The Temporal and Spatial Aspects of Homeless Social Capital: Using Critical Cartographic Methods to Impact the Health and Wellbeing of the Homeless

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Abstract

   The trajectory of homelessness is the movement of people across place/space as a function of time. Maps and mapmaking can play a vital role in understanding this phenomenon, as well as other related socio-geographic processes including social capital. Maps offer a window into critical micro-geographies of homelessness in everyday life that contextualize the interconnection between people, place and movement for the homeless, and through mapping, a way to visualize the trajectory of homelessness. In this presentation we discuss the preliminary findings from S. Cook's doctoral research on the temporal and spatial aspects of homeless social capital. The study, currently being conducted in Kelowna, B.C., uses participatory cartographic methods to examine the relationship between homeless social capital and place in the urban environment. In it, we advance a post-structural view of maps and mapmaking that theorizes maps as process, through which critical hidden geographies of homelessness in everyday life can be made visible.

Background and Relevance

The Trajectory of Homelessness

   People are generally not born homeless. The process begins with the circumstance people are born into and ends with the street. Commonly from troubled beginnings (Bantchevska, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Glebova, & Slesnick, 2008; Lee & Schreck, 2005), the descent into homelessness often starts at a young age. Homelessness has been described as a process by which people "drift down" (Benda, 1987) or "spiral downward" (Grigsby, Bauman, Gregorish & Roberts-Gray, 1990). As the end point in an escalating process of marginalization (Rowe & Wolch, 1990), homelessness shapes and is shaped by homeless people's placed-based relationships.

   For the homeless, place is both highly relational and has great significance in terms of the quality and quantity of material aid they can acquire (Marr, DeVerteuil & Snow, 2009). According to Herbert and Beckett (2010), "strong connections to place are a constituent part of the human condition" (p. 242), that is even more essential for the homeless because place is more directly connected to their daily survival. For the homeless "place matters for material survival, in profound and direct ways" (Marr et al., 2009, p. 308), which has everything to do

with their relationships with others.

Social Capital

As a framework for speaking about the benefits acquired through affiliations and networks of support, the concept of social capital has been the focus of much interest and debate by practitioners, policymakers and researchers in recent years (Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). In the context of this paper, social capital means the ability of individuals to acquire benefits via membership in a particular social network or other form of social structure (Whittaker & Banwell, 2002). Despite the importance of social capital to the psychological and material wellbeing of people, even the most resource poor populations, little is known about how it functions for the homeless (Fitzpatrick, Irwin, LaGory, & Ritchey, 2007; Townley, Miller, & Kloos, 2013). As a "geographic concept" (Mohan & Mohan, 2002, p. 193), understanding social capital requires exploring the link between people and place (Holt, 2008; Lang & Hornburg, 2010).

The interconnectedness between place and homeless people's survival through access to social capital is problematized in the urban context through the spatial conflict that exists between the homeless and forces of urban governance that often contest their presence in the public realm. Daily survival, an obvious driver in homeless people's efforts to maximize social capital, becomes about place seeking and negotiating increasingly constrained territory in an effort to retain socio-spatial connections. In light of this tension and given that access to place is a fundamental ingredient in the production of social capital (Mohan & Mohan, 2002), more needs to be known about the place-social capital nexus of homelessness.

Mapping the Geography of Social Capital of the Homeless

Maps are powerful tools that can profoundly affect the world (Harley, 1989a; Kitchin, Dodge, & Perkins, 2011b). As rhetorical graphic images that function as a form of basic communication (Dodge, Kitchin & Perkins, 2011), maps shape how we understand and interact with the world. The power of maps has traditionally been used by controlling interests to extend dominance over space and "exercise power over existence" (Wood, 2010, p. 22-23), and further subjugate marginalized populations (Crampton, 2001). Despite their long history as tools of oppression, maps are increasingly being reclaimed as instruments for emancipation and social justice (Harley, 1989a/b), through which the act of mapping by marginalized groups becomes a form of resistance (Kwan, 2007). The interest in taking back the power represented in maps has led to the call for new mapping practices that challenge the status quo (Kitchin et. al., 2011a/b) and use the force behind the map to effect social change (Wood, 2010). Supported by a new view of spatiality that "move[s] away from physical objects and forms towards the variety of territorial, political and social processes that flow through space" (Corner, 1999, p. 94), through these new uses, maps and mapmaking is reimagined as process or practice.

The current research uses participatory mapping with chronically homeless people to map the geography of social capital of the homeless. The approach is a blend of social and mobility mapping (Chambers, 2009), and it builds upon the idea that maps facilitate storytelling (Caquard, 2011). Through participatory mapping, homeless social capital can be spatially and temporally contextualized. This information can be used to inform, create and/or revise policies and current practices to make them more sensitive to the interconnectedness of these variables, and the impact on homeless survival through access to social capital.

Methods and Data

The broader methodological framework for this research is Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR is increasingly used as an umbrella term to encompass a variety of different research approaches all structured around the elements of *participation, research, and action* (Minkler, 2005). CBPR aims to be an empowering approach to research through which the researcher actively shares power and knowledge, utilizes community resources and builds on individual and community capacity, and works to achieve a balance between research and action (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Minkler, 2005). As a research strategy, CBPR is often used with vulnerable populations (Stacciarini, 2009). In this study participation is actualized through the use of an advisory committee composed of formerly homeless individuals that guides the research.

The research uses participatory mapping to understand the relationship between homeless social capital, place, and time, an approach that can be applied to homelessness globally. At its broadest level, participatory mapping involves the creation of maps by local communities and it has been used for a variety of purposes, including mobility and social mapping (Chambers, 2006). Having homeless people draw their own maps instead of relying on pre-formed maps has the benefit of providing a clearer picture of what is most important to the individual (Townley, Kloos, & Wright, 2009). Through this approach, we use maps as a way to tell stories about the hidden, embodied meanings of place (Caquard, 2011).

Visible homelessness in Kelowna is on the rise, as it is across Canada (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016). In Kelowna, estimates suggest that upwards of 230 people are homeless on a given night (HPS Kelowna, 2016), which per capita, is on par with large urban centers like Vancouver and Calgary. Within the municipal boundaries of Kelowna, there are several distinct spatial clusters of homeless people that occupy different locations. By conducting individual level participatory mapping sessions with members of different geographically based clusters, we are able to assess the unique socio-spatial footprint for each cluster. By then examining how this socio-spatial footprint changes overtime and in relation to other individuals/clusters, we are able to tap into the temporality of homelessness and in turn, better understand the trajectory of homelessness.

Four sources of data are generated through individual participatory mapping sessions: demographic information, accounting of social capital (type and source of support), sketch maps of homeless people's social capital, and when possible,

transcripts of mapping sessions. Conversion mixed data analysis is used to "quantitiz[e] narrative data" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 269). This involves geocoding locations on sketch maps and inputting them into a geo-spatial database. We are also working with staff/managers at the City of Kelowna to develop a typology of space upon which to layer participants' maps that builds upon Snow & Mulcahy's (2001) conceptualization of homeless urban space (prime, marginal and transitional). Layering, as the "super imposition of various independent layers one upon the other to produce a heterogeneous and 'thickened surface'" (Corner, 1999, p. 95), is used to compare and contrast the socio-spatial footprint of different geographic clusters and overlay homeless maps onto the tripartite typology of space. Once findings are compiled, we will hold separate workshops with the advisory committee and broader homelessness stakeholders to leverage findings to develop policy and service delivery recommendations.

Preliminary Results

Currently we are in the early stages of fieldwork that commenced in November 2016. In order to get at what are seasonal fluctuations in homelessness in Kelowna, we are conducting one full year of fieldwork commencing in fall 2016 and concluding summer 2017. Prior to commencing participatory mapping, a significant amount of time has been spent developing relationships in the field.

As determined in consultation with key homelessness stakeholders, there are multiple locations in Kelowna where participatory mapping participants are being drawn from, many within the downtown core. In order to more broadly explore how maps in their many forms can be used to understand homeless social capital, we have expanded our approach to include macro-level asset mapping with groups of homeless people in different locales. Preliminary findings suggest the existence of different typologies of chronic homelessness based upon where people locate themselves in the urban environment and the breadth of their geographic footprint. Ultimately, this approach can lead to new practical uses for participatory mapping as a strength-based way of assessing the appropriateness and timing of interventions based upon what homeless people actually do day-to-day, as opposed to their perceived weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

This study is the only one of its kind to use participatory cartographic methods to map the social capital of the homeless. Beyond its academic significance, findings have direct, practical relevance to an emerging social crisis of urban public space impacting municipalities across Canada. As a result, there are broad policy and service delivery implications. By normalizing spaces of homelessness and providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between people, place, and mobility in homeless people's daily struggle to survive, mapping the trajectory of homelessness can play an important role in the formation of effective and humane social policy, as well as in the development of meaningful, socio-geographically relevant interventions for the homeless. Viewing homelessness

through a socio-spatial lens assists policy makers in predicting in "which cases people-or place-based policy, or some combination, is likely to work best" (Lang & Horburg, 2010, p 13).

Homeless people's actions are rarely framed in ways that emphasize the rationality or agency implicit in their choices, especially given the context in which they occur. Such constructions do little to advance an understanding of the complexities of the socio-spatial realities of homelessness. Given that most constructions of the homeless tend to portray them one dimensionally - "as deviants or victims" (Cloke, May & Johnsen, 2008, p. 244), research on the geography of social capital of the homeless provides an important and often absent perspective. The resulting approach offers a new way of understanding and contextualizing social behaviour that speaks to homeless people's motivation, why they do what they do, and emphasizes the relational and spatial. Having a more accurate, informed view of homeless people's agency is integral because our ability to understand and assist them is impaired if we can't move beyond "mainstream middle class assumptions and world views" (Hodgetts, Stolte, Nikora, & Groot, 2012, p. 1223).

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