Redevelopment and Equity: Examining the Impacts of Revitalization in a Resurgent Detroit

By Julie Mah, IMFG Postdoctoral Fellow
Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto
Outline of talk

• Brief context
• Overview of select regeneration initiatives
• Impacts of revitalization
• Planning for spatial justice: Broadening equitable development approaches
• Q&A
Research question & methodology

What are the social and housing impacts of recent regeneration initiatives in Greater Downtown Detroit?

Mixed-methods approach

Study area = Greater Downtown Detroit
Dot Density Map of Racial distribution in Detroit Region (2015)
From 1950 – 2010, Detroit lost over 1.1 million residents, while the surrounding suburban areas gained over 1.9 million residents.
Completed & planned demolitions (2014 to March 2017)

Source: Detroit Building Authority
The face of Detroit’s urban landscape

Source: Bing maps Bird’s eye view – Near Motorcity Casino (Trumbull & Ash)
Campus Martius
Dequindre Cut greenway
Qline LRT
This reinvestment has been fueled by:

- Property tax abatements (e.g. Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (NEZ); Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act; Commercial Rehabilitation Act)
- Grants from private philanthropic foundations
- Anchor Strategy – to revitalize Midtown Detroit
Property tax abatements

Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (NEZ):

1. New and Rehab (NR) programs;
2. Homestead (H) program

Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act (OPRA)
Commercial Rehabilitation Act (CRA)
Private foundation grants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>No. of Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$45,523,640</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$12,312,125</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$19,670,354</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$19,055,230</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>$23,066,198</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$131,575,564*</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$12,703,770</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$263,906,881</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- In declining cities, revitalization helped by private philanthropic organizations
- Kresge – which is a $3.8B foundation – took the lead in funding Detroit Future City, U3 Anchor Strategy and M-1 (now called Qline) LRT
- Woodward Corridor Initiative (WCI) launched in 2010

Ford Foundation’s total grants awarded in Detroit (2006-2018) = $272.4 million (273 grants)
New homeowners: Forgivable loan up to $20,000

Existing homeowners: up to $5,000

New Renters: $2,500 for first year’s rent & additional $1,000 for second year

Existing renters: $1,000
Positive development activity in Detroit (2010-2015)
Socio-demographic change (2010-2015)

Newcomers tend to be young, white, professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DOWNTOWN (5207 CT)</th>
<th>STUDY AREA</th>
<th>DETROIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHANGE IN WHITE POPULATION</td>
<td>+69.4%</td>
<td>+62.5%</td>
<td>+18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHANGE IN BLACK POPULATION</td>
<td>+4.6%</td>
<td>+7.4%</td>
<td>-11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHANGE IN 20-34 YEAR OLDS</td>
<td>+40.9%</td>
<td>+38.8%</td>
<td>+1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHANGE IN TOTAL POPULATION</td>
<td>+22.4%</td>
<td>+18.3%</td>
<td>-8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% OF PROFESSIONALS &amp; MANAGEMENT (2010)</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% OF PROFESSIONALS &amp; MANAGEMENT (2015)</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2010, black population made up 69% of the downtown. In 2015, black population made up 59% of the downtown.
For many critical scholars, the term “regeneration” is seen as a euphemism for gentrification (Porter & Shaw, 2009).

But do conceptual boundaries between regeneration and gentrification exist? If so, when does regeneration become gentrification?
Impacts of revitalization

- Loss of deeply affordable housing
- Rising rents
- Displacement (direct & indirect)
- Increasing housing cost burdens
- Expiry of subsidized contracts
- Cultural displacement
- Political displacement
Conversion & Displacement:

The Griswold was a project-based Section 8 subsidized building that housed over 100 low-income seniors in downtown Detroit.
The Griswold is now The Albert
Evictions data in Detroit

36th District Court: Over 232,000 eviction cases (2009-2015). Average is about 33,000 cases a year.

Evictions can be viewed as a form of gentrification-induced direct displacement or pre-gentrification or non-gentrification forms of displacement (Chum, 2015; Sims, 2016).
Spatio-temporal patterns of eviction filings

Downtown

Evictions LQs 2009
- 0.00 - 0.95
- 0.96 - 1.00
- 1.01 - 3.00
- 3.01 - 14.86

Spatio-temporal patterns of eviction filings
Spatio-temporal patterns of eviction filings

Downtown

Spatio-temporal patterns of eviction filings
Tenant moves out of the downtown (2012-2014)
(re)conceptualizing displacement

• Undertheorization of displacement processes (Davidson, 2008; Davidson & Lees, 2010)

• Going beyond spatial understandings of displacement (Davidson, 2009)

“Put simply, displacement understood purely as spatial dislocation tells us very little about why it matters. We miss the very space/place tensions (Taylor, 1999) that make space a social product (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26).”

(Davidson, 2009: 223)
Marcuse’s (1985) conceptualization of displacement

- Direct last-resident: "displacement of a household from the unit that it currently occupies"
  - Physical (e.g. landlord cuts off the heat or water)
  - Economic (e.g. landlord raises the rent)

- Indirect
  - Exclusionary Displacement pressure
    - Existing businesses & residents may be under displacement pressure, as stores, services and restaurants change to cater to the tastes of more affluent newcomers.
Lived experiences of indirect displacement

- Diminishing social space
- Loss of sense of place and inability to claim rights to social space
- Class remake & changes in retail and amenities
- Feelings of exclusion
- Fears of direct displacement
Planning for spatial justice

- Broadening equitable development approaches to include understanding of indirect displacement
- Identify spaces of belonging by asking: Where do non-gentrifying residents feel most at home and connected to the community?
- These spaces could then be protected and enhanced through use of value capture tools (e.g. community benefits agreements)
• When revitalization efforts are successful in generating reinvestment and growth, they may also result in severe negative consequences for vulnerable populations.

• Planners can be more proactive in anticipating these impacts to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed. The question of ‘who benefits’ should be a central concern for planners and policymakers.

• Indirect displacement holds serious implications for equitable planning initiatives.
Thank you!

julie.mah@utoronto.ca