SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE: A WAY TO SEE HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS IN
RURAL AND NORTHERN ONTARIO TOWNS

by

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ABSTRACT

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What is social infrastructure? How is it defined, if at all? This paper importantly brings together cross-disciplinary discussions that are often *about* social infrastructure. Examining social infrastructure in rural and northern Ontario to draw connections between reports of hidden homelessness, discussions about or in reference to social infrastructure, and the realities faced by rural and northern Ontario municipalities and communities. Using a review and analysis of these different streams of research, social infrastructure spaces are mapped according to different definitions or understandings in the disciplines. This mapping exercise is applied to Sault Ste. Marie to illustrate the complexities of addressing social issues as they unfold in small northern Ontario communities. The research suggests that a broader understanding of what social infrastructure is can help us to see spaces that are often overlooked and underappreciated by planners, but perhaps valued by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness for the sociality and comforts that they can provide. This suggests that in addressing homelessness, poverty, and economic revival, planners in rural, small, and northern communities ought to think critically about the ways in which planning policies, programs and strategies might overlook spaces use by those most marginalized.

Key words: social infrastructure, hidden homelessness, rural and northern Ontario, Sault Ste. Marie

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge that the process of writing and editing this paper was finalized during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, we are witnessing the temporary global closure of spaces where public life happens in order to protect human health. This includes the libraries, malls, diners, cafes, and coffee and barber shops that allow us to connect with each other. For many, these are the spaces where we grab a bite to eat, sip coffee with a friend, shop, or study. However, an often-overlooked function of these spaces is that they provide refuge from unsafe homes or precarious living situations when some feel like they have nowhere else to go. These spaces are a central focus of this paper, and I feel that it is necessary and right to acknowledge that although the temporary closure is imperative for the overall health of the global population, this will have underlying consequences for the individuals who rely on them for purposes beyond their often intended functions. To the individuals whose experiences are impacted in greater ways than the world may know right now, you have not been forgotten. As an urban planning student who cares deeply for the people that make our communities wonderful, I hope that when the world recovers to a new "normal" we collectively value the importance of having safe and reliable places to live and be.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a complicated matter. Images of ‘what homelessness looks like’ are often conceptualized based on scenes people encounter everyday - individuals sleeping in streets, alleyways, or bus shelters, others asking for or being given money (Dean, 2015). These experiences are unfortunate and visible realities prevalent in spaces where physical and social resources cluster. Common as these images may be, homelessness takes on many shapes and forms. In fact, it is estimated that nearly 80 percent of individuals without a permanent home are hidden (Government of Ontario, 2015). The term “hidden homelessness” is used to describe a range of experiences which includes but is not limited to staying with family or friends, sleeping in cars, couch surfing, living in crowded accommodations, or living in unsafe environments. These experiences are difficult to measure because individuals often relying on informal social networks and spaces for shelter rather than standardized homeless shelters however, In this paper, I suggest that looking through the lens of social infrastructure can be used as a method of inquiry to better understand experiences of hidden homelessness, particularly in rural and northern Ontario communities.

In rural and northern Ontario, substandard housing, disjointed transportation systems, racism and discrimination, nonexistent or piecemeal social services, and migration between rural and more urban centres present a unique set of challenges to individuals living without consistent or adequate housing in these communities (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015). Further, methods used to measure homelessness in Canada typically rely on headcounts from social service providers and homeless shelters (Shapcott, 2010). What these official counts do not capture are the hidden dimensions of homelessness where individuals may not be using traditional homeless services (Hallstrom, et al., 2013; Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2017). Nor do

these counts address the fact that many smaller communities may not have facilities or resources dedicated to supporting individuals experiencing homelessness, such as homeless shelters or food banks. These experiences may not be captured because the social services and support organizations that provide these headcounts are nonexistent in rural communities or when they do exist, individuals who are experiencing hidden homelessness do not qualify for assistance or are not served by these agencies (Kauppi et al., 2017). Instead, I suggest that individuals rely on social infrastructure, defined broadly to include a number of public and private, or indoor and outdoor spaces for shelter and social support.

The extent and nature of homelessness in rural and northern communities of Ontario is poorly understood in part because it has been severely understudied in comparison to experiences of homelessness in major cities and large urban centres (Milbourne & Cloke, 2006a; Waegmakers Schiff et al., 2015; Walmsley & Kading, 2018). In their edited book on rural homelessness, Milbourne and Cloke (2006b) ask: *How can we make homelessness known in rural areas in order to understand the range of experiences as they are affected by their environments, to identify the issues that prevent them from securing permanent, adequate housing, and to support the institutions or structures that do support individuals in their time of need?* This paper will investigate this question by critically examining the definition of social infrastructure through a hidden homelessness lens that is informed by available literature that speaks to these experiences. The literature review will be preceded by a mapping exercise. The mapping exercise will illustrate different variations of social infrastructure spaces to demonstrate how social infrastructure can be used as an avenue for inquiry to understand hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario.

Social infrastructure plays a critical but underappreciated role in modern society. Klinenberg (2018) expands the definition of social infrastructure beyond that of spaces for

leveraging economic growth to suggest that social infrastructure be defined as physical places that become social spaces, and are essential for the creation and ongoing development of healthy communities. Viewed through a planning and community building lens then, social infrastructure could be defined as spaces like hospitals, schools, parks, busses, coffee shops, malls and other spaces that afford individuals the opportunity for sociality.

This paper brings together cross-disciplinary discussions in urban and regional studies, sociology, and geography and demography studies that are often *about* social infrastructure. In discussions within these disciplines, the concept of social infrastructure is almost never explicitly referenced or elaborated on in great detail. Instead, the literature addressing hidden homelessness describes common experiences of isolation, loss of social networks, or difficulties accessing services. Discussions about rural and northern community development point to the decline of bustling public life due to economic restructuring as being detrimental to the economic and social health of communities. Broadly, social infrastructure appears in the literature to describe spaces that allow social life to happen. This paper seeks to identify common threads of community ideals that are based on acceptance, sociality, and inclusion and the causal relationship between social relationships, inclusion and health (Mamatis et al., 2019) to demonstrate that social infrastructure is an important resource used by individuals who are often living on the margins of our communities and ought to be protected and procured by local governments to support people and build strong communities. These threads of how to build a sense of community pose unique challenges in smaller rural and remote communities. Small municipal governments are grappling with homelessness, poverty, illness, and other social issues for the first time as a result of the withdrawal of public funds and economic restructuring that has left downtown cores sparse (Walmsley & Kading, 2018). Academic homelessness literature focussed on rural and northern Ontario focus on

government policies developed to encourage the development of spaces that facilitate inclusion and sociality. The final thread includes those discussions about what social infrastructure is and what it does. Together, these discussions tell a more complete story about what makes a “good” community with the perspective of underrepresented voices, such as individuals experiencing hidden homelessness, at the forefront of the discussion.

This paper will demonstrate that the definition of social infrastructure can be both inclusive or exclusive, whereby combining the discussions of hidden homelessness, rural and northern community development and social infrastructure, professionals engaging in research in these realms of practice can identify what Slocock (2018) calls a “blind spot” for spaces that naturally create well-being and inclusion. When cross-examined, this demonstrates how a broad understanding of what social infrastructure is can help communities to mend feelings of disassociation and isolation commonly experienced by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario.

2 DEFINING SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOMELESSNESS TO TELL DIFFERENT STORIES THROUGH MAPS

Social infrastructure and homelessness are defined by different disciplines in diverse ways. To broaden the understanding of how communities can employ social infrastructure to mend feelings of disassociation and isolation commonly experienced by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario, an interdisciplinary lens incorporating knowledge and research between and across disciplines is required to define the terms ‘social infrastructure’ and ‘hidden homelessness’. These definitions can be used to better understand and experiences of hidden homelessness and how the terms have been applied, used, and discussed across disciplines, and can be used to tell different stories about isolation, socialization, and inclusion in rural and northern Ontario.

This paper explores and identifies intersections across planning, sociological, geographic and demographic literature that discusses homelessness in Ontario and other small or rural communities as well as sociality and the built form to understand how social infrastructure and homelessness are defined and discussed and calls for researchers and practitioners to break free from research silos to address society’s most pressing issues. Aiming to demonstrate that how the use of a concept that is applied, used, and discussed across disciplines can be used to tell different stories, depending on how the information is studied, organized and presented this paper asks the following research questions:

- 1) What is social infrastructure?
 - a) How is social infrastructure defined?

- b) Does the general understanding of what social infrastructure is need redefining?
- 1) What is hidden homelessness?
 - a) How is hidden homelessness defined and understood within the context of Ontario?
- 1) How might different iterations and definitions of social infrastructure be used to understand and uncover experiences of hidden homelessness?
- 2) How can social infrastructure, depending on the way that it is defined, organized, and presented through a map, tell a story about isolation, socialization, and inclusion?

To address these questions, this paper employs a mixed-methods approach of a literature review, policy analysis and case study analysis using the City of Sault Ste. Marie in Ontario. A literature review of academic and professional reports is first used to understand if and how social infrastructure and homelessness is defined, discussed, and understood in research and in practice, and specifically in rural and northern locations in Ontario. Common experiences of homelessness and the individuals who work in the social service field across the geographic area are discussed.

Next, a brief overview of policy documents and programs from federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government is provided to understand what measures are being taken to support social infrastructure and eradicate homelessness. This review assists to understand how hidden homelessness and social infrastructure are defined from a policy perspective. Next, a mapping exercise is conducted to illustrate how different interpretations of 'social infrastructure' are reflected on the landscape. The City of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario is used as a case study because it has been included in other academic studies that seek to understand hidden homelessness in rural and northern areas and various community and municipality-led initiatives have identified hidden homelessness and the decline of economic and social health as issues that must be addressed to revive community life. These factors exemplify why Sault

Ste. Marie is the ideal place to use social infrastructure as a method of inquiry to further address the research gap on hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario.

As attention focuses more intently on complex social and urban problems, combining knowledge, funds, and research efforts would facilitate potentially transformative solutions. However, it can be difficult to achieve interdisciplinary studies in academic and professional environments due to realities of schedules, time constraints, funding structures and requirements, and other considerations (Gibson et al., 2019). This mixed methods approach will demonstrate how the use of a concept that is applied, used, and discussed across disciplines (social infrastructure) can be used to tell different stories, depending on how the information is studied, organized and presented. Returning to the question forwarded by Milbourne and Cloke (2006b) of *how can we make homelessness known in rural areas*, these methods will exemplify how social infrastructure, depending on the way that it is defined, organized, and presented through a map, can tell a story about isolation, socialization, and inclusion in one northern Ontario town.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Social Infrastructure

3.1.1 Defining Social Infrastructure

There is no unanimously accepted definition of social infrastructure evident in the academic literature, nor is there a pertinent debate about how social infrastructure ought to be defined with the exception of Davern et al. (2017) who argue for a consistent and measurable definition of social infrastructure in order to demonstrate why it is important to the health, wellbeing and liveability of communities. Within the literature, the term ‘social infrastructure’ is generally used very broadly to describe networks of services, spaces, facilities, institutions and groups that allow for some type of social activity to take place (Latham & Layton, 2019). Broadly, this includes health services, education, housing, community development, legal and public safety, emergency services, public transportation, and arts and culture (Casey, 2005). In some studies, specific examples of social infrastructure are provided and used as a means to evaluate the sociality of specific spaces. These spaces range from dog parks, shopping areas and public parks, schools and spaces that provided internet connectivity (Capps, 2019; Lund, 2003; Nethercote, 2017; Simpson, Daws, & Wood, 2003).

The general trend in the literature suggests that a basic quality of social infrastructure is that it facilitates sociality (Klinenberg, 2018). This necessarily includes the physical spaces and social networks that may exist in any given space. For example, Richardson and Mumford (2002) use the term social infrastructure synonymously with ‘community’, arguing that social infrastructure encompasses services, facilities and social organizations. Use of the term ‘interactional infrastructure’ by Kilpatrick and Loechehl (2004) captures the social nature of these spaces or networks that provide formal and informal opportunities for interaction. This

idea is repeated elsewhere to suggest that social infrastructure necessarily involves an interdependent relationship between the structural spaces that facilitate interactions with one another (Poplova, Kostko, & Skripnuk, 2017; Richardson & Mumford, 2002; Simpson, Daws, & Wood, 2003). This can also include how social infrastructure may satisfy individual and social needs (Vazonienė & Pakeletiene, 2017), or how equitable and accessible social infrastructure services and facilities can foster a sense of community and place so that individuals may experience feelings of belonging and safety (Casey, 2005).

The most comprehensive definition of social infrastructure in terms of examples provided and descriptions used is provided by Slocock (2018). Slocock (2018) recognizes three interdependent dimensions of social infrastructure: the built form, services and organizations, and strong and healthy communities. Finally, it is important to note that the literature review has not identified geographic limitations on the definition of social infrastructure or geographic limitations on a particular focus of social infrastructure as an analytical tool.

Overall, the literature review suggests that social infrastructure is not defined as an explicit type of space or relationship. Rather, social infrastructure is an umbrella term used to describe a range of spaces. Where the term does appear, it is often in reference to educational or health care facilities. This suggests that there are opportunities to study other forms of social infrastructure that are underrepresented in the academic literature.

3.1.2 Planning for Social Infrastructure

There is a documented link between social infrastructure and equity, stability, and social wellbeing (Davern, et al., 2017; Slocock, 2018; Wai, et al., 2013). It is generally accepted today that planning practices must include and incorporate social issues and must consider how social and physical approaches to planning can be successfully merged (Hoerning, et al., 2005). Wear (2014) and Slocock (2018) argue for a need to evaluate how social infrastructure

projects are planned for and implemented to avoid the underfunding of valuable spaces and promote preventative action against social issues. Planning practices that make a concerted effort to include individuals who typically experience spatial marginalization as a result of normative planning and design practices (such as children or older adults) in the co-design of social infrastructure can help to provide equitable and non-discriminatory access to resources and public and private spaces through universal design and the opportunity to participate in a community (Baldwin & Stafford, 2019). A broad definition of social infrastructure permits the inclusion of spaces, services, and social interactions that can facilitate qualities of a successful and healthy community by improving the function of institutions, creating better living conditions, and enhancing wellbeing (Cavaye, 2001). Given the potential of social infrastructure to fight inequalities and polarizations (Klinenberg, 2018), social infrastructure should be evaluated and planned for more carefully (Vazonienė & Kiaušienė, 2018).

In terms of planning for social infrastructure identifying plans, policies or programs from a planning perspective that advance the provision or protection of social infrastructure are difficult to identify, as social infrastructure is primarily discussed indirectly. This discussion will be further elaborated on in reference to federal, provincial, and municipal policies and programs that impact Sault Ste. Marie, however, it is important to recognize that through the literature review, only one concrete “Social Infrastructure Plan” is identified. The City of Vancouver’s Social Infrastructure Plan was launched in 2017 and defines social infrastructure as “the places and spaces where residents gather to connect, learn, and support each other” (City of Vancouver, 2020). A broad definition, yet the plan does not include several spaces that are discussed in the academic literature, including parks, plazas, community centres, libraries, schools, or health clinics and hospitals.

Once again, the literature review indicates that social infrastructure is broadly defined, yet narrowly applied. This includes a myriad of spaces, yet professional or standardized applications of social infrastructure as a planning or analytical tool that can be used to understand or address social issues is an underdeveloped concept. As Latham and Layton suggest, there is a need for planners to “think infrastructurally” (2019, p.4) in order to see overlooked dimensions of public life. Thinking infrastructurally requires practitioners to consider the places that allow social life to happen, how these places and facilities are provisioned, and how social life is practiced in and influenced by these spaces (Latham & Layton, 2019). This is important because the physical aspect of the social infrastructure – how it is designed, maintained, and where it is located – will inherently influence the social dimensions of the space (Latham & Layton, 2019).

3.1.3 Social Capital & Built Form

The concept of social capital inevitably arises through a discussion about social infrastructure as the formation of social capital depends on spaces or networks that facilitate community interaction (Debertin & Goetz, 2013). Mention of social capital appears frequently across a wide variety of mediums, from academic journals to magazines, as it provides a credible and measurable point of entry to investigate sociopolitical issues (Woolcock, 1998). Though social infrastructure is not explicitly identified as a responsible force in facilitating social capital, there are many studies that employ a user-centered approach to studying urban forms to understand how individuals use physical spaces and how policies and program decisions can result in harmful or helpful spatial organizations (Gans, 2002). User-centered studies that examine how the built form affects people’s lives can help to identify responsible agents and forces and redirect planning processes towards more user-friendly spatial planning (Hillier, 2007; Gans, 2002).

Analysis of the built form in a variety of different communities indicates a direct and reciprocal relationship between the built form and socio-spatial relations (Jalalkamali, 2014; Soja, 2008). Further, the built environment is fundamentally enmeshed with power relations, and public spaces often function as spaces where marginalized groups can express their rights and co-presence in urban life (Nejad & Walker, 2018). Even the seemingly simple ability to know *how* to use these spaces according to social norms and expectations involves a process of learning that can be taken for granted by those who consider it second nature (Star, 1999). This discussion about spatiality of justice and injustice as facilitated or influenced by the built form is included in this paper to highlight existing literature that identifies how the equitable distribution of socially valued resources, such as social infrastructure, and opportunities or barriers that facilitate or prevent their use, will have negative and positive consequences on users. These inequities are crucial to consider when reviewing the literature focused on individuals who are transient, mobile, or experiencing hidden homelessness and often experience isolation and a loss of social networks as a result of their experiences (Kauppi & Pallard, 2015). The literature demonstrates that social infrastructure is understood in relation to the spaces and networks that address inequalities and experiences of isolation. By bringing the literature surrounding ‘social infrastructure’ and ‘hidden homelessness’ together in the same paper, we begin to see that functional purpose of social infrastructure, brought together with the experiences of a largely underserved and underrepresented group of individuals can help to draw attention to spaces that facilitate community and social cohesion.

3.2 Hidden Homelessness

3.2.1 Experiencing Hidden Homelessness

A discussion about mobility and hidden homelessness necessarily requires understanding what these experiences look like. Individuals who are mobile or in between

homes, are often cited as experiencing homelessness in the literature because they are in temporary or unsustainable housing situations (Kauppi et al., 2017). The nexus between hidden homelessness and housing mobility has been given some attention in the homelessness literature. The available literature that discusses this offers a few reasons why individuals might travel to a different community and how these individuals might experience homelessness as a result. Lack of job opportunities upon arriving in a community, low wages, expensive private housing markets and long wait times for subsidized housing, as well as racism, mental illness and discrimination have been cited as factors causing individuals to experience hidden homelessness in rural and northern communities in Ontario (Kauppi et al, 2017).

Methods used to measure homelessness in Canada typically rely on headcounts from social service providers and homeless shelters, but this method does not capture the experience of individuals typically considered to be ‘hidden’ who do not rely on traditional homeless services and instead use informal networks among family and friends for shelter and support (Shapcott, 2010). This federally imposed counting method misses individuals who do not access supports or services available to homeless populations because they do not qualify for these services (Shapcott, 2010), or because they do not perceive themselves as homeless and thus do not access these services (Kauppi et al., 2017), or because social services and supports are unavailable in communities where individuals who might qualify as ‘homeless’ exist (Waegmakers Schiff et al., 2015). For those that do access services and supports when and where they are available, interviews with service providers in rural and northern Ontario communities through studies by Kauppi, Pallard and Faries (2015), Kauppi and Pallard (2015), and Shaikh and Rawal (2019) indicate there are difficulties with providing services to those who are mobile or hidden because there are difficulties in determining an individual’s eligibility for services, needs are often required on short notice, which places strain on support systems that

are already stretched, and there is a lack of or gaps in resources that are explicitly designed for individuals who are mobile or experiencing hidden homelessness.

3.2.2 Homelessness in Rural and Northern Ontario

The extent and nature of rural homelessness has been poorly understood as little research has been done to examine it. Any studies that have been conducted have largely been restricted to the United States and the United Kingdom (Milbourne & Cloke, 2006a). However, there have been some studies produced within the last two decades that have identified hidden homelessness as a persistent and existing social problem experienced in rural and northern Ontario (Kauppi et al., 2017). However, mobility and its relationship to homelessness in rural and northern communities in Ontario is severely understudied in the academic literature (Kauppi, Pallard, & Faries, 2015, Kauppi et al., 2017; Walmsley & Kading, 2018). Ontario's northern and rural communities are heterogeneous entities with unique historic, geographic, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic conditions that are neglected in the academic literature over research pertaining to social service provision and homelessness that is carried out in urban centres in southern Ontario (Shikh & Rawal, 2019). Studies that have explored this issue in Ontario identify individual and community-level problems that are linked to migratory homelessness. Migration between communities in Ontario typically happens as people search for opportunities and services (Kauppi, Pallard, & Faries, 2015). People living in Ontario communities that do not have these essential services must travel to access these services or opportunities, and as the literature suggests, the act of travelling to access these services is not always accompanied by procurement of safe or reliable shelter. Thus, migration can contribute to or lead an individual to experience hidden homeless in rural or northern Ontario.

The human cost of migratory and transient homelessness is high. Interviews with individuals who experience hidden homelessness in northern and rural Ontario reveal loneliness, culture shock, isolation, guilt, shame, loss of social networks, difficulties making friends and accessing social services, and experiences of racism and discrimination (Kauppi, Pallard, & Faries, 2015; Kauppi et al., 2017; Shaikh & Rawal, 2019). Compounded with these experiences are harmful perceptions of mobility that underpin the lack of attention it has received in policy despite early intervention proving to be a necessary piece to preventing homelessness (Habibis, 2011).

Thus, we begin to see how the act of arriving in a community such as Sault Ste. Marie might make finding or accessing services difficult for individuals who are not familiar with the location. If an individual does not access services that are typically dedicated to individuals who experience homelessness, which is cited as a common hidden homelessness experience, then we return to the problem associated with understanding what hidden homelessness looks like in rural and northern communities in Ontario. The following section will bring this discussion about hidden homelessness and social infrastructure in northern Ontario together by exploring how the intersection of experiences discussed thus far lends an opportunity to better understand hidden homelessness through social infrastructure in order to address where and why hidden homelessness exists in northern Ontario and to explore how the process of understanding these experiences can help municipal governments and service providers to build supportive and strong social infrastructure.

3.3 Knowing Hidden Homelessness Through Social Infrastructure

A discussion about the nexus between social infrastructure and hidden homelessness specifically within the context of rural and northern communities in Ontario is necessary to tie in these seemingly unrelated topics. The following sections seek to elaborate on important

questions about 'seeing' homelessness in rural areas as proposed by Milboure and Cloke (2006b) as well as Shapcott (2010), Waegmakers Schiff et al. (2015), and Walmsley and Kading (2018) who call for more research on hidden homelessness specifically in rural and northern communities, and others who have identified social infrastructure as an important and underused diagnostic and analytical tool (Cowen & Parlette, 2011; Klinenberg, 2018).

As previously cited, the human cost of hidden homelessness is high. Isolation, loneliness, a loss of social networks, and difficulty making friends are emotional impacts common among individuals who are or were experiencing hidden homelessness. Understanding that different cultures are represented in different ways in what hidden homelessness looks like is defined, but is not within the scope of this paper to define. These experiences are precisely what social infrastructure can mitigate against. Social infrastructures are the places that allow social life and social connections to happen. Yet, the literature review suggests that social infrastructure has not been widely defined in the academic literature to include spaces that can facilitate inclusion, accessibility, and civic life beyond publicly provided institutions commonly considered to be a part of the social infrastructure of a community.

The planning, social, and geographic literature that discusses social infrastructure in some form demonstrates that studies have largely focused on specific types of social infrastructure. This paper will contribute to this discussion by accepting a broad definition of social infrastructure that includes a range of spaces and exploring how turning our focus towards different kinds of social infrastructure might reveal how a community is rich in or depleted of social infrastructure spaces, depending on how social infrastructure is perceived and studied.

The intersection of these literatures will be further facilitated through a mapping exercise. Mapping has long been used in the planning discipline to understand the spatial form

of cities, but also how people navigate, use, perceive, influence, and are influenced by the built environment (Hillier, 2017). A map is a graphic representation of the spatial arrangement and distribution of places, but the process of mapping expands the function beyond a simple geographic exercise to produce new ways of seeing, understanding and designing cities (Dovey & Ristic, 2017). As Dovey and Ristic (2017) note, mapping is often initiated by the desire to change or understand elements of the social or built environment because mapping can reveal the enmeshment of seemingly unrelated concepts. For example, Capps (2019) mapped the location of parks and police enforcement to reveal the relationship between laws and land use decisions. In a similar manner, the mapping exercise performed in this paper explores the intersectionality of socialization, hidden homelessness, and municipal development in northern Ontario.

4 CASE STUDY: SAULT STE. MARIE A TYPICAL NORTHERN ONTARIO TOWN

4.1 Sault Ste. Marie: An Overview of the Municipality

Statistics Canada's 2016 Census Profile for Sault Ste. Marie indicates a total population of 66,313 individuals for the population centre (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to Statistics Canada's definition of population centres, Sault Ste. Marie qualifies as a medium population centre, and is surrounded by rural areas. The Sault Ste. Marie census agglomeration population count is 78,159, and this number accounts for the population centre as well as the rural areas surrounding the centre (Statistics Canada, 2017). In many current policy and research documents, Sault Ste. Marie is described as a small or mid-sized city in comparison to other larger Ontario cities. This is significant to recognize in order to understand how smaller communities such as Sault Ste. Marie are affected disproportionately by economic and social issues. The Sault Ste. Marie was long considered a 'one-industry town' as the steelworks dominated the economy and job market. However, job losses at the steelworks in the mid-1980s led to significant economic decline and the outmigration of younger individuals (Community Adjustment Committee, 2017; Kauppi et al., 2017). Additionally, Sault Ste. Marie is in a precarious position as defined by Evergreen's Mid-Sized Cities Research Series (2018), which classifies Sault Ste. Marie as a "Legacy City" – a city that is shrinking, declining, and has experienced decreases in population and median income as they bore the brunt of global economic restructuring. The declining economy and out migration growth has been accompanied by declining social metrics, such as health, well-being, and education in the community (Community Adjustment Committee, 2017). Sault Ste. Marie has centered discussions about rehabilitation and growth around these unfortunate realities, however, there

is the need for greater government intervention in order to address the myriad of economic, social, and environmental issues affecting Sault Ste. Marie and other small cities as a result of boom-bust economies and out net migrations common in rural and northern Ontario.

Population centres such as Sault Ste. Marie have services such as hospitals, doctors and other forms of assistance that surrounding communities often do not have access to at the same capacity, and thus Sault Ste. Marie and similar communities serve populations beyond those living in the population centres. This requires individuals to travel for longer-than-normal travel times to access the essential services typically only found in places like Sault Ste. Marie (Kauppi et al., 2017; Shaikh & Rawal, 2019). Sudbury is the nearest town to Sault Ste. Marie with a comparable population of 88,000 living in the population centre (Statistics Canada, 2017). Sudbury is slightly over 300 kilometers away from Sault Ste. Marie. As the only town with a major hospital, post-secondary institutions, and other services aside from Sudbury, individuals will access Sault Ste. Marie for the services that it provides that are absent in surrounding areas. Recent revitalization committees and reports from Sault Ste. Marie focus on the need to build economic and community development, build the labour force, improve community well-being, and revitalize the downtown (Broad et al., 2014). As more people come to Sault Ste. Marie to access the labour force and social services, it is imperative to ensure that residents and visitors are able to access the appropriate services to support their well-being.

To further explore this issue within the context of Sault Ste. Marie, the next section will delve further into plans, programs, and policies related to social infrastructure and homelessness planning in Canada, Ontario, and Sault Ste. Marie. This will provide context to help to understand what the recent and current political climate is as it relates to social infrastructure and homelessness. This context will be useful to contribute to the analysis of the mapping exercise presented in section 5.0 of this paper as it helps to understand if and how

these types of services and spaces are supported and invested in. As the literature review demonstrates, strong municipal communities require planning and investment in both physical and social forms of infrastructure (Clutterbuck & Novick, 2003), which renders the jurisdictional scan necessary.

4.2 Existing Social Infrastructure and Homelessness Plans in Sault Ste.

Marie

This section provides a brief overview of plans, programs, or policies as they relate to social infrastructure and homelessness, and is organized according to jurisdictional level and identifies relevant documents that outline approaches to acquisition and protection of social infrastructure, and interventions to address homelessness.

This list is not exhaustive, and documents were chosen based on a snowballing research method conducted through general online searches for plans, programs and policies that pertain to social infrastructure and homelessness. As mentioned, the purpose of identifying these documents is to contextualize the current dialogue surrounding social infrastructure and homelessness that is occurring on a national, provincial and municipal level. This will help to analyze the presence of social infrastructure spaces in Sault Ste. Marie upon conducting the mapping exercise.

4.2.1 Federal Government Plans for Social Infrastructure and Homelessness

Investing in Canada: Canada's Long-Term Infrastructure Plan

The Government of Canada's, 2018 planning publication *Investing in Canada: Canada's Long-Term Infrastructure Plan*, promises historic infrastructure investment over a twelve-year period. These investments are intended to achieve three objectives: to generate long-term economic growth to build a stronger middle class; to improve the resilience of communities

and transition to a clean growth economy; and to improve social inclusion and socio-economic outcomes for all Canadians (Government of Canada, 2018, p.4). Investments will be separated into various streams, and include both a social infrastructure stream, which is set to receive a total of \$25.3 billion, and a infrastructure support for a rural and northern communities stream that has been dedicated \$2 billion of investment (Government of Canada, 2018, p.5). According to the Plan, “social infrastructure” primarily includes investments in housing, early learning and childcare, accessible infrastructure, and community, culture and recreation with the intention of creating stronger, more vibrant communities. Interestingly, the Plan explicitly identifies homelessness as an important area of concern that investments in social infrastructure intend to overcome (Government of Canada, 2018, p.44). Investments for rural and northern communities outline intentions to assist these communities to overcome many of the challenges associated with small town living identified in the literature review, such as economic decline and net out migration, in addition to this long distances between commercial markets and little or no access to modes of transportation such as private automobiles or public transit (Kauppi et al., 2015; Kauppi et al, 2017).

Investing in Canada: Canada’s Long-Term Infrastructure Plan as a federal plan is important to recognize as it points to high-level support for investments in social infrastructure. The explicit goals in the plan of reducing homelessness and creating more inclusive and accessible communities suggests a broad recognition of social infrastructure as a realm of space that expands beyond the procurement of housing and of early definitions of social infrastructure and includes a range of services and supports public transportation to cultural spaces.

Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy

Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy is the current plan, established in April 2019, to address homelessness at the federal government level as it replaced the previous *Homelessness Partnership Strategy*. Although many aspects of this strategy are based on metrics according to homeless shelter use, it does recognize that experiences of homelessness go beyond shelter use to include couch surfing or rough sleeping (Government of Canada, 2019). Investments of support made through this plan provided funding directed towards different community types, including rural and remote communities, as well as Indigenous service providers in order to address the specific needs of Indigenous peoples living off-reserve (Government of Canada, 2019).

According to the strategy, Sault Ste. Marie receives shared funding as a Designated Community (DC) to support Indigenous Homelessness (IH) programs. The DC stream provides long-term stable funding to communities that face significant issues with homelessness. Reception of this funding requires that Sault Ste. Marie develop a community plan in order to identify local outcomes, and to report on these outcomes through annual reports (Government of Canada, 2019). In addition to providing culturally appropriate services, the IH funding stream promotes social inclusion and cultural connections within communities. Individuals who access services provided through the IH funding stream are not restricted from accessing services provided by other streams (Government of Canada, 2019).

In general, eligible activities and expenses are broadly defined in the strategy. It is not surprising to see that social infrastructure is not explicitly referenced in the strategy. However, 'client support services' are identified as an eligible activity and expense stream. According to the strategy, these services include "individualized services to help improve integration and connectedness to support structures [...] They may also include services to support the economic, social and cultural integration of individuals and families." (Government of Canada,

2020). This acknowledges the fact that services that provide adequate basic needs contribute to outcomes that reduce homelessness. Accordingly, eligible activities include funding for short- and long-term food programs that assist with community integration and bus or public transit tickets related to integration activities. Key to this is the fact that eligible programs vary widely in terms of the activity being performed, yet the consistent eligibility criteria is that the activity facilitates inclusion or participation in a community setting. Although social infrastructure is not explicitly mentioned, these activities generally reflect discussions about social infrastructure identified in the literature review. For instance, Clutterbuck and Novick (2003) refer to the need to invest in social infrastructure to foster opportunities for individuals to participate as members of society in social, economic, and political activities. Similarly, Cavaye (2001) states that social infrastructure increases choices, sustains positive attitudes, and enhances community well-being, particularly in rural communities. The language used in the academic literature about social infrastructure is very similar to the language used to describe eligible activities in the *Reaching Home* strategy. This suggests that although social infrastructure is not used to describe what the strategy supports, the activities it supports are a form of social infrastructure according to the literature review.

4.2.2 Provincial Government (Lack of) Plans for Social Infrastructure and Homelessness

Ontario's Make Poverty History Plan

In 2007, the Government of Ontario conducted significant community engagement to inform the development of *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*, and *The Poverty Reduction Strategy* that were released in 2008 and 2009 (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2019). In 2014, *The Poverty Reduction Strategy* was updated with the goal of lowering the province's poverty by 25 percent. It is unclear what the statuses of these plans are at present, which indicates that the direction of homeless reduction strategies at the provincial

level is unclear. This could be a reflection of the transfer of provincial government in Ontario from Liberal to Conservative in 2018. This transfer did result in the archival of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the largest research institute devoted to homelessness in Canada, was largely relied on to confirm strategies and plans implemented by the provincial government. Through this resource and further internet searches, there were no other strategies or plans identified on the provincial level that explicitly address homelessness reduction or social infrastructure. This lack of official planning or strategic direction is important to recognize as the lack of support from the provincial level becomes an important part of informing how homelessness might be addressed in Ontario's communities and how social infrastructure might be supported.

4.2.3 Municipal Government Plans for Social Infrastructure and Homelessness

Downtown Dialogue in Action: Crime Prevention through Social Development

Economic decline and net outmigration, met with increasing social need, and corresponding requests to develop a comprehensive approach to address these issues is well documented in municipally based reports (Broad et al., 2014). The NORDIK Institute (Broad et al., 2014) published a report titled *Downtown Dialogue in Action: Crime Prevention through Social Development (DDIA)* to assist with the development of a comprehensive approach to extend beyond the capacity of any single service provider. The DDIA report sought to engage social service agencies, education providers, businesses and residents in conversations about a plan to reduce crime through social development (Broad et al., 2014, p.4). For example, an important finding from the research indicates that “higher than average police service calls stem from issues of ‘social disorder’ that are best addressed by increasing opportunities for social interaction and providing supports to those most in need.” (Broad et al., 2017, p.4) Ultimately, the NORDIK report identifies the need for the city to work with local public services,

non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, and creative residents to develop a holistic approach to revitalization. Recommendations are presented in four key directions for action and are presented in the report as follows:

- 1) Strengthening social cohesion
 - Including increased access to recreation and support for social enterprise, community events, and cross-cultural awareness;
- 2) Addressing the needs of ‘at risk’ neighbourhoods and people
 - Including expansion of the Neighbourhood Resource Centre, increased access to health and social services, organizing neighbourhood residents and businesses, and design solutions to crime and isolate;
- 3) Increasing access to the necessities of life
 - Including greater access to food, housing, and childcare; and
- 4) Fostering a healthy downtown culture & economy
 - Including greater support for the Downtown Association and local small businesses, increased walkability and accessibility, residential intensification, support for active transportation, and promotion of local heritage.

Without explicitly identifying ‘social infrastructure’, these recommendations allude to the need for spaces that facilitate inclusion, socialization, and cooperation between business owners, residents, community members, service providers, and municipal agents. The language used to describe ‘social development’ in the NORDIK (2014) report mirror language used in academic literature to define or discuss social infrastructure.

The Sault Ste. Marie experience is not unique. The decline of the urban market street, where independent businesses lined walkable downtown and central streets, has been met with replacement of these businesses with large shopping centres located outside of historic

downtown commercial areas in many rural and northern towns (Walmsley & Kading, 2018). The decline of these businesses in historic downtowns has left the streets that were once places of high activity deserted, vacated, and often filled with void gaps in retail store frontages due to either vacancies or demolition. This is important to identify prior to mapping social infrastructure in Sault Ste. Marie because we have identified that individuals who experience hidden homelessness often have difficulties accessing public transit or private automobiles, leaving individuals to rely on biking or walking to travel within a community (Kauppi et al., 2017). If the services and spaces that daily activities take place in are dispersed throughout a community, these spaces become less accessible for people who cannot rely on private automobiles or have difficulty accessing public transit (Kauppi et al., 2017).

10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan and the Homelessness Prevention Team

District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board produced a draft *10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan* (2014) as required under the provincial Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy and the *Housing Services Act* (2011). The purpose of the *10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan* is to address homelessness and housing affordability throughout the entire housing continuum in Sault Ste. Marie (District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board, 2014). The housing continuum includes a range of services and housing types including homeless prevention, emergency shelters, transitional *housing*, supportive housing, with the end points of the continuum being an affordable rental or home ownership.

The *10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan* recognizes the social imperative and economic argument for communities to address the range of homelessness experiences with a core focus on improving access to housing that is affordable to improve quality of life. There is no explicit mention of social infrastructure in the document, or a discussion about facilitating

social inclusion for homeless individuals. However, the plan does recognize the element of mobility as an experience unique to the context of rural and northern communities by stating that, as a regional centre, Sault Ste. Marie draws in residents from surrounding communities that are often looking for employment or wish to be closer to services such as medical facilities.

Additionally, a Sault Ste. Marie Homeless Prevention Team was initiated in 2014 to provide a 'Housing First' approach to housing with a strong focus on case management for those who are or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. This team was awarded with the Local Municipal Champion Award from the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association for excellent performance in working towards achieving "functional zero", which is defined as being reached when the number of individuals who are homeless is no greater than the monthly housing placement rate (District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board, 2014). Since the Sault Ste. Marie Homeless Prevention Team was initiated, ninety percent of those who were housed have remained housed (Lakes, 2019). Although this program is commendable in terms of measurable achievements and addressing case management, this program does not specifically address hidden homelessness but rather, targets and only measures individuals who contact shelters for emergency accommodation. As identified through the literature review, there are many individuals who will not rely on what might be referred to as traditional homeless support services, such as homeless shelters, because they may not feel as though they qualify for services or have been rejected from such services in the past.

Overall, this review of federal, provincial, and municipal plans, programs and policies that address or refer to social infrastructure and/or homelessness points to a few important gaps that this paper will address. First, social infrastructure is not explicitly identified as a

concept or method that can be used to understand or address homelessness. Additionally, the use of mapping as a tool to facilitate learning was not extensively applied in the documents reviewed. The *Downtown Dialogue in Action* report (Broad et al., 2014) does utilize maps to present data such as low-income neighbourhoods and a walking distance map, the maps do not include multiple data factors to bring together different ideas or concepts. Overall, the discussions about social infrastructure and homelessness do not explicitly overlap, particularly at the federal and provincial levels. The mapping exercise presented in the following section can help to frame these experiences within the same discussion so as to help to understand and imagine a plan, policy, or program direction that addresses hidden homelessness by way of supporting and procuring social infrastructure.

5 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

5.1 Methodology to Produce the Maps

In order to explore the intersectionality of homelessness, social infrastructure, and planning practices in small Ontario communities, a mapping exercise is conducted to demonstrate how mapping is a valuable tool to: demonstrate the range of social infrastructure spaces that populate Sault Ste. Marie; critically examine the accessibility of social infrastructure and homelessness services; and illustrate the intersectionality of disciplinary work that is often about the same topic or problem in a compelling and complete way. This methodology addresses a gap in the literature that does not explicitly bring discussions of social infrastructure or homelessness together through the use of mapping exercises that are place-based. Latham and Layton (2019) and Slocock (2018) establish mapping exercises as an effective tool to evaluate the concentration of social infrastructure spaces. However, only Popkova, Kostko, Skripnuk (2017) and Capps (2019) were identified through the literature review to use some form of mapping in discussions about social infrastructure, sociality or the enmeshment of land uses and spatial justice. Social infrastructure, if broadly understood as spaces that facilitate sociality, can help us to see spaces that directly address certain issues experienced uniquely by individuals who experience hidden homelessness in rural, northern and/or hub communities.

As such, I will apply a mapping exercise to Sault Ste. Marie to demonstrate how mapping social infrastructure spaces will identify the location and proximity of spaces that achieve social belonging, integration, and interaction. These terms are interconnected and mutually reinforcing and generally refer to individual or collective relationships and feelings of trust (Mamatis et al., 2019). I will then discuss these spaces through a hidden homelessness

lens to understand the in-between spaces of culture and society that often help to facilitate social bonding that is desperately sought by individuals experiencing homelessness in rural, northern and/or hub communities. The hidden homelessness lens has been informed by the literature available on these experiences in Ontario and how different interpretations of the term social infrastructure are established in Sault Ste. Marie.

In the following section I present an additional five maps. Each map identifies spaces and services that support individuals experiencing homelessness or an expanded definition of social infrastructure and how it has evolved through time across disciplines as through a lens of hidden homelessness. Through a discussion about each map, I identify what the expanded definition includes, how the map changes (e.g. proximity between these spaces) and what it means to have this definition expand in terms of accessibility and mobility.

A legend that has been established in this paper that accompanies each map and includes five categories that reflect the different types of social infrastructure and homeless spaces and services in the literature: Social Support; Education; Health Care; Public Institutions; Mobility; and Commercial/ Retail. Each category includes at least three types of services and spaces that are seen in the literature.

The data used to populate these maps is sourced from Scholars Geoportal, the City of Sault Ste. Marie's Social Services website (Social Services SSM, 2020), Google Maps using the following search terms "food bank", "homeless shelter", "hospital", "walk-in clinic", and "mall", and data as provided by the City of Sault Ste. Marie's Geographic Information Services (GIS) Coordinator. Data from multiple sources is used to create maps that are as comprehensive as possible within the categories, of where these spaces exist within the city. To understand and evaluate the accessibility of these spaces and services, a 400 metre and 1,500 metre (1.5 kilometer) radius is established on each map to measure where social infrastructure spaces

exist in relation to one another. The 400 metre measure is the widely acceptable walking distance when assessing walkability (Brown & Barber, 2012; Yang & Diex-Roux, 2012). This metric is important to use when evaluating how accessible social infrastructure spaces are for people experiencing hidden homelessness because transportation needs, including access to a vehicle or purchase of a bus pass, are notable issues for people experiencing hidden homelessness (Kauppi et al., 2017). Planning literature suggests that livable, inclusive communities should provide equitable, non-discriminatory access to resources (Baldwin & Stafford, 2019) and other discussions about social infrastructure and accessibility suggest that a social community is one that facilitates equitable access to services and facilitates community participation (Casey, 2005). Therefore, distances beyond this measure of walkability will amplify experiences of homelessness, such as social isolation and lack of access to transportation, that are already impacted by geographic distances to and from spaces and services that support individuals. Ultimately, this exercise demonstrates how different communities, networks, spaces and experiences can be found by widening the definition of infrastructure (Latham & Layton, 2019).

5.2 Mapping Social Infrastructure

Visualizing the spatial distribution of spaces can influence how we think about our communities. This section presents the five maps described, which will illustrate common themes of how social infrastructure is discussed and defined in the literature. These interdisciplinary maps encompass literature of social infrastructure, hidden homelessness, and rural/ small-town/ hub community disciplines to illustrate the connection between social infrastructure and hidden homelessness via social inclusion. This intersection is identified as a gap in the literature, specifically the use of maps to facilitate this discussion.

5.2.1 Map 1: Mapping Social Support for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

This map illustrates the location of services and spaces I identify as ‘social support’. In this map, I am using a definition of social infrastructure that broadly includes spaces, services and networks that enable individuals and groups to interact with one another and satisfy individual and social needs (Simpson et al., 2003; Vaznoniene & Pakeltiene, 2017; Williams & Pocock, 2010). This definition is influenced by the use of spaces identified in the literature as being occasionally used by individuals who experience hidden homelessness, such as emergency shelters or food banks (Kauppi et al. 2017). These services and spaces are perhaps not exclusively to these individuals, as exemplified by the inclusion of the food bank and soup kitchen. Social support in this definition of homelessness includes a shelter for youth aged 16 to 21, and women over the age of 18 called Pauline’s Place, and an emergency shelter for women and their children who are fleeing domestic violence called Women in Crisis. (Doxtater et al., 2016). The social support category also includes the Housing and Early Years office, the Ontario Works office, the United Way of Sault Ste. Marie, and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) office. These spaces are included in this category because they are frequently referenced as forms of support for individuals at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness (Kauppi & Pallard, 2015; Kauppi, Pallard, & Faries, 2015; Kauppi et al., 2017). The final social support category, Food Banks & Soup Kitchens, includes the only two places listed within Sault Ste. Marie where free or affordable food is provided.

Map 1: Homeless Services

LEGEND

Social Support	Education	Health Care	Public Institutions	Mobility	Commercial/ Retail
● Food Banks	● Elementary	● Mental Health & Addictions Treatment Centres	● Religious Centres	■ Parks	● Chain Coffee Shops
● Social Services	● Secondary	● Walk-In Clinics	● Libraries	Transit Lines	● Grocery Stores
● Emergency 24/7 Shelter Support	● Alternative	● Hospitals	● Community Centres	● Bus Stops	● Malls
	● Post-Secondary				

The map demonstrates that social supports offered to individuals experiencing homelessness are concentrated around the southern portion of Sault Ste. Marie. Although these spaces are concentrated in south Sault Ste. Marie they are situated in clusters and each cluster is located beyond a 1.5 kilometer walk to the next cluster of services. Each cluster has three to four spaces of social support being located within a five minute, or 400 meter walking distance, of one another. The fact that these services are clustered suggests that individuals who experience homelessness are able to access these services, as they are located within close proximity to each other based on the established walking metric. However, this does little to exemplify what supports exist in Sault Ste. Marie for individuals experiencing *hidden* homelessness. Hidden homeless populations are less likely to use services that are explicitly designed to support homelessness. For example, through interviews with individuals who have or do experience hidden homelessness, Kauppi et al, (2017) found that nearly all participants had experiences with or were in some way familiar with shelters. Participants who had accessed a shelter before had indicated that while the shelter was considered valuable for providing beds, heat, and washrooms, most participants disliked staying there because of the lack of privacy, the smells, the exposure to violence and assaults, and the rules that were enforced (Ibid, 2017, p.76). Instead, these individuals would stay temporarily with others, vehicles, stairwells, or tents.

This map also makes evident the importance of metrics to measure homelessness and how they are collected. Standard methods used to provide measures of homelessness rely on data provided by homeless services and shelters, such as those identified in this map. As federal counts of homeless populations rely on the services and spaces that are located within a small cluster in the downtown portion of Sault Ste. Marie, and therefore not walkable or easily accessed from other areas of Sault Ste. Marie, it is likely that there are many individuals who

experience hidden homelessness that are unlikely to access these services not only because they may feel unqualified to use them, but also because they are clustered in a concentrated area in Sault Ste. Marie. If individuals are unable or unlikely to access these spaces, then service providers are not able to capture high quality metrics of who needs assistance and what types of assistance they may require. Ultimately, outreach, connection and support with these individuals is unlikely because they are socially and physically inaccessible to individuals experiencing hidden homelessness.

The next section will build on this map and conceptualization of homelessness services by adding to the visualization spaces and services most frequently identified as or associated with social infrastructure in the literature. This will begin the visualization of the intersection of homeless services and spaces and social infrastructure spaces.

5.2.2 Map 2: Mapping Education & Healthcare as Frequently Referenced Social Infrastructure Spaces

Map 2 continues the story of intersectionality and accessible social spaces by building on Map 1, which identifies the location of social support spaces and services, by expanding the definition of social infrastructure to include education and health care spaces and services. The addition of two categories to the definition reflect two common themes identified in discussions about social infrastructure in the literature review. While the literature confirms that there are different perspectives on what social infrastructure is, educational institutions and health care facilities are most often identified as social infrastructure, or are used as a method of inquiry to understand social infrastructure (Baldwin & Stafford, 2019; Bigotte & Antunes, 2007; Brown & Barber, 2012; Kassam, 2009; Love et al., 2012; Osumgborogwu, 2016; Raagmaa & Kroon, 2005; Rothman, 2005; Uduku, 1994). This includes multiple levels of educational institutions and a wide range of health care facilities that are not necessarily

defined as variation is common, particularly across geographies. Interestingly, these spaces are often identified and examined as social infrastructure spaces within the same publications. For this reason, it is logical to begin our exploration of social infrastructure in Sault Ste. Marie according to a definition of social infrastructure that includes educational and health care facilities.

The types of facilities represented on Map 2 include educational institutions according to the demographic that the institution serves: post-secondary institutions, high schools, elementary and middle schools, and alternative learning spaces, such as adult education centres. Health care facilities are mapped in three hierarchies based on the types of services that are offered. The Sault Area Hospital is a large-scale facility with 24 hour service and the only hospital in Sault Ste. Marie or surrounding communities that provide the level of service available at the hospital. Walk-in and day clinics are also mapped to show where general medical attention may be provided. Finally, mental health and addictions services included in Map 2 to reflect the fact that mental health and addiction issues are often cited as factors leading individuals to homelessness in rural and northern communities (Shaikh & Rawal, 2019).

With the expansion of the definition of social infrastructure to include educational institutions and health care facilities it can be observed on Map 2 that social infrastructure spaces are generally spread out across Sault Ste. Marie due to the various elementary schools that are dispersed across SMM. This would indicate that services such as child care or breakfast programs that are found in elementary schools can support those experiencing hidden homelessness by providing a secure location for potential children to attend if parents or guardians are able to provide a secure address, perhaps that of a friend or relative. Unlike Map 1, where social support services and spaces are clustered in a walkable section of Sault

Map 2: Frequently Referenced Social Infrastructure Spaces

Ste. Marie, adding this element of social infrastructure data to the map does not produce any new clusters of services.

Map 2 indicates a few issues that arise from applying a hidden homelessness lens to a definition of social infrastructure that is exclusive to education and health care facilities. First, studies by Kauppi and Pallard (2015) and Kauppi, Pallard, and Faries (2015) reveal that individuals experiencing homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness, and are migrant, are most often between the ages of 20 to 59. Given this average age, these individuals will not be directly using many of the spaces that are identified on the map at this stage because most of these spaces are elementary or middle schools. However, the children of individuals who are experiencing hidden homelessness may use these spaces. Social infrastructure is about identifying spaces that promote, facilitate, or allow for sociality. The spaces identified in this definition may be used by more heavily by the children in a family experiencing hidden homelessness. For example, Kauppi et al. (2017) found that service providers interviewed indicated that single parent families were one group identified to be at the highest risk of homelessness. Within the same study, Kauppi et al. (2017) state that women, children and youth constitute about two thirds of the homeless population. Thus, measuring the accessibility of educational facilities is crucial to the mapping exercise because it can capture the spaces that are very likely used by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness in rural or northern Ontario.

Next, Kauppi et al. (2017) identify discharge from hospital or jail as a specific type of incident that contributes to experiences of homelessness and hidden homelessness. This is particularly noted as an issue for Indigenous peoples who travel from smaller communities to access hospitals or health care services that are not available in their home communities. Considering this, it is important to recognize that if social infrastructure is understood

exclusively as educational facilities and health care centres, the Sault Area Hospital is located within walking distance to *one* additional social infrastructure space. This space is a public elementary school that is not open and accessible to the public at large. This reflects the issue of thinking about *who* social infrastructure serves when the definition is restricted to schools and health care. It is problematic when thinking about social infrastructure and hidden homelessness because the Sault Area Hospital is the largest medical facility in Sault Ste. Marie and the only large-scale medical facility open 24 hours a day in Sault Ste. Marie or surrounding communities, it is likely that individuals will travel from distant communities to Sault Ste. Marie in order to access services that are provided by the Sault Area Hospital. Given the Sault Area Hospital's physical disconnect from social supports described in Map 1 and social infrastructure spaces, defined here as educational and health care facilities, the connection between hospital discharge and hidden homelessness identified by Kauppi et al. (2017) becomes evident when we see that there are no social infrastructure spaces within close proximity to critical places like the hospital.

Considering the average age of individuals at risk of or experiencing hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario, it can be assumed that *if* these individuals are accessing educational services, it would be through a post-secondary institution, an adult education centre, or perhaps courses offered at a library, community hub or community centre. However, the Northland Adult Learning Centre for example is not located within walkable proximity to other social infrastructure spaces according to this definition. Access to education is considered a determinant of health and as a barrier that can exacerbate challenges faced by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness. Yet, as the map illustrates, if an individual experiencing hidden homelessness were to pursue an education in Sault Ste. Marie, it might be difficult to pursue education from a physical accessibility perspective as the educational

institutions that are likely used by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness are isolated in terms of their proximity to other social infrastructure spaces. Although this is one example that demonstrates the isolation of this social infrastructure space, and this example is used to demonstrate the accessibility of services that are more likely to serve individuals experiencing hidden homelessness, there are many other schools located across the community that are isolated in terms of their proximity to spaces identified as social infrastructure through this iteration.

Thus far, Map 1 and Map 2 demonstrate the location of social supports that are typically provided to individuals who experience a certain type of homelessness and educational and health care facilities. Map 2 tells us that when a hidden homelessness lens is applied to this definition of social infrastructure, Sault Ste. Marie is an inaccessible and hard-to-navigate place. The next section will build on Map 2 to further expand the definition of social infrastructure and will evaluate the inclusivity of this definition from a hidden homelessness perspective as informed by the available literature.

5.2.3 Map 3: Mapping Public Institutions

As we continue to challenge the definition of social infrastructure, Map 3 expands the definition of social infrastructure to include public institutions which includes community centres, community hubs, libraries and religious institutions. Map 3 expands on the spaces and services illustrated in Maps 1 and 2 to includes a more capacious understanding of what social infrastructure is. These spaces are mapped to reflect physical spaces that are typically open to the public and provide spaces where individuals can access a range of programs or services. Libraries are frequently referenced in the literature as social infrastructure (Brown & Barber, 2012; Clutterbuck & Novick, 2003; Davern et al., 2017; Latham & Layton, 2019, Klinenberg, 2018, Osumgborogwu, 2016; Rothman, 2005). Community centres, community hubs, and

religious institutions are explicitly referenced less frequently however, general discussion about publicly funded spaces that facilitate mutual support (Klinenberg, 2018) or places where support services are in place to support the social environment (William & Pocock, 2010; Woodcraft et al., 2012) are commonplace in the literature. Where noted, these include religious institutions, and/ or community centres.

It can be observed in Map 3 that with the expanded definition to include religious institutions, community centres, and community hubs and libraries, that the social infrastructure of Sault Ste. Marie is visually more clustered and less sparse than the two previous maps indicated. Community centres, community hubs, libraries, and religious institutions are spaces that support social environments (William & Pocock, 2010). These are spaces that meet the needs of residents and enhance quality of life. In terms of walkability, the inclusion of these spaces in the definition of social infrastructure does increase the prevalence of social infrastructure spaces within both 400 metre and 1.5 kilometer walking distances. However, in order for the social benefit that is associated with social infrastructure to be achieved, specifically when thinking about individuals who experience hidden homelessness, there must be equitable access to these spaces in terms of who *feels* that they can use these spaces and *how* they can access them (Brown & Barber, 2012). A report from the NORDIK Institute sought to evaluate the collective impact of the Neighbourhood Resource Centre (NRC), which is identified on this map, indicated that the NRC “is seen as a positive, safe space for socialization where residents may interact casually with staff and other members of the community.” (Doxater et al., 2016, p.6). Of particular relevance is that prior to the opening of the NRC in 2014, neighbourhood residents shared long-held beliefs of negative interactions with social service agencies, which co-existed with negative perceptions of community as reflected in the NORDIK Institute’s Downtown Dialogue in Action Report (Broad et al., 2014).

Map 3: Multi-Purpose Public Spaces

LEGEND

Social Support

- Food Banks
- Social Services
- Emergency 24/7 Shelter Support

Education

- Elementary
- Secondary
- Alternative
- Post-Secondary

Health Care

- Mental Health & Addictions Treatment Centres
- Walk-In Clinics
- Hospitals

Public Institutions

- Religious Centres
- Libraries
- Community Centres

Mobility

- Parks
- Transit Lines
- Bus Stops

Commercial/ Retail

- Chain Coffee Shops
- Grocery Stores
- Malls

It is important to recognize that one of the issues identified in the NRC Report was that many individuals were afraid to use the space because of potential police presence and feelings of surveillance. This sentiment is repeated elsewhere in the literature as a common experience of individuals who are or are at risk of homelessness. Further, as was explored in the literature review, the built environment of communities is fundamentally related to power relations, and public spaces can and should provide areas where marginalized groups can express their rights and co-presence in urban life (Nejad & Walker, 2018). Overall positive effects noted by the report indicated that users of the space reported a reduction in social isolation. This was particularly noted by service providers, such as those offering addictions programming, who moved their service to the NRC and were able to increase the amount of services they provided and the number of hours that they remained open for (Broad et al., 2016).

Overall, mapping and critically evaluating Map 3 suggests that while libraries, community centres, and religious institutions may be frequently referenced in the academic literature as social infrastructure spaces, these spaces may not always be accessible to individuals who are marginalized and/ or experiencing hidden homelessness. In order for social infrastructure to be equitable and accessible, it must not only be accessible from a physical point of view, but from a social perspective as well. Mapping social infrastructure in this way may not fully capture or help us to understand hidden homelessness because it may not reflect the spaces that people actually inhabit, regardless as to whether or not they are within walking distance from one another.

As such, we must continue to challenge the definition of social infrastructure to seek places that might be used or frequented by a range of individuals, particularly those experiencing hidden homelessness in hub communities. The next map, Map 4, will continue this story and will again present a more inclusive definition of what social infrastructure is.

5.2.4 Map 4: Mapping Mobility and Ways to Move Around the City

Map 4 builds on Maps 1, 2 and 3 to now capture public transportation routes, bus stops, and parks in the definition of social infrastructure. Brown and Barber (2012), Clutterbuck and Novick (2003), Davern et al. (2017), Kassam (2009) and Klinenberg (2016) all specifically reference sidewalks, roads, or public transportation systems as forms of social infrastructure.

Public parks are important to include particularly as it relates to experiences of homelessness because public parks are often used as private spaces for individuals who experience varying degrees of homelessness (Kauppi et al., 2017). This layer of social infrastructure is added to the mapping narrative because it permits the element of movement to, from, and between spaces. Reflecting on discussions with individuals who experience homelessness, Kauppi et al. (2017) states that rural and northern communities often feel isolated because of the lack of transportation options. Distance is a barrier to those who do not own cars (Davern et al., 2017), especially when access to transportation might not be available. Even so, the cost of purchasing a bus pass may prevent an additional barrier to someone looking for transportation alternatives (Kauppi et al., 2017). Additionally, Star (1999) notes that knowing how to navigate these spaces is a privilege in and of itself that is often taken for granted by those who frequently use these spaces in a community. Individuals who experience hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario communities might not be as familiar with the community that they are temporarily sheltered in and therefore may have difficulty navigating the community.

However, as the map demonstrates, public transit routes do operate across the city with numerous stops located along transit routes. These types of spaces are important to consider when challenging the definition of social infrastructure because not only can a bus facilitate access between social infrastructure, but these elements themselves can facilitate

Map 4: Mobility Networks & Outdoor Spaces

LEGEND

- Social Support**
- Food Banks
 - Social Services
 - Emergency 24/7
 - Shelter Support

- Education**
- Elementary
 - Secondary
 - Alternative
 - Post-Secondary

- Health Care**
- Mental Health & Addictions Treatment Centres
 - Walk-In Clinics
 - Hospitals

- Public Institutions**
- Religious Centres
 - Libraries
 - Community Centres

- Mobility**
- Parks
 - Transit Lines
 - Bus Stops

- Commercial/ Retail**
- Chain Coffee Shops
 - Grocery Stores
 - Malls

sociality (Latham & Layton, 2019). As Map 3 shows, the addition of the transportation system, bus stops, and parks contributes to the concentration of walkable social infrastructure spaces. For example, the Neighbourhood Community Centre and surrounding social infrastructure spaces are no longer inaccessible in terms of walking distance to other social infrastructure clusters in Sault Ste. Marie as it is surrounded by bus stops, the transportation route, and public parks. The Sault Area Hospital, which was relatively isolated in the previous map illustrations, is now connected to other social infrastructure spaces via a bus route and bus stops. As well, clusters of social infrastructure spaces, such as the Nog-Da-Win-Da-Min Family and Community Services, Arthur A. Wishart Library, Algoma University, and surrounding schools and churches are now connected to other areas of the community due to the walkable proximity of these locations to transit stops. However, transportation costs, such as the expense of purchasing a bus ticket, is cited as one of many issues that have a significant effect on the lives of people living in hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario (Kauppi et al., 2017). The Sault Ste. Marie exact cash bus fare is \$2.25 (Sault Ste. Marie Transit, 2020). This cost may seem insignificant in comparison to the cost of public transportation in larger cities however, the cost of transportation is one of many other costs, including the cost of food or shelter, that quickly add up and place a significant burden on the already tight budgets that many individuals experiencing hidden homelessness survive from on (Kauppi et al., 2017).

Access to some form of transportation is essential to daily life in terms of getting to school, work, medical appointments, or social events. This is particularly important considering interviews with individuals who have or experience homelessness in rural and northern Ontario often do not own a vehicle and note that transportation needs are a notable barrier to existing precarious situations for these individuals (Kauppi et al, 2017). Considering this, it is important to challenge the definition of social infrastructure to include not only stagnant physical spaces,

but also the mobile infrastructure that moves people to and from places, particularly the transportation networks that enable individuals and groups to interact with each other and especially those forms that may be more accessible to individuals experiencing hidden homelessness.

Map 4 demonstrates that expanding the definition of social infrastructure to include forms of public transportation, including the stations or stops that facilitate access to these networks, because these are spaces that allow and enable individuals to interact with one another (Simpson, Daws & Wood, 2003). However, these forms of social infrastructure may still function as a barrier to individuals experiencing hidden homelessness, particularly if they are not from the community and therefore do not know how to navigate this type of service. Accordingly, the next section will provide an additional elaboration on the definition of what social infrastructure is to try and capture a better picture of the intersection of social infrastructure and hidden homelessness.

5.2.5 Map 5: Mapping Commercial/Retail Publicly Accessible Private Spaces

The fifth and final map in this paper, Map 5, again expands the definition of social infrastructure to now also include a select few publicly accessible private spaces. These spaces are identified as ‘commercial/retail’ in the map legend. While the commercial/ retail description suggests that this permits the inclusion of a broad range of commercial retail spaces, for the purposes of this paper, Map 5 only includes spaces that can be identified as frequented spaces by individuals experiencing homelessness in the professional and academic literature review, specifically as it relates to Sault Ste. Marie. For example, service providers from rural and northern Ontario, indicated that homelessness was not as apparent in smaller communities, with fewer people panhandling and instead, gathering in places like the local Tim Hortons (Kauppi et al., 2017). The Sault Ste. Marie Downtown Dialogue in Action report (Broad

et al., 2014) indicated that the arrival of the Walmart at the Station Mall provided an accessible and affordable grocery option in the downtown core. Tim Hortons and McDonalds are both locations with long business hours. Fourteen of the Tim Hortons located in Sault Ste. Marie indicates 24 hour business hours online, and four of the McDonalds are open 24 hours a day. Latham and Layton refer to cafes and coffee houses as places to experience “light sociality” (2019, p.7). These commercial spaces are spaces where people socialize and make connections, where strangers encounter other strangers (Klinenberg, 2016; Williams & Pocock, 2010). Their long business hours provide a space where people can meet, be warm and possibly eat when other spaces are not open or accessible. It is spaces that facilitate this type of accessible sociality that are important to think about when we conceptualize the spaces that are necessary for cities to function as social spaces.

With these spaces added to the mapping exercises, new clusters of social infrastructure emerge. The significance of this is that there are now clusters of social infrastructure that include spaces from each of the five different categories identified in the legend. Therefore, using a definition of social infrastructure that includes social support services, educational and health care facilities, public institutions, mobility networks, and commercial/ retail spaces in Sault Ste. Marie indicates that there are clusters of spaces and services that capture a range of social infrastructure spaces, and that this might be the same in other rural and northern communities. The expanded definition of what social infrastructure is indicates that there are walkable spaces that are social infrastructure rich in Sault Ste. Marie. For example, the Wellington Square Mall, located in the north eastern cluster of social infrastructure spaces, is within 400 metres of a Food Basics, a Tim Hortons, and a McDonalds. Beyond the 400 metre mark, there are also schools and religious organizations located within walking distance to the Wellington Square Mall. We also now see health care and education

Map 5: Publicly Accessible Private Spaces

LEGEND

Social Support

- Food Banks
- Social Services
- Emergency 24/7 Shelter Support

Education

- Elementary
- Secondary
- Alternative
- Post-Secondary

Health Care

- Mental Health & Addictions Treatment Centres
- Walk-In Clinics
- Hospitals

Public Institutions

- Religious Centres
- Libraries
- Community Centres

Mobility

- Parks
- Transit Lines
- Bus Stops

Commercial/ Retail

- Chain Coffee Shops
- Grocery Stores
- Malls

spaces that are in close proximity to coffee shops, malls, and grocery stores. The Sault Area Hospital, previously isolated from the rest of the community and spaces of social infrastructure, is now within walking distance to four additional social infrastructure spaces, including a Walmart. This is important because if an individual experiencing hidden homelessness is unfamiliar with their location, unable to access a reliable form of transportation, and does not have secure housing and/or employment, then the walkability of these types of services will be crucial to ensure that they have access to at least some forms of basic necessities.

In smaller communities, mandated services such as medical care, social housing, mental health or addictions counselling are likely to be provided by government agencies or agencies that are funded by the government. The discussion about whether or not coffee shops, fast food restaurants, or malls and grocery stores are forms of social infrastructure might be interpreted differently in relation to the experiences of individuals at risk of or experiencing hidden homelessness in rural or northern Ontario communities. Sault Ste. Marie and other small communities, particularly those in northern Ontario, have experienced significant population and medium income decline (Evergreen, 2018) as well as a steady decline in investment from the federal government (Walmsley & Kading, 2018). With little support from senior levels of government, local governments have borne the brunt of the burden to provide social support to those most in need (Walmsley & Kading, 2018). In Sault Ste. Marie, these issues have been explicitly identified in the Downtown Dialogue in Action Report (DDIA) (Broad et al., 2014), which states that the changing global economy and withdrawal of funding “has led to a general loss of vitality in the City’s core, exacerbated by increasing social needs.” (Broad et al., 2014, p.4). Interestingly, DDIA explicitly states that the loss of activity in the downtown area has led to an increase in 911 calls that are related to “social disorder” issues that are “best addressed by increasing opportunities for social

interaction” (Broad et al., 2014, p.4). Participants in the community engagement networks for the report indicated that coffee shops or shops and spaces that are open more often would facilitate a sense of security, “so at least you know you have places to go if you need help.” (Broad et al., 2014, p. 59).

These types of spaces are important to consider in challenging the definition of social infrastructure because they provide individuals with the opportunity to be in close contact with others. They facilitate sociality. These spaces are crucial to consider in the discussion about hidden homelessness in hub communities in rural and northern Ontario because isolation and a loss of social networks are a noted barrier to existing hidden homelessness. It is inferred that spaces such as a Tim Hortons or a Walmart with long business hours and places to sit and interact, are more likely than other forms of social infrastructure with restrictive hours of operation that are represented exclusively in earlier map iterations to provide individuals with access to opportunities for socialization. One typically goes to a medical facility to receive medical attention, not to socialize or develop social interactions. Moreover, these spaces are not policed by an administrative or state-imposed presence, which may encourage individuals to inhabit and spend time in these spaces as opposed to those that are monitored by a governing body. These publicly accessible private spaces can provide areas where marginalized groups can express their rights and co-presence in community life (Nejad & Walker, 2018)

5.2.6 Social Infrastructure Generously Defined: A Map of Sociality

The mapping exercise in this paper on the expansion of social infrastructure as it relates to hidden homelessness demonstrates how different definitions of social infrastructure, particularly within the context of rural/ northern/ hub communities in Ontario, can tell different stories about the types of spaces and networks that a community has. Map 5 demonstrates

how a generous understanding that includes educational and health care facilities, public institutions, mobility networks, and commercial retail spaces of how social infrastructure is defined suggests that Sault Ste. Marie is rich with social spaces that are within close proximity to one another. Through a visual exploration of what these spaces look like on the ground, we rethink what social infrastructure ought to be, particularly when we think about non-specific spaces that facilitate a social environment where social interaction is encouraged, and where people can get together (Brown & Barber, 2012; Williams & Pocock, 2010; Zizys, Kosny & Bonnell, 2004).

In essence, Map 1 and Map 5 tell very different stories about how an individual experiencing hidden homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie might navigate the community. The fifth and final map demonstrates physical assets that offer a means through which social capital can be developed, or “places of possibility” (Hobson et al., 2019, p.123) where the physical spaces can offer a space for the community to meet, to be with each other, and to develop social connections (Hobson et al., 2019). This paper suggests that it is important to challenge the perception of social infrastructure because spaces that people experiencing hidden homelessness might feel more comfortable accessing, or are *able* to access more frequently due to their frequency across the community, add a significant amount of social space to Sault Ste. Marie beyond what “traditional” social infrastructure spaces such as schools or hospitals might add.

5.3 Social Infrastructure, Homelessness and Small Town Ontario

This paper brings together different realities: one of small, northern Ontario hub communities seeking ways to revive and reinvent themselves after years of economic and social decline; one of social infrastructure, a concept, a buzzword, a space, and sometimes a network of social connections loosely defined in the academic literature, yet with a common

understanding that these are spaces that facilitate social connection and serve an underappreciated role in creating a “good” community (Latham & Layton, 2019; Nethercote, 2017). This paper also indicates the need to assist people experiencing hidden homelessness and homelessness related to migratory activity not only to address social isolation, which is an identified barrier to existing precarious situations, but also to connect these individuals with services and supports through social networks that may help to reveal these instances where they happen. As Milbourne and Cloke (2006b) asked, “how can we make homelessness known in rural areas?”. Through the mapping exercise of social infrastructure spaces in this paper, it can be observed that the in-between spaces that reflect a more inclusive understanding of social infrastructure suggests that Sault Ste. Marie has several clusters of varied social infrastructure spaces that are within walking distance from one another. By expanding the definition of social infrastructure to allow for the inclusion of *general spaces that allow social life to happen*, we begin to see a community that has a number of walkable publicly accessible spaces that can, and do, facilitate an element of social connection.

The Sault Ste. Marie, much like other small urban centres in northern Ontario, draws individuals from surrounding communities who may be looking for employment opportunities, or individuals who may need to receive health care services that they cannot access in their smaller communities. Where do these individuals go? Rural and northern communities are often isolated from one another, and many times individuals stuck in hub centres where they have sought health care services (Christensen, 2017) such as Sault Ste. Marie with little knowledge of the town they find themselves in and few or no social connections. At the same time, the City of Sault Ste. Marie is working on plans that seek to revitalize their neighbourhoods to attract economic and population growth. Unfortunately, these types of initiatives often translate to the removal of “unwanted” or “less desirable” spaces and people,

the exact populations that this paper seeks to include in gaining access to social infrastructure. The presence and concentration of social infrastructure is often cited as what makes a community “good” (Latham & Layton, 2019). Yet, a good community cannot be realized unless it meets the needs of diverse users and reflects the ways in which public and private spaces are used by different social and cultural groups (Klinenberg, 2018). When the social infrastructure is available, it improves capability and offers people the opportunity to develop social ties, to become a part of social networks (Osumgborogwu, 2016). The mapping exercise illustrates that the more capacious the definition of social infrastructure, the more walkable and accessible the community becomes.

Turning to planning for social infrastructure, particularly in rural communities where revitalization efforts are underway, it is important to consider qualities of space and facilities that allow social life to happen. Not all spaces defined as social infrastructure do facilitate the sense of inclusion or socialization as promised, which prompts a question about how activity in undervalued spaces, like the local Tim Hortons where people can go after a long night in an emergency room, can be recognized as a kind of public life. Or how the functional spaces of public life, such as the bus that one might take when they are discharged from hospital, might also have social dimensions to it.

5.4 Mapping as a Planning Tool

Throughout this paper, mapping is identified as an important planning tool that can be used to frame experiences and understand or reimagine the environments that we inhabit. The use of maps to bring together three different disciplines – homelessness, social infrastructure, and small town or hub development – in this paper, helps to comprehensively bring together problems that are described in these disciplines to address a gap of different types of social infrastructure used as a method of inquiry to understand persistent social issues in rural and

northern Ontario communities and make a valuable contribution to the literature. This paper asserts that maps can reveal different realities depending on what definition determines what places are shown on the map and how the information that populates the map is organized and presented. It encourages the recipient reading the map to think about what the urban environment is, but also how our conceptual understanding of the urban environment necessarily affects what we think about what the urban environment does (Atmodiwirjo, Johanes & Yatmo, 2019). In doing so, we can uncover the planning practices that may be contributing to oppressive experiences or miss the realities experienced by hard-to-reach people who are overlooked because they rely on undervalued spaces. These people that are typically overlooked include people who experience hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario, where the realities that individuals may face are likely missed by commonly used metrics to gauge homelessness. By focusing the discussion of social infrastructure on a specific *place* and a specific group of at-risk individuals, a very specific reality is uncovered that might otherwise have been unidentified.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Exploring and developing the concept of social infrastructure alongside an exploration of the realities of hidden homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie draws attention to a wide variety of overlooked and underappreciated spaces. These are spaces that, because they are open late, or because they are within walking distance from one another pieces of social infrastructure, provide a safe haven for people who may not feel like they have anywhere else to go. By focusing on social infrastructure as a method of inquiry, this research paper demonstrates how social infrastructure may be interpreted, presented, and mapped to reveal new dimensions of public life, so that something as simple as getting a coffee may become a significant social event. Spaces that facilitate social inclusion are important for seeing and understanding hidden homelessness, especially in rural and northern Ontario hub communities, where much of homelessness is thought to be hidden.

This paper demonstrates how social infrastructure might be used to see or understand the experiences of hidden homelessness within the context of rural and northern Ontario hub communities. In doing so, this paper draws on research occurring in the homelessness, social infrastructure, and rural and northern community development silos to identify conversations *about* social infrastructure and social inclusion without explicitly referencing what social infrastructure is but rather what it does. These conversations, while happening simultaneously, are using different terms and definitions to describe what is happening, but a common story that appears is one about the importance of urban environments that facilitate social inclusion. If social infrastructure is to be accessible, to facilitate social inclusion, and to offer a way to understand hidden homelessness and if, in the face of homelessness, poverty, and mounting social tensions, rural or northern municipal governments are to address these problems, then

there is an important role for local municipal planners to play in ensuring that strong infrastructure, the spaces that facilitate social inclusion for those most vulnerable, is identified, protected, and supported. This might include the use of existing planning tools that can facilitate redevelopment and equitable distribution of community resources, such as Community Improvement Plans, or negotiations during site plan development approval processes to acquire additional funds for the municipality to funnel funding towards community-based projects.

Finally, to address the research question of what is social infrastructure, this paper suggests that the understanding of social infrastructure be expanded to include educational facilities, health care centres, public institutions, such as libraries and community centres, modes of transportation, outdoor public spaces, commercial and retail spaces, and in general, spaces that facilitate sociality. The literature demonstrates that social infrastructure is often broadly described as including these spaces, however detailed discussions about social infrastructure other than schools or health care facilities have not been widely addressed in the research. Future plans, policies, programs, or studies that are about social infrastructure should consider broadening the scope of what social infrastructure might be and what types of social infrastructure might be studied. This paper demonstrates that a broad understanding of what social infrastructure is reveals that a community is likely rich with social infrastructure. This is missed when social infrastructure is applied as a method of inquiry exclusively to schools and health care facilities. This can lead to problems in terms of the types of experiences that are shared when social infrastructure is explored in this way because it limits the scope of users who are engaging with social infrastructure. A broad, inclusive, or alternative application of social infrastructure as a method of inquiry that looks at spaces

beyond schools and health care centres might better capture the experiences of marginalized communities, such as individuals who are hidden homeless.

When evaluated through the lens of hidden homelessness, which is understood in Ontario to include a broad range of experiences such as staying with family or friends, sleeping in cars, couch surfing, living in crowded accommodations, or living in unsafe environments (Government of Ontario, 2015), social infrastructure can provide individuals experiencing hidden homelessness with access to social networks and opportunities for social inclusion that is often lost through these experiences. Social inclusion should be supported by rural, northern or hub municipalities in Ontario in plans, programs, or policies that recognize the value of these spaces in terms of the social inclusion that they foster. Social infrastructure is not only important for the economically or socially marginalized (Latham & Layton, 2019), but also for municipalities to build and support just and compassionate communities (Clutterbuck & Novick, 2003) and provincial planning policies that influence land use decisions in Ontario should incentivize the protection and procurement of spaces that can facilitate these needed circumstances.

7 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Moving forward, there are a few courses of action that might be taken by practitioners, including planners, to better understand experiences of hidden homelessness in their community from a social perspective as well as a planning and programming perspective.

1. Challenge the perception of social infrastructure

Educational facilities and health care centres are the most frequently referenced and identified spaces of social infrastructure in the literature. However, it is recommended that in thinking about social infrastructure, the definition or conceptual understanding rely less on the physical space and more on what types of interactions the space facilitates.

2. Explore social infrastructure as a method of inquiry to understand hidden homelessness and address enumeration challenges

Many enumeration challenges associated with “knowing” hidden homelessness were identified throughout the research. Using social infrastructure, or spaces that afford sociality, to identify and understand where individuals who are experiencing difficulties are going may present a successful alternative method for gathering data on hidden homelessness. This recommendation is in line with other studies (e.g. Kauppi et al., 2017) that suggest working with health care facilities, religious organizations, or community hubs may be useful to understand these experiences.

3. Strengthening social cohesion

Social isolation is a barrier to individuals exiting homelessness, and social infrastructure spaces can mend disassociation and isolation commonly experienced by individuals experiencing hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario. It is thus suggested that planners and community leaders should increase access to community spaces, community

events, and opportunities for social inclusion in public spaces. These spaces should not only be accessible based on walkability or connection to transit, but also in terms of how the space is designed to make marginalized individuals feel welcome.

Overall, looking at social infrastructure in rural and northern Ontario communities through a lens of hidden homelessness is not only an effective approach to understand experiences of hidden homelessness that are often unseen or forgotten but also challenges policy and programming perceptions about the value attributed to certain types of spaces.

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