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'Everywhere they are trying to hide poverty. I hate it!': Spatial practices of the urban poor in Calgary, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Globalizing cities such as Calgary, Canada's center of the oil and gas industry, are confronted with increasing socio-spatial inequalities and uneven development. The aim of this paper is to comprehend poverty in the disadvantaged area of Greater Forest Lawn (GFL) in Calgary through everyday spatial practices of the urban poor and to examine how these practices are affected by urban developments in the area. We provide an in-depth ethnographic account of everyday routines and social conventions of people experiencing poverty in GFL. Our findings reveal how spatial practices that enable poor residents in GFL to meet basic needs are precariously balanced with many intersecting social, spatial, economic, and political structures. They also portray how many residents feel new developments in the area attempt to hide the presence of poverty by oppressing the undesirable aspects associated with it. Consequently, GFL as a social space is increasingly torn between the spatial practices of those trying to cope with poverty and the urban development which imposes a spatial code of desirability and consumption. Consequently, we see urban development in the case of GFL as oppressive and recommend a shift from thinking about urban development in terms of desirability and profitability to becoming more aware of and involved in local practices. Overall, we argue that the right to the city includes the right to urban development in harmony with one's own everyday spatial practices.

1. Introduction

Globalizing cities are confronted with increasing socio-spatial inequalities and uneven development (Townshend et al., 2018; Peck, 2014; 2012). In times of austerity, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged neighborhoods are hit hardest by neoliberal urban development and funding cuts. Peck (2012) states that austerity measures offload social and environmental consequences to local communities resulting in an increasing ineptitude of government to control growing socio-spatial disparities. The city of Calgary, situated in the historically conservative and oil-rich province of Alberta, Canada, is faced with similar challenges. Since the 2019 provincial elections, after four years of center-left provincial government and increased investments in social services, Alberta is once again governed by a conservative government preparing to drastically cut back on spending, particularly in the public sector (Bellefontaine, 2019). Furthermore, due to a crisis of affordable housing (see Domaradzka, 2019; Townshend et al., 2018; Okkola & Brunelle, 2018), socio-spatial disparities in Calgary continue to increase. In the southeastern quadrant of the city lies the Greater Forest Lawn area (henceforth GFL), historically one of Calgary's most disadvantaged areas. GFL is the focus area for this ethnographic study.

Against the backdrop of austerity and growing socio-spatial disparities, academic interest in the concept 'right to the city' has grown. The right to the city is commonly understood as the right of urban inhabitants to be involved in the democratic production of urban space (Shillington, 2013). In recent years, the right to the city – a term coined by Henri Lefebvre (1991) and embraced by David Harvey (2008) – as a political and social ideal has been adopted on a global scale by governments, NGOs, and, most passionately, by grassroots social movements in their endeavors for social justice and combatting socio-spatial inequality (see Mayer, 2012; Attoh, 2011; UN-HABITAT, 2010; UNESCO, 2006). The idea of the right to the city has influenced debates concerning unequal socio-spatial transformations within cities driven by capitalist and neoliberal forces and raises the fundamental question to what extent the poor possess a right to their city.

Academic work on uneven urban development commonly focuses on understanding the characteristics and unequal outcomes of socio-spatial transformations for different groups (see Townshend et al., 2018; Sampson et al., 2002). Even though Lefebvre draws explicit attention to everyday social interactions as the main component in the production of urban space, everyday practices in poor urban neighborhoods remain less often studied than e.g. urban policy and urban

development (see Duff, 2017; Martin, 2003). The aim of this paper is, therefore, to comprehend poverty in the GFL area through everyday spatial practices of the urban poor and then to examine how these practices are affected by urban developments in the area. We provide an in-depth ethnographic account of everyday routines and social conventions of people experiencing poverty in GFL. In the findings section we first paint a detailed picture of the spatial practices of our participants in order to contextualize and understand the impacts of urban development on those practices in GFL. Our findings portray how spatial practices of poor are disrupted and oppressed by urban development in GFL. We argue the right to the city entails the right to urban development in harmony with one's own spatial practices.

2. Right to the city and urban space

In their critique on the effects of capitalism on urban spaces, both Harvey (2008) and Lefebvre (1991) advance the concept of the right to the city. Most writings represent the right to the city as referring to a freedom for urban dwellers that extends beyond a right to merely access urban resources to the collective right of citizens to exert influence over the urban processes that shape their city. Having the right to the city therefore entails the opposite of urban transformations, whether they be social, physical, or political, that are imposed upon citizens while the latter are denied the possibility to influence these transformations (Huisman, 2014). Furthermore, the right to the city does not exist in ephemeral moments of public engagement. Instead, the right to the city is negotiated in the everyday, and originates from lasting and trusting relationships between multiple actors (Pierce et al., 2016).

The idea of the right to the city should be understood vis-à-vis the changing nature of the economies of cities, widely researched in urban studies (see Peck, 2014; 2012; Florida, 2014; Zukin, 2012). From the mid-twentieth century onward, industrial economies made way for an economy built on cultural production and consumption, revolving around producing and consuming services and experiences. In contemporary capitalist societies, urban spaces are designed to promote the consumption of these services and experiences, ultimately to make a profit. As David Harvey (2008, p.1) states: *"we live in a world, after all, where the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights one can think of"*, and the quest for profit is widely regarded as the primary catalyst for increasing urban inequality (see also Peck, 2012; 2014; Kohn, 2004). According to Lefebvre (1991), urban spaces often produce services and experiences that are not affordable for or accessible to everyone, thereby denying certain groups their right to the city. Indeed, according to Lefebvre (1991), the right to the city fundamentally concerns the redistribution of products of an inherently unequal capitalist system and a reclaiming of the city by the oppressed classes. Consequently, urban space should be seen as a relational concept involved in the production and reproduction of social structures, social action, and relations of power and resistance (Kudva, 2009; Gotham, 2003; Giddens, 1991). Since urban development plays a key role in the shaping of urban space, it is also crucial to consider the ways in which urban development respects people's right to the city. Where powerful actors in urban development - such as planners, developers, and corporations - ultimately control new developments in cities, they cannot, Sharon Zukin (2012) argues, control how diverse groups experience and make sense of their city. Thus, the extent to which urban development upholds residents' right to the city depends largely on the ways in which people perceive and experience urban development and urban spaces.

There is a wide range of work that criticizes the revanchist nature of urban development because it commonly attempts to background homelessness and poverty due to their undesirability for economic development (see Dozier, 2019; Goldfischer, 2018; Speer, 2019; Collins & Blomley, 2003). Duff (2017) calls for a more explicit focus on affective dimensions of the right to the city – how the right to the city is embodied and performed in the context of everyday life. Home and

housing are considered a base from which everyday life is structured and crucial in achieving privacy, social justice and the right to the city (see Munoz, 2018; Langegger & Koester, 2016; Sparks, 2010; Klodawsky, 2009; 2006; Mifflin and Wilton, 2005). Munoz (2018) states that housing and home are currently not central in discussions on right to the city, while home is where urban dwellers are able to create stability, access urban resources, and take part in the social life and development of cities. Consequently, home and housing are fundamentally important for everyday spatial practices. Research by Klodawsky (2006; see also Hwang et al., 2011) demonstrates that particularly vulnerable groups struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse find it difficult to find housing stability in Canadian cities. In an ethnographic study among homeless in Denver, Colorado, Langegger and Koester (2016) stress the importance of having access to public urban space for marginalized groups such as the homeless. They found a ban on camping in open spaces in Denver resulted in a deprivation of the right to the city of homeless because it exposed them even more as visibly homeless due to a lack of a stable space to create a home. Research in Fresno, California (Speer 2019), finds that promoting urban aesthetics and economic development benefits middle-class consumption practices, while displacing vulnerable population such as the homeless. Simultaneously, Speer (2019) argues that the focus on urban aesthetics spawns practices of resistance, which promote collective use and re-use of urban space that is more conducive to all urban residents instead of just the middle and upper classes. Similarly, Deverteuil (2014) calls for research on urban injustices to not only focus on the punitive consequences of urban development, but to also conceive of the complex and ambiguous ways marginalized groups are supported in small scale projects and social structures that co-exist with capitalist urban restructuring.

3. Spatial practices

Since urban space is to be regarded as a social relation in larger social, economic, and political structures, it is important to consider and reflect on its meaning to different actors. Lefebvre (1991) argues that urban spaces imply a diversity of social knowledge and that they contain acts of production able to illuminate systems of oppression. A fundamental component to the production of space are spatial practices, which unfold in everyday routines, social interactions, and social conventions (Watkins, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991). Spatial practices encompass the ways in which people use and perceive space, thereby infusing space with social meaning and producing a social space (Stewart, 1995). Evidently, they do not produce a singular space but rather simultaneously produce different or even conflicting renditions of 'social space'. Social space corresponds to 'everyday discourses' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.16) which differentiate certain spaces and the spatial practices that constitute and express them. In everyday discourse, social spaces may have a fairly straightforward description and corresponding set of spatial practices. Through language, spaces such as 'parking lots', 'bedrooms', and 'grocery stores' generate what Lefebvre calls spatial codes. Even so, there is no point in emphasizing spatial codes as a way to dissect social space, simply because there is no singular spatial code for any one space. Rather, Lefebvre (1991) once more stresses the dialectical nature of spatial codification. Nevertheless, spatial codes can be deconstructed. Deconstructing spatial codes entails looking at the spatial practices that produce space as a process in which opposing forces compete to impose a spatial code. In certain spaces one might find signs or practices aiming to enforce a spatial code, which automatically indicates the existence of oppression of spatial practices conflicting with that spatial code. Arguably, well-designed and inclusive urban spaces do not require spatial codes to be forcefully imposed as they will allow for a multiplicity of spatial practices.

Similar to spatial codes, it is important to recognize that social space cannot be reduced to a singular abstract and objective form, nor should it be seen as a fixed and concrete concept. Rather, social space is the

outcome of a multiplicity of production processes, i.e. spatial practices, rooted in meanings, values, and ideas. Lefebvre (1991, p.106–107) writes that a reduction of social space results in oppression of the capacities, ideas, and values of certain groups. Therefore, spatial practices, in all their potential harmonies and contradictions, produce a social space which reflects the power dynamics and injustices embedded within social structures. Indeed, other scholars concur that space is a crucial point of reference in the production and reproduction of inequalities (Gotham, 2003; Giddens, 1991).

In times of increasing neoliberal urbanism and eroding social welfare systems (see Peck, 2012; 2014), the ways in which urban development results in forms of oppression are often reflected in consumption practices, e.g. 'the enjoyment of the fruits of production' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.73). Studies by Shaker and Rath (2019; 2017) on the consumption of specialty coffee show that consumption related to lifestyle as well as urban spaces is able to reveal ways in which people demarcate class lines. Other research suggests that urban neighborhoods with a poor or rough image are increasingly becoming sites for gentrification, tourism, and consumption (see Füller & Michel, 2014). These processes are not necessarily accompanied by a displacement of vulnerable groups, but can nevertheless cause a sense of oppression and 'loss of place' (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015), or indeed, a deprivation of marginalized groups' right to the city.

4. The case of Greater Forest Lawn

Calgary – Canada's fourth largest city – is situated in the province of Alberta on the brink of where the prairies on the East transition into the Rocky Mountains on the West. For the past century, Calgary's economic development has been characterized by a transformation from a regional center for beef and agriculture to a global center for the fossil fuel industry. Although the fossil fuel industry has enabled the city to grow and brought it much wealth, economic growth in Calgary has certainly not been linear. Dependent on global oil prices, Calgary's economy follows turbulent boom bust cycles. In times of booming oil prices the city experiences tremendous increases of capital investment, construction, wages, and immigration. However, boom cycles typically also lead to rising housing and living costs and growing social, economic, and spatial inequalities (Townshend et al., 2018). Various reports on inequality and poverty in Calgary stress that one of the most conspicuous social challenges facing the city is the growing socio-spatial polarization, which is firmly rooted in a lack of affordable non-market rental housing (Townshend et al., 2018; Okkola and Brunelle, 2018; Miller & Smart, 2011). In a report on socio-spatial polarization in Calgary, Townshend et al (2018) signal a strong decline in the share of middle-income census tracts accompanied by a rising share of low- and very-low-income tracts, increasing from 11%in 1970 to 33% in 2010. In terms of the spatial distribution of declining income, Townshend et al. (2018) identify a growing concentration of low- and very-low-income people in suburban neighborhoods, particularly in the East and Northeast of the city.

This study is set in Greater Forest Lawn in East Calgary (see Fig. 1). Approximately fifteen percent of the GFL population relies on some sort of social assistance (i.e. receives their income from government benefits), which is much higher than the rest of Calgary and the province of Alberta as a whole (Wilkins, 2019; Peterson, 2013). 'Enough for all' is Calgary's poverty reduction policy, which advocates strong, supportive and inclusive communities, sufficient income and resources for all Calgarians, and the inclusion of Indigenous in Calgary's future (Vibrant Communities Calgary, 2019). 'Enough for all' aligns with Canada's first nationwide poverty reduction policy named 'Opportunity for all' (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). Effective from 2018, the policy focuses on three pillars: dignity, opportunity and inclusion, and resilience and security. 'Opportunity for all' also sets an official measure of poverty called the Poverty Line, based on the minimum income individuals and families require to meet their basic

needs and achieve an acceptable standard of living in their communities.

Historically, the GFL area suffers from low investment by local government (Peterson, 2013), although since 1993 investments have been made in the designated 'International Avenue Business Revitalization Zone' (BRZ) along 17th Avenue Southeast. To combat the reputation of East Calgary as a haven for drugs, crime, and alcohol, the BRZ focuses on celebrating the area's rich ethno-cultural diversity. On their website (intlave.ca), 'International Avenue' (17th Avenue) is promoted as the cultural and culinary capital of Calgary. The overarching aim of the BRZ is *"to promote, improve and create a more pleasant community in which to shop and live"* (International Avenue BRZ, 2020). Over the years, the BRZ has transformed the avenue in significant ways, i.e. the implementation of a crime prevention and safety plan (increased policing and community crime watch), the demolition of a trailer park to create space for retail, land-use changes that promote retail, and a major restructuring of the avenue as part of a comprehensive transportation policy. While at first glance these changes seem to promote a safer, cleaner and more attractive environment, our findings will show that many of these changes solely benefit economic development while oppressing our participants' everyday practices. In many ways, 17th Avenue Southeast can be regarded as the commercial center and main street of the area. Always busy with cars, 17th Ave Southeast stretches from the Eastern city limits through the central part of the study area to the major roadway Deerfoot Trail in the West. A central lane is dedicated to a bus rapid transit line called MAXPurple which takes riders to the downtown area. These elements make 17th Avenue Southeast an important traffic artery. Furthermore, along the avenue many social service agencies, shops, businesses, and restaurants are located, making it an important social and economic hub.

5. Methodology

This paper is based on an ethnographic study, the core method for which was participant observation. Over a period of six months low-income residents of GFL, many of whom on social assistance, were observed in their daily lives. Considering the fluidity of participant observation, it is difficult to determine a precise sample size. However, to illustrate: encounters with 69 individuals were recorded in the field diary, approximately 30 of whom had been spoken with on a regular (weekly) basis. Observations were recorded in a handwritten field diary and subsequently logged into a digital field diary to make computer-assisted qualitative analysis possible. In addition to the participant observations, seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted with GFL community members consisting of seven men and ten women, ranging in age from twenty-six to seventy-five. While the participant sample contains individuals from a diversity of ethno-cultural backgrounds including Canadian, Indigenous, Chinese, Filipino, French-Canadian, and African, our findings focus on the similarities in spatial practices, rather than the differences. Furthermore, one focus group discussion was organized in which seventeen community members participated. The group discussion was titled 'Claim Your Space in Forest Lawn' and preliminary results of the study were used to set up a discussion about how participants view new developments in GFL. As agreed in the informed consent forms signed by all interview participants, pseudonyms were used for all participants quoted in this paper. Analysis of spatial practices followed an open coding scheme, which were later categorized into the practices described in the next section. The spatial practices were subsequently analyzed against the right to the city literature.

Deliberate efforts were made to recruit participants in an organic way. These entailed the field researcher dedicating much time to becoming a familiar face in GFL to win trust and build rapport. Volunteering at various initiatives that supported residents in meeting basic needs was an important part of the strategy. For most of the six months of fieldwork, the field researcher volunteered at: a cooking program set up to share indigenous knowledge, feed community
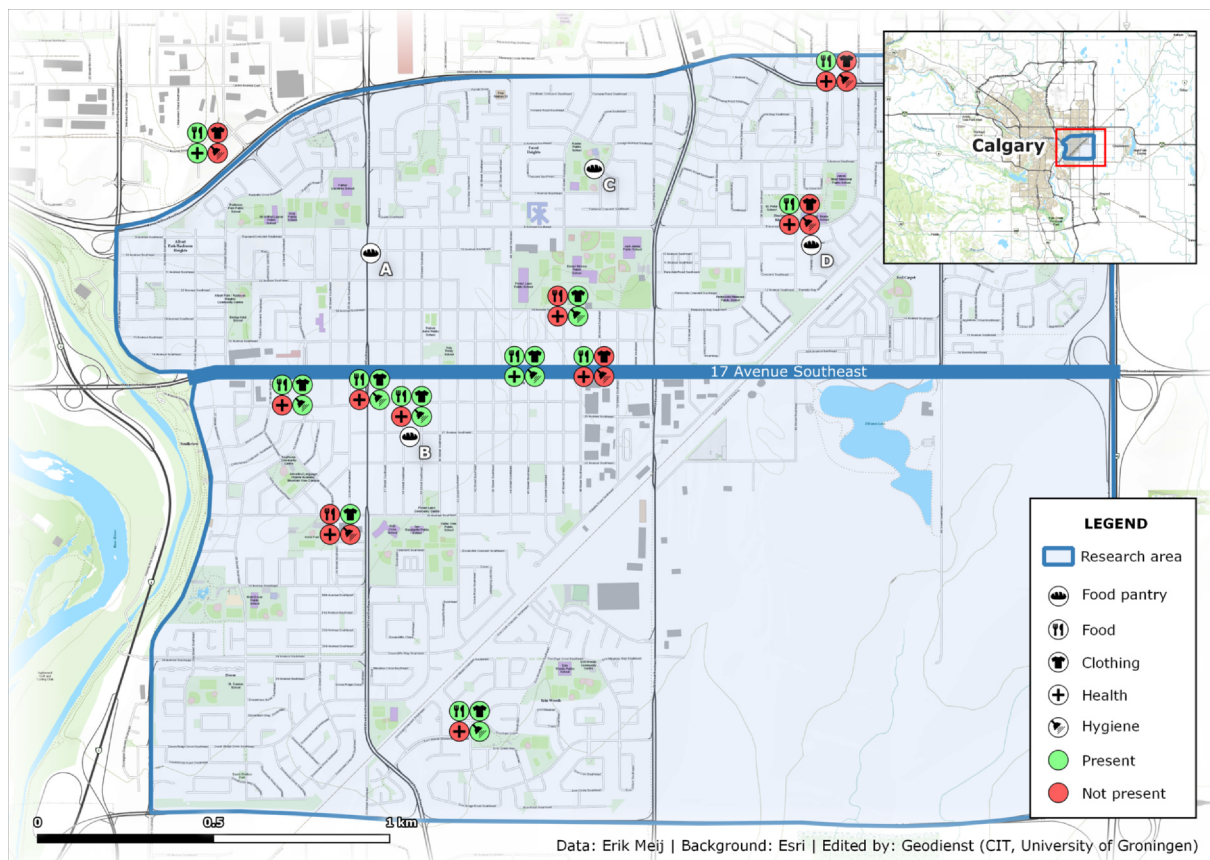
Fig. 1. The area comprising Greater Forest Lawn with the service providers and food pantries our participants frequently visit. Map design by Geodienst (CIT, University of Groningen).

members, and build community; a community-driven network of free food pantries to support residents struggling to meet food needs; a free shower program serving community members without ready access to sanitation; and an activist group consisting of members with lived experience of poverty. Traversing the boundaries of GFL, the latter group advocates the views and needs of people facing poverty citywide. Considering the principal aim of ethnography to give voice to excluded and marginalized groups (Ellis et al., 2011), we decided to foreground the spatial practices (everyday routines, social interactions, and social conventions) of a group of individuals struggling to meet their basic needs, specifically food security, shelter, and hygiene. Considering these factors, individuals who were homeless or became homeless over the course of the study were also included, although most participants were housed. We refer to this group of people living below the poverty line and struggling to meet basic needs as 'the urban poor' (see Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018).

6. Spatial practices in GFL: The struggle to meet basic needs

In the following section we describe the spatial practices of participants, comprising participants' daily routines, social interactions, and social conventions. The daily routines of all participants revolve around getting by, i.e. meeting basic needs. For most participants who receive social assistance (income support) we found that almost their entire income is put toward rent. Subtract the rent from the total income and for most, there is little money, if any, left to be able to afford anything else – including groceries. As a consequence, many participants are so absorbed by attempting to meet the most basic of needs, such as food, hygiene, and housing, that there is simply not enough time or energy in a day to start to pursue a better future, i.e. employment or educational opportunities. For readability, the section is divided into four

subsections discussing practices which emerge from the analysis as the most defining for the daily lives of our participants: food practices, housing practices, mobility practices, and the social dynamics that revolve around coping, exclusion, and competition.

6.1. Food practices

Janis and David shared their weekly schedule with us, which is predominantly determined by visiting places in the GFL area that offer food and other basic needs.

David: "Our weekly schedule is dictated by finding places to take a shower and places to eat. (…) We often walk four or five hours a day to visit all the places where they offer food or showers. (…) Most days we manage. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we come to the food center, Fridays we go to the arena for showers… Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays they have meals at the church."
Janis: "Yeah, but Saturdays are the worst! Nothing is open on Saturdays. We hardly ever eat on Saturday."

The meals at the Food Centre and church are only offered once a day. The couple explained how they carry as many leftovers as they can to ensure they can have two or even three meals on most days of the week. Similar stories were shared by more participants, as well as observed by the field researcher. For most participants, taking leftovers from free community meals and food programs is absolutely necessary to meet an acceptable level of food security. It is also a time-consuming process due to traveling and the time required to partake in the programs. Storing leftovers was a complicated process, in particular for participants who were experiencing homelessness at the time of this. For instance, David explained how keeping perishable food items

during summer is almost completely impossible due to the absence of refrigeration. In winter the cold temperatures can help to keep food frozen, although the abundant wildlife in and around the city also provides challenges to this way of storing food: *"One night we brought some fried chicken back to the tent and buried it under a pile of snow. The next morning we couldn't find the chicken, but we did find chicken bones scattered around the site. Those damn coyotes had found our stash and ate the chicken!"*

Janis and David's story illustrates the complexity of the basic needs struggles that many of the participants face. Each individual and household faces a different set of challenges in different socio-cultural contexts in terms of meeting basic needs. Challenges in one domain unavoidably pose challenges in another. The difficulty to meet basic needs for Calgary's low-income population is widely recognized by municipal government and non-profit organizations combating poverty. GFL's many resources and programs designed to aid people experiencing poverty to meet basic needs are a testimony to this awareness. To most participants, however, the resources and programs make it possible to only just meet basic needs. Moving beyond basic needs to work on a better future is hardly an option.

6.2. Mobility practices

All of our participants who rely on public transit as their main mode of transportation describe using it as a time-consuming and frustrating process. Participants mentioned poor connections, delays, and poorly accessible stops as their main frustrations. The area has seen many changes in terms of public transit since the construction of the bus rapid transit lane on 17th Avenue. Most participants detest the changes - in particular the construction of the new central bus lane. Tina, a woman in her sixties, explains how there used to be more bus stops located along 17th Avenue. For Tina, who, like some of the other participants, has impaired mobility, fewer bus stops means that it is a lot harder to walk to the nearest stop. Additionally, the bus stops are now located in between busy car lanes, meaning participants have to cross the street before arriving at the stop. Traffic lights also do not seem to favor pedestrians on 17th Avenue. Many participants described missing the bus while waiting for the light to change.

Dolly rather accurately summed up participants' frustrations with public transit in GFL.

"The bus routes… [Calgary Transit] say it's easier. I say F-no! Ha ha. They say they have made it easier, but it is actually harder. They made the

center lane but only half the buses use it, the other half still use the regular

lanes. So it's like, what's the point? You are not decongesting traffic and now

you have this meridian that keeps cars from turning and people have to

cross all the time. (…) It's a waste of money. It has actually made it worse. It

has made it harder for pedestrians. Harder for people in wheelchairs and

walkers. And it's even harder for vehicles! Like, did they pay attention to people

who use it? Did they ask anybody?"

Dolly's explanation demonstrates how participants feel the changes to public transit are imposed on them, without taking their experiences into account. As a result, some participants refrain from using public transit altogether. Such is the case for Joan, who claimed she walks everywhere by choice because it keeps her healthy. She also expressed that it limits her options to access support resources offered within her neighborhoods. When the field researcher probed her if her reluctance to use public transit really was by choice, indeed to 'stay healthy', or

that there perhaps was another motivation for not using public transit, she admitted that the low-income transit pass at a price of twelve dollars per month was simply too expensive for her. Generally, participants who refrain from using public transit remain within the GFL area during the course of a typical week. Therefore, regardless of their true motives for not using public transit, the fact that participants prefer to not use transit places a renewed emphasis on support and resource provision *within and between* the neighborhoods. Because the bus rapid transit line in the center of 17th avenue predominantly promotes to get riders to the downtown area, and makes fewer stops than the traditional bus line, it does not benefit participants who wish to travel within the GFL area.

6.3. Housing practices

Because all participants in this study rely on some form of income support, they spend almost their entire income on housing. For many participants this creates extremely precarious housing situations. Incidental costs related to health care, education, fines, or even mundane issues such as birthdays can cause a month's rent to be missed. Over the course of the fieldwork multiple participants drifted from being housed to homelessness. Becoming homeless is accompanied by serious risks, especially during the harsh winters in Calgary. It is therefore striking how some of the participants who had experienced or were experiencing homelessness expressed their preference for rough sleeping over staying in shelters, most of which are located in the downtown area. They explain how, to them, downtown represents a very insecure environment, because police frequently arrest the homeless loitering near office buildings, but more importantly because they perceive the downtown shelters and service organizations as a very competitive environment. Carole and Tina both described how, in the shelter, they used to sleep on a chair with their legs pressing down in their boots, only to prevent the boots from being stolen while they were sleeping. Furthermore, many participants suffer from various forms of trauma and related mental health issues which impact their capacity to stay in large groups, such as in shelters downtown. Janis recounted how she clung on to a man to guide her through her time in the shelter, only to realize later that he was isolating and abusing her for money to buy drugs and alcohol. Janis' story illustrates how people's vulnerabilities are ruthlessly exploited in competitive environments such as the downtown shelters.

Those participants that did have housing for extended periods of time often express unhappiness with their living circumstances. Multiple participants lived in rooming houses during the study. Although some had no complaints, the majority experienced problems regarding other tenants, the relationship with their landlord, or finding peace and privacy in their home. Some participants mentioned sharing a house with people in abusive relationships or with persons battling addictions or mental health issues, all of which make for a problematic and unstable living situation. Participants also referred to landlords who failed to take care of the wellbeing of their tenants e.g. by taking a long time to fix broken pipes, by not dealing with mold issues appropriately, or by being negligent in terms of the overall upkeep of the house. Most participants experience a sense of frustration regarding a lack of peace and privacy within their home. Some share how they do not have a key to their own room and therefore do not feel safe leaving their belongings there. Amy expressed how she felt she had no choice but to cohabit with an older couple to share housing costs. In exchange for a discount on rent, Amy agreed to provide informal care for the elderly couple. For Amy this arrangement eventually became too intense to handle. She describes how the lack of privacy triggered old mental health issues to surface, which caused her to temporarily move to a local hotel. Staying at the hotel cost her all the money she had managed to save from sharing the room with the elderly couple. Eventually, at serious risk of becoming homeless, she moved back in with her ex-husband with whom she admits she has a very troubled and

unhealthy relationship.

"I had a difficult time finding a place for myself. That's why I'm back with [my ex-husband] now. I just didn't know where to look or who to talk to. (…) What I liked about the [hotel] was that I had a space of my own and had control over it, you know? That I didn't have to let anyone in, and the hotel staff backing me up on that. Not letting anyone up without my permission I mean".

Amy's story displays the impossible dilemmas many of the participants face regarding their housing situation. Generally, their housing practices show that our participants are exposed to a complexity of vulnerabilities in the struggle to find adequate housing. We found how mental health problems in particular can be exacerbated due to precarious housing situations. Furthermore, due to the (perceived) lack of housing options, participants are prone to becoming victims of questionable landlords, exposing them to even greater risks of becoming homeless, for example.

We also have to consider the challenges that Calgary's climate poses in terms of shelter for the homeless participants. During an extremely cold spell mid-January 2020, temperatures remained well below minus 20 degrees Celsius for over a week (see Fig. 2). Some of the homeless in the GFL area indicated to stay within the GFL area and sleep rough, because they do not feel welcome in the downtown shelters as they rarely stay there and are consequently treated hostile by the other people staying there. Other participants refer to the common practice of strategically committing a petty crime in order to have shelter in jail for the freezing nights. During the mid-January cold spell many service providers in the GFL area shut their doors, forcing some people to take their chances by sleeping rough.

6.4. Social practices

GFL residents facing poverty exchanged stories and experiences among themselves, which instills a sense of solidarity and fosters reciprocal emotional support which is essential to participants' manners of coping with poverty. Furthermore, important forms of local knowledge are constructed within the community. In some cases, this local knowledge is very tangible information regarding the extensive and therefore sometimes incomprehensible system of resources and services in the area, e.g. which places serve free meals on which days or which agencies offer free haircuts. Participants also pass on more informal forms of local knowledge like which businesses along 17th Avenue will open their washrooms to the public, or which restaurants will allow people to have a meal on credit in case they are short on money.

In other instances, the local knowledge shared between participants

Fig. 2. 17th Avenue SE in Greater Forest Lawn, Calgary during a cold spell (photo by author).

refers explicitly to the social conventions that govern life in GFL. During an interview, Paul, an indigenous man, explained how one needs to be able to 'play a role' in tense social situations that can arise in the area. There are several gangs active in the area, including indigenous gangs. Paul explained how in brief encounters on the streets he wants to convey that he is to be respected, i.e. not to be harassed.

Paul: "I used to be involved in the gangs here. I was like the poster boy of an
indigenous gang member (laughs)! (…) Not anymore. I am trying to take care of my family now. Keep them safe, you know? (…) There are desperate
people here that will rob you if you show weakness. That's why you have to show they can't mess with you. Yeah. I have a look for that.(laughs)"
Interviewer: "You, you look at someone a certain way? To scare them?"
Paul: "Yeah. Yeah. Well. You know. Back off! The look in someone's eyes will tell you
if they're real or not. You can tell if someone has gone through serious shit."

During a walk, the field researcher and Paul encountered a group of other indigenous males walking on the sidewalk. Paul made a quick hand gesture, extending his arm with his palm facing the ground. The field researcher inquired about the meaning of the gesture. Paul replied *"I told them that I am Blackfoot. From the plains."* Many similar types of encounters were observed that illustrate how participants draw on local knowledge and identities to negotiate safety.

To participants who grew up in GFL this local knowledge is instilled from an early age, as David described during an interview. David grew up in one of the now demolished trailer parks in GFL. He was a shy child, and often bullied because of it. Additionally, he comes from a family of bikers that has an intimidating reputation in the area. David describes how from an early age he has demonstrated an awareness of local social identities that provides him safety from within his family network, but which simultaneously isolates him from his peers. His story reveals the beneficial and harmful sides to local knowledge.

"So… What I did was… Whenever I was bullied or beaten by other kids, I would just
run home as fast as I could! Because when they saw, they knew. When they saw
where I lived they usually left me alone. That was one of my ways to keep safe."

David's quote illustrates how local knowledge, i.e. on different groups and identities, has two-sided and often dividing effects. On the one hand, he utilizes his family's reputation in the area and the biker identity to achieve a sense of safety. On the other hand, this same identity isolates him from most other residents who do not belong to the group of bikers. This way, the ethnic and cultural diversity of GFL creates a complex social space in which different groups develop different practices to cope with poverty.

Some participants suggested that different ethnic groups are in competition with each other over the limited resources available in the area. Our findings underline this notion that the restrictive nature of service provision to be an important source for exclusion from basic needs services as well as competition between different groups in GFL. Participants explain how services and resources tend to target specific groups defined by indicators such as age, gender, marital status, or household composition. Take for example the case of Saad, who blames his split from his wife and daughter on the fact that they were taken into shelters separately when they first became homeless. Shelters do not take in families as a unit, the men are usually given shelter at a different location. John describes the restrictive character of certain support services as follows:

"Everything seems to be designed around drug users. We don't qualify.

'Sorry you're
not a drug user!' 'Well, I am sorry!' (…) Also, we are a couple and prefer
not to be split
up. Couples also never qualify."

We observed how, in times of impending funding cuts, service providers were frantically looking for funding options to continue their work and retain their employees. In fact, some agencies appeared so preoccupied with fulfilling the requirements of funders that serving vulnerable community members almost seemed a secondary objective. Our participants' stories illustrate how the fragmented and restricted landscape of service provision pushes them to make impossible choices between e.g. family and shelter, or love and housing. As a consequence, many participants develop a distrust toward some service providers as well as a tendency to rely on themselves and community networks to cope with poverty.

In general, the social dynamics of GFL show that to be embedded in community networks and having access to information on support and resources alleviates participants' experience of living in poverty in GFL significantly. Participants who grew up in the area in particular all possess extensive community networks as well as a highly developed sense of local knowledge, providing access to important support and resources. However, highly developed forms of local knowledge and social and cultural differences also create divisions that cause exclusion from and competition over resources between certain groups.

7. Different meanings of poverty in place

Our findings demonstrate a highly conflicted picture of GFL as a social space. We found a widespread sentiment among our participants facing poverty, in which they find their understanding of poverty to be different from what is projected upon the neighborhood by outsiders and new developments. In this section, we illustrate the different and sometimes opposing meanings of poverty encountered in GFL.

Joni described her idea of poverty to resemble a spectrum – an analogy many participants understood – within which people facing poverty struggle to maintain what she referred to as 'dignity and re-spect' while constantly struggling to meet basic needs. Participants describe cases in which people experiencing poverty are faced with additional or aggravated adversity – e.g. losing a job or becoming homeless – and end up failing to meet personal hygiene and health standards, e.g. having regular showers, having a clean change of clothes, or maintaining oral hygiene. When basic hygiene and health standards begin to decline, the prospect of procuring a job or finding stable housing becomes even less likely. Participants who have trouble meeting these health and hygiene standards embody a rough image of poverty with which most people feel uneasy, which has consequences for the ways in which they are treated in public spaces.

Wanda provided an example of the sensory aspects of poverty, talking about a certain smell that evokes connotations to poverty. The 'smell of poverty' to which Wanda refers does not apply to everyone living below the poverty line. It naturally possesses various forms and is perceived differently by each individual, yet it is unambiguous and si-multaneously highly stigmatizing. Even if equating a smell with poverty is far too generalizing and stigmatizing for individuals facing poverty, it is very much a part of the space that is Greater Forest Lawn to many participants, simply because it is encountered on a daily basis. According to Wanda, one encounters the smell frequently in the study area, for example on the streets, in buses, or in washrooms. For Wanda, as for other participants, these encounters are merely a fact of life en-countered regularly in the area.

Participants refer to many more symbols that link poverty to the area. Most commonly mentioned are expressions of mental health is-sues, e.g. people yelling or being aggressive in public; poor physical health, e.g. persons with impaired mobility or rotting teeth; addiction; loitering; and prostitution. All of these symbols contribute to a

perceived stigma of the neighborhood. To most participants this stigma symbolizes how poorly the area is understood. However discomforting or painful, the same symbols that create the stigma also evoke a sense of common ground due to recognized and shared lived experiences in the area. In turn, this encourages reciprocity in terms of helping each other out and giving back to one another when possible. In this sense, despite all the prejudices and misunderstandings about the area, many parti-cipants feel relieved in their experience of poverty, simply because it is so prevalent around them. Diana describes how, in the struggle to maintain a sense of human dignity, notions of respect and common courtesy receive an elevated importance.

"There is a hierarchy in poverty that you will seldom see, but it is there. You will find a lot of people in poverty, whether they are on the street or just barely getting by, still demonstrating a lot of respect for each other. You will still see the courtesies shown. A lot of these homeless people will open doors for you and if you say 'thank you' you've just made their day! (…) When you don't have a lot to do with in terms of money, it's probably more about the social contact. It's like 'oh, maybe I'm not so bad because that person just said hi to me.'"

In this quote Diana points to a human approach to poverty that many participants find lacking in their daily encounters with people on the street. It is the 'courtesies' that to many participants make a meaningful positive difference in the experience of poverty. Strikingly, Diana underlined the importance of one of the key priorities of Calgary's urban and Canada's national poverty reduction strategy – dignity. In the next section, we describe how practices to maintain a sense of dignity are oppressed by the type of urban development along 17th Avenue.

8. Making the neighborhood look good

Neighborhood developments, such as the BRZ on 17th Avenue, are commonly the result of decisions made by local government. Often these decisions are in favor of so-called economic development and regeneration. Despite efforts by local government directed to achieve 'community consultation' or 'public engagement', participants express feeling excluded from the decision-making process regarding new de-velopment in their neighborhood. Amy explains how she feels com-munity consultation often overlooks the most vulnerable groups:

"These things are always done in the usual places like there [points to a community association building] … but they never come here, outside, like asking the people who stand outside. The people who don't ask for help anymore."

When the field researcher asked her who these people are, she re-plied: "*The people who don't believe it [their situation] will get better, who have given up looking for government to help them, who help each other.*" Amy's story shows how the majority of community consultation ap-pears to be conducted in places with people who already find support. A group of individuals that are struggling to find the support they need are left out of the consultation process. Consequently, is the structural exclusion of vulnerable groups is reinforced through community con-sultation, as poverty is persistently represented in ways known to and supported by community resources and organizations. Further evidence of this phenomenon was observed in the community assessments con-ducted by City of Calgary community social workers during the field-work period; most of the findings repeated the same issues of the pre-vious community assessments. In addition to suggesting that current neighborhoods developments are ineffective in addressing the experi-ence of poverty in the neighborhoods, the ongoing poverty issues also point to an enduring underrepresentation of a hidden target group. Most participants strongly identify with or recognize this 'hidden group' experiencing poverty. Their political and social exclusion from neigh-borhood developments evokes and reinforces sentiments of injustice, exclusion, and despair. Moreover, we argue it deprives them of their

Fig. 3. A free food pantry in the neighborhood of Penbrooke (photo by author).

right to GFL.

As a result of consultation processes in which our participants do not participate or feel represented, their daily routines come under pressure because of new developments. According to most participants, these new developments give the impression of wanting to regulate the image of an impoverished area in order for it to become more attractive to outsiders. Some of the most notable changes in the area participants list are increased police presence pressing down on homeless, drug users, prostitutes, and loitering groups; the demolishing of trailer parks; fewer pawn and payday loan shops; and an increase in art installations along 17th Avenue. Most participants do perceive an increased sense of safety as a result of these changes. At the same time, however, participants have a strong sense of hypocrisy surrounding the changes. During an interview, Nina expressed a widespread sentiment among participants of how poverty is an undeniable part of GFL, yet it is actively hidden from view through new developments. She provided an example of this while talking about a volunteer-run initiative seeking to help community members meet their food needs by placing free food pantries across the GFL area (see Fig. 3). Similar to small free libraries, people in need can access the free food pantries which are stocked with non-perishable food items by volunteers and residents. The initiative had been a success and the pantry team was looking to expand by adding more pantries. However, they encountered resistance in various ways.

> "They didn't want the pantry near the entrance of the community hall because
>
> that would attract the wrong type of people. Yeah. You know [Cilla]? (…)
>
> She is like the owner of 17th Avenue. 'NO PANTRIES ALLOWED ON 17th
>
> AVENUE' [spoken in an announcing manner]. Attracts the wrong crowd. And
>
> this is what bugs me. Everywhere they are trying to hide poverty. I hate it!"

For many participants Nina's description of 'hiding poverty' addresses their core concern about the area. Many refer to the various ways in which they feel pushed away, either passively by new developments, or actively by being removed from places they used to frequent. For instance, Janis and David had experienced several stints of homelessness and described how they were always being asked to leave certain restaurants, in their view based on their appearance. This underlines our findings how for the sake of aesthetics and commerce, expressions of poverty are continuously and progressively being displaced.

To our participants, 17th Avenue is increasingly viewed as a site for

the consumption of 'desirable' ethno-cultural diversity and even poverty itself. However, it hardly conveys participants' perceptions of what GFL represents. George phrased it rather succinctly: *"the developments along 17th Avenue seem to benefit a more affluent population than the people who are in poverty."* During the group discussion frustrations were voiced about so-called 'rich' people from the city's Southwestern quadrant who came to enjoy exotic cuisines in 'the hood', as it was phrased. What annoyed them particularly was that this activity provided these visitors with an image of open-mindedness and involvement in GFL, while participants argue they are merely consumers, adding nothing to the neighborhood. In this sense, the ongoing developments on 17th Avenue can be seen as the epitome of the displacement and marginalization of vulnerable groups in favor of more economically 'desirable' developments and those who want to consume the ethno-cultural diversity. As a consequence, GFL as a social space is increasingly torn between the spatial practices of those trying to cope with poverty and the new developments that impose a spatial code of desirability and consumption.

9. Discussion

This paper describes how the daily routines that enable participants to get by in life are precariously balanced with many intersecting social, spatial, economic, and political structures. Consequently, informal coping mechanisms represented in everyday spatial practices are easily disrupted or oppressed by changes to the neighborhood. In terms of everyday routines we found overwhelming evidence that the challenges to meet basic needs take up a significant part of every day. In general the everyday struggles participants face were found to be deeply interwoven with each other. Hardships in one area, e.g. housing, inevitably cause new, or exacerbate existing challenges in other areas of life, such as food security and hygiene. The housing insecurity experienced by many of our participants – even if they were housed in e.g. a rooming house – removes a stable base of privacy and social stability to work on change and a better future city (see Munoz, 2018; Langegger & Koester, 2016; Sparks, 2010; Klodawsky, 2006; Mifflin and Wilton, 2005).

Our findings furthermore display how social identities play an important role in navigating the social service system as well as in negotiating safety and support in terms of meeting basic needs. Most participants perceive the social service landscape in GFL as restrictive and complex. It is worth noting that the impending funding cuts cause a deep sense of unrest among participants. Most of them worry about their ability to meet basic needs when funding for support service will be cut. The cold spell in Calgary mid-January, in which support services in GFL were largely unavailable, underlined the importance of local support structures within the area for our participants.

Our findings also reveal practices that assert the right to the city for poor, albeit in ambiguous and small-scale ways (see Speer, 2019; Deverteuil, 2014). Most importantly, we found how, in spite of the difficult living circumstances, to many of our participants GFL represents a safe haven – a place where it is acceptable to be poor, if only because many people around them are also poor. This creates a common ground of shared experiences resulting in GFL as an accepting and inclusive social space for those in poverty. Nonetheless, we argue that our participants' right to a safe and inclusive GFL is continuously challenged by new developments and looming cutbacks in terms of local support provision.

Our findings on symbolic meanings of poverty in GFL expose more ways in which participants' right to GFL is oppressed in favor of more economically desirable images of GFL. To most of our participants, new developments in GFL seem predominantly concerned with 'making the neighborhood look good' rather than making a positive difference in the daily struggles of residents faced with poverty. These findings reveal how 'unattractive' expressions of poverty are suppressed by new developments, ultimately pushing spatial practices belonging to poverty

into darker, more obscure corners. Notably, our findings on the meaning of smell in our participants' daily lives underline the importance of smell and other sensory factors in the experience of poverty in place, which has been discussed in the developing body of research on 'urban smellscapes' (see Henshaw, 2013; Power, 2009). Furthermore, tensions between developments and lived experiences expose the ineffectiveness of public engagement efforts. Consider how, while the BRZ on 17th Avenue claims to actively engage the local population, the vast majority of our substantive group of participants feel their views and stakes are poorly represented – or even trodden on – in the BRZ's developments. Deconstructing the spatial code put forward by the 17th Avenue BRZ branded 'International Avenue' illuminates how our participants experience many forms of oppression and displacement regarding their struggle with poverty. We found how developments that promote consumption in the ethnically diverse restaurants and shops on 17th Avenue offer little room for informal local initiatives developed to assist residents facing poverty. As such, community members experiencing poverty increasingly feel that their views and needs are swept aside in favor of economic development. Based on our findings, we argue that the redevelopment of 17th Avenue attempts to hide signs and symbols of poverty due to their economic undesirability. This argument aligns with the thesis that in our current system profit and private property prevail over 'all other notions and rights one could think of' – and indeed the right to the city of the urban poor (see Peck, 2012; 2014; Harvey, 2008; Kohn, 2004).

Our findings portray how stakeholders pushing new developments fail to meaningfully engage the local poor population, which thereby denies poor residents the right to negotiate changes to their neighborhood (see Pierce et al., 2016; Huisman, 2014). Instead, these stakeholders succeed in effectively hiding poverty by removing the negative symbols and signs associated with it. We deplore this strategy, and instead recommend all stakeholder involved in urban development to invest in gaining an understanding of local practices, to identify coping mechanisms, and to consider how interventions might harness these practices instead of disrupt them. This requires a shift from thinking about development in poor areas in terms of desirability and profitability to becoming more aware of and more involved in local practices. In the case of GFL, Calgary, we recommend that the International Avenue BRZ should reconsider its strategy to celebrate the diversity of the area in such a way that it acknowledges instead of hides the poverty tied to GFL. We contend that a promising way to achieve this is to build lasting relationships with poor community members to achieve a deep understanding of their everyday practices, which is not realistic to achieve through ephemeral 'moments' of public consultation. We also recommend that during extreme cold spells some form of coordination of service and resource provision is set up within GFL to ensure the most vulnerable of residents are protected. Even when the economic climate in Calgary is as harsh as its winters, local government should play a leading role in safeguarding and coordinating these recommendations in future developments.

Ultimately, we argue that the right to the city in areas such as GFL comprises the right to urban development in harmony with one's own everyday practices. This way urban development aligns better with the Canada wide policy on poverty reduction because it helps those facing poverty to achieve a sense of human dignity and to feel acknowledged instead of being suppressed and pushed further to the margins of society. We argue that this view on the right to the city in urban development is an important step in sustainably addressing socio-spatial inequality. Perhaps even more important, this view opens up meaningful ways to harness existing strengths and inspire change from within areas such as GFL.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Erik Mey: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Tialda Haartsen:** Writing -

review & editing, Supervision. **Louise Meijering:** Writing - review & editing, Supervision.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.10.002.

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