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GLST 395

Research Essay

Toronto's Developmental Issues: A look at The Effects of Development on the Environment, The
Community through Gentrification, and The Housing Crisis.

Introduction:

Toronto, the bustling metropolis and economic hub of Canada, faces a myriad of challenges concerning environmental sustainability, gentrification, and most significantly, the pressing issue of affordable housing. As the city continues to experience rapid growth and development, it grapples with mounting pressures on natural resources and infrastructure, necessitating a delicate balance between continued growth and environmental preservation. This research paper intends to delve into three developmental issues prominent in Toronto: the sustainability and environmental protection, gentrification, and the affordable housing crisis. It will elaborate on these three problems before plunging into the latter in a more elaborate fashion. As Toronto grapples with the complexities of the housing crisis, the regional, national, and international levels of government and institutions play crucial roles in addressing the issue. These will be examined briefly before concluding with insights gathered in the research of this paper. These observations shed light on the complexities and challenges of Toronto's housing crisis, underscoring the importance of adopting a comprehensive and sustainable approach to development. By addressing inequalities Toronto can pave the way for a thriving and equitable urban environment for all its citizens. The solutions to these issues must encompass economic, ecological, and social considerations, ensuring a comprehensive strategy that benefits both the people and the planet. Only through concerted efforts can Toronto overcome its housing crisis and work towards a more sustainable and inclusive future for its residents.

Section 1: Developmental Issues in Toronto:

Environmental Protection and Sustainability

Toronto, as a bustling metropolis, faces a myriad of environmental and sustainability challenges amid its ongoing growth and development. The rapid pace of urbanization, coupled with the negative environmental impacts, exerts mounting pressure on natural resources and infrastructure, necessitating a delicate balance between continued growth and environmental preservation. Sustainable development is a term widely used, but it lacks a singular definition. Albeit, it generally encompasses a multi-faceted approach, considering ecological, economic, and social dimensions within the development sphere. Ecologically, sustainable development strives to operate within the biophysical carrying capacity of the Earth and preserve biodiversity. Economically, it aims to fulfill the basic needs of individuals and communities on a global scale. Socially, sustainable development seeks effective governance and prioritization of values that are crucial to citizens' well-being. In essence, sustainable development is envisioned as a holistic strategy that benefits both people and the planet. However, a crucial question arises regarding the focus of sustainable community development: does it primarily serve consumers or citizens? Critics argue that sustainable development, in practice, has become a locus of greater commodification, leading to increased consumption rather than fostering the intended positive environmental changes. This shift towards consumer-driven sustainability can undermine the ultimate goals of preserving the environment and promoting long-term well-being. One essential aspect of achieving sustainability is ensuring equal distribution of resources. Indeed, unequal resource distribution has been identified as a central environmental problem. Sustainable development, therefore, must prioritize equitable access to resources, ensuring that all members

of society can enjoy the benefits of development without exacerbating environmental degradation. A key component of sustainable development lies in the concept of soft infrastructure, which goes beyond traditional physical infrastructure like roads and buildings. Soft infrastructure focuses on fostering social well-being, promoting recreation, and preserving cultural elements within communities. It encompasses a range of livability elements, such as green spaces, popular shops, and thoughtfully designed urban furnishings. By prioritizing soft infrastructure, cities like Toronto can enhance residents' quality of life while minimizing the environmental impact of urbanization. This prioritization must come from public social services spending. Cutting costs in this sphere will amplify the issues we have already been witnessing. Toronto's journey towards sustainable development is a multifaceted and dynamic process. Striking a delicate balance between economic growth and environmental preservation is crucial in ensuring a sustainable and thriving future for the city and its residents. By embracing a holistic approach that considers ecological, economic, and social dimensions, Toronto can pave the way for a more equitable and environmentally conscious urban development model. The focus must remain on serving citizens' needs and well-being while preserving the natural resources that sustain the city's vibrancy and vitality.

Gentrification

Toronto's once-affordable neighbourhoods have been facing an incessant wave of gentrification, posing a significant development challenge with far-reaching negative consequences for the city and its residents. Gentrification, in this context, refers to the process by which lower-income or working-class neighbourhoods are transformed into middle or upper-

class areas through reinvestment and redevelopment. This phenomenon is closely linked to the emergence of the 'neoliberal spatial fix.' It involves a complex interplay between rapid suburban growth, the decline and disinvestment of inner suburbs, and significant investment in inner-city areas, often facilitated through the process of gentrification. The consequence of this process is the displacement of the original population of the affected areas. Housing costs across Toronto have skyrocketed as a result of gentrification, making it increasingly challenging for the original inhabitants to remain in their communities. As these neighbourhoods cater to those with higher spending power, affordable goods and services are replaced by upscale, trendy big businesses. Consequently, the vibrant cultural identity that once defined these neighbourhoods gradually erodes, and public services shift towards privatization. Small businesses struggle to compete with their larger counterparts, and property prices continue to rise. This situation leaves low-income individuals without access to essential services, exacerbating existing inequalities and marginalizing the most vulnerable members of society. The relentless pursuit of attracting the wealthier demographic perpetuates the gap between the rich and the poor, rather than fostering any real trickle-down effect. Gentrification has evolved over the years, reaching a new level in the late 1990s when it expanded beyond the inner-city neighbourhoods that had already experienced it. This expansion, often referred to as the "condofication" of Toronto, has seen an explosion of condo developments throughout the city. As part of its global urban strategy, Toronto aims to create specific urban environments that attract people to live and invest in the city. This strategy is closely tied to neoliberal policies that seek to "tame" target neighbourhoods to encourage foreign investment and immigration. The city's focus on private sector real estate investment primarily serves its own economic interests. However, the trickle-down effect

promised by such policies has repeatedly proven to be ineffective, leading to a widening wealth gap and increased economic disparity. Toronto's aspiration to become a creative hub has been highlighted in its Culture Plan for the Creative City, which leverages culture, arts, heritage, and ethnic diversity under neoliberal conditions to position the city uniquely on the world stage. Central to Toronto's development strategy is the desire to attract the wealthy and creative class. By commodifying culture and diversity, the city seeks to appeal to those who can contribute to its economic growth and innovation. Toronto's relentless gentrification is a complex development issue with profound implications for the city's social fabric and economic landscape. The transformation of once-affordable neighbourhoods into exclusive, upscale enclaves has resulted in the displacement of original residents, increased housing costs, the loss of cultural identity, and a widening wealth gap. As the city continues to navigate its urban strategy, it must carefully consider the social impact of such development and find sustainable solutions that benefit all of its residents.

Housing crisis

The housing crisis in Toronto stands as a formidable and intricate challenge, carrying profound implications for both the city and its residents. Rooted in profound historical underpinnings, the crisis has been a looming concern since the 1970s, when social assistance struggled to cope with the changing economy and social reality. A pivotal moment that aggravated the crisis occurred in 1975 when the Ontario Conservative government implemented a coordinated policy to suppress social spending. Lack of purchasing power of individuals is considered a great obstacle for economic equity. The 1960s marked a transformative period in

Toronto's trajectory, characterized by the shift towards a post-Fordist, post-industrial society. The Fordist focus on mass manufacturing had ended and instead the professional job market within the city centre excluded those who could not find work within it. The onset of these shifts gave rise to the concept of 'global urban restructuring' in the 1980s, which sought to delineate the political, economic, and spatial transformations occurring within the global urban system. This restructuring encompassed multiple aspects, including economic and occupational alterations, gentrification, and the pursuit of neoliberal welfare state reforms. By the 1980s, these changes coalesced into a crisis of homelessness that reshaped the urban poverty landscape. This confronted the ramifications of 'urban marginality,' which entailed growing income inequality, heightened poverty, and socio-spatial polarization and segregation. As the 1980s unfolded, the crisis continued to escalate, leaving an indelible impact on Toronto's populace. Consequently, by 1986, social assistance remained woefully insufficient to cover fundamental needs. The advent of neoliberalism further compounded the crisis. While both the federal and provincial governments pledged to improve social housing, their responses were predominantly reactive, offering temporary solutions that failed to address the underlying causes of the housing and homeless crisis. Consequently, existing housing initiatives operated at near-capacity nightly, struggling to keep pace with the escalating issue. The 1990s witnessed a turning point as the Canadian federal government discontinued all spending on affordable housing in 1993, and funding for social services drastically reduced in 1995. The ratchet wheel effect elaborates that by developing the economy and focusing on recovery, instead of aiding via social assistance, the issue of homelessness could be simply maintained at best. Neoliberal influence permeated all levels of government, leading Ontario to implement cost-cutting reforms, significantly reducing social

housing construction between 1993 and 1994. Consequently, homelessness surged during this period. Throughout these decades, various factors contributed to the exacerbation of the housing crisis, including neoliberal welfare state reforms, uneven effects of urban restructuring, post-Fordist occupational shifts, widespread gentrification, and the "condofication" of Toronto. Instead of prioritizing comprehensive solutions, Toronto focused on positioning itself as an investment platform, pursuing large-scale development projects, and reinforcing dominant global city industries. The mismanagement of the housing crisis was evident as social spending continued to diminish, and responses to the crisis consistently failed to address its core issues.

Section 2: Elaboration on Issue of Homelessness and Overall Housing Crisis:

The housing crisis in Toronto is a complex and pressing issue with significant implications for the city and its residents. I chose this issue as most important because it involves aspects of all of the other mentioned development issues. I believe it to be the cause of and outcome of many of the overarching issues within Toronto's government. A country is only as well off as its worse off citizens. This is referencing them and their importance within our community. The housing crisis has been evident for decades now and is in dire need of renewed social priority and infrastructure.

The housing crisis has deep historical roots, with evidence of its impending nature surfacing as early as the 1970s. During this period, social assistance was failing to keep up with rising rent prices, privately-owned affordable housing was dwindling, and hostel stays were becoming longer. A critical moment in exacerbating the crisis was the Ontario Conservative government's coordinated policy to suppress social spending in 1975, which led to a decline in

purchasing power for those relying on social assistance, hindering employment opportunities and economic recovery.

The 1960s witnessed Toronto's transition towards a post-Fordist, post-industrial society, characterized by the decentralization of manufacturing and a growth spurt in professional employment in the city centre. These changes were associated with the concept of 'global urban restructuring,' which gained popularity in the 1980s to describe the political, economic, and spatial transformations unfolding in the global urban system. This restructuring encompassed various elements, including economic and occupational shifts, gentrification, and the pursuit of neoliberal welfare state reforms. The culmination of these changes in the 1980s was marked by the crisis of homelessness, reshaping the landscape of urban poverty. Historically, homelessness had been associated with individuals, mainly men, who displayed certain eccentric characteristics and frequented specific areas known as 'skid row.' However, a new form of homelessness emerged in the 1980s, referred to as 'street homelessness,' encompassing diverse groups such as youth, women, families, and individuals with disabilities. These groups faced the effects of 'urban marginality,' characterized by increasing income inequality, intensified poverty, and socio-spatial polarization and segregation.

The 1980s continued on this path, impacting an unprecedented number of Toronto's population. Following the loss of approximately 13,000 rental units in the previous decade, an additional 20,000 affordable rental units were lost during the 1980s. The lack of incentives for private investment in affordable housing was evident, as the cost of land surged, by-laws governing housing became stricter, and regulations governing land use tightened. Private investors shifted their focus towards commercial and residential real estate, neglecting the

pressing need for affordable housing. As a result, by 1986, social assistance was still insufficient to cover basic needs like food, shelter, and maintenance. The early stages of neoliberalism further compounded the crisis. Although both the federal and provincial governments promised improvements in social housing, their actions were largely reactive, offering temporary fixes rather than addressing the root causes of the housing and homeless crisis. Consequently, existing housing solutions were operating at near-capacity every night, unable to fully address the mounting issue. The collapse of Toronto's real estate market in 1989 triggered an intense recession that magnified the uneven effects of post-Fordist urban development. This economic downturn encouraged more aggressive neoliberal reforms at both the provincial and federal levels, leading to a lack of state involvement and disinterest in aiding the housing crisis.

By 1993, the Canadian federal government completely ceased spending on affordable housing, while funding for social services saw a drastic reduction in 1995. Neoliberalism's pervasive influence reached all levels of government, with Ontario implementing cost-cutting reforms in 1993 and 1994, freezing social assistance rates, and drastically reducing social housing construction. This period saw a major spike in homelessness, with the number of individuals using homeless shelters increasing significantly between 1996 and 2001. Many homeless individuals sought refuge in city centres, marking a shift from the previous tendency to stay in more isolated, specific geographical areas. Throughout these decades, factors such as neoliberal welfare state reforms, uneven effects of urban restructuring, post-Fordist occupational changes, widespread gentrification, and the "condofication" of Toronto further exacerbated the housing crisis. Provincial government policies further deepened the crisis by deregulating rents and downloading programmatic responsibilities to the amalgamated City of Toronto in 1998.

Instead of prioritizing comprehensive solutions, Toronto focused on promoting itself as an investment platform, pursuing large development projects, and reinforcing dominant global city industries. The mismanagement of the housing crisis was evident as social spending continued to be cut, and responses to the crisis ultimately failed to address its core issues. The housing crisis in Toronto demands a comprehensive and proactive approach to address its historical roots and contemporary challenges. To effectively combat the crisis, policymakers must prioritize sustainable social housing initiatives, equitable resource distribution, and a commitment to providing stable and affordable housing for all residents. Only through concerted efforts can Toronto overcome its housing crisis and create a thriving and inclusive urban environment for its citizens.

Section 3: Linkages with Regional, National, and International Institutions:

The regional, or municipal, government of Toronto plays a crucial role in addressing the housing crisis. It is responsible for urban planning, zoning, and housing regulations. The regional government has the ability to consult citizens. Regional development authorities have the potential to assist in coordinating efforts among neighbouring municipalities to collectively address the housing crisis. It is their responsibility to promote political cooperation and stand for the needs of its citizens. It is the regional government's duty to promote economic integration does not entail ignorance of its population. It maintains a duty to share practices, pool resources, and implement regional strategies targeting the unequal distribution of affordable housing options.

The national level institutions include the federal Canadian government. It plays a vital role by providing financial support, grants, and incentives for affordable housing projects in Toronto. It also has the ability to create and fund social housing initiatives, targeting low-income individuals and families. They have the ability to coordinate policies and programs across the country and significantly impact the scale and effectiveness of housing solutions. The national government's withdrawal from funding affordable housing for Toronto in 1993 was a major issue as its involvement is significant for true change. This level of government also could work with non-government organizations, which have a better chance than governmental of achieving real public change, and regional governments to develop comprehensive housing strategies to counter the crisis. Instead of doing any of this, the government made significant reductions in social assistance at the provincial and federal level, ignoring their responsibility to their population.

The International level institutions have hindered Toronto's progress in this crisis. While the UN has criticized Canada for its homelessness disaster, there has been a lack in accountability. Canada continues to make promises to the UN to address and affect its human rights violations through the housing crisis without keeping following through on its commitments. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank offer funding and support for affordable housing project in developing economies. While a great intention, they also force the countries who accept their loans to adhere to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that benefit themselves economically first and foremost. These institutions have a skewed view of global development goals and sustainable urbanization due to the persistence of neoliberal economics.

Section 4: Theoretical and Analytical Insights:

The information I have gathered reveals significant insights. The impact of neoliberalism has been immense and widespread. The shift to a market-oriented economy through reform policies was idealized as innovative and beneficial to all. Instead of offering the benefits promised, it created an international wealth gap that has sustained and deepened while debilitating lower-income populations. In this neoliberal economy, questions arise concerning the focus of sustainable community development. Arguably, it has become consumer-driven and seems to prioritize economic interests over environmental conservation. A balance must be made between urban growth and environmental preservation that has not yet been identified. In order to realize this stability economic, ecological, and social factors must all be considered. By prioritizing soft infrastructure and public social services spending, Toronto can enhance residents' quality of life while minimizing its impact on the environment.

Similarly, the prominence of gentrification sheds light on how the housing crisis exacerbates existing inequalities by leading to the unequal distribution of resources. Gentrifying displaces original residents, increases housing costs, and erodes the cultural identities of long-standing neighbourhoods. Thus, it leaves low-income individuals and communities with limited to no essential services let alone services for well-being. The role of institutions is critical in addressing the housing crisis. It is up to the regional government to prioritize urban planning and coordination. National governments owe it to their citizens to provide financial support and incentives for affordable housing projects. The International institutions' level of influence allows it to either help or hinder progress. If they are to continue to impose conditions on

countries they must have the organization and information to evidence why it is necessary. Their potential to offer funding is helpful but they must too, be held accountable for their impositions.

These insights shed light on the complexities and challenges of the housing crisis in Toronto. They underscore the importance of adopting a comprehensive and sustainable approach to development, addressing inequalities in distribution, and the need for meaningful collaboration among government and institution levels to create a thriving and equitable urban environment.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Toronto faces a multitude of challenges concerning environmental sustainability, gentrification, and, most notably, the pressing issue of affordable housing. The city's rapid growth and development have strained natural resources and infrastructure, necessitating a balance between growth and environmental preservation. Sustainable development, with its focus on ecological, economic, and social dimensions, offers an integrated strategy that benefits both people and the planet. Gentrification poses another significant challenge, leading to the displacement of original residents, increased housing costs, and the erosion of cultural identities in once-affordable neighbourhoods. The pursuit of attracting wealthier demographics perpetuates the gap between the rich and the poor, undermining the city's social fabric and economic landscape. Toronto must prioritize sustainable social housing initiatives, equitable resource distribution, and comprehensive housing strategies to counteract the negative consequences of gentrification.

The housing crisis in Toronto stands as a formidable and intricate challenge, deeply rooted in historical underpinnings. Policies implemented in the 1970s and the subsequent rise of neoliberalism have exacerbated the crisis, leading to insufficient social spending and inadequate responses from governments at all levels. The housing crisis demands renewed social priority and a commitment to providing stable and affordable housing for all residents.

At the regional level, the municipal government plays a critical role in addressing the housing crisis through urban planning and coordination. The national government, on the other hand, can provide financial support and incentives for affordable housing projects. However, it must fulfill its responsibilities to the population, not neglecting its duty to its citizens. At the international level, institutions like the UN, IMF, and World Bank can have a significant impact, either supporting or hindering progress. While they offer funding, they must be held accountable for the conditions imposed on countries and their true commitment to sustainable urbanization and development goals. The insights gathered throughout this research shed light on the complexities and challenges of Toronto's housing crisis. They emphasize the need for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to development, addressing inequalities in resource distribution, and fostering meaningful collaboration among governments and institutions at all levels. To achieve a thriving and equitable urban environment, Toronto must prioritize social welfare, sustainable housing, and the preservation of its cultural heritage. By addressing these issues collectively, the city can pave the way for a more inclusive, environmentally conscious, and prosperous future for all its citizens. The solutions lie in concerted efforts and a shared commitment to creating a city that prioritizes the well-being of its people while preserving the natural resources that sustain its

vibrancy and vitality. Only through such efforts can Toronto overcome its housing crisis and work towards a more sustainable and inclusive future for all its residents.

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