

# Negotiating Spaces of Incorporation:

Community Development and Immigration in Canada, the US and Denmark

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Sheryl-Ann Simpson  
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Sheryl-Ann Simpson, Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

Community development is in many ways the work in between physical planning and individual social work. It is social planning ideally aimed at improving an area through sustainable methods that increase equity and deepen democracy. In common with other fields, the day-to-day practices of community development are shaped and conditioned by the context and circumstances of the work, alongside the history of the field.

In the contemporary moment, the context of community development has shifted dramatically as much of the social welfare infrastructure is dismantled in favor of privatized and market-based solutions to social questions (Hackworth, 2007). Additionally, a rescaling of competencies (Brenner, 2004) leads to local community development organizations taking on a larger share of responsibility for social welfare. These are some of the key characteristics of neoliberalization (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Hackworth, 2007). Yet there is still little research on the intermediary role of community development organizations connecting the shifts in government policies and programs to changes in community development practices and strategies, and further to impacts on residents served by community development organizations.

This dissertation addresses this gap in understanding by examining the intermediary role of community development organizations through a comparison of case neighborhoods in three distinct country contexts: Spence and parts of the West End in Winnipeg, Canada; Olneyville in Providence, US; and Nørrebro in Copenhagen, Denmark. By comparing community development in three distinct contexts, the study also contributes to the literature addressing place in incorporation, examining how immigrant residents are incorporated into a political economy at the local scale. Additionally the study contributes to the growing literature that examines the impact of processes of neoliberalization on community development organizations' roles in the incorporation of immigrant residents (Theodore and Martin, 2007; Trudeau and Veronis, 2009; Martin, 2010). Finally, a relational approach to the comparisons in this study, focuses on understanding the quality of an object, or set of relationships, and the work they do in context (Ward, 2010). In this case, on the work of country-specific circumstances in shaping and conditioning the strategies used by community development organizations with relation to states and migrant communities.

In terms of relationships with immigrant residents, in both Canadian and Danish case neighborhoods the on-average greater resources for community development with immigrant residents supports greater professionalization within organizations, and correlates with limited participation of immigrant residents beyond client roles. In the US case neighborhood a general

lack of resources specifically correlates with greater immigrant resident participation and organizations relying on residents to play stronger and more varied roles within organizations, including leadership positions. As such the organizations with greater resources are also least likely to provide opportunities for residents to engage deeply in spatial negotiations or to facilitate an active incorporation into local political economies.

Residents in all three cases, however, display a strong sense of commitment to place, and are finding ways to create the places they need and want, albeit in often temporary ways or at quite intimate scales within their own homes and cultural communities. Immigrant residents also have critiques of the places in which they live, and of the resources available to them. These critiques are, however, infused with a sense of care and attachment. Critiques relate to residents' desire to gain greater access to local political economies, and focus on their ability – or lack thereof – to increase their participation in negotiations within and around spaces of incorporation.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sheryl-Ann Simpson was born in Toronto, and earned a B.Sc. (Ag) in Animal Biology from McGill University in Montréal. She also earned a M.A. in Community Development and Planning from Clark University in Worcester MA. During the course of dissertation research she also received a Luigi Einaudi Graduate Fellowship from the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, a Sage Diversity Fellowship from the Graduate School of Cornell University, and a Doctoral Student Research Award from the Understanding Canada: Canadian Studies Program of the Government of Canada.

In between and during school she has been privileged to be employed by, volunteer at and/or just hang out with a variety of groups working to increase equity and justice, and make the places where we live, work and play more healthy, beautiful and fun. Some of these have been non-profits, some radical, some community-based, and on occasion a curious mix of all three. These include Withrow Park School Garden, The Hot Pink Stockings, Total Fabrication, Adsum House, The HOPE Coalition, Rock Paper Scissors Collective, and The Stop Community Food Centre.

To everyone who was generous enough to share their stories with me.  
Once again, I hope that I can do them justice.  
And to everyone who is living today on soil that is not their own.

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