**Mechanisms of Exclusion in a Postindustrial City:   
Contextualizing Social Work in Urban Communities**

**Abstract**

Summary: Cities are being radically transformed by deindustrialization, globalization and neoliberalism. While these processes have marked progress in various aspects of urban life, they have also generated high levels of exclusion and marginalization. This qualitative study examines exclusion practices in a postindustrial city in Israel using data collected from interviews and focus groups with a total of 93 participants as well as written materials, numerous walking tours and observations. The purpose of this article is threefold: to address the issue of excluded communities in postindustrial cities; to identify practices and institutional mechanisms of exclusion; and to move towards a preliminary conceptualization of how understanding advanced marginality can inform social work at the community level.

Findings: The results confirm that a progressive deterioration of the marginalized communities under study is taking place and identify multiple practices that produce and sustain three main institutional mechanisms of exclusion: service erosion, spatial deterioration and political disempowerment. These practices reflect top-down policies at the local level, while creating and sustaining exclusionary practices from the bottom-up, ultimately propelling a dynamic of community decay.

Applications: Study implications for social work suggest a) incorporating an urban social work perspective that examines institutional, spatial, and political processes at the community level; b) adopting a multi-professional approach to ameliorating social exclusion in postindustrial cities; c) moving towards a critical multidisciplinary conceptualization of advanced marginality for social work in postindustrial cities.

*Keywords:* social exclusion, community, marginalization, postindustrial city, critical theory

**Introduction**

The turn of the millennium brought about vast changes affecting the urban landscape as well as the social work profession. Many cities flourish economically while acting as global hubs bolstering technological innovation and creativity as they thrive with diversity, art and cultural richness. At the same time, cities act as catalysts of inequality due to the dire impacts of post-industrialization, globalization, and neoliberal policy (Winlow & Hall, 2013; Williams, 2016).

Social work is also changing significantly. While the profession’s formal documents and ethical codes continue to emphasize change towards achieving social justice goals, practice, teaching, and research have come to diverge considerably. This shift manifests in many ways, such as the “re-individualization” and “de-politicization” of social work practice (Reisch, 2009); the uncritical adoption of evidence-based practice; and a focus on individual and community resilience and self-help, rather than resistance to oppressive institutional arrangements (Strier & Feldman, 2018; Reisch & Jani, 2012). In many contexts, professional autonomy has become limited and room for community-oriented preventative work, organizing, and policy practice has diminished (Strier & Feldman, 2018; Williams, 2016).

This article seeks to renew the historical relevance of social work to studying and ameliorating the urban marginalization of communities. Based on an extensive qualitative study of advanced marginality, the article examines exclusion practices in communities in a postindustrial city in Israel. The first part of this article reviews social exclusion in communities in the context of postindustrial cities and describes the local context of the study. The second part presents our methods and findings, which identify multiple mechanisms of exclusion at the institutional, spatial and political levels. The last section discusses the dynamic these mechanisms create and sustain by implementing exclusionary practices, and suggests implications for social work theory and practice.

**Postindustrial Cities**

The 20th century was a time of advanced industrialization. In many countries, capitalist economies coupled the industrial mass production of goods with various forms of well-established welfare systems. However, in the 21st century, both the proportion of the world population engaged in industrial work and the share of economic output generated by industrial activity has dramatically declined (Byrne, 2020). As the industrial world has lost much of its factory base, corporations move production to lower-cost locations around the globe, leaving former industrial cities deprived of their economic foundation (Martin et al., 2016; Shaw, 2011). Although there is still an enormous global industrial working class, it is predominantly located in East and South Asia and parts of the Global South (Byrne, 2020). On the threshold of the millennium’s second decade, for the first time more than half of the world’s population live in cities (Shaw, 2011). However, while the first urban sprawl was molded by the industrial revolution of the 19th century, today many cities across almost all countries of the globe have been reshaped to some degree by deindustrialization. The postindustrial city exhibits the characteristics of a postindustrial society and can be described as an emerging set of urban forms and functions that is sufficiently different from industrial cities to warrant a separate definition (Oxford Reference, 2020; Shaw, 2001). Moving in tandem with globalization and changes in the economy and the labor market, cities are constantly shifting shape, turning ever more diverse and bursting with innovation. These changes pose new challenges informed by a set of interconnected factors at both the national state and local municipal levels, which include neoliberal policies and welfare austerity, globalization and financialization, and increasing diversity. For the privileged, these cities can be exciting spaces for individual growth and thriving communities, while for the less socially favored, they can turn into enclaves of human degradation (Wilson, 2016).

The hegemonic neoliberal approach has shaped the role of cities as economic actors in the global arena. From this perspective, cities must vigorously compete to attract foreign investments, wealth, and desirable populations (Cucca & Ranci, 2016; Florida, 2005; Moularet et al., 2003). They do so by implementing a variety of neoliberal urban government tools such as the promotion of international events, urban renewal, sustainability processes, and cultural interventions, all of which are often quite successful (Cucca & Ranci, 2016). However, the neoliberal restructuring of the city comes at a price. Most cities generate growing inequality and new forms of poverty, segregation and division, crime and compromised security, and slum development (Cucca & Ranci, 2016; MacLeod, 2002; UN-Habitat 2012). The financialization of the economy, which is an important aspect of globalization, allows many activities to be converted into globally tradable financial assets. This has increased inequality as wealth holders choose the most profitable ways of doing business by reducing labor costs (Crouch, 2019). Lastly, cities have become plural spaces, characterized by superdiversity and race relations. Many postindustrial cities reflect superdiversity both qualitatively and quantitatively, through a growing number of residents that display an increasing diversity in nationalities, languages, religions, traditions, and lifestyles, as well as diversity in migration background and socio-economic status (Vertovec 2007; Meissner & Vertovec, 2015).

The response to these myriad challenges has been a wave of neoliberal policies engaging with what has been framed as “the welfare crisis” and resulted in austerity measures sweeping across many Western countries (Strier, 2013; Reisch, 2014). Cities have been at the heart of the global financial crisis which prompted welfare policies to take a sharper turn towards retrenchment at the national and local levels. Even in Europe, with its tradition of relatively high government involvement in welfare provision, cities have progressively adopted more neoliberal policies and exacerbated austerity measures (Cucca & Ranci, 2016; Oosterlynck & Gonzalea, 2013). Wacquant’s seminal work compared the trajectories of the black American ghetto and the European working-class periphery of postindustrial cities in the era of neoliberal ascendancy (Wacquant, 2008). Despite the many differences between continents, his studies demonstrate how, on both sides of the Atlantic, postindustrial cities are afflicted with urban relegation that takes the form of real or imaginary consignment to distinctive sociospatial formations (Wacquant, 2016).

**Marginalized Communities in Postindustrial Cities**

The costs and benefits of deindustrialization have been unevenly distributed among urban residents. Individuals and groups are being excluded from access to what the city has to offer on the basis of race, class, religion, income, gender, national origin, disability status, sexual orientation, or other characteristics such as place of residence (Madanipour, 1998; MecLeod, 2002). Bringing the lens of social exclusion to communities represents a focus on relational issues rather than on the lack of financial capital or overall neighborhood poverty, moving beyond the low income level of specific communities to examine participation, spatial segregation, as well as lack of social integration and political power (MacLeod, 2002; Van Kempen, 2002). Madanipour (1998) argues that while the exclusion of groups from the opportunities and advantages of cities is injurious to group members, it is also damaging to society at large, as it fails to take full advantage of available talent, instead wasting resources on conflict and social control.

Research on social exclusion at the national level commonly refers to a wide range of contingent factors that affect exclusion and inclusion, and which are likely to change over time and place (Silver, 2015). However, many of the most effective accounts of social exclusion are neighborhood or community studies. The neighborhood level allows researchers and policymakers to capture interrelated factors that lead to social exclusion (Murie & Mustred, 2004). Where individuals and families live strongly influences access to opportunities and ultimately affects health, education, and economic outcomes (Sampson, 2013). Other things being equal, living or growing up in a poor neighborhood has an impact on many dimensions of social exclusion (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Ellen & Turner, 1997; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). Lichter, Parisi and Taquino (2012) redirect attention to communities rather than areas or neighborhoods, since communities are where local political and economic decisions are made. Studies point to the political geography and economy of communities, by which poor people living in poor places become doubly disadvantaged as they are disproportionately exposed to economic barriers, declining institutions, spatial decay, and political isolation (Levine, 2017; Silver, 2019).

Social exclusion is often marked by a clear spatial manifestation in deprived inner city or peripheral urban areas (Madanipour, 1998; Waquant 2016, Winllow & Hall, 2014). The reference to spatial concentrations of disadvantage as a defining aspect of social exclusion emphasizes its impact on communities. Consequently, there is growing concern regarding the concentration of deprivation in particular parts of cities and neighborhoods, which targets public policies to these areas (Murie & Mustred, 2004).

The spatial manifestation of urban social exclusion is tied to the distribution and supply of services. The availability and quality of marketed services, such as restaurants, shops, hairdressers, and transport is determined not only by the demography, but also by the wealth of the local population. Wealthier areas tend to attract greater numbers of often higher-quality services, deepening existing inequalities as they create employment (Crouch, 2019). Residents in afflicted areas often voice a need for services ranging from more effective policing to better schools and youth programs as well as job training and wider retail offerings (Stone et al., 2015).

Finally, the deindustrialization of cities has political impacts that indirectly feed back into inequality (Crouch, 2019). Inclusion requires a stake in power and participation in municipal decision making. Political exclusion means that urban residents may be discriminated against and excluded from power by being denied voting rights or full political representation (Madanipour, 2015). As state involvement in local development diminishes, residents must face turbulent urban changes without much-needed institutional support. Communities are often co-opted into the change effort with the message that they must fend for themselves and rely on their own resources or market-based solutions (Clarke & Newman 2012; Haughton et al. 2013; Willson, 2016). Local politics thus involve a scramble to accumulate resources in a time of scarcity as communities often compete for valuable real estate investment and high-income residents. Moreover, policymakers and investors have come to realize that disinvestment and neglect can potentially spread and downgrade adjoining areas. This incentivizes policymakers to implement policies to preserve the interests of high-value property owners, giving rise to patterns of concentrated poverty and affluence in the city (Stone et al., 2015).

Considering the manifestations of exclusion and inclusion in their local context does not diminish the impacts of globalization or national-level policy. However, it focuses on local practices, solidarities, and institutions to better understand how they mediate global trends and lead to distinctive local patterns (Silver, 2015). The following section briefly describes the local context, history and socio-demographics of the area investigated in the present study.

**Local context**

Haifa is the third-largest city in Israel and the economic, public, and administrative center of its northern metropolitan area. The city is situated by the Mediterranean Sea along the largest natural bay in Israel and is home to the Haifa port ([Schiller, 1985](http://www.kotar.co.il/KotarApp/Viewer.aspx?nBookID=99404819" \l "8.1706.8.fitwidth)). Haifa has transitioned along with the postindustrial and neoliberal shifts in the Israeli national economy. The occupational structure of Israel resembles that of most developed postindustrial societies (Aharoni, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2018). In the last three decades Israel has moved from a social-democratic welfare orientation towards a neoliberal regime applying austerity measures to its welfare system and public services. While its economy registers remarkable fiscal performance, steady growth, and low unemployment, Israel also ranks high in poverty among Western countries (Ben-David & Bleikh [2013](https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1111/spol.12332" \l "spol12332-bib-0005); Koreh [2017](https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1111/spol.12332" \l "spol12332-bib-0037); Lahat, [2018](file:///C:\\Dassi%20PA\\מחקר\\התחלה\\The%20Effects%20of%20Knowledge%20about%20Poverty,%20Exposure%20to%20Poverty%20and%20Trust%20on%20Policymakers’%20Perceptions%20about%20Poverty%20Lihi%20Lahat.%20SOCIAL%20POLICY%20&%20ADMINISTRATION%20ISSN%200144-5596%20DOI:%2010.1111\\spol.12332%20VOL.%2052,%20NO.%203,%20May%202018,%20PP.%20611–630); OECD, 2018).

Haifa’s population of 278,900 is multicultural, consisting of diverse ethnic and religious groups with a majority of Jewish residents (many recently immigrated from the post-Soviet states and Ethiopia) as well as Muslim and Christian Arabs (Haifa MSPR, 2018). Haifa was historically the center of Israel’s heavy industry. While the industry flourished, the city’s population was prominently working-class and unionized ([Schiller, 1985](http://www.kotar.co.il/KotarApp/Viewer.aspx?nBookID=99404819" \l "8.1706.8.fitwidth)). During the 1980s, Haifa lost much of its traditional industry base and has since been promoting science-intensive industries, mainly high-tech and bio-tech. Most of these industries have their facilities located close to the coastal highway, adjacent to some of the poorest areas of the city, where this research took place.

The study focuses on four communities located in an area known as the “coastal neighborhoods” that is home to approximately 15% of the city’s residents. Changes in the national and local labor market as well as in welfare delivery have affected the socio-economic situation in this area of the city (Postan-Aizik & Strier, 2020). Most of the western area features low apartment blocks representing a poor construction standard, erected during the 1950s and 60s. Nevertheless, it is attractive thanks to the potential for tourism and leisure activities afforded by its proximity to the beaches and to main transportation routes. Recently, national and municipal agencies have been promoting urban renewal and development through market-based programs in the area. Many plans involve demolishing entire blocks, building high-rises or adding construction to existing buildings ([Haifa Outline Plan, 2008](http://www1.haifa.muni.il/mitar/chapters/chap1.pdf); [Nardi, 2017](https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-haifa-unveils-plans-for-kiryat-eliezer-urban-renewal-1001307177)). These prospects have encouraged new investors and driven up real estate prices in this declining area (Mirovsky, 2015).

Method

The data were collected throughout 2012–2016 in the framework of an academy-community partnership program between the University of Haifa and local agencies aimed to tackle social exclusion (Ofek, 2017). Data were gathered using several qualitative methods: in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observations, walking tours, and textual analyses. We applied purposive sampling to set up 30 in-depth interviews with local activists (N = 20) and professionals (N = 10) who were involved with the program. Interviews were conducted at the homes or workplaces of the participants and lasted 60–90 minutes. For the focus groups, residents (N = 63) were recruited by local agencies and divided into six groups, each of which held a session of 90–120 minutes. Interview and focus groups participants were selected to be representative of the ethnic, religious, gender, and age composition of the area. Numerous observations were conducted throughout the study period, primarily at meetings and public gatherings. On walking tours data were collected through observations and photography. Lastly, data were gathered from protocols and textual resources presented by study participants.

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently analyzed to identify emergent themes and patterns (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In coding, we looked for shared understandings and divergences, as well as descriptive analyses of the participants’ evolving understanding of exclusion and inclusion (Sandelowski, 2000).

The study was approved by the University of Haifa institutional ethics committee. At the time of data collection, the authors held professional and academic positions in the academy-community partnership. This allowed for a mix of insider-outsider perspectives that informed the study, while also raising ethical considerations. The researchers made their positions known during data gathering and special care was taken with participant confidentiality. To enhance rigor, we used triangulation through several data collection techniques that captured the participants’ various viewpoints. We employed bracketing to diminish the influence of the researchers’ early assumptions and allow for deeper reflexivity in data analysis (Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2012). Finally, the main findings were communicated to several participants as a form of member checking to enhance research credibility (Padgett, 2016). In the following results section, each quote is followed by the participant’s alias, gender and affiliation in parentheses.

Results

The study identified multiple exclusion practices falling into three main categories of mechanisms: service erosion, spatial deterioration and political disempowerment.

### **Service Erosion**

Study participants indicated that services eroded in a four-tier dynamic. First, essential services were eliminated, leaving residents without support for their basic needs. Second, “unwanted” services were introduced. These were usually services catering to individuals from outside the community; although taking advantage of local resources, namely public buildings or parks, they did not serve the local community. On the contrary, they soon attracted stigmatized populations, while – as a third step – the few public services still left in the neighborhood underwent privatization and harsh cutbacks to the point where they barely supported community needs. Lastly, fragmentation of community services and programs generated division and lack of organizational collaboration.

***Elimination of Services***

When services started to disappear in a neighborhood on a mountain slope, residents had to walk steep and narrow streets that were inaccessible to public transport to run errands such as grocery shopping or doctor’s appointments. Elimination of vital services principally affected elderly or physically disabled individuals, and families with young children. A focus group participant complained about this problem:

*"There is nothing [here]. Nada. Zero. Many promises were made. They promised a healthcare facility for families, they promised a bank. There once was a bank here, but it was closed. Probably didn’t make enough profit for them…" [Resident, FG1].*

The once-thriving businesses that serviced these communities have disappeared, leaving vacant commercial spaces in the main streets, as a community activist described:

"The shopping center here you just have to look at it. I think maybe 90% is closed. God have mercy. The whole building is crumbling. There were once shops inside the pavilion. Now they've closed it. I think for safety reasons, so it doesn’t collapse... But there was once a tailor, maybe three or four grocery stores. Shoes, a hardware store. All kinds of services you need around. Now there isn't even a cash machine." [Gil, 38]

Lack of accessible services raised food prices in the area. Focus group participants in one of the poorest communities noted that the only local supermarket is much more expensive than in other retail areas: “*We pay killer prices*” or “*the highest prices are here.*” [FG3]

Elimination of public services had the greatest impact on vulnerable individuals who faced other forms of discrimination. The following example was given by an activist describing the impending termination of a program for seniors, who constitute almost 20% of the population in the area: *“Elderly women frequent this place. Their husbands died…Their only income is social security which is so little… they come to drink tea, get warm in winter, or cool off in summer. They are so lonely at home…” [Sol, F, activist].* In another area residents objected to the closing of a youth club that serviced the Jewish Ethiopian minority in this community: “*We need places for our kids. Somewhere sheltered and organized. We can't tell them not to disrupt or not to sit outside, to go someplace else. Where would they go?*” [Shoshana, F, activist].

***Introduction of “Unwanted Services”***

Subsequently, “unwanted” services were established in the area. Although these services are important, we use the term “unwanted” here to indicate that they are considered as such by the inhabitants of most residential areas and are often stigmatized (NIMBY – Not in My Back Yard). In this area, examples included a program for juvenile offenders and a center for individuals with disabilities. Coupled with the elimination of vital services, residents perceived this as robbing the community of its limited resources. A city official described the process as follows:

"*Suddenly [residents] wake up in the morning and have… all these services they don’t want. These communities are already excluded, so it's easier to put all these things there that make them even weaker, like services that no one wants anywhere.*" [Shadia, F, professional]

Shadia’s experience explains how this practice further entrenches the exclusion of specific communities. It also points to the risks of hyper-exclusion as stigmatized groups may exclude each other. In other parts of the city this dynamic is resisted, as exemplified in the remark of a professional: “*In another part of the city… an organization wanted to build hostels for people with intellectual disabilities. The mayor himself led the protest that didn’t let them do that*…” [Avishai, M, professional]. This suggests that the downscaling of vital services combined with a simultaneous utilization of scarce community assets for the benefit of non-residents is a dynamic associated with excluded communities that have little political power or financial resources to resist.

***Privatization of Services***

The few public services remaining in the community underwent a rapid process of privatization, changing their agenda so drastically that they could barely provide services to residents anymore. A focus group participant gave an example of this:

"I'd like to talk about the community center. I exercised there for many years. They have activities for kids, a swimming pool and all. But it costs lots of money... if it's really a community service it has to be priced so that a family in the community can afford it…" [Resident, F, FG4]

This participant pointed out how the term “community,” associated with the center, obscured the privatization process by which it was gradually ceasing to serve local families. Similarly, an activist from another community described his conversation with the director of the only publicly funded community center in his neighborhood:

The manager… he doesn’t understand the needs of our youth. So, I asked him why don't you open [after school programs]? He says – "look, I get a tiny budget from the city. I need to keep this center afloat. So, I rent out the rooms for privet tutors, parties etc. It barely covers the costs." So, you see? The real purpose of a community center gets distorted because the city and government can't see this. [Haim, M, activist]

As local community centers are gradually coming to rely on private rather than public funding, they are forced to offer costly services to remain financially viable. What happens when affordable services discontinue? An activist described what can be commonly seen in the afternoons as residents congregate in front of buildings and in the street:

A woman that leaves every morning to work as a cleaner, she works very hard to pay for these exercise or dancing [classes]. So, she will give up the club. She has neighbors for company. She has her mother-in-law. She will sit outside under the building [with them]. [Mary, F, Activist]

***Fragmentation of Community Services and Projects***

Lastly, interactions between public organizations in the area were often competitive rather than cooperative. This triggered a fragmentation of services along the lines of organizational priorities. Strategic competition for scant resources made things worse: *“The organizations, between themselves, they don’t always succeed in working together to maximize efficiency for the community. That’s another story. This whole cooperation thing, added to the lack of services and cut-backs.” [Shoval, F, professional]* This participant emphasized that the dwindling resources allocated to local organizations were dispensed to smaller-scale projects, which reduced their overall impact. A manager from a national program for child welfare implemented in the area described the situation as follows:

It's crazy. When you're the one allocating the resources, the one with the money, you think- how much will I invest? Let's say it's one million. But you don’t understand that… you need four million! Now there is a big difference between how each side views the situation. Agencies feel they are highly invested… in many programs… but the public can't feel the difference. [Amit, F, professional]

This statement exemplified that in addition to a restricted budget as such, dividing budget items between programs and organizations with different missions generated smaller impacts than planned.

**Spatial Deterioration**

Study participants referred to the physical deterioration of the area as a propellant of community erosion. Many participants described their experience of their communities’ spatial environment by comparing it to that of “good neighborhoods” or “up there,” referring to the wealthier parts of the city situated on the slopes of Mount Carmel. Here is an example:

"Take a walk outside now and see how filthy … Just here. Bottles, cups, garbage. We report it… it's true - people should be educated. But if the city gave fines for trashing like they do up there… well when someone gets a big fine we'll see if they'd throws anything ever again" [Resident, M, FG4].

This resident expected the city to keep the area clean and enforce order like it does in other neighborhoods. Local activists also gave examples of the unequal allocation of spatial resources:

If one of us calls [the city] for something, then they either take care of it or not. But if someone from another neighborhood [calls]… well they know exactly who to call to get things done… they all know each other. Maybe it's because they pay more taxes? Maybe it's because city officials are scared that they'll go to the press. Down here we don’t know how to, and we don’t insist [Yaakov, M, activist].

Yaakov shared his thoughts about the possible reasons for the unequal allocation of resources, while another activists described how grassroots organizing efforts for spatial change were ignored or suspended. A local activist who had joined a community group mapping neighborhood hazards gave the following description:

Cleanliness and safety. These are the two most important things for us. So, I did the groundwork and took about 200 photos [of hazards]. I didn’t miss a thing. I saved all this correspondence with the director and the department… Finally, they sent over someone that said he doesn’t see any problems… but I gave them all the photos... So, the director finally says: 'you only took pictures of what you want [to fix]'. Well what do you think I'm going to take pictures of?! [Ezrah, M, activist].

Ezrah’s claims were not only ignored – he was even criticized for formulating them. Another activist from a group tackling spatial issues described her experience of striving to promote improvements in public transportation as follows:

They sit in offices and have their private vehicles. They don’t see what's going on in the neighborhoods! Poor people are unnerved… They keep saying it'll be okay, and it only gets worse. [now] we have no public transportation in this neighborhood at all [Sarah, F, activist].

By eliminating much of the public transportation, communities were effectively disconnected from the rest of the city. This policy disproportionately affected excluded groups within these communities. A professional added her city-wide perspective on the spatial processes and policies affecting excluded communities:

"It’s a fact that you can invest and change the situation. First and foremost, in the physical aspect, all the infrastructure. They [the city] are getting ready for urban renewal. But where are the residents? They're not in these processes. No one even gives them a second glance. It's worse than that… they want to develop and move these people away! They're not interested in inclusion or support for existing communities… The physical aspect of the neighborhood, the streets, the roads, buildings. It's all a part of this [Shadia, F, professional].

This is an example of a professional’s perception that the municipal policy was not directed at inclusive redevelopment. On the contrary, residents and local activists also suspected that spatial neglect was not a consequence of unsuccessful policy, but a strategy designed to drain the community of its resources and possibly force poor households to relocate.

**Political Disempowerment**

Political disempowerment refers to a set of practices that promote and sustain the existing power dynamic propelling the two other mechanisms just described.

***Distancing from Power***

Study participants described difficulty in contacting public officials in positions of power. By limiting access to officials, the community was regularly distanced from resources and decision-making processes. Professionals described this situation using various metaphors. For example, one community professional described it thus: “*They are putting this place to sleep. It is detached. As if there is a bubble around it. You can see and feel it*.” [Daniella, F, professional] This imagery suggests that the community is being intentionally confined and segregated. Another professional saw a connection between physical and political distancing:

Physical proximity to decision makers, accessibility to decision makers, being closer to people who have influence... You can't do [exploiting] things in the neighborhoods where you and I live because the residents would resist. It's sad that the voting for local elections in these neighborhoods is insanely low. [Avishai, M, professional]

Avishai compared excluded communities to the “better” neighborhood in which he lived in order to contrast the ability of each to influence local decisions. Although he noted that residents were not politically involved, some local activists did try to promote change during the research period. Nevertheless, study participants described several practices that distanced them from power. Bureaucracy was perceived as a mechanism of suppression, as described with apparent frustration and anger by an activist who tried to report an urgent complaint:

The safety department instructed me to find the construction department. I tried. I called. Finally, someone came and said 'mam, you need to send a letter to the city engineer'…it continued [eventually] I gave up. It's them despairing you. Making you feel hopeless, so you don't ask again. It's because we're not royals like those who live… on top of the mountain. [Hanna, F, activist]

Hanna was mad about what she perceived as an urgent safety complaint being pushed around between city departments and perceived bureaucracy as a means to discourage her. In using the term “royals,” she contrasted her community with affluent areas, which she was certain received better treatment. Other study participants gave examples of general disregard by public officials who control issues vital to the community. The following is an example from an activist who tried to contact officials concerning an upcoming neighborhood revitalization:

We asked for a meeting. She said to contact her. The person in charge, she is very nice, but I sent e-mails and there is no response. Call? They never answer the phone. I think we will have to come over and knock on their doors. [Guy, M, activist].

These examples demonstrate the importance of access to public officials for both residents and professionals. However, study participants perceived themselves to be actively distanced and treated unequally by those in power because of their community membership.

***Weakening of Local Community Leadership and Organization***

Throughout the study, interview and focus group participants expressed motivation to invest time and energy in promoting community change. However, in observations we identified only a scant representation of local leadership in significant arenas such as public gatherings or board meetings of organizations serving the area. Our findings indicate that various practices obstructed local leadership development and bottom-up decision making. A professional described his efforts to sponsor community elections and the pushback he encountered:

The policy is not to grow community power. They don't exactly want leadership here. There are no elections for councils... almost no elections for neighborhood committees, or any community development processes. When I sponsored election in one of the neighborhoods, they looked at me like I'm crazy. You can't endorse this by yourself if the city doesn't back it up. This is exactly what the city wants - if they officialize the election process, they'll be compelled to hear them. [Avishai, M, Professional]

In this case, weak community organization was reinforced by municipal policy. Professionals were not only discouraged from empowering local leadership but even expected to suppress it. Contrary to supporting local leadership, study participants described cases in which authorities substituted bottom-up representation with top-down processes controlled by the local or national government. An activist described his experience with urban renewal processes a follows:

The city scheduled this civic engagement meeting with a [private] consultant. So, they selected three or four people from each block and asked- what would you like? Everybody wrote something. That was about a month and a half ago and they say it would take till December to get answers. But… we can't come up with ideas. We need to be informed about our options. [Simon, M, Activist].

While the process used a facade of community engagement to legitimize city policy, local leadership was not part of this top-down intervention, conducted with only a few selected residents. In other cases, engagement was not compatible with community needs or excluded the most vulnerable groups. The following example was given by an activist from another neighborhood who worked to organize residents that faced market-based urban renewal. In doing so, she realized that many residents had no legal standing in the process:

People have been renting here for decades! In my building about 80% are renters… and the owners live in the Tel Aviv area- can't find them. It’s a problem and I haven’t got solutions. Moving away means loads of money. It's not just the apartment, also changing schools and other things. [Alona, F, activist]

Despite the fact that renters would be strongly affected by urban renewal, and although Alona succeeded in her endeavor to organize the community, authorities declined to recognize their association. A professional pointed to the social price of unheard local voices: *‘People are part of the process if you don’t exclude them and toss them out. The city could have benefitted from their input. But they are “miserable” so what do they know? That’s how they treat them.’ [Shadya, F, professional]*

***Restricting accesses to information and rights***

Study participants described receiving little or no pertinent information regarding issues that impact then, thus restricting access to rights at the individual and community levels. In the following case residents were forced to cut down a beloved tree at their own expense:

This tree was there for 25 years. [We were forced to] Remove it in two weeks or get a fine... we chopped it off. It didn’t disturb anything. It was hiding the trash, there were birds. I used to look at it from my third-floor apartment and meditate. No! Chop! Not just part of it we had to chop it all off. [Hanna, Activist]

The imminent fine compelled residents to obey the ordinance despite their objections, while apparently lacking information about their right to appeal. Although many factors might have ultimately determined the tree’s fate, since most residents cannot afford legal services, this incident, like others described by residents, limited their control over community resources.

The following example describes a case in which restricted information has had more severe impacts. It involves about twenty apartment buildings constructed during the 1950s as a quick response to immigration waves and the need for public housing. In recent decades, as public housing schemes declined, the apartments were offered to their occupants for sale. The residents were mainly new immigrants and families with a low socio-economic status, excited at the possibility of purchasing their apartments at an affordable price. Approximately 80% of the apartments were privately owned at the time of the research. A community worker explained the situation and what transpired after the sale:

It's this big block that the government built and sold very cheap 350 apartments in total. About 1000 people live there. Most of them were new immigrants. And so, they sold them for a funny price. Like 'we are coming to help you out' and then it [the asbestos hazard] was discovered. Now, as soon as you own the property you are also responsible for that. [Daniella, professional].

It was only discovered later that the agencies involved in the sale had neglected to share pertinent information regarding asbestos panels that covered the buildings. As these panels deteriorated over time, they began crumbling. This compromised the blocks’ appearance, driving down real estate prices throughout the area. However, the main problem remains (up to the study period) the environmental hazard caused by loose asbestos particles, which pose serious health threats such as increased risk of lung disease and cancer. A resident described the ensuing situation as follows:

A few years ago, a city inspector came and wrote a block citation about the broken panels. That the residents of this block of apartment buildings, fix this thing with their own money because asbestos is a dangerous thing. This is the situation - We didn’t build these buildings. Other than that, they did nothing (to help). [Resident, FG 3].

Apparently, realizing the danger, the city instructed residents to coordinate and finance the repair immediately. However, as they could not afford the cost of safe asbestos removal and renovation while vacating their own apartments, the city’s citation was impossible to follow. In this case, restricted access to critical information proved detrimental not only to the private owners but to the entire community, which still faces a health threat. During the study period, local leadership tried to collaborate with environmental advocacy organizations to no avail.

In conclusion, participants described many practices combining to produce and sustain mechanisms that ultimately influence social exclusion or inclusion at the community level. Table 1 summarizes the main findings.

*Table 1: Local Practices and Mechanisms of Exclusion*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mechanism | Local practices |
| Service erosion | * Elimination of necessary services * Introduction of “unwanted services” * Privatization of local services * Fragmentation of community services and projects |
| Spatial deterioration | * Spatial neglect * Safety and crime control * Lack of transportation |
| Political disempowerment | * Restricting access to public officials * Weakening of local community organization * Restricting accesses to information and rights |

**Discussion**

This study examines community exclusion in the context of a postindustrial city. Understanding mechanisms of exclusion requires careful attention to the practices that lead to denying marginalized communities access to the benefits enjoyed by other city dwellers (Madanipour, 1998; MecLeod, 2002). To understand the dynamics of community marginalization, we studied four neighborhoods in the western part of the postindustrial city of Haifa, Israel. Our analysis of qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, written materials, as well as numerous walking tours and observations, confirms that progressive marginalization and segregation is taking place in these communities. The study identifies multiple practices that produce and sustain institutional mechanisms of exclusion at the community level.

By identifying *service erosion* as the first mechanism, this study corroborates previous research showing that afflicted areas generally offer fewer services, and that those remaining are of a lower quality (Crouch, 2019; Stone & Stoker et al., 2015; Winlow & Hall, 2013). Our analysis disentangles the dynamics giving rise to this state of affairs by identifying four local practices: the elimination of necessary services, the introduction of “unwanted,” stigmatized services, the privatization of local services, and the fragmentation of community services and projects. This dynamic is especially destructive because its effects reach far beyond the quality of services delivered to residents: it tends to stigmatize the area and create financial pressure on communities by raising service prices while real-estate prices drop. The second mechanism of *spatial deterioration* demonstrates how policies that physically neglect specific areas in the city affect how communities understand their exclusion. Neoliberalism has reproduced mounting inequities and new forms of urban deterioration, criminality, and the development of impoverished neighborhoods at the peripheries of postindustrial cities (Cucca & Ranci, 2016; MacLeod, 2002; UN-Habitat 2012). These inequities create striking spatial manifestations of social exclusion (Andersen, 2003; Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001; Madanipour, 1998; Waquant 2016). Our findings show how spatial neglect, lack of safety and crime control, as well as a lack of transportation have effectively disconnected the western area of Haifa from the rest of the city. Finally, the mechanism of *political disempowerment* is driven by practices that restrict access to public officials, weaken community organization, and restrict access to information and rights. Communities are where local political decisions are made (Lichter et al., 2012). Social inclusion implies that communities have the political power to make decisions that affect them. However, in combination the practices identified in this study produced transformational processes that eroded the local social, spatial and political infrastructure. As mechanisms of exclusion propel community deterioration, the path may be cleared for market-based urban revitalization programs, which tend to be more profitable to private investors and developers than to the local community.

These findings call for a re-examination of social work practice with excluded communities in the context of urban marginalization in postindustrial cities. The historical development of the social work profession is inextricably linked to the development of the Western city. The urban setting is significant because many professionals working with marginalized communities in the city are social workers in national or local government services as well as civic organizations (Reisch, 2014). Indeed, much of social work takes place in communities that face exclusion, poverty, declining resources, poor housing, high crime rates, and other problems (Cummins, 2016). Williams (2016) argues that the city should not be considered as the backdrop for social work practice but as a critical arena for the development of viable responses to inequality and social exclusion of vulnerable and marginalized people (Williams, 2016). As most of the world’s population reside in cities that undergo postindustrial processes, social work must continuously strive to fulfill its social justice mission by viewing the city as figure and not merely ground.

Studies show that although public and private programs may advance specific individuals or families, and despite enormous material progress over the years, only limited headway has been made in transforming marginalized urban areas (Robertson et al, 2008; Tunstall & Coulter, 2006). Community services employ different approaches to confront community problems. However, much of social work practice emphasizes capacity building and social planning strategies, while little attention is paid to critical community practice (Brady et al., 2014; Fisher & Shragge, 2000). In light of the study findings that identify institutional mechanisms rooted in urban policies, we suggest incorporating a wider, critical view of communities is postindustrial cities. Wacquant (2016) refers to excluded areas or neighborhoods as “territories of relegation.” According to Wacquant, using the term “urban relegation” focuses inquiry not on the place itself or its residents, but on the multilevel structural processes whereby persons are selected for, thrust into and maintained in specific locations, as well as the social structures and cultural forms they develop. He argues that studies must avoid looking at vulnerable “groups” and turn their attention to the institutional mechanisms that produce, reproduce and transform the network of positions to which members are dispatched and attached. The implications of adopting a more critical urban perspective on social work suggest a re-examination of programs that focus on restricted community issues or target specific groups within excluded communities. We propose that narrowly goal-oriented projects may unwittingly facilitate the same fragmenting dynamics that propels the destitution of urban communities. Therefore, while focused community programs can produce evidence-based results, when oblivious to the urban context of inequality, they may do little to remedy the mechanisms of exclusion. As such, they risk becoming a part of the institutional system that impedes social inclusion in postindustrial cities and further marginalizing individuals and communities.

Social work requires greater awareness of the postindustrial urban context to analyze and challenge processes of social exclusion and advanced marginality. At the institutional level, there is a need for critical examination of the role of local organizations and government institutions and services in sustaining exclusionary dynamics. In so doing, social workers can potentially facilitate the communities’ tackling of service erosion by identifying relevant mechanisms and resisting its manifestations. At the spatial level, social work must incorporate spatial considerations into practice and research in urban settings, including, but not limited to, urban renewal, transportation, environmental problems, safety, and sanitation. Dealing with wide-ranging problems requires broadening the scope of professional interventions and enhancing multi-professional alliances. At the political level, identification of power structures that inhibit community representation and create political disempowerment is essential. These structures are often obscured by “community-washed” programs that impart a participatory aura to processes even when these are delivered top-down. Social work values also require paying attention to unheard voices often associated with groups that are marginalized within the excluded communities themselves on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, gender and other attributes.

Postindustrial cities pose mounting challenges for marginalized communities. At the same time, they hold the promise of prosperity by extending economic opportunities and sharing the benefits of cultural and social diversity. Urban social work holds the potential to advance social justice by contributing to ameliorating local mechanisms of exclusion in order to help communities realize social inclusion for the benefit of all city dwellers.

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