

ABSTRACT

Gentrification is a phenomenon that most urban planners are intimately familiar with

1. INTRODUCTION

Gentrification – the process of transforming predominately working-class neighbourhoods or vacant areas in the inner city into ones that are dominated by higher-educated, middle-class residents – is certainly one of the most popular topics for urban researchers. Critics of gentrification claim that in addition to rent and housing price increases, as more affluent individuals move in, the amenities that they desire essentially ‘price out’ working class residents. Those in favour, however contend that gentrification fosters social mixing and revitalizes inner city neighbourhoods that have been blighted.

On one hand, gentrification stabilizes declining areas, increases property values, reduces vacancy rates, increases local tax bases, and reduces urban sprawl (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, 196). On the other, it creates community conflict, reduces affordable housing, increases homelessness, creates unsustainable speculative property price increases, creates housing demand on surrounding poor areas, and results in a loss of social diversity (from socially disparate to rich ghettos) (Ibid). This research will examine socioeconomic indicators over the course of 30 years in neighbourhoods that were identified as having gentrified in the 1970s (Ley 1986), and compare them to other inner city neighbourhoods, suburban neighbourhoods, and the entire CMA. Refer to Figure-1 and Figure-2 for the location of the aforementioned gentrified census tracts in Montreal and Toronto.

Gentrification was first examined in the 1960s in London and several east coast cities in the United States. Since this period, researchers and planners alike have been striving to achieve a balance between neighbourhood revitalization and displacement.

Forty-plus years of observing gentrification have shown that it is indeed a very powerful tool for urban revitalization (Newman and Wyly 2006, 26). As a result, under the current neo-liberal paradigm, gentrification appeals to many as the “ideal solution to urban decay; and the state, which in the past has been hesitant to encourage gentrification, has since taken a much more aggressive role by acting as a catalyst to encourage gentrification” (Ibid). Indeed, many see it as the panacea, since gentrification can be used as a ‘hands-off’ urban renewal policy. Freeman (2002) claimed that gentrification is a natural succession in the inner city housing market and explained that low-income households are actually less likely to move out because they enjoy and benefit from living in a neighbourhood that has moved up in social standing.