. The consulted literature is cited in Appendix A.

- a. Community-Based Participatory Action Research
- b. Youth inclusive participatory methods in urban planning and policy

(2) Media Analysis

In order to develop a theoretical framework, a media / discourse analysis was conducted to understand the problem definition and framing of inclusive city in the public discourse. Within the Toronto context, the discourse focused on inclusivity in terms of women within urban planning, policy and governance of cities to include a gender-based lens. Further work towards inclusion of youth perspectives must be included.

(3) Interviews

This summer, I worked at the City of Toronto within the City Manager's Office in the Strategic and Corporate Policy. Looking at the high level management of the city, particularly in terms of governance and engagement, I was fortunate to work with the team leading the Special Committee on Governance. We discussed questions around: engagement in the city specifically equity-based to include voices that are not typically represented in consultations and proposing governance towards building an inclusive city beyond from diverse representation. Further interviews will be conducted with academics, non-for-profits, and urban planners.

Forthcoming and Next Steps

In September 2019, I began my Master of Science in Planning at the University of Toronto. One of the major requirements in my program is the Critical Issues Paper (similar to the Masters Thesis) due towards at the end of my final year. The topic I wish to pursue is developing a framework towards building an inclusive city in Toronto. I am grateful for the time spent with the school of cities fellowship as it has allowed me to explore my research interests and conduct preliminary work for my CIP, both within a theoretical and the public discourse. I intend to further expand the literature review and analytical framework developed during my time as a fellow with the School of Cities. As this stage, I am receiving input from professors and individuals with expertise on this topic, further revising and redeveloping the proposal submitted to the School of Cities. Following the submission and approval of the ethics review, I intend to conduct the co-designs and interviews.

I would gratefully appreciate and ask that this report not be circulated beyond the executive leadership team at School of Cities until the completion of my master program in April 2021.

Appendix A: Literature Review and References

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(3a) Media Analysis: Defining, Problem Setting and Framing Inclusive Cities

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