JUNE 18, 2019
PUBLIC DIALOGUE
OVERVIEW & REPORT

YOUTHLESS CITY
GLOBAL TO LOCAL HOUSING SOLUTIONS
Youthless City, A Public Dialogue was held by Simon Fraser University's Summer 2019 Semester in Dialogue cohort on June 18, 2019 at SFU Woodward's. As participants approached the room, they were able to enjoy an array of photos and written pieces on the wall leading up to it. Once inside, there was an art installation where attendees could choose from a range of photos related to the theme of ‘home’ and create a caption for it using a sticky note. The event was then opened with a land acknowledgement by the moderators and an overview of how the afternoon would look.

The main goal of this event was to engage participants in four mini-dialogue sessions - also known as a World Café format - wherein they were given the chance to participate in meaningful conversations and idea-generating sessions taking inspiration from cities around the world. The four 15-minute sessions each examined solutions being explored in a particular city - Hong Kong, Berlin, Vienna, and Montreal. Attendees were provided with some information about the research each Semester in Dialogue student group had done and were subsequently asked to share, converse, and offer their ideas and experiences. After all four sessions, student note-takers reported back to the collective group with summaries of what had taken place at each station.

The event concluded with a powerful witness reflection panel hosted by one of the students, Ana Mendez. The two guest panelists, Sekani Dakelth and Leo Wu, were asked to provide statements of meaning around what they had observed throughout the World Café session and overall thoughts and feelings about the event. Ana then posed them more specific questions related to issues of housing in Vancouver, which was followed by an opportunity for audience members to ask questions.

Finally, moderators concluded the event and participants were free to mingle, continue enjoying the catered food, and contributing to and appreciating the art installations.
The recommendations presented from the Vienna group generated conversations and questions around housing through the lens of social action. There was a unanimous agreement between groups that in order to implement any recommendations, there must first be a paradigm shift in Vancouver’s housing culture. In order to segue into a more sustainable, affordable housing situation, there must be a lifestyle change that shifts the demand for single family homes to consider alternatives, such as minimalism and communal living. Furthermore, getting public approval to increase taxes to support subsidized housing requires a shift in mindset and values. Another barrier is the culture around Vancouver as an investment city that is catered towards high-end buyers. We have to question who the city is being built for and shift the focus from global to local.

Vancouver does not have enough stock to meet the demand for social housing, and one barrier to increasing that stock is the stigma that is attached to social and non-market housing. In order to combat the stigma, participants suggested the creation of open-house events that give the public opportunities to experience the conditions in social housing and generate dialogue between residents and the public.

Finally, compared to smaller, historic European cities, Vancouver has weak overall social cohesion and public engagement, but there is solidarity among specific smaller communities within the city. We need to utilize these pockets of solidarity in order to organize the community and actually implement change in a meaningful way.

“Housing is a medium for maintaining mental health”

“Adequate housing takes a needs-based perspective”

“Depending on where you build social housing, you can create social handicap and segregation”
VIENNA
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VANCOUVER

60% SOCIAL HOUSING

$700-900 MILLION GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON HOUSING ANNUALLY

1. FUNDING TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE NHS

2. INCREASE ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

3. SOFT URBAN RENEWAL WITHOUT DISPLACEMENT

4. PROTECTION FOR INDIVIDUALS IN SOCIAL HOUSING

5. HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

6. REZONING INDUSTRIAL ZONED LAND

7. COMPETITIVE NON-MARKET DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM
In the Berlin session, the main theme was non-market housing and how it could be implemented in Vancouver. Non-marketing housing is protected from market forces and offers affordable rental and ownership options. The participants came to a common understanding that the current values in society are preventing a large build-up of non-marketing housing such as co-op and non-profit housing. They agreed that the obsession over private property is a huge barrier that prevents a paradigm shift towards growing our rental housing stock.

The commodification of housing has turned housing into a commodity rather than a human right and is often seen as an investment rather than as a necessity. We acknowledge that the system asks people to live specific lives that some people cannot live because they face so many intersectional barriers. Therefore, it is not realistic to expect everyone to own a house and to live a certain kind of life.

The groups also acknowledged that even though non-market housing is often more affordable, it still may not be accessible. This is in part because there are many steps and barriers that prevent people from accessing non-market housing. By making non-market housing more accessible, a large number of people who wouldn’t have otherwise been able to can access affordable, secure and comfortable housing.

“The system asks people to live specific lives that some people can’t live because they face so many intersectional barriers”

“Even though non-market housing is affordable, it doesn’t mean it’s accessible for everyone”
BERLIN
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VANCOUVER

85% OF BERLIN CITIZENS ARE RENTERS
OVER 50% IN SOME VANCOUVER NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE RENTERS.

RENTAL FREEZE
A rental freeze allows wages to catch up to the cost of living and provides added security for tenants

INCREASE PUBLIC HOUSING STOCK
By reducing market housing and increasing government housing stock, there is a greater emphasis on providing housing as a human right for all.

IN 2018, THERE WERE OVER 16,000 INDIVIDUALS WAITLISTED FOR GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZED HOUSING THROUGH BC HOUSING

EXPROPRIATION OF LAND
The provincial and federal governments should grant municipalities greater housing market controls, such as rent control and speculation regulations.

THE POPULATION OF METRO VANCOUVER WILL NEAR 3.5 MILLION BY 2041.
The outcomes of the Hong Kong group’s World Cafe discussion revealed several distinct subjects. The focus of our discussions largely centred around issues of housing and sustainability, including ideas participants had to make the City of Vancouver’s housing strategies more sustainable.

Weaved throughout was a sense that participants craved thriving communities where people live less in isolation and more in closer contact with one another. Here are some of the major themes that emerged:

- Community spaces where everyone is taking responsibility for them are important but are lacking. For example, having community kitchens where people can share meals together and yards where families can play together would help to improve connectivity within many neighbourhoods.

- Densification of communities can be an important measure to help increase people’s sense of community and to make better use of space. It can also help areas to become more environmentally sustainable because amenities are more accessible by foot or by bike. This being said, participants also emphasized that city culture plays a large role in whether densification in a particular area is appropriate.

- There is great value in tiny homes and in living in small spaces to reduce environmental impact. At the same time, there must be emphasis on easy access to community services, spaces, and resources so that people can live much of their lives outside of their living quarters and not feel confined to only their small space.
HONG KONG RANKS FIRST FOR MOST UNAFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE WORLD. VANCOUVER IS SECOND.

PUBLIC/SOCIAL HOUSING AND TENURE

- Restructure the City of Vancouver’s zoning regulations to allow for more diverse housing types within the umbrella of residential zoning.
- Give greater control to municipalities to impose stricter rent control measures, ensuring renters’ security and tenure are respected.

ZONING AND INCREASED MUNICIPAL CONTROL

- Redesign the EcoDensity Charter (environmentally sustainable densification) to allow for flexibility of zoning bylaws throughout Vancouver.
- Require land use/land development policies to be reviewed on a 25 year basis to consider city growth and climate change.

HONG KONG HAS MORE THAN 7 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING ON ~1,000 KM² OF LAND

DENSIFICATION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT

- Establish micro living spaces such as tiny homes and laneway houses to densify neighbourhoods currently zoned for single family homes.
- Implement a rent-to-own scheme to offer more affordable ownership possibilities to lower income earners like seniors and youth.

MICRO LIVING AND RENT-TO-OWN
Throughout the dialogue sessions, many of the main ideas that came out pointed to the need to provide a stronger financial and housing policy education for students to better understand their opportunities in the future. The limitations of bureaucratic processes and the lack of resources that simplify policies being implemented were both factors that participants believed contribute to the lack of civic engagement in Vancouver. Regarding co-op housing for students and consultation on student housing needs, participants showed concern on how these projects would be funded, and the lack of trust towards the government in consulting student needs. Lastly, a great number of youth participants revealed strong concerns regarding the hostility of renting in Vancouver as a student or young adult. Students in the group also pointed to the financial vulnerability they experience and the inability of the government to assist them. Based on the wide range of opinions and concerns, these are some of the main changes our city needs:

- Stronger and simplified education on housing policy and financial planning for students and young adults to allow for more participation.
- The implementation of policies that penalize discrimination towards students and young renters in all parts of the city.
- Consultation on youth and student housing needs that is led by those groups and not organized by the government.

"Nobody wants to rent out their place to a group of students"

"What about those who don’t have financial representation?"
Community Housing through Community Bonds
Community bonds are funds collected by non-profits on behalf of the community. Incorporating community bonds into Vancouver’s housing policies will build more resilient communities and create more affordable housing options for low income earners.

Civic Engagement and Government Consultation on Student Housing Needs
The city of Vancouver lacks in post-secondary institutions and government collaboration that consult on student and youth housing needs. Through government funded programs, the local government should incentivize student participation in housing conversations and policies.

Student Cooperative Housing
Using the Woodnote Housing Cooperative as inspiration, the city of Vancouver should invest in a student housing co-op to tackle affordability and community building.

Reducing Rental Dispute Hearing Wait-Lists
By adding more support staff within the Residential Tenancy Branch and by giving more power to clerks to judge reasons behind tenant-landlords disputes more equitably, Vancouver will be able to reduce their wait-times from the projected four months to two months, like Montreal.

Strengthening Airbnb Regulations
Using Quebec’s new provincial regulation on short-term rentals, Vancouver can strengthen their regulations so that there is more incentive to prevent illegal listings. Limiting the profit that can be made from companies like Airbnb will reduce the number of listings and therefore increase the rental supply in Vancouver.
SFU SEMESTER IN DIALOGUE SUMMER 2019 COHORT

From left to right back row: Kevin Kuo, Shina Kaur, Juan Treviño, Rose Wu, Zariya Khan, Ann Tony, Hedieh Shadiloo, Brian Portner, Victor Yin, Marie-Gabrielle Béchard, Vanessa Cheng, Andriana Lanji
From left to right front row: Camille Ancessi, Bradley Sarandi, James Chan, Ana Mendez

SFU's Semester in Dialogue is a one-semester, full-time program designed to inspire students with a sense of civic responsibility and encourage their passion for improving society. Each semester the program offers an original, interdisciplinary experience that bridges the classroom with the community and creates space for students to reflect on what they are doing and why it matters.

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