



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Social Work

of

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BSW (University of British Columbia, 2010)

**“There Goes the Neighbourhood:  
A Case Study of Social Mix in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside”**

School of Social Work

Tuesday, April 23, 2019

10:00 A.M.

Human and Social Development Building  
Room B347

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Leslie Brown, School of Social Work, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Bruce Wallace, School of Social Work, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Eric Roth, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Michael Nowlin, Department of English, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

*Social mix* is a highly contested global trend in urban planning as it can result in some of the same negative social consequences as gentrification, such as displacement and social polarization. In 2014, the City of Vancouver approved a social mix strategy for one of its low-income neighbourhoods in their Downtown Eastside (DTES) Local Area Plan (LAP). With this plan, the city aimed to increase mid- and high-income residents in a predominately low-income neighbourhood. Included were Social Impact Objectives to mitigate harm to existing low-income residents, and assurances the approach would benefit all community members. The LAP provoked questions of whether social mix could, indeed, benefit low-income residents. This qualitative single-case research study investigates the experiences of residents with low incomes in the DTES neighbourhood, three years after the implementation of the LAP. The study is grounded in an anti-oppressive framework, with attention to anti-colonization and the unique experiences at the intersection of gender and colonial oppression. Three key findings emerged from neighbourhood observations and semi-structured focus groups conducted in 2017 with twenty-four research participants. First, experiences of displacement in the DTES were reported; second, experiences of social polarization within their neighbourhood were described; and, third, most participants demonstrated strong community connections despite the social mix changes. The findings suggest low-income residents did not benefit from social mix and, if further displacement and polarization were to continue, the negative impact on low-income residents would increase. Simultaneously, continued acts of resistance by low-income residents in the DTES help maintain their place in the neighbourhood and continue to shape the social mix landscape. The findings, therefore, support low-income residents' efforts to slow increasing numbers of high-income residents into the social mix of their community.

**Keywords:** Social mix, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, DTES Local Area Plan, DTES Plan, gentrification.