

# AUSTERITY and its **ALTERNATIVES**



## Age Friendly Communities or Austerity Friendly Communities?

The Case of Toronto

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# What are Age Friendly Communities?

- AFCs a place-based policy program intended to manage new societal needs associated with population aging via holistic policy checklist
  - housing, transportation, health and social care, planning and urban design, communication, social participation, civic engagement, combatting ageism (WHO, 2007)



# AFCs as a Progressive Policy Approach

1. Promotes a Positive Aging Identity
2. Improves Local Environments
3. Empowers Local Policy Actors

# AFCs as Progressive Policy Practice?

- Gap between AFC concept and practice
- Challenges include programs that are small in scale, lack sustainable funding, fragmented across geographies
- Relates gap to austerity
  - Modlich, 2011; Buffel et al, 2012; Scharlach, 2012



# AFCs and Austerity in Toronto

- Austerity does not just prevent the implementation of AFCs but works through AFCs in both rhetoric and practice as a political project (Newman & Clarke, 2009)
- AFCs can enhance democracy and equity OR extend austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012; Keil, 2009)
- Study actually existing austerity through AFCs in Toronto
  - History of neoliberal restructuring
  - Toronto Seniors Strategy (TSS) passed during austerity regime
- 77 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Toronto politicians, bureaucrats, citizen advocates, non-profit staff, and other policy experts



## Promotes a Positive Aging Identity?

- New focus on senior citizens but aging still seen as a problem
- Problem of aging overcome by activating seniors
- Active aging produces inequities



# Improves Local Environments?

- Problems of access to services and amenities for senior citizens but changes through AFCs small in scale and residual
- Increasingly targeted means-tested provision
- Non-profits scrambling to meet public service gaps



# Empowers Local Policy Actors?

- Non-profits and cities lack policy and administrative capacity in context of increasing responsibility and need
- Practical challenges not adequately considered by AFC proponents
- City has stopped advocating to other levels of government for support



# AFCs as an Alternative to Austerity?

- Austerity Friendly Community > Age Friendly Community
- As Alternative to Austerity, AFCs must
  - Promote a positive aging identity grounded in rights
  - Include both large-scale and small-scale improvements to environments
  - Be multi-scalar in nature



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