

The Uses of an Inner-City Sport-for-Development Program: Dispatches From the (Real) Creative Class

Jay Scherer, Jordan Koch, and Nicholas L. Holt

University of Alberta

As a result of a rapidly changing global political economy, deindustrialization, and neoliberalism, a new form of racialized urban poverty has become concentrated in the inner cities of innumerable North American urban centers. In response to these material conditions, various nonprofit organizations, corporate-sponsored initiatives, and underfunded municipal recreation departments continue to provide a range of sport-for-development programs for the ‘urban outcasts’ of the global economy. While sport scholars have widely critiqued these initiatives, little is known about how people experience these programs against the backdrop of actually existing neoliberalism (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) and the new conditions of urban poverty. As part of a three-year urban ethnography in Edmonton, Alberta, this paper examines how a group of less affluent and often homeless young men experienced and made use of a weekly, publicly funded floor-hockey program. In so doing, we explore how this sport-for-development program existed as a ‘hub’ within a network of social solidarity and as a crucial site for marginalized individuals to negotiate, and, at times, resist conditions of precarious labor in a divided Western Canadian city.

L'économie globale en évolution constante, la désindustrialisation, et le néolibéralisme ont entraîné une nouvelle forme de pauvreté urbaine qui est désormais concentrée dans les quartiers défavorisés de nombreux centres urbains d'Amérique du Nord. En réponse à ces conditions matérielles changeantes, diverses organisations à but non lucratif, des initiatives commanditées par des entreprises, et des départements municipaux de loisirs sous-financés continuent de fournir une variété de programmes de sport pour le développement pour les « parias urbains » de l'économie globale. Alors que les chercheurs en sport ont vivement critiqué ces initiatives, on connaît encore peu comment ces programmes sont perçus dans le contexte néolibéral actuel (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) et des nouvelles conditions de pauvreté urbaine. Cet article présente les résultats d'une ethnographie urbaine de trois ans à Edmonton en Alberta en examinant comment un groupe de jeunes hommes moins riches et souvent sans abri a vécu et utilisé un programme de hockey balle hebdomadaire financé par des fonds publics. Ce faisant, nous explorons comment ce programme de sport pour le développement a constitué un carrefour à l'intérieur d'un réseau de solidarité sociale et un site majeur au sein duquel des individus marginalisés ont pu négocier et, parfois, résister aux conditions de travail précaires dans une ville divisée de l'ouest du Canada.

Our three-year study of an inner city sport-for-development program was located in Edmonton (pop. 899,441), the fifth largest urban center in Canada, and the capital city of the Western Canadian Province of Alberta. Known as the ‘Gateway to the North’, Edmonton is the northern anchor of the Calgary-Edmonton corridor—the staging point for large-scale oil sands developments in Northern Alberta. Since the new millennium, Edmonton has experienced enormous economic growth thanks to a resource-driven boom and the expansion of the oil sands, “the second largest oil reserve in the world, after Saudi Arabia” (Taft, 2012, p. 8). Within this context, there has been an influx of wealth and money into the city

and, alongside Calgary, Edmonton has emerged as an important ‘arriviste’ city as a result of strong oil prices and economic diversification (Hiller, 2007). So, too, has Edmonton been substantially transformed by immigration—young men and families from peripheral regions in Canada as well as immigrants from around the world seeking employment in the extensive oil sands reserves of northern Alberta and other sectors of the economy.

As a result of Edmonton’s growth and repositioning in the national political economy and beyond, various corporate and civic elites have aspired to re-image the city and, crucially, its downtown core by providing the types of cultural and entertainment amenities that are

now commonly on offer in other ‘world-class’ cities (Scherer & Davidson, 2011). For example, one of the most significant developments associated with this promotional agenda—an agenda with a much longer history in Edmonton (Whitson & Macintosh, 1993)—has been the construction of a publicly financed CAD\$ 613.7 million arena and entertainment district in the inner city to house the Edmonton Oilers, a National Hockey League franchise owned by one of the wealthiest men in Canada, Daryl Katz. The new arena district is intended to revitalize and gentrify one of the least developed and poorest parts of the city and will feature not only a new arena, but also new office towers, upmarket hotels, condominium complexes, and an array of consumption experiences to attract affluent residents and tourists to the downtown core, and to entice white-collar and predominantly white (Euro-Canadian) workers to relocate to Edmonton and work for the city’s major corporate players. The City of Edmonton’s significant public investment in this development is emblematic of a broader trend as cities from Columbus, to Detroit, to Los Angeles have each endeavored to revitalize their downtown cores via the construction of arenas and various major league sport facilities that are aligned with gentrified shopping, entertainment, and housing districts. It’s important to note that Edmonton’s downtown core, like so many others across North America, was hollowed out over the course of the past three decades thanks, in part, to the onset of a significant recession in the 1980s as well as the opening of West Edmonton Mall in 1981. This latter development, in particular, enticed a number of businesses to relocate to the western edge of the city, closer to suburban communities and nearby municipalities that had emerged as desirable and safe residential destinations for many middle class families.

Edmonton’s growth in the new millennium has, however, been accompanied by a marked expansion of economic inequality¹ as well as a host of social issues that have become concentrated in the inner city including high rates of crime, an acute shortage of social housing, and a visible homeless population. Indeed, Edmonton’s homeless population increased from 836 to 3,079 between March 1999 and October 2008 (Taft 2012), although the number of individuals actually experiencing homelessness has declined in recent years thanks to the implementation of various provincial and municipal policies in 2008² that aspired to end homelessness within a decade—an all but impossible goal, especially since the onset of a recession in 2014 following the collapse of the price of oil. Nonetheless, according to the 2014 Homeless Count, there were 2,307 individuals without a home, the majority of whom were young and middle aged men who resided in the inner city (Homeward Trust, 2014). In addition, just under half (46%) of all individuals experiencing homelessness in Edmonton in 2014 were Indigenous (Homeward Trust, 2014). The disproportionate representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness is a clear and prescient reminder of how current political decisions and economic processes continue to exacerbate the “troubled legacy” (Miller, 2003) of colonialism in

Canada, especially in the Western Canadian inner cities of Edmonton, Regina, and Winnipeg that are home to significant Indigenous populations including Cree, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Blackfoot and Saulteaux.³

Much of the expansion of social and economic inequality in Edmonton can be traced to the province’s neoliberal regimen of the 1990s, led by then Premier Ralph Klein. During his tenure as premier, Klein systematically retrenched and reorganized provincial funding for a variety of social service provisions (including housing)—a development that seriously compromised public support for those on social assistance. Following a significant economic downturn in the 1980s, the result of collapsing oil prices, Klein implemented a severe austerity agenda that included: a commitment to debt-reduction; massive cuts to social spending that radically diminished the province’s welfare system; and, finally, the reduction of municipal transfers that had a profound impact on the provision of various social services—including recreation services—at the urban level (Whitson, 2011). So, too, did Klein implement a range of policies known as the “Alberta Advantage” that privileged the attraction and retention of capital through the institutionalization of a business-friendly tax system that included the nation’s lowest tax regimen, one of the lowest minimum wages in the country, and weak labor regulations.⁴ Since 1993, therefore, a neoliberal program of economic deregulation, privatization, fiscal austerity, democratic downsizing, as well as a discourse of individual responsibility, was successfully sold to a reasonably compliant Alberta electorate (Brownsey, 2005).⁵

In an attempt to cope with the ensuing expansion of economic inequality and homelessness, a number of shelters (e.g., Hope Mission, Herb Jamieson Centre, Women’s Emergency Accommodation Centre, the Salvation Army) and nonprofit social service providers (e.g., Boyle Street Community Services, the Bissell Centre, the George Spady Centre, Boyle McCauley Health Centre, the Mustard Seed) have become concentrated in the downtown core. Collectively, these organizations provide crucial relief for innumerable individuals who have complex life circumstances (poverty, mental illness, substance-related disorders) and are otherwise negotiating vulnerable social conditions, especially during the city’s long winter months when temperatures regularly fall below -20C. Indeed, unlike many European cities where the emblematic space of the precarious worker is the metropolitan periphery, in Edmonton, the cumulative impact of all of these developments has been increased levels of social polarization, poverty, and homelessness that cut differently across racialized, gendered, sexualized and differently-abled bodies and feature most prominently in the inner city.

In this article, we hope to contribute to both the sociology of sport literature and a growing body of knowledge in urban sociology (Davis & Monk, 2007; Nuttall & Mbembe, 2008; Simone, 2004) by exploring how a group of less affluent and often homeless men experienced and made use of a weekly floor-hockey program in downtown

Edmonton—a program that has been provided by Boyle Street Community Services, Alberta Health Services, and Alberta Hospital for over two decades. More precisely, we examine how this particular sport-for-development program and its associated urban spaces served as a communal ‘hub’ within a network of social solidarity and as a crucial site for marginalized individuals to negotiate, and, at times, resist conditions of precarious labor. Of interest to sociologists, then, is the potential for these programs and urban settings to exist as spaces where even the most marginalized can creatively explore a “wide range of productive activities inside and outside wage relations” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. xi), “not in an isolated or independent way but in the complex dynamic with the resistance of other bodies” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 31).

The New Urban Poverty and Sport-For-Development Programs in the Neoliberal City

Beginning in the 1970s, as a period of postwar economic growth in many advanced capitalist nations began to unravel under its own internal contradictions and limits, the ascendance of economic globalization and the embracement of neoliberalism as a ‘whole way of life’ have profoundly transformed life in cities around the world (Abrahamson, 2004; Harvey, 2012; Short & Kim, 1999). Against the backdrop of these broader political-economic shifts, a new form of racialized urban poverty has become concentrated in various North American inner cities, the result of a rapidly changing global political economy and labor market (Silver, 2011). On this latter note, the post-1960s departure of thousands of industrial and manufacturing jobs along with the suburbanization of middle class residents who could afford to relocate to more affluent neighborhoods and communities have together contributed to the hollowing out of countless North American inner cities. These industrial and manufacturing jobs were primarily replaced with contingent and precarious labor (temporary, nonunionized jobs), while a host of other changing material conditions worsened the circumstances of those left behind. As a result of these developments, large numbers of residents—predominantly African Americans in the U.S. and visible minorities and Indigenous communities in many Canadian urban centers—now constitute a distinct urban underclass that experience new forms of racialized poverty on a daily basis (Silver, 2011).

This new form of urban poverty has been steadily nurtured by the rise of neoliberalism and “the double retrenchment of the labour market and the welfare state from the urban core” (Wacquant, 2008, p. 3). In the U.S., Wacquant has argued that it is “*the collapse of public institutions*, resulting from state policies of urban abandonment and leading to the punitive containment of the black (sub-)proletariat, that emerges as the most potent and most distinctive cause of entrenched marginality in the American metropolis” (2008, pp. 3–4: his emphasis).

In Canada, meanwhile, these issues have been exacerbated by cuts in spending by all levels of government, especially on social programs that have historically directed assistance and resources to less affluent residents. In the neoliberal era, moreover, there has been a widespread divesting of public sector responsibilities onto lower levels of government including cities that are often limited in their tax powers. In cities across Canada, these developments have resulted in tremendous cuts in civic spending, privatization, the introduction of user fees, and the formation of public-private partnerships as well as the adoption of policies and tax incentives to augment an urban tax base through the attraction of nomadic capital and high earning positions. All of these shifts, then, are emblematic of a decisive change in the characteristics of urban governance from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1987), as cities now aggressively compete for mobile forms of investment (private, as well as public), affluent consumers (whether citizens or tourists), and new businesses, especially the types of businesses that employ well-paid, white-collar professionals and geographically mobile cultural workers (Scherer, 2011).

An agenda of urban entrepreneurialism aimed at members of the so-called ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002) has subsequently given rise to a focus on various re-imagining strategies that now commonly include the material transformation of downtown neighborhoods that were previously abandoned by middle class residents decades earlier. As noted earlier, civic elites from across North America have widely embraced public expenditure on urban sport and entertainment districts as common sense investments to ‘revitalize’ various inner city communities whose infrastructure and property values/tax base have eroded over the course of a generation (Rosentraub, 2010). The promotional strategies and urban growth agendas of the neoliberal city, thus, regularly include gentrified housing complexes and upmarket shopping spaces that are aligned with the interests of developers, speculators, and financiers, and cater to a very narrow set of class tastes and dispositions associated with a new transnational urbanism (Scherer, 2011). “Quality of urban life”, Harvey (2010, p. 175) argues, “has become a commodity for those with money, as has the city itself in a world where consumerism, tourism, niche marketing, cultural and knowledge-based industries, as well as perpetual resort to the economy of the spectacle, have become major aspects of urban political economy”.

However, as various governments across North America and, indeed, across the world, have increasingly invested in these developments, they have also been confronted with the effects of decades of financial restructuring and fiscal austerity measures—heightened levels of social polarization and a growing gap between the rich and poor. These are the geographies of actually ‘existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), where lavish waterfront condominium complexes and gated communities, cultural spectacles such as the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA)

World Cup and the Olympic Games, and other displays of conspicuous consumption occur alongside unprecedented levels of urban poverty and the multitude of the poor who stand in opposition to property—the dominant form of the republic (Hardt & Negri, 2009). For Hardt and Negri (2009), the ascendance of globalization, the decimation of various commons, and the inevitable conflicts between wealth and poverty in cities around the world, thus, also need to be understood in terms of the forms of subjectivity that are produced in the neoliberal condition. “Private property”, they write, “creates subjectivities that are at once individual (in their competition with other another) and unified as a class to preserve their property (against the poor)” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 39). Neoliberalism, in other words, needs to be understood as a political rationality that “entails a host of policies that figure and produce citizens as individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’” (Brown, 2006, p. 694). For example, Michel Foucault’s lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* exemplify how neoliberal subjectivities grounded in private property and competition have been produced as matters of ‘common sense’: “In neoliberalism... Homo Economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault, 2004, p. 226). In the neoliberal era, subjectivity is largely regulated by market interests and economic calculations as hypercompetitive individuals are compelled to accumulate human capital as consumer-citizens, and as “each individual’s social condition is judged as nothing other than the effect of his or her own choices and investments” (Hamman, 2009, p. 43). These are developments that inevitably obscure a host of enduring structural barriers and constraints, as well as rendering invisible various power relations and other forms of inequality that are better understood as public issues of social structure (Giardina & Denzin, 2013).

The production of neoliberal subjectivities has accompanied over three decades of wage repression and the erosion of much of the postwar gains made by working people and unions as well as “the emergence of new logics of *expulsion*” (Sassen, 2014, p. 1). These class-based logics include the “expulsion of low-income workers and the unemployed from government social welfare and health programs as well as from corporate insurance and unemployment support” (ibid), in addition to “the countless displaced people warehoused in formal and informal refugee camps, the minoritized groups in rich countries who are warehoused in prisons, and the able-bodied unemployed men and women warehoused in ghettos and slums” (Sassen, 2014, p. 3). Indeed, as a result of these broader changing material conditions, the polarization of class and race relations within increasingly divided urban centers—from Delhi to Detroit to downtown Edmonton—has been sharpened in much starker material and corporeal terms, including the concrete realities of disposable homeless “bodies and their alterity” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 30). These are the ‘urban outcasts’ (Wacquant, 2008) of the global economy who, as we shall see below, live well

beyond simply being expected to exist as autonomous and entrepreneurial economic agents within the gentrified metropolis, and do so largely “through informal networks of communication, mobility, employment, exchange, and cooperation that are largely invisible to outsiders” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 254). From this perspective, then, the poverty of the multitude in no means refers “to its misery or deprivation or even its lack, but instead names a production of social subjectivity that results in a radically plural and open body politic, opposed to both the individualism and the exclusive, unified social body of property” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, pp. 39–40).

In this context, a wide range of nonprofit organizations, corporate-sponsored initiatives, and underfunded municipal recreation departments—the social problems industry (Pitter & Andrews, 1997)—have, once again, returned to the provision of sport-for-development programs as relatively inexpensive means for addressing a host of social issues that stem from these broader political-economic developments (Coakley, 2011; Gruneau, 2015; Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Kidd, 2008).⁶ In confronting issues such as urban poverty, homelessness, crime, and juvenile delinquency in the neoliberal era, sport-for-development programs have been criticized by scholars as sites for the administration of biopower—the power to administer and produce life that functions through the government of populations (Hardt & Negri, 2009). So, too, have these programs been critiqued for encouraging individual ‘solutions’ to complex public problems, for ignoring broader structural issues, and for their assimilatory and often patronizing approaches to managing ‘at risk’ populations, especially less affluent young people (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). Yet despite these criticisms, and, indeed, the widespread prevalence of these initiatives—from global organizations such as *Right To Play* to various local Midnight Basketball leagues (Hartmann, 2016)—little is known about how the multitude of the poor experience and use such programs against the backdrop of neoliberalism and precarious labor in distinct urban settings (Coalter, 2010; Levermore, 2008; Pitter, 2004; Wilson & White, 2003). It is precisely this latter issue that we explore in this study.

Methods

In 2011, as part of a broad, urban ethnography of the provision and uses of inner city sport and recreation services, we began ‘hanging out’ (Willis, 1978) at Boyle Street Community Services—a not-for-profit street-front agency in Edmonton’s inner city that, since 1971, has offered a wide range of services for the city’s most vulnerable communities, including recreational and leisure programming. Over the course of three years, we collected extensive fieldnotes and over 100 reflexive diary entries that focused predominantly on the uses of a weekly floor hockey match played every Friday by mostly

less affluent young men in the basement of the Mental Health unit of a psychiatric hospital in the Northeastern end of Edmonton. There were, on average, 15–20 players per week, including 10–12 ‘regulars’ who participated nearly every week; roughly half of participants identified as Euro-Canadian and a quarter were Indigenous (nearly all Cree). While the program was initially designed for the men to practice ‘controlled aggression’ (personal communication, Snejder), enjoy some regular physical exercise, and access showers on a weekly basis, as we shall see, the social functions of these games were far more complex and significant than any singular iteration or operational definition of the program could ever hope to capture.

We also conducted a series of interviews with ten men who participated in the weekly floor hockey games. All of the interviews were open-ended and semi-structured in nature, and occurred only after extensive rapport and trust had been nurtured to minimize the risk of alienating the men from their programming. Participants were aged 20–55 years, and eight of the men self-identified as Euro-Canadian and two as Indigenous. All of the men embodied a wide range of visible and hidden injuries of class (Sennett & Cobb, 1972): five had been diagnosed with mental illnesses (schizophrenia or bipolar disorder) and the others did not disclose their specific diagnoses of mental illness but confided that they were addicted to alcohol or illicit drugs. The men stayed, on various occasions, in subsidized housing, shelters, mental health care facilities, group homes, or on the street (circumstances varied over the course of the study). Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of all involved.

Our analysis is also drawn from fourteen interviews with community support workers and other service providers in the downtown core, the most notable of which was with Snejder (a pseudonym), a long-term, Euro-Canadian social worker who organized the Friday hockey games in addition to providing a range of mental health services at Boyle Street Community Services. Importantly, the second author not only participated in the weekly floor hockey matches, but also traveled to and from the games with the participants in an Alberta Health Services van that was driven by Snejder as he collected individuals at predetermined locations. While these embodied research practices have been extensively explored elsewhere (Koch, Scherer & Holt, 2015), we wish to emphasize a number of key issues associated with our entry into the field and the complex ethical issues that we encountered during our fieldwork.

First, the slow and gradual manner in which we nurtured relationships over time was paramount to our ethical commitment to the community. Indeed, we only discovered the hockey program’s existence after several months of fieldwork at Boyle Street Community Services and through interactions with some of the game’s regular participants, which demonstrates the ‘word of mouth’ culture through which such grassroots programs are often regulated by Edmonton’s inner city residents. The gradual

establishment of a consistent and visible presence at Boyle Street Community Services, therefore, was crucial to gaining the trust and respect of both the hockey ‘regulars’ and the game’s organizers who served as informal gatekeepers to the event, including Snejder himself.

Many of the men have, of course, experienced tremendous trauma in their lives; so, too, were they highly distrustful of authority figures and various institutions from which they have been regularly abandoned. And while high rates of staff turnover of frontline social services in Edmonton’s inner city have, at times, contributed to this cycle, the weekly floor hockey program has been consistently run by Snejder—a commitment that was matched only by the devotion of the players themselves, many of whom have been weekly attendees since the program’s inception. The importance of the stability and regularity of this program as well as the long-term relationships that have been fostered between Snejder and many of the men simply cannot be over-emphasized. It was not uncommon, for example, for the men to openly describe their love for Snejder as well as the importance and certainty of the weekly floor hockey matches in their lives.

As academic ‘outsiders’, therefore, we strove to emulate these actions by demonstrating a long-term, ethical commitment to the program and to the broader community itself based on reciprocity: by volunteering time and labor to assist with the floor hockey program; by engaging in critical dialogue with public administrators over social issues in the inner city; and by producing research that has been used to secure funding for inner city sport and recreation programming. None of these actions can ever fully balance the inherent power relations of any short-term, ethnographic research project—projects that have, historically, contributed to the exploitation of marginalized peoples, especially when researchers simply drop in to various communities and decamp following the completion of their ‘study’ (Smith, 1999). Nor can the embodied distinctions of social class and race/ethnicity associated with the privilege of *visiting* Boyle Street Community Services—the privilege of both mobility and being able to ‘do research’—ever be fully reconciled (Koch, et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the most rewarding aspect of our experiences remains the strong relationships and, indeed, the enduring friendships with many of the men whose stories are the lifeblood of this article. The second author, in particular, met regularly with the men before and after hockey games, enjoyed dinners together, visited the men when they were receiving treatment or were hospitalized, and continues to socialize and maintain regular contact with many of the men discussed below. The first author, meanwhile, will continue to nurture these longstanding relationships in the years to come through various political associations as well as through a community-based participatory action research project that examines the impacts of the new downtown arena and entertainment district and the gentrification of the inner city.

Finally, it's important to also emphasize the importance of the sport of hockey for recreation and leisure programming and for the research process itself. As a significant element of national popular culture, hockey was highly valued by the men regardless of their backgrounds as both a cultural pastime and as a salient site to stake their public claims to masculinity (Holt, et al., 2015). The cultural significance of the sport was, in fact, recognized by Snejder as the foundation upon which long-term relationships with the men could be established, and as the entry point for the provision of other kinds of social services and support (Holt, Scherer & Koch, 2015). All of the participants, including the second author, moreover, had a common investment in displaying proficiency in both the physical and social aspects of the game—hockey 'talk' often provided an important ice breaker and point of departure for broader conversations on various social issues, and was vital in the development of rapport, trust, and meaningful relationships. Indeed, over the course of this three-year ethnography, we regularly observed how this particular sporting ritual and its associated traditions provided the men with valuable opportunities to form genuine social relations with peers and social workers alike, to enjoy a shower, some exercise, banter, and, perhaps most importantly, to experience a consistent, albeit brief, weekly reprieve from life on the street (Holt, Scherer & Koch, 2015).

So, too, did many of the men use the weekly floor hockey matches to discuss and engage in supportive interchanges (Goffman, 1971) about profitable sites and locations for bottle-picking, panhandling, shelter/rest, and dumpster diving as part of a moral obligation to help each other and the broader community. Despite the common-sense portrayal of members of the 'underclass' as lazy and disposable, many men also displayed a critical and creative awareness of an array of markets through which various commodities were circulated as they traversed across the city in their daily efforts to make a living, all while being subjected to a nearly insurmountable set of obstacles associated with an urban carceral network including being regularly stopped by police and the "hierarchies of property" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 245) on Edmonton's Light Rail Transit (LRT), in the streets, and in various shopping centers.

On this note, one of the most significant themes that emerged from the research was the role of this particular sport-for-development program in providing the men with opportunities to collectively discuss a host of structural/public issues including the circumstances under which they were, instrumentally, willing to sell their labor as commodities. These productive activities, of course, occurred in conditions that were structured in partial accordance with a host of ideological assumptions regarding the positive, developmental, and 'corrective' capacity of sport. As we shall see below, though, these conditions fostered not only important discussions about precarious labor between the floor hockey 'regulars', but also a host of other actions that inevitably occurred

beyond the scrutiny and surveillance of the state and various public authorities.

Career Opportunities

We first became aware of the significance of discussions of labor and employment in the van rides to the weekly floor hockey matches. These van rides—lasting approximately 30 minutes each way to and from the hockey/mental health facility—emerged as crucial and safe sites for people to discuss a host of issues related to their life circumstances, and as therapeutic spaces to vent and joke. However, we also came to understand the van rides as part of a vital network of laboring subjectivities that cooperate and communicate about employment issues and, indeed, the indignation of poverty and precarious labor in general. Consider the following field note entry from June 22, 2011:

We pass another temp-agency work-for-hire place and Paul (23 year-old, new to Edmonton) pipes up from the back seat:

"Yo, this is the place where I got some work."

Apparently, the agency hooked him up with a lumber-stacking job. Paul seems somewhat satisfied by this position, probably because he is young, new to Edmonton, and figures the job is only temporary. In contrast, Manny (33 years old, struggles with drug addictions and mild schizophrenia) responds that he hates temp agencies and other places like it, and his comments trigger an insightful conversation about wage labour in Edmonton and the way in which this particular marginalized population gets exploited by a system that requires cheap, temporary 'labourers' to fill various menial positions. Manny, for example, openly fumed at:

"busting my ass for \$10/ hr only to have it reduced to \$8 after the agency takes its cut. Forget that! No benefits ... and taxes too!"

On occasions such as these, the discussions in the van provided meaningful glimpses into the world of an unskilled, temporary labor force with few options and resources to obtain legitimate, well-paying work outside of the black market. Many of these men were, inevitably, fully conscious of the parasitic practices of many organizations, temp agencies, and payday loan businesses that capitalize on the most vulnerable in society who are desperate for employment and are simply struggling to survive (it is not uncommon for some predatory payday loan operators to charge interest rates of 600 percent). These organizations, among others, engage in powerful forms of both primary and secondary exploitation that diminish discretionary income while recapturing value for capital. "All of these practices", writes Harvey (2014, p. 67), "form a collective site where the politics of accumulation by dispossession takes over as a primary

means for the extraction of income and wealth from vulnerable populations, including the working class (however defined)”.

Manny’s comments also illustrate the types of economic calculations made by these men on a daily, if not hourly, basis—under what conditions and for what wage am I willing to sell my labor-power? Conversely, when should I engage in leisure opportunities, such as Friday hockey? All of the men with whom we talked were fully aware that they were not in positions to work for themselves; they were also well aware that what they were selling to various businesses across the metropolis was labor as a commodity. Far from embodying states of false consciousness, moreover, many of these men saw through liberal bourgeois definitions of freedom and market law that are anchored by money power. So, too, were they conscious of a dominant ideology that normalizes the value of being able to ‘freely’ sell labor as a market choice while discounting the power of capitalists to exploit the labor of others who have no other commodity for sale and do not have access to other means of survival. Still, while many men like Manny refused to accept offers of employment with low wages and forms of ‘degraded work’ (Doussard, 2013)—even without other prospects on the horizon—others such as Paul were ‘free traders’ who were compelled to take temporary work in any form, even while recognizing it as exploitative and lacking creative possibilities.

Another man, Ernie (38 years old), was similarly anxious to secure work. Ernie had recently been fired from his job as a food and beverage vendor in Edmonton—a job he had held for over 14-years despite suffering chronically poor health. As Ernie explained in our interview, he was emotionally devastated by losing “the only job I’ve ever been at where I’ve actually seen successes”. Ernie also recognized his dismissal and subsequent alienation as the product of a broader economic crisis and the increasing exploitation of temporary labor by capital:

I think that’s the way it is because ... they [his employer] started that over the last couple of years [using] temporary labour. At one point in time everybody, about 75% of the staff, stayed around for the first 10 years I worked there. The last 2 years, since the market [crashed], basically everything changed and all of a sudden they’ve lost a lot of employees and, and they’re firing people for just, being stupid about the way they’re firing people, and other stuff like that.

Of course, the main beneficiaries of the free market system and its accompanying reserve army of unemployed labor (Marx, 1976) have, historically, always been the capitalist class. However, in nurturing the conditions that ensure the production and appropriation of surplus value (low wages and a docile reserve army of labor), “then the aggregate demand exercised by the labour force in the market-place will tend to be restricted, if not systematically diminished” (Harvey, 2014, p. 80).

Indeed, such a contradiction between production and realization has the potential to create a not-insignificant barrier to the continuity of capital accumulation if left unchecked and as a growing number of people, like Ernie and Manny, increasingly lack the means of buying even the most basic goods and services (at least without relying on substantive amounts of credit). As Marx noted in the second volume of *Capital*:

The workers are important for the market as buyers of commodities. But as sellers of their commodity – labour power – capitalist society has the tendency to restrict them to their minimum price. Further contradiction: the periods in which capitalist production exerts all its forces regularly show themselves in periods of over-production; because the limit to the application of the productive powers is not simply the production of value, but also its realization. However, the sale of commodities, the realization of commodity capital, and thus of surplus value as well, is restricted not by the consumer needs of society in general, but by the consumer needs of a society in which the great majority are always poor and must always remain poor. (1978, p. 391)

Facing a future of precarious and exploitative labor, many of these men had even less incentive to work for capital and regularly turned to gray and black markets to obtain money and a wide range of commodities and services. Still, each of these men craved meaningful, worthwhile, creative labor—not alienated social labor—and were willing to work and use their bodies for social uses other than producing surplus value for capital in jobs that kept them temporarily employed. And, crucially, they desired a fair and secure living wage—aspirations that were identical to those of the men with whom George Orwell spent time and lived as documented in his classic text, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933).

I’m Not Down

The significance of the human body to produce surplus value points to its importance for more hopeful, if modest, biopolitical events aimed at restoring the full productivity of bodies across all domains of life, and not solely in service of capital (Hardt & Negri, 2009). Such an observation reminds us that: “At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Consider the following discussion that took place on November 4th, 2011:

In the van I sit beside Fred (40 years old), who struggles with severe cognitive impairments due to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), and we catch up on all that is new in our lives. I ask him how life is working at the *Edmonton Journal*:

“I don’t work there anymore. Just wasn’t worth the effort.”

Fred had for years delivered newspapers along a specific route in the inner city. As a means of enhancing his compensation, Fred had contacted other newspapers (the *Edmonton Sun* and *The Globe and Mail*) and made himself the paperboy for the same general routes:

“Sometimes things were so busy that I hired other people to deliver some of my papers to different parts of the route when I couldn’t make it. It was awesome!”

His paper route monopoly, however, has all-but ended. As Fred explained:

“The thing is, now there are less papers to be delivered to less houses, which translates into less pay for me. Eventually I was just working for the *Edmonton Journal* and it just ain’t worth my while. I’d rather have the free time. I got my AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) and some other things here and there so I’m doing okay. I might as well take the free time.”

Fred has clearly demonstrated a meaningful and imaginative ‘entrepreneurial’ awareness by delivering three newspapers on the same route to triple his income. Yet, his comments also reveal the erosion of his career thanks to digitalization and the transformation of the division of labor associated with the media and culture industries. Against the backdrop of a range of technological developments and broader patterns of convergence and concentration, new opportunities for immaterial production and other forms of employment associated with the knowledge economy have emerged for qualified middle class workers. Other forms of work—in particular low-income manual labor that often went unseen but supported people like Fred—have evaporated as newspaper sales plummet and as older reading habits are replaced with new forms of online and mobile consumption. It can be granted that this example of technological change may appear insignificant when compared with broader patterns of deindustrialization as capital continually invents and adopts technological forms, in part, to control labor and regulate wage rates. Yet, as noted above, capital’s relentless pursuit of wage reduction—in this instance through the implementation of new technologies and modes of distribution/communication—produces a powerful contradiction that threatens the reproduction of capital itself: the destruction of socially necessary labor (i.e., the production of value and the basis of profitability) and the subsequent diminishment of aggregate demand as jobs and incomes disappear (Harvey, 2014).

Furthermore, in the world of precarious labor, increasingly redundant, alienated, and disposable populations including men like Fred have looked elsewhere to form meaningful social relations. Fred, for example, has simply refused to exchange his labor-power for an alienating and exploitative low-paying job with neither benefits nor job security. Instead, Fred has opted to take

the ‘free time’ to engage in pleasurable activities such as Friday hockey and some of the other recreational programs at Boyle Street Community Services that are unrelated to conspicuous consumption. Such daily calculations and strategies of indignation (Hardt & Negri, 2009) are not insignificant assertions of agency and autonomy in a world where many less affluent citizens struggle to gain a sense of control over at least some of the immediate circumstances of their lives. Indeed, Fred’s reclamation of his ‘free time’ is meaningful precisely because it illuminates the politics of time that, as John Clarke and Chas Critcher noted 30 years ago, is “the invisible resource that structures many of the conflicts and inequalities of leisure” (1985, p. 239). Fred, therefore, sees leisure as something other than ‘an escape from work’ or something that has to be ‘earned through work’ and, in so doing, is making the best use of his time according to his own values and aspirations. In these instances, as Paul Gilroy noted in an analysis of sites of working class leisure in the United Kingdom, the body is “celebrated as an instrument of pleasure rather than an instrument of labor” (1990, p. 274). It’s important to emphasize, however, that none of these strategies represent a revolutionary gesture or a collective challenge to capitalism; their central purpose, for men like Fred, is to simply make life more bearable.

Clampdown

For several floor hockey participants, access to the labor market was heavily restricted as a result of prior criminal convictions; many others had also spent significant periods of time in various psychiatric institutions and subsequently carried with them a stigma (Goffman, 1963) of mental illness that also set decisive limits on their ability to sell their labor power. Consider the following conversation in the van with Joe (27 years old) on February 15, 2013.

On the van ride home I sit beside Joe, originally from Kitchener, Ontario. Joe and I make some small talk about where we attended high school and recite a few Oktoberfest-related stories (the biggest festival of the year in Kitchener). As the van leaves the hospital parking lot, Joe shares with me his own hospital story:

“This is my second visit to this hospital,” says Joe.

“When were you here last?” I ask.

“I did a month in the psych ward last summer,” answers Joe. “It was ridiculously boring. I wish I had known about the hockey game!” (*Laugh*)

Not wanting to be invasive, I wait for Joe to break the silence and hopefully share with me more of his story.

“Ah, it wasn’t that bad I guess,” opens Joe. “It was better than jail, that’s for sure. I got arrested with

6 1/2 lbs. of weed in the spare tire. Shit! I did a month at the psych ward to reduce my sentence to 9 months.” “The real bugger,” continues Joe, “has been finding sustainable work since my arrest.” “I’m no longer bondable. It’s a joke! Warehouses won’t trust me to not steal product, even though I’m qualified to drive a forklift.”

“How long until you have your record expunged?” I ask.

“It’s seven years total,” says Joe. “I’ve still got four to go. Sucks being in a province with so much work and I can’t get any.”

Thus, despite serving his corrective and rehabilitative sentence in prison and, it appears, in a psychiatric ward, Joe and many of the other men who participate in the weekly floor hockey matches are still doing hard time in the ‘free’ market as a result of the additional punitive conditions that they are subjected to in the carceral city.

So, too, was Pat (39 years old), who was residing at the psychiatric hospital at the time of our interview in February 2013. Over the course of his life, Pat has been employed in several capacities (as a painter, truck driver, and factory worker) in spite of his ongoing struggles with bipolar disorder. However, as Pat explained in our interview, his most recent mental and physical health issues have resulted in his prolonged hospitalization and corresponding unemployment:

I did it [painting] for a year and then I got a hernia and then it was like I was a nobody to the company ‘cause I had a hernia and was off for a while, so they tried to, you know, basically give me the gears. I left there and I went to work for a company that did oil rig parts and I was spray-painting oil rig parts. But then my medication started going crazy and I ended up in here. The problem is the public thinks that you’re not taking your medication, that’s your problem or whatever but I was actually taking my medication on this level for about 10 years and the doctors suggested that I take my antidepressant in the morning instead of before bed and I said well...for 10 years but why, why break somethin’ that ain’t broken, and the pharmacist filled it out so that I would take it in the morning and I thought, well, you know the pharmacist, the doctor told me, so I’ll do it. Within 2 to 3 weeks. I was up all night and my system started to go, my mind started to race uh, depression started to set in and having racing thoughts and depression at the same time is two contrary things. So it was kind of a mixed blue state and then so I’m kinda fighting with that since last Christmas so.

Facing no foreseeable employment prospects as well as having to deal with disjointed treatment plans and the inadequate and uncoordinated delivery of public housing for mental health patients—unresolved systemic issues

across the province (Auditor General, 2015)—Joe and Pat are often left to fend for themselves on the streets, as well as relying heavily on various networks of friendship and support in their continual efforts to locate shelter, food, money, and clothing in the inner city, especially in the winter months.

In light of these circumstances and their exclusion from the labor market, innumerable men engage a host of markets to circulate and distribute a variety of goods and services via the weekly Friday hockey matches and throughout the inner city and beyond. A number of these practices are ‘borderline activities’ (Henry, 1978) that occupy “the grey area between theft and the consumption of goods either stolen or acquired outside of the normative retailer-consumer relationship” (Hobbs, 2001, p. 140)—a reminder of how the goal-directed actions of these men remain firmly attuned to their positions in the labor market. Consider the following excerpts that illuminate some of the rational and creative responses to the structural constraints of both poverty and capitalism:

I ask Rance (youth worker) about recruiting youth to weekly floor hockey and he tells me that most seem pretty keen on coming. He tells me that he just met Tony (28 years old) for the first time last week and found him to be really keen on playing hockey. According to Tony (via Rance), he lost his construction job last week and has since been hanging out at the youth unit; passing time playing billiards (now hockey), and trying to earn extra cash here and there via selling small items like DVD’s (which are most likely stolen). (field note, January 27, 2012)

As we sit, one of the youth pulls out a bag of cigarette butts that he clearly collected from the streets. He opens up the part of the cigarette above the filter and mines them for any remaining tobacco. He then compiles this into rolling papers to make a package of cigarettes from the garbage of others. None of the other youth react as he performs this task, as it is probably more commonplace than I realize. He offers to sell a cigarette to anybody at the table, effectively creating a market out of half smoked cigarettes; selling them ‘individually’ in a way that is not offered in stores. (field note, February 8, 2012)

From the refurbishing of old electronics, appliances, clothing and bicycles; to recycling bottles, bus tickets, and half-smoked cigarette butts; to manufacturing various tools, garden supplies, home remedies/medications, and drug paraphilia; to selling their hair, artwork, music and writings compositions, and, occasionally, their bodies; the city’s disposable ‘underclass’ has (and continues to be) fully engaged in a wide range of rational and imaginative pursuits outside—and sometimes *in spite*—of the dominant institutions from which they have effectively been excluded. These are, by no means, the traits of a collection of individuals who are lazy, incapacitated, unintelligent, or unwilling to work; rather, they are clear

markers of class struggle, resilience, and resistant labor within a particular community born of a common cultural inheritance and an exploitative economic system (Gowan, 2010).

None of these activities or economic exchanges, however, provided a consistent source of income or shelter, and many of the men also carried financial debts to various institutions and to various individuals and gangs in the inner city. Lacking professional qualifications and the skills needed to sell their labor power in a transformed economy, as well as facing insurmountable barriers due to previous criminal convictions, many consistently (re) turned to the black market in their daily struggles to survive, but to also stake their own claims to independence outside of wage labor. For all intents and purposes, then, the black market was not only an attractive and logical choice for many of these men, it was their only choice—albeit one with entirely predictable consequences.

Police on My Back

The van rides and the weekly floor hockey matches also provided opportunities for the planning of various scams and, on rare occasions, discussions of more significant criminal activities—a reminder that these programs have, at times, the potential to promote labor that actively resists and takes from capitalist modes of production and private property. The following excerpt is from a field note dated March 21, 2012 in which three young men rehearsed a door-to-door collection scam:

I overhear three young men chatting about a fictitious scheme that they have been performing in the wealthier neighborhoods of Edmonton. The youth are dressed relatively nicely and have in their possession binders, flyers, and other ‘props’ to support the charity that they have invented in an attempt to extract money from homeowners:

“Yo, I gotta go pick up a pencil case or something to put the money in. Otherwise it just doesn’t look legitimate,” says one youth.

“Good idea,” says the other. “Should I bring Jesse?”

“Is he a good talker?” he asks.

“Not really,” replies the other.

“Then no,” he says. “I don’t want to have to split the cash more ways than necessary.”

In another instance, Sneijder discussed some of the other strategies that have been collectively developed by some of the men to sporadically earn money as they continually, and in their minds, *legitimately*, strive to secure pecuniary rewards both within and outside the free market:

The parking sign is a good one. Anytime there is an Oilers game or big event at Rexall, some of the guys

will go down and stand near a vacant lot or parking space holding up a sign that reads “\$5 Parking.” It’s easy money, right? The car pulls up, hands them \$5, and gets directed to park in what he believes is a legitimate parking spot. After the game, by the time the guy realizes he’s been towed or ticketed, our guys are gone, cash-in-hand. (field note, January 18, 2013)

During our interview, Sneijder also recalled an even starker example of inner city culture following the establishment of a bike repair program:

So, people wanted transportation, and then I got tools donated and I got a garage to work in, and we started helping people repair their bikes. And then we started helping people get bikes by giving them all the parts and they had to take ‘em down and repaint them and rebuild them themselves so that they would know how to repair their own bike, and then they would own the bike. Yeah. Sounds great except I figured out one day, I don’t know, after we’d been doing it for quite some time, that I was running a chop shop for stolen bicycles. So we stopped supplyin’ parts because all our parts were stolen, right? The guys would dump off frames and I’d take them and they’d be taken down to bare paint and repainted and given a new lease on life.

The van rides occasionally provided opportunities for discussions about more serious felony offenses, including trafficking and discussions of other criminal aspirations:

We go directly to the George Spady Detox Center and pick up three new players, all Indigenous. Two of the men are approximately 25 years old. The third man is in his late 30s. All three are really enthused about the game. They shake hands with everybody and integrate well into the group. We then continue our tour through the inner city, picking up more players at Urban Manor, Bissell, and various side-street/ pick-up spots. We pass by a house on Jasper Avenue that is under construction. Bright orange temporary fences surround the property. Debris is scattered over the lawn. The front door has been removed, as have the windows on the front side of the building. One of the mid-20s men from the Spady Center comments upon the copper wires he sees as we pass:

“Yo!” he says. “I bet that place is loaded with wire!”

“Guy,” remarks another man of around the same age. “We’d make a killin’ off that haul.”

The two men pause for a moment, contemplating a potential ‘economic’ game plan to ‘get at’ the wire.

“We’d have to come at night, eh?” says the one guy.

“Yeah, but they likely got mad surveillance on that place,” replies the other.

“Fuckers are probably putting it (the wire) out front as a set-up, eh? Pinching the first guy stupid enough to grab it.”

The two men agree. They laugh and banter back and forth about times when they almost got pinched by the cops. I am unclear about the sincerity of their stories. Part of me suspects they are ‘putting on’ a show for the guys so as to emphasize their ‘hardness’ and perhaps earn respect from others in the van. The Boyle crew remains silent on the subject, neither condoning nor condemning the men’s stories. (field note, August 17, 2012)

Of interest in this exchange, is how the men immediately recognized the construction site as an *economic opportunity*, as opposed to simply a neighborhood eyesore. Poaching copper wire represents a rational (and creative) means to potentially generate much-needed income for individuals in the inner city with the required occupational skillset—i.e., to remove the copper wire and subsequently bring the commodity to market. However, as with all black markets, economic opportunities are accompanied by certain risks, most notably for this job, the risk of getting ‘pinched’. The pursuit of money outside of wage labor, then, is emblematic of an opportunity structure that is not linked to the dominant assumptions of a moral order, but to very pragmatic economic considerations and rational market analyses: the odds of being arrested, the potential application of the law and its associated economic costs, and the potential selling price for the wire commodity in the marketplace that, together, constitute the broader calculation of a job’s ‘worthwhileness’. In this respect, and as the US economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen noted over 100 years ago, there are undeniable parallels between criminal activity and business that have become even more pronounced and, indeed, normalized in the neoliberal era: “The ideal pecuniary man is like the ideal delinquent in his unscrupulous disregard for the feelings and wishes of others and of the remoter effects of his activities” (1899/1967, p. 237).⁷

Facing significant structural barriers to regular employment, many of the men are never fully able to extract themselves from the mutually reinforcing cycles of poverty and crime, and are regularly incarcerated. Consider the following excerpt:

We arrive back at Boyle Street Community Services, and I run in to Josh (29 years old, grew up in foster care), wearing a black sideways ball cap and puffing on his cigarette. As we greet each other, Josh remarks:

“Fuck! I got pinched selling to an undercover.”

“What?” I ask in quasi-disbelief. “You get arrested?”

“Yep,” he replies despondently. “Two years man. I got two years jail-time. I’m gonna do it straight, no parole or anything like that. I wanna get it all over with at once. I have to check-in Tuesday.”

“Shit dude,” I reply, not knowing how else to react. “Edmonton Max?”

“Probably Drumheller,” replies Josh. “Edmonton Max is for violent offenders, but I don’t know as they are now making the argument that since drugs produce violence, trafficking drugs ought be considered a violent offense. It’s totally fucked man. I don’t belong with fucking rapists and killers.” (field note, June 8, 2012)

Only a few months earlier, Josh had aspired to register for classes at Grant MacEwan University. At the time, Josh had ‘done time’ at the Edmonton Young Offenders Center, but had no criminal record as an adult. He had also explored a range of funding avenues to help support his education. However, in the absence of both family wealth and credit due to an existing debt-load, as well as lacking intellectual capital in terms of the grades required to be successful in competitions for scholarships and other forms of assistance, Josh’s pursuit of social mobility *through public education* via normal, middle class means and resources was simply unimaginable. Instead, Josh sought to acquire capital for an increasingly costly postsecondary education in a manner that appeared, at least to him, as a resourceful, common sense economic solution for his personal trouble in the neoliberal condition—trafficking drugs and actively engaging the very markets and distribution networks that he was desperately trying to escape. His arrest as an adult and subsequent ‘corrective’ incarceration, however, means that he will now have a criminal record: a punitive stigma that Josh will carry, like numerous other men we encountered throughout our fieldwork, in his future efforts to sell his labor power, thus driving him further into the margins of a much broader carceral network whose conditions, as Foucault (1995) persuasively noted, inevitably perpetuate delinquency and condemn so many to recidivism.

Conclusion

All the same (like our Victorian predecessors), we once again regard unemployment as a shameful condition: something akin to a character defect. Well-paid pundits are quick to lecture “welfare queens” on the moral turpitude of economic dependence, the impropriety of public benefits, and the virtues of hard work. They should try it sometime. (Judt, 2011, p. 134)

In this article, we have provided a glimpse into some of the uses of an inner city sport-for-development program in Edmonton’s divided urban center. Specifically, we examined how a group of men relegated to society’s margins made a host of economic and cultural calculations associated with labor and leisure despite—and often in response to—their subordinate positions “within the global rhythms of biopolitical production” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. xi). In the context of economic globaliza-

tion and increasingly polarized Canadian cities such as Edmonton, we have, in turn, placed emphasis on trying to grasp what has happened “in the minds of those to whom, in effect, all this has been done” (Williams, 1983, pp. 186–187). To be sure, the weekly floor hockey matches remain a vital entry point for a wide range of social services and networks of friendship and support, and, for many participants, a powerful source of community, hope, and love—a stark contrast from many of the broader circumstances of their lives.

Addressing the public issues associated with the new forms of spatially concentrated, racialized urban poverty will clearly require much broader political solutions and decisions about the redistribution of wealth including the establishment of a universal basic income, and, conversely, a maximum wage. (in Canada the CEO-to-worker pay ratio stands at 206–1.) The discussions over the creation of an urban commonwealth in Western Canadian cities such as Edmonton will involve questions about property rights, rent control, the provision of social welfare and adequate housing use values for vulnerable populations (including those with mental illness and various drug addictions), as well as the implementation of some of the most significant recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

However, these latter uses of urban spaces are likely to be opposed by powerful economic interests and subordinated to ever-deepening exchange value considerations, especially as cities such as Edmonton invest hundreds of millions of dollars in wealth creation projects, including the new downtown arena and entertainment district that is located only a block away from the current location of Boyle Street Community Services. While this revanchist development will generate substantial monopoly rents for the wealthy, it will have enormous consequences for the community’s long-term residents who are at risk for being displaced as their neighborhoods gentrify and as land values in the downtown core are revalorized—another ‘frontier’ of dispossession (Coulthard, 2014), all in the name of benefiting the city ‘as a whole’.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Mike Giardina and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, as well as Brendan Hokowhitu and Rylan Kafara who provided feedback on an earlier draft of this article. We are profoundly grateful to everyone at Boyle Street Community Services who assisted us with this project and from whom we learned so much. This research was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Sciences from whom we have learned so much. This research was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Sciences.

Notes

1. Between 1993 and 2004, for example, the income gap between Alberta’s poorest and wealthiest populations increased 20% (Edmonton Social, 2007), while one in four children live in

low-income families (Lorinc, 2006). The number of Albertans dependent upon welfare has also expanded—25,000 caseloads pre2008 economic crisis, to 33,000 in early 2014, peaking at 40,000 in 2010—while poverty reduction strategies languish (Kleiss, 2014).

2. These policies include the Provincial Government’s A Plan For Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years (2008), and the City of Edmonton’s A Place to Call Home: Edmonton’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (2009).

3. Edmonton has the second largest urban Indigenous population in Canada (61,375), the majority of whom are Métis and Cree.

4. Alberta has the lowest corporate tax rate in the country, minimal royalty rates, a flat provincial income tax rate (as opposed to a progressive tax rate), and no provincial sales tax (an important revenue generating tool).

5. Alberta has, historically, been a conservative political anomaly in Canada. Unlike other Canadian provinces that have elected governments from the center-left and center-right, Alberta was continuously governed by the center-right Progressive Conservative party between 1971–2015. Before this, Alberta was governed by the right-wing Social Credit Party between 1935–1971. However, in 2015, the center-left Alberta New Democratic Party was elected to a majority government.

6. In Canada, for example, the state’s provision of sport and recreation programs as social control measures has deep historical roots in the public education system and various policies directed at the unemployed—roots that are firmly grounded in a longstanding middle class belief in the positive, character-building value of sport (Harvey, 1988). During the Great Depression of the 1930s, for example, “the National Employment Commission of Canada prompted the Minister of Labour to establish young men’s physical training centres, the goal of which was to help unemployed men develop good levels of mental and physical fitness to maintain their employability” (Harvey, 2015, p. 261). The most germane example of a major governmental initiative in this era, though, was the establishment of the Recreational and Physical Education Branch of the Adult Education Division of the British Columbia Department of Education in 1934 (BC Pro-Rec)—a Branch that was forged explicitly “to meet the recreational and fitness needs of the thousands of unemployed and destitute young men who rode the rods to the warm-winter cities of Vancouver and Victoria during the depths of the Depression” (Kidd, 1996, p. 247). Free to all participants, Pro-Rec centers were established “wherever there was interest, whether application came from a municipality no longer able to provide activities itself, a service club, or an unorganized group” (Kidd, 1996, p. 249). By 1939, 155 Pro-Rec centers provided a wide range of sporting opportunities throughout British Columbia for the unemployed; in fact, demand was so significant that local groups were eventually required to provide their own facilities. “Schools, community halls, even commercial cinemas and theatres during their ‘dark’ times were used” (Kidd, 1996, p. 249).

7. See Foucault (2004) for a fascinating discussion of neo-liberal/market analyses of crime and punishment.

References

- Abrahamson, M. (2004). *Global cities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Auditor General of Alberta. (2015, July). *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta*. Edmonton Alberta.
- Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2002). Cities and the geographies of “actually existing neoliberalism”. *Antipode*, 34, 349–379. doi:10.1111/1467-8330.00246
- Brownsey, K. (2005). Ralph Klein and the hollowing of Alberta. In T. Harrison (Ed.), *The return of the Trojan horse: Alberta and the new world (dis)order* (pp. 23–36). Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Brown, W. (2006). American nightmare: Neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and de-democratization. *Political Theory*, 34(6), 690–714. doi:10.1177/0090591706293016
- Clarke, J., & Critcher, C. (1985). *The devil makes work*. London: The Macmillan Press. doi:10.1007/978-1-349-18013-4
- Coakley, J. (2011). What counts as “positive development?”. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 35(3), 306–324. doi:10.1177/0193723511417311
- Coalter, F. (2010). The politics of sport-for-development: limited focus programmes and broad gauge problems? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45, 295–314. doi:10.1177/1012690210366791
- Coulthard, G. (2014). *Red skin, white masks. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Davis, M. (2006). Planet of slums*. London: Verso. doi:10.5749/minnesota/9780816679645.001.0001
- Davis, M., & Monk, D. (Eds.). (2007). *Evil paradises: Dream-worlds of neoliberalism*. New York: The New Press.
- Donnelly, P., & Coakley, J. (2002). *The role of recreation in promoting social inclusion*. Toronto: Laidlaw Foundation Working Papers on Social Inclusion.
- Doussard, M. (2013). *Degraded work: The struggle at the bottom of the labor market*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. doi:10.5749/minnesota/9780816681396.001.0001
- Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing. (2006). Out in the cold: A count of homeless persons in Edmonton, October.
- Edmonton Social Planning Council. (2007). Standing still in a boom economy, October.
- Florida, R. (2002). *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Perseus Book Group.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795. doi:10.1086/448181
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (2004). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. New York: Picador.
- Giardina, M., & Denzin, N. (2013). Confronting neoliberalism: Toward a militant pedagogy of empowered citizenship. *Cultural Studies ó Critical Methodologies*, 13(6), 443–451.
- Gilroy, P. (1990). One nation under a groove: The cultural politics of ‘race’ and racism in Britain. In D. Goldberg (Ed.), *Anatomy of Racism* (pp. 263–282). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public*. London: Allen Lane.
- Gowan, T. (2010). *Hobos, hustlers and backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. doi:10.5749/minnesota/9780816648696.001.0001
- Gruneau, R. (2015). Sport, development, and the challenge of the slums. In R. Field (Ed.), *Contested terrain: the struggle for sports and recreation (essays in honour of Bruce Kidd)* (pp. 492–536). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hamman, T. (2009). Neoliberalism, governmentality, and ethics. *Foucault Studies*, 6(1), 37–59.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009). *Commonwealth*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Hartmann, D. (2016). *Midnight basketball: Race, sports, and neoliberal social policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hartmann, D., & Depro, B. (2006). Rethinking sports-based community crime prevention: A preliminary analysis of the relationship between midnight basketball and urban crime rates. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 30(2), 180–196. doi:10.1177/0193723506286863
- Harvey, D. (1987). Flexible accumulation through urbanization: Reflections on “post-modernism” in the American city. *Antipode*, 19(3), 260–286. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.1987.tb00375.x
- Harvey, D. (2010). *The enigma of capital and the crisis of capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso.
- Harvey, D. (2014). *Seventeen contradictions and the end of capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, J. (1988). Sport policy and the welfare state: An outline of the Canadian state. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 315–329.
- Harvey, J. (2015). Sport, politics, and policy. In J. Crossman & J. Scherer (Eds.), *Social dimensions of Canadian sport and physical activity* (pp. 257–276). Toronto: Pearson.
- Henry, S. (1978). *The hidden economy*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Hiller, H. (2007). Gateway cities and arriviste cities: Alberta's recent urban growth in Canadian context. *Prairie Forum*, 32(1), 47–66.
- Hobbs, D. (2001). *Doing the business: Entrepreneurship, detestives and the working class in the East End of London*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holt, N.L., Scherer, J., & Koch, J. (2015). Using masculine capital to understand the role of a sport program in the lives of men from a Western Canadian inner-city. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*. doi:10.1123/jsep.2015-0109
- Homeward Trust. (2014). *Annual Report*. Edmonton, AB.
- Judt, T. (2011). *The memory chalet*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Kidd, B. (1996). *The struggle for Canadian sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kidd, B. (2008). A new social movement: Sport for development and peace. *Sport in Society*, 11(4), 370–380. doi:10.1080/17430430802019268
- Kleiss, K. (2014, October 4). Thousands still on welfare rolls despite booming Alberta economy. *Edmonton Journal*.

- Retrieved from <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Thousands+still+welfare+rolls+despite+booming+Alberta+economy/10259097/story.html>
- Koch, J., Scherer, J., & Holt, N.L. (2015). Urban outcasts, disposable bodies, and embodied research in a Western Canadian 'arriviste' city. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, 15(1), 32–44. doi:10.1177/1532708613516426
- Levermore, R. (2008). Sport: a new engine of development? *Progress in Development Studies*, 8, 183–190. doi:10.1177/146499340700800204
- Lorinc, J. (2006). *The new city*. Toronto: The Penguin Group.
- Marx, K. (1976). (Vol. 1. Capital. London: Penguin Classics.
- Marx, K. (1978). (Vol. 2. Capital. London: Penguin Classics.
- Miller, J.R. (2003). Troubled legacy: A history of Native residential schools. *Saskatchewan Law Review*, 66, 357–384.
- Nuttall, S., & Mbembe, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Johannesburg: The elusive metropolis*. Raleigh, London: Duke University Press. doi:10.1215/9780822381211
- Orwell, G. (1933). *Down and out in Paris and London*. New York: Harcourt.
- Parkland Institute. (2012). *A social policy framework for Alberta: Fairness and justice for all*. Retrieved from http://parklandinstitute.ca/research/summary/a_social_policy_framework_for_alberta/
- Pitter, R., & Andrews, D. (1997). Serving America's underserved youth: Reflections on sport and recreation in an emerging social problems industry. *Quest*, 49, 85–99. doi:10.1080/00336297.1997.10484225
- Pitter, R. (2004). Midnight basketball: Avoiding the hazards of assimilative reform. In B. Kidd & J. Phillips (Eds.), *From Enforcement and Prevention to Civic Engagement: Research on Community Safety* (pp. 170–181). Toronto: Centre for Criminology, University of Toronto.
- Rosentraub, M. (2010). *Major league winners*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Sassen, S. (2014). *Expulsions: Brutality and complexity in the global economy*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. doi:10.4159/9780674369818
- Scherer, J. (2011). Olympic villages and large-scale urban development: Crises of capitalism, deficits of democracy? *Sociology*, 45(5), 782–797. doi:10.1177/0038038511413433
- Scherer, J., & Davidson, J. (2011). Promoting the 'arriviste' city: Producing neo-liberal urban identity and communities of consumption during the Edmonton Oilers' 2006 Playoff Campaign. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 46(2), 157–180. doi:10.1177/1012690210387538
- Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1972). *The hidden injuries of class*. Toronto: Random House.
- Short, J., & Kim, Y. (1999). *Globalization and the city*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Silver, J. (2011). *Good places to live: Poverty and public housing in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Press.
- Simone, A. (2004). *For the city yet to come*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. doi:10.1215/9780822386247
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.
- Taft, K. (2012). *Follow the money: Where is Alberta's wealth going?* Calgary: Detselig Enterprises.
- Veblen, T. (1967). *The theory of the leisure class*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Wacquant, L. (2008). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Whitson, D. (2011). Changing notions of public goods: Paying for public recreation. Paper presented at the 2011 National Recreation Summit, October 23–26, Lake Louise, AB. Retrieved from http://lin.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Whitson_Dave%5B1%5D.pdf
- Whitson, D., & Macintosh, D. (1993). Becoming a world-class city: Hallmark events and sport franchises in the growth strategies of Western Canadian cities. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10(3), 221–240.
- Williams, R. (1983). *Towards 2000*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Willis, P. (1978). *Profane culture*. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, B., & White, P. (2003). Urban sanctuary: Youth culture in a recreation drop-in center. In R. Wilcox, D. Andrews, R. Pitter, & R. Irwin (Eds.), *Sporting dystopias: The making and meanings of urban sport cultures* (pp. 153–178). Albany: State University of New York Press.