

The role of the City of Vancouver in addressing childcare availability

**by
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Abstract

Like many cities across Canada, the City of Vancouver has a significant shortage of licensed childcare. Although childcare is primarily funded and regulated by the provinces, staff and officials at the City of Vancouver have, to a greater extent than most other local governments in British Columbia, made long-standing efforts to facilitate the creation of childcare spaces. My study uses key informant interviews and document analysis to understand the strategies that Vancouver's officials have used to address licensed childcare availability, the motivations behind the city's active approach, and the outcomes therein. My findings suggest that, in the historical absence of adequate provincial and federal support, City of Vancouver officials intervened in an area of social services that is officially the responsibility of senior governments. Although these efforts have not solved Vancouver's childcare availability issues on their own, my study suggests that local governments can play important roles in creating childcare spaces through the use of partnership development, advocacy, investment and planning.

Keywords: childcare; child care; daycare; Vancouver; local government; intergovernmental relations

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to working parents, in all our varied forms and life experiences.

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Ethics Statement.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Acronyms	x
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Conceptual framework.....	7
2.1. The case for government involvement in childcare.....	7
2.2. Multilevel governance in Canadian social welfare	10
2.3. The role of Canadian cities in childcare	13
Chapter 3. Methodology and research design	17
3.1. Research methods.....	17
3.1.1. Document analysis.....	17
3.1.2. Semi-structured key informant interviews	18
3.2. Research design	20
Chapter 4. Background and context	21
4.1.1. The effects of federal policies on childcare in Vancouver.....	21
4.1.2. The effects of provincial policies on childcare in Vancouver.....	24
Chapter 5. Research findings	29
5.1. Strategies used by the City of Vancouver to address childcare availability	31
5.1.1. Partnerships.....	34
Nonprofit childcare operators.....	39
5.1.2. Advocacy to senior governments.....	42
Effects of Vancouver’s advocacy efforts on the Province of British Columbia’s 2018 Childcare Strategy	44
5.1.3. Investment	47
5.2. Political will as a motivating factor for Vancouver’s active role in addressing childcare availability	54
5.3. Formal policy vs. informal action.....	60
5.4. Limitations to Vancouver’s approach	63
5.5. Outcomes of Vancouver’s approach	68
Chapter 6. Discussion	71
6.1. Recommendations	74

Chapter 7. Conclusion	77
7.1. Areas for further study.....	80
References	82
Appendix A. Sample interview questions	88
Appendix B. Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on childcare availability in Vancouver	90

List of Acronyms

CAC	Community Amenity Contribution
CAP	Canada Assistance Plan
COV	City of Vancouver
DCL	Development Cost Levy
ECE	Early Childhood Educator
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
JCC	Joint Childcare Council
LAP	Local Area Plan
PBS	Public Benefits Strategy
VSOCC	Vancouver Society of Children's Centres

Chapter 1.

Introduction

The City of Vancouver has a significant lack of available licensed childcare, with an estimated shortfall of 16,299 spaces as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). Although childcare is a service that is negotiated and delivered at the local level, it is primarily funded and regulated by the provinces, with municipalities in British Columbia having no formal mandate to help create childcare spaces. Despite this lack of jurisdiction, staff and officials at the City of Vancouver, more than any municipality in British Columbia, have made concerted long-term efforts to facilitate the creation of childcare spaces. To understand the reasons for and outcomes of the City of Vancouver's uniquely active role in addressing childcare availability, my study asks, *how has the City of Vancouver been able to play a meaningful role in addressing licensed childcare availability at the local level, despite its lack of jurisdiction in this provincial responsibility?*

Vancouver's childcare availability shortage has gained significant media attention in recent years, with news articles exposing and editorials opining on the multi-year waitlists, high costs and stress placed upon local families. In a 2019 *Vancouver Sun* article, journalist Dan Fumano spoke with Mary Clare Zak, the City of Vancouver's Managing Director of Social Policy, who admitted that she has had colleagues leave Vancouver due to the city's lack of available childcare, and had others make daily commutes to the suburbs before work each day, because that is the only place where they could find a childcare space (Fumano, 2019). The majority of neighbourhoods across the city meet the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' definition of a "daycare desert", with more than three children for every licensed childcare space (Macdonald, 2018). Although the childcare shortage is not unique to Vancouver – in fact, this problem exists to some degree across nearly all of Canada, outside of Quebec (Macdonald, 2018) – the city presents a relevant case study for two key reasons. Firstly, despite its ongoing childcare availability shortage, Vancouver is considered to be a leader amongst BC municipalities in taking action on childcare. Secondly, Vancouver

faces some specific challenges which are exemplary of the types of pressures that Canadian cities face in solving the childcare crisis, including its high density, high real estate costs, and challenges retaining childcare workers. Both of these factors make understanding Vancouver's daycare activism useful to other cities facing similar pressures.

To a large extent, Vancouver's childcare problems stem from a historic lack of funding from the provincial and federal governments. Despite being an important social service, childcare has historically been underinvested and undervalued in society, leaving market forces to provide childcare spaces, a strategy that has proven to be woefully inadequate. For Prentice and White, "a liberal welfare state tradition that historically has encouraged private and market based and gendered system of care, in the context of a relatively decentralised federal institutional system, drives distributional inequalities and makes coordinated policy-making challenging" (Prentice & White, 2019, p. 60). Only in 2018, following decades of concerted efforts from childcare activists, did the Province of British Columbia pay real attention to childcare with the release of a new comprehensive childcare strategy promising the creation of 24,000 new spaces across the province over the span of three years using a combination of provincial and federal funding (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 14 & 22). However, given the overall lack of childcare in British Columbia, with licensed spaces available for only 19.5% of children as of 2019, it will take a long time until every family who desires a licensed childcare space can access one (Anderson, 2020). In the context of this ongoing childcare availability vacuum, local governments have been placed in a position of choosing to either leave senior governments to fill the gap, or taking action at the local level.

According to the parents Fumano spoke with, Vancouver's childcare shortage is driving some families out of the city. Fumano adds that "if a failure of public policy" is forcing parents of prime working age to move away, "that's a societal problem" (Fumano, 2019). When childcare is not available in people's communities, it becomes a big problem for parents of young children, and a problem that has been under recognized until quite recently (Fumano, 2019). Childcare availability is also, arguably, a significant problem for municipalities who want their city to be a liveable place where young families can put down roots and contribute to their community and the economy.

My research explores how and why the City of Vancouver has recognized that the lack of available childcare has been a threat to the livelihood of the local economy and community. Specifically, I examine how, in the absence of adequate support from higher levels of government, the City of Vancouver tried to do what it could to fill the childcare availability gap. I focus on how the city's actions during the period from the 1990s – which saw economic restructuring at the federal and provincial levels that led to reduced childcare availability at the same time as larger numbers of women were entering the workforce – until the release of the new provincial childcare strategy in 2018, connect to the city's current childcare situation. I investigate how, in the absence of support from higher levels of government prior to 2018, municipalities were placed in a position of either allowing childcare to be neglected, or, in the case of Vancouver, finding creative ways to address it at the municipal level, even if their efforts were not sufficient to meet demands. These strategies, which have been well-established by the City of Vancouver, are beginning to be adopted by other municipalities in British Columbia now that the Province has made more funding available.

Childcare is a complex field that encompasses many key urban issues, including but not limited to children's wellbeing, feminism and gender roles, housing affordability, political and economic regimes, women's labour and immigrant labour. Furthermore, when childcare is not available within communities, the effects are disproportionately borne by women and children, and particularly by women and children who belong to low-income, racialized, or other vulnerable groups. Solving the childcare crisis requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all of these areas. While recent policy discussions have tended to put particular focus on childcare affordability, this study focuses on childcare availability, since it is the core aspect of childcare policy that the City of Vancouver has been able to tackle more directly as a municipality than other aspects, given its limited jurisdictional ability to raise funds. As Macdonald points out in analysing "child care deserts"¹ across Canada, although childcare affordability is a key issue, "a lack of local licensed spaces will also limit the choices parents have when it comes to raising their children and re-entering the workforce" (2018, p. 4). At a

¹ Macdonald defines child care deserts as "postal codes where there are at least three children in potential competition for each licensed space" (2018, p. 4).

fundamental level, if childcare is not available in sufficient numbers within communities, the other pieces of the puzzle won't come together.

This study originated from my own challenges in securing childcare as a working parent. Amongst my friends with young children, discussions frequently turn to the difficulty of finding childcare. Rather than accepting this as an uncomfortable reality, I have chosen to investigate the challenges of childcare at the local level. Throughout this investigation, I am guided by a normative stance that all levels of government should support working families and should provide high-quality, accessible resources. Childcare availability has become an increasingly important service in recent years as social and economic norms have shifted towards increased female workforce participation (Mahon, 2006, p. 452). These societal shifts have placed pressure on a social policy structure that was established during a much earlier era. Furthermore, significant challenges exist in attracting and retaining childcare workers, who typically earn less than a living wage (Sarosi and Adeland, 2019, p. 10). This challenge may be more pronounced in Vancouver given its high housing costs. I am deeply informed by feminist literature that discusses the challenges that are disproportionately placed on working mothers in navigating the social and economic realities of childcare, and especially the conflicting messages we may receive about our personal choices around participating in the labour market. In engaging with this literature, I have also made efforts where possible to use language that honours the diversity of family arrangements that exist, and that does not conflate “mother” with cisgender female identity or childbearing experiences.

In recent years, there has been considerable development in childcare policy in British Columbia, a trend that has become even more pronounced as a result of pandemic recovery efforts. As the provincial and federal governments align to recognize childcare as an important social service that is fundamental to the healthy functioning of our economy and society, it is easy for the role of local governments to get lost in the mix. Given the dizzying current pace of childcare policy development in Canada and British Columbia, this project aims to contribute to the field by offering a study on Vancouver's efforts. This project makes a case that local planning is an essential element of efforts to establish universal childcare, and also that, conversely, local governments need robust support from higher levels of government in order to help address the childcare needs of their residents.

The primary goal of this project is to discuss the strategies that the City of Vancouver has used to address childcare availability, as well as the motivations, challenges and outcomes of these strategies. In doing so, I aim to address a gap in literature regarding the roles of British Columbian local governments in tackling childcare availability shortages. Furthermore, I am interested in exploring the successes and failures of intergovernmental cooperation in relation to the City of Vancouver's ability to play a meaningful role in addressing childcare availability. Despite the recent media attention on childcare in British Columbia, there is relatively little academic research into the specific strategies and tools available to Canadian cities in working with their provincial partners in creating childcare spaces. Understanding these factors is important because childcare is, fundamentally, a service that is regulated at the provincial level but delivered at the local level. Beyond the realm of childcare, my research may also be relevant to those in other social service sectors which are primarily the responsibility of the provinces, but which are locally delivered and ultimately require collaboration between all three levels of government. I hope that my project will contribute to a greater understanding of the tools and opportunities that municipalities can use to take action on provincially regulated programs.

This study focuses on licensed group childcare, defined as part-time or full-time daycare for children age 0-5, as well as after-school care for elementary school age children, in community-based facilities which have been licensed by the Province of British Columbia. Licensed group childcare is only one of several forms of childcare that are legal in British Columbia, including licensed or unlicensed in-home daycares, preschools and private or shared nannies and babysitters.² What all of these types of childcare share in common is that money is exchanged for the service of caring for children outside of the caregiver's family. Although all types of childcare form important aspects of the services available to families, this study will focus on licensed group childcare because it is the focus of municipal and provincial policy efforts. Please note that some of the sources discussed in my project use "daycare" or "child care" interchangeably with "childcare." Furthermore, in recent years, the term "Early Childhood Education and Care" (ECEC) has become increasingly popular with childcare advocates

² Information on the types of childcare that are legal in British Columbia can be viewed on the Government of BC's website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children/how-to-access-child-care/licensed-unlicensed-child-care>.

as a way to describe high quality childcare services. To avoid confusion, I will use “childcare” throughout my project except when quoting directly from other sources.

In summary, the City of Vancouver faces an ongoing shortage of licensed childcare, which has been caused, to a large extent, by the historical lack of adequate provincial and federal funding and reliance on market forces. In the absence of this funding, the city has developed a number of strategies to attempt to ameliorate this shortage even though childcare is not formally a municipal responsibility. The next chapter, Chapter 2, offers a conceptual framework that positions my study within existing literature on childcare from a municipal lens. In Chapter 3, I outline my research methods and research design. Chapter 4 provides context and background on how municipal approaches to childcare availability are situated within federal, provincial, and activist policies. Chapter 5 presents my research findings. This chapter contains two main parts, with the first exploring the strategies that the City of Vancouver has used to address childcare availability, and the second exploring how the presence of political will, in the form of internal champions within Vancouver’s staff and elected officials, informed the COV’s efforts, as well as their outcomes and limitations. Chapter 6 discusses the implications of these findings and how planners and policymakers in Vancouver and other cities might use them to inform future policymaking. Chapter 7 concludes this research by summarizing key findings and areas for further study.

I respectfully acknowledge that my study takes place on the unceded traditional territories including the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), sə́lilwə́taʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations, on which Vancouver is located.

Chapter 2.

Conceptual framework

To understand the City of Vancouver's role in addressing the existing childcare availability shortage, I have developed a conceptual framework based on three bodies of literature. The first literature explores the case for government involvement in supporting the creation of childcare spaces. This body of literature examines existing rationales for why childcare may be seen as a social responsibility rather than as a personal responsibility of the family unit, or as a matter best left to the private market alone. Secondly, I engage with literature on multilevel governance in Canadian social welfare. This literature addresses the issue of municipal 'weakness' and multi-level governance in Canada and British Columbia. My third body of literature discusses the role of Canadian cities in childcare. This literature demonstrates that although Canadian provinces have a primary position in funding and regulating childcare, municipalities also take on significant responsibilities in providing childcare spaces.

2.1. The case for government involvement in childcare

As my research question examines the role of municipal governments in supporting childcare, it is necessary to first understand the rationales for, and debates around, why childcare may be seen as a social responsibility rather than as a personal responsibility of the family unit, or as a matter best left to the private market alone. By exploring the rationale for government involvement in childcare, this literature helps to frame the case that activists and policymakers in Vancouver are making for local government involvement in addressing childcare availability.

Prentice and White explain that "in many OECD countries, governments have invested in early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies and programmes for reasons that include gender equality, poverty alleviation, labour market activation, supporting life-long learning, encouraging social cohesion and inclusion, facilitating

Indigenous reconciliation, integrating children with special support needs, and more” (2019, p. 59). Arguments in favour of childcare programs generally fall into two main categories: children’s development and women’s employment.

The idea that public spending on childcare is good for children has been advanced by many childcare proponents. This rhetoric can trace its roots to postwar ideas about preparing children with the skills necessary for democratic citizenship (Pasolli, 2015, p. 7). Furthermore, the understanding that childcare benefits children’s development has gained credibility under neuroscience and population health research which finds that access to high quality early childhood education and care increases children’s long-term health and economic outcomes. Much of this research comes out of the U.S., including the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Center research, three high-profile longitudinal studies focusing on at-risk and low-income children. These studies find that each dollar invested in early childhood education and care generates a significant economic return over the long run, in terms of increased rates of employment, social stability and health outcomes (Prentice, 2009, p. 694). Taken together, these studies have formed an economic rationale which is based on children’s long-term social outcomes and economic performance.

While the rhetoric of investing in children has informed much of the contemporary policy discourse in Canada, feminist childcare movements have focused on correcting structural inequalities in access to labour markets (Pasolli 2015; Prentice 2009, p. 692). Prentice (2009) explains that “feminist advocacy for childcare was a political intervention, part of a campaign for fundamental changes to an economic structure that systematically produced inequality” (p. 692). This argument is contingent on the idea that mothers who have access to childcare are able to enter the workforce and provide for their families or even create upward mobility without relying solely on a male breadwinner. However, such sentiments have historically met resistance from policymakers and members of the public alike, who characterized working mothers as either pitiable (needing assistance from the state) or selfish (desiring work outside the home despite the presence of a male breadwinner) (Pasolli, 2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, feminist arguments for government provision of childcare have persisted and grown more mainstream, particularly as social and economic changes have required more women to enter the workforce.

Although Prentice stresses that feminist childcare movements were “expressly designed to be part of social change, not capitalist accumulation and legitimation” (2009, p. 692), Gallagher finds that, when adopted by liberal welfare regimes, women-centred arguments for childcare programs are often framed in terms of supporting economic growth (2013, p. 162). Gallagher cautions that state interventions into childcare, especially when they target unemployed parents, run the risk of becoming workfare programs which place economic gains and individual responsibility ahead of state social responsibility for the common good (Gallagher, 2013, p. 162; Jessop, 1999, p. 355). Furthermore, Gallagher highlights the potential inequities that can be caused when non-familial childcare is used to advance social mobility of individual families at the expense of childcare workers, who are often underpaid and typically come from immigrant and racialized groups (2013, p. 166).

Childcare programs in Canada are not as robust as those in comparable countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the U.K. (White, 2017). In Canada, “day-care needs have historically been seen as a private family problem, and, consequently, regulated center-and family-based services are expensive, fragmented, and scarce” (Prentice, 2009, p. 687-688). Similarly, Pasolli explains that “federal, provincial, and municipal governments, not to mention a significant portion of the BC and Canadian public, primarily understood the care of young children to be a private responsibility, and, more specifically, a mother’s responsibility, whether it meant within the family or the market. The state thus consistently distanced itself from the provision of universal child care” (2015, p. 6).

More recently, in British Columbia, the case for government involvement in childcare has evolved, with the Province endorsing the concept of universal childcare in its 2018 childcare strategy. While the endorsement of universal childcare appears to be the beginning of the kind of “third order paradigmatic change” that Prentice and White hope for (2019, p. 59), I would argue that many of the mechanisms described in the province’s documents simply build onto the existing market-based system, rather than adopting a truly social democratic approach that the word “universal” might suggest. This can be seen in the continued emphasis on market-based provision espoused in the Province’s 2018 childcare strategy. The Province’s strategy came after extensive economic analysis by independent childcare advocates which suggests that a universal system in British Columbia would, to a large extent, pay for itself (see Fairholm, 2017;

Ivanova, 2015). It is reasonable to expect that this framing, wherein childcare is positioned as a worthwhile investment, helped to make the idea of universal childcare appealing to policymakers.

The literature discussed above has demonstrated that, characteristic of liberal welfare states, Canada has historically positioned itself at a distance from the delivery of childcare as a social service, leading to a patchwork system and the lack of a national childcare strategy. Although the federal and provincial governments are responsible for funding and supporting childcare, their involvement has relied on third-party provision, either through non-profit or private operators, with little publicly delivered care. For municipalities in British Columbia, there is no clear role for local governments to take action on childcare, even when their communities face serious challenges with insufficient licensed childcare availability.

2.2. Multilevel governance in Canadian social welfare

This section of my conceptual framework situates my study within a larger context of understanding the relatively weak position of Canadian local governments in providing social services to their communities, even when these services are locally delivered. Social services in Canada are primarily the responsibility of provincial governments, with municipal governments having varying levels of jurisdiction depending on the province and the specific social service. This governance structure was entrenched by the introduction of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1966. The CAP, which gave the provinces primary responsibility over social programs, did not establish a federal childcare program, nor did it obligate the provinces to develop them. According to Mahon, the CAP has resulted in “the centralization of social services to the provincial scale, at the expense of cities” (2006, p. 457). Even after the CAP was dismantled in 1996, it is still “the provinces that occupy the key place within the hierarchies governing social policy, including child care” (2006, p. 458). According to Leibovitz, whose 1999 article on municipal politics in Ontario provides an illuminating general discussion on the role of Canadian local governments, “centralisation of provincial-local relations was carried out in a context of the post-war economic growth, rapid urbanisation, immigration and greater demand for social services, in which the

federal government and the provinces have come to play an increasing role in social regulation” (1999, p. 202). During this period, “greater provincial involvement in municipal affairs was justified by the need to guarantee efficiency in service delivery and spatial equity in their availability on a province-wide basis” (Leibovitz, 1999, p. 202-203). Tindal, Tindal, Stewart³ & Smith explain that “by the 1960s, local governments had been subjected to three decades of developments that undermined their independence and brought them increasingly into the orbit of the senior levels of government... The sun at the centre of most such municipal orbiting was the province” (2017, p. 150). According to Tindal et al. (2017),

One rationale for service reallocation is that local governments should be refocused on their historic role of providing services to *property*, whereas services to *people* should be the responsibility of the provincial government. Some argue that the latter services, such as education, provide benefits well beyond the boundaries of one municipality and should be financed from broader revenue sources. Social services involve income redistribution tied to broad provincial standards and objectives, should not be open to local variation, and, as a result, are also held to be inappropriate for local administration (p. 151).

However, Tindal et al. add that “others object to this arbitrary distinction” (2017, p. 152). They refer to a 1980 article by David Cameron, who, as summarized by Tindal et al., “suggests that the idea of municipal responsibility not extending beyond the provision of services ignores the representative and political role of municipal government” (Tindal et al., 2017, p. 152). In the words of Cameron, summarizing Nova Scotia’s 1974 Graham Commission as a case study on the roles of Canadian municipalities, “it would be difficult to be much concerned with a level of government responsible only for that which is unimportant and inexpensive” (Cameron, 1980, p. 226). Tindal et al.. offer a playful framework through which to understand how some local governments, despite being bounded by limited powers, are able to break through their constraints to tackle issues that go beyond what they are officially mandated to do: “Particularly active local governments – ‘eager beavers’ – can overcome their lack of formal power to influence policy decisions made by provincial or federal governments or even international bodies” (2017, p. 167). This eager beaver concept characterizes the

³ Kennedy Stewart, one of the authors of this text, is currently the mayor of Vancouver.

City of Vancouver, which took on an active approach to childcare and other social services despite having no formal mandate to do so.

As the concept of eager beaver municipalities demonstrates, although the centralization of social services to the provinces may appear to describe a straightforward dynamic with municipalities having little to no jurisdiction, the reality is much more complex. Mahon highlights scalar theory, also referred to by some scholars as the politics of scale, as a lens through which to understand the complexities of provincial and municipal relationships with respect to the provision of childcare as a social service. Although scalar theory is diffuse and varied in its meanings, in general it is concerned with the relationships between different geographic levels of economics and politics as they relate to capitalist production, social reproduction and consumption (Graddy, 2011; Marston, 2000, p. 221). Sheppard explains that “the existence of a vertical hierarchy of scales from the body to the globe is generally taken for granted, and certain kinds of activity are often associated with particular scales” (Sheppard, 2002, p. 313). Scale theorists are concerned with how these levels are socially constructed, how they interact, and the power dynamics between them. Thus, scalar theory offers a framework through which to understand the complex relationships between federal, provincial and local governments with respect to childcare.

Scalar theory is useful to this study, rather than simply discussing the division of power and responsibility between federal, provincial and local governments, because it highlights the messiness and social construction of how these levels of government interact in reality. It helps to explain how a local government such as Vancouver can maneuver into a position of taking a strong stance on social services, even when they are not formally the responsibility of local governments. As Mahon explains, “the conception of hierarchy employed by political economists is also more complex than that suggested by the ‘Russian dolls’ metaphor” that would dismiss levels of government as neatly nesting within one another with clear boundaries” (2006, p. 452). According to Mahon, “it is not a question of a simple, singular hierarchy structuring interscalar arrangements and the social relations embedded therein. Rather there is a multiplicity of diversely structured, overlapping interscalar rule regimes operative in and across diverse policy fields. While these arrangements clearly influence what happens at the local scale, sufficient room often exists for local actors to modify the effects” (2006, p. 452).

The scalar arrangements in Canadian social service provision have left municipalities in a position of relative weakness to address social problems in their own communities. However, the complexity and fluidity of scalar theory demonstrates that, in some cases, eager beaver local governments can also maneuver themselves into stronger positions in taking action on social services, either by advocating to higher scales of government, or by finding ways to support these services themselves, as is the case with Vancouver's approach to childcare availability.

2.3. The role of Canadian cities in childcare

This section of my conceptual framework applies the question of multilevel governance and scalar theory specifically to childcare and to the municipal role in its provision. Although Canadian municipalities are described in the Canadian Constitution of 1867 as "creatures of the province", they are also, fundamentally, the level of government that is "closest to the people" (Tindal et al., 2017, p. 305). According to Jenson and Mahon, "municipal government has the best knowledge of the needs of local populations, and is the level at which participation can most easily occur" (2002, p. ii). However, like in the case of other forms of social welfare provision, Canadian cities in most provinces, including British Columbia, have no formal mandate over childcare.

Despite this lack of a formal mandate, scholars have highlighted the importance of local communities in providing childcare. Gallagher emphasizes that although public policy is important in determining the broad frameworks for how services are delivered, decisions around childcare are ultimately made between parents and childcare providers within their communities (2013, p. 165). Mahon explains that, despite the dominant role of Canadian provinces, "child care is a service produced and delivered at the local scale" (2006, p. 453). Furthermore, according to Mahon, studying childcare through the lens of large cities is particularly important because "the impact of post-industrialism on labour markets, and thus the intensity and extent to which the need for non-parental child care is experienced, is likely to be greatest in major urban areas" (2006, p. 453).

In their 2020 report, *Moving From Private To Public Processes To Create Child Care In Canada*, Friendly et al.. make a strong case for the importance of local

governments and municipal planning processes in providing equitable access to childcare. According to the authors, “the municipal role in land use planning and zoning regulations, use of revenues from local taxation, building regulation, licensing, permitting and specific local policies are key planning tools that enable the planning and creation of child care. Municipalities can use these tools to enable or restrict use of the land and thus, the creation of quality child care facilities” (Friendly et al., 2020, p. 43-44). Friendly et al. contrast Canada’s market-based, provincially focused patchwork provision of childcare with Norway, which places local governments in a central position of administering childcare centres within a robust and well-funded national system. The authors argue that public planning processes at the local level are essential in order to ensure that childcare is available in sufficient numbers and is equitably distributed at the local level: “just as communities are acknowledged to have a role to play in building sewers to ensure the health of the community, it can easily be argued that they also have a role in building child care facilities for healthy, sustainable communities. This can be facilitated through municipalities’ role in land use planning” (2020, p. 47). Similarly, Macdonald, reporting on childcare deserts in Canada, comments that city planning is very important in addressing childcare availability, and that low childcare coverage rates can be caused by a lack of local planning (2018, p. 11). However, Friendly et al. caution that Canada’s approach to childcare, which emphasizes market-based provision at the expense of public planning, “fails to ensure that child care services are available when and where they are needed, with pervasive gaps and inequities of service across the country” (2020, p. 41). As a result, the majority of Canadian municipalities face chronic childcare shortages.

At the municipal scale, Canadian local governments have made efforts to address childcare even when they have no formal obligation, and little capital, to do so. The amount of municipal involvement in childcare varies considerably among major Canadian cities, with Toronto taking on a major leadership role and Montreal having almost no jurisdiction (Mahon, 2006). These varying levels of responsibility reflect Provincial regimes: Ontario has a long-established practice of municipal-provincial cost-sharing on childcare, whereas Quebec has taken on nearly all responsibility for administering its universal childcare system (Mahon, 2006). In British Columbia, although municipalities have no formal role in addressing childcare, the City of Vancouver has gotten around these limitations by including childcare in its Local Area

Plans and developing local funding measures such as Community Amenity Contributions, among other actions (Mahon, 2006). According to Mahon, “despite the lack of provincial support”, Vancouver, as well as the similarly proactive city of Toronto, “have worked to lay the foundations for an affordable, high-quality child care system, accessible to all denizens” (2006, p. 457). Thus, Mahon argues that Canadian cities are “more than ‘puppets on a string’” when it comes to actively participating in the creation of childcare spaces (2006, p. 453). The efforts of cities like Toronto and Vancouver to take action on childcare suggests that local governments are responding to a clear need which is borne out of the provinces’ inability to respond adequately to demand at the local level. Leibovitz argues that an unexpected outcome of the neoliberal restructuring which followed the cancellation of the CAP is that it “may in fact induce policy innovation at the local level. As financial support to cities from higher levels of government diminishes, and as localities finds themselves ‘alone’ in their attempts to deal with the consequences of economic restructuring, local decision-makers may be more likely to look for alternative tools for economic development” (1999, p. 207).

Mahon, responding to Leibovitz’s theories, suggests that “the provision of child care may be governed by a hierarchy in which the province occupies the key position, but local resources can be mobilized to increase the room for manoeuvre” (Mahon, 2006, p. 459). Although many urban governance scholars have focused primarily on the limited formal functions of local governments, Leibovitz calls for a “broader perspective”, which “might in fact reveal a whole plethora of institutions, players and practices located in the somewhat grey area where state and civil society intermingle” (1999, p. 204). Leibovitz argues that the role of Canadian local government within scalar hierarchies is not as inferior, or as straightforward, as it may seem: in reality, “intergovernmental relations take place within a complex and diversified environment” (1999, p. 201).

While the accomplishments of local governments such as Vancouver and Toronto in creating childcare spaces are notable, coverage rates remain low in almost all municipalities outside of Quebec. These low childcare coverage rates in Canadian cities are “not surprising, as in Canada cities do not have the kind of revenue base required to ensure the provision of quality child care for all who want and need it” (Mahon, 2006, p. 457). Akbari and McCuaig dismiss municipal childcare efforts across Canada: “at the local level, infrastructure is weak with poor oversight and support for service providers, lax or absent planning, and operators competing for the same families in some

neighbourhoods while other communities have no options” (2017, p. 3). These statements point to broader issues with Canada’s approach to childcare, which has historically combined inadequate federal and provincial funding with a market-based approach to creating childcare that provides no clear role for, and little support to, local governments. Although Canada and British Columbia’s approach to childcare appears to be changing, it will take considerable time and effort to turn the situation around, and in the meantime, childcare availability at the local level remains a serious problem, even in cities whose municipal governments have attempted to tackle it.

Chapter 3.

Methodology and research design

3.1. Research methods

This research project uses two main research methods, document analysis and semi-structured key informant interviews, to understand the City of Vancouver's role in addressing the licensed childcare availability shortage.

3.1.1. Document analysis

I reviewed a range of City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia and childcare advocacy documents that discuss childcare availability. In examining these documents, I was interested in looking at how the COV's role in addressing childcare is characterized, its relationship with the provincial and federal governments in addressing childcare, whether any rationale for creating (or not creating) childcare spaces is articulated, and the degree of detail to which childcare is discussed. I analysed these documents using Mendeley, a software program that allowed me to highlight and annotate relevant passages in a straightforward manner. The following is a partial list of the types of documents that I analysed:

- City of Vancouver local area plans
- City of Vancouver strategies
- City of Vancouver budgets and reports
- Province of British Columbia strategies
- Childcare advocacy reports
- Web materials, including City of Vancouver and Province of British Columbia websites
- Additional news items, unpublished reports and social media items, not used in my findings directly but which informed the development of my project.

Of these documents, I paid particular attention to Vancouver's local area plans because they contain detailed, neighbourhood-specific information about the COV's approach to childcare, including short-term and long-term space creation targets. However, it is worth noting that local area plans are only currently active for a select number of neighbourhoods in Vancouver and do not provide an overall picture of childcare in the city. Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy is also an important document for understanding the COV's approach to childcare but contains relatively few specific details.

3.1.2. Semi-structured key informant interviews

I used semi-structured key informant interviews as a core research method for this project. In selecting my interviewees, I was interested in speaking with people who could offer a range of expertise in childcare policy both within the City of Vancouver and from provincial and intermunicipal perspectives. A total of five interviews were conducted with the following participants:

- Marylyn Chiang, Senior Policy Analyst, Union of British Columbia Municipalities
- Rita Chudnovsky, former City of Vancouver Civic Children's Advocate
- Sharon Gregson, Spokesperson for the \$10aDay Child Care campaign, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
- Andrea Reimer, former Vancouver City Councilor, former Vancouver School Board member, former Chair of Vancouver's Joint Childcare Council
- Niki Sharma, current BC MLA Vancouver-Hastings, former Senior Ministerial Assistant to the Minister of State on Child Care, and former Vancouver Park Board Commissioner

These interviews were conducted between February and October 2020 and were under an hour in duration. I conducted my interviews with Andrea Reimer, Sharon Gregson and Niki Sharma in person February and early March 2020 prior to the pandemic and used a recording device to capture our conversations. My interview with Chudnovsky was conducted in late March 2020 when the emergence of COVID-19 was starting to make in-person meetings difficult, and as such I used a recorded phone call to

interview her. Finally, my interview with Chiang was conducted during the pandemic via a recorded phone call. I fully transcribed all of the interviews, edited interview transcripts for grammar and clarity, and used Microsoft Word to organize the transcriptions into categories and take notes. These categories eventually formed the preliminary structure of my research findings. A list of sample interview questions is included in Appendix A. While these sample questions provided guidance about the general topic, each interview took its own shape. Because my research design focused on key informant interviews rather than an ethnographic study, I asked each interviewee specific questions pertaining to their own experience in shaping Vancouver's childcare landscape. My interviewees were offered the chance to review the quotes I used prior to publication.

Although my intention had originally been to conduct a larger number of interviews, I ran into a number of challenges. In particular, I was initially planning to include members of the City of Vancouver childcare planning team in my interviews, but had unexpected challenges during my initial research collection period in securing a childcare planner who was willing to speak with me. My efforts were further complicated by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although I was intending to make additional efforts to connect with Vancouver's childcare planning team, I did not feel that it would be appropriate to do so during the early days of the pandemic when I was completing my data collection. Amidst these considerable challenges, I also found, through the early stages of transcribing my interviews, that I was able to reach satisfactory data saturation with the interviews I had already conducted. While I am aware that the relatively small number of interviews I conducted poses some limitations to the robustness of my findings, I was confident in being able to write my thesis based on the data collected, as the interviews I conducted were well-aligned thematically.

Each of the interviews I conducted offers a unique perspective on the landscape of childcare planning and advocacy. In particular, my interview with Reimer has strongly influenced my project, as she offered on-the-ground experience as a municipal elected official working to advance childcare. The people I interviewed played crucial roles in advocating for, and implementing, childcare policy in Vancouver and across British Columbia. I am aware that several of my interviewees, including Reimer, Sharma, and Gregson, have held elected positions with the Vision Vancouver civic party and the BC NDP. My interview choices were limited by who I was able to connect with, and were also influenced by the fact that the people who did the most advocacy work to affect

change came from these parties. Although a more exhaustive interview process might have led to more diverse political perspectives, I believe that the people I spoke with took major roles in moving the childcare discussion forward and therefore were key informants in answering my research question.

Prior to commencing formal interviews, I also engaged in several informal, unrecorded conversations with childcare advocates, childcare operators and officials during the summer of 2019, along with wide-ranging reading on childcare policy from both academic and government sources. This preliminary research helped me to gain a broad understanding of the challenges facing childcare policy in Vancouver and BC. Throughout the process of completing my thesis, I regularly attended webinars on local childcare issues in Vancouver and have followed news stories on developments in the childcare landscape in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and beyond, read a number of informal or unpublished reports on childcare, and have closely followed social media groups for parents in Vancouver seeking childcare and advocating for childcare policy. Although these activities are not discussed explicitly in my research findings, they informed the depth of my understanding of childcare in Vancouver, particularly with regards to the challenges that parents have faced in accessing quality care that meets their needs.

3.2. Research design

My research findings are structured according to a qualitative mixed-methods approach, with the findings arranged according to subject matter. Within these subject areas, I have used a combination of document analysis and quotes from my interviews, along with scholarly context and other sources where appropriate. The first part of my research findings explores the specific strategies that staff and officials at the City of Vancouver have used to address childcare availability at the municipal level. The second part of my research findings discusses the motivations, limitations and outcomes of Vancouver's approach.

Chapter 4.

Background and context

The sections that follow situate the City of Vancouver's local government within the context of federal, provincial, and activist approaches to childcare policy. I will demonstrate how existing policy structures, which rely on demand-side tax incentives and market-based childcare delivery, are a reflection of historically low support for childcare from the federal and provincial levels of government which has, in turn, led to increased pressure on Vancouver's local government to address childcare.

4.1.1. The effects of federal policies on childcare in Vancouver

Historically, social spending on childcare in Canada emerged as a welfare service extended only to the neediest families where mothers had to work due to the absence of a male breadwinner, a service which was fraught with stigmatization because it signalled that a family did not meet social norms (Pasolli, 2015, p. 6). For those families that did meet social norms, caring for young children was considered to be solely a mother's responsibility until the Second World War, which placed demands on female labour participation, followed by social and economic shifts in the second half of the twentieth century which saw more women entering the workforce (Pasolli, 2015, p. 1). Women who used childcare by "choice" rather than by need were required to find it through the market. Prentice and White explain that in Canada, "childcare services originated as 'split' or bifurcated systems, with one set of policies and programmes targeted to the poor as part of social welfare services, and another set of policies directed to education" (2019, p. 60). They argue that the legacy of this bifurcated policy approach can be seen today in Canada's focus on tax relief for parents rather than on providing childcare services, leading to inequality in childcare access at the regional level (2019, p. 60).

Canada's approach to childcare policy is characteristic of what Gøsta Esping-Andersen describes as a "liberal welfare state," with a focus on demand-side funding

and market-based provision in which social benefits are offered as part of “means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers, or modest social-insurance plans (1990, p. 26-27). As a result of this social policy structure, childcare across Canada relies on what is often referred to as a patchwork provision of care (see Boychuk, 1998; Prentice & White, 2019; Mahon, 2006; Pasolli, 2015). This patchwork uses market principles to create childcare spaces, and allows both for-profit, non-profit and public entities to build and operate childcare facilities, both in purpose-built facilities and within private homes. As Pasolli comments, “The most notable aspect of Canadian child care history, perhaps, is the absence of a universal program comparable to those established in Sweden, France, and elsewhere” (2015, p. 12-13). Prentice and White argue that the longstanding structure of Canadian federal policy has failed to create adequate childcare coverage, both in terms of availability and access: they explain that Canada’s legacy of tension between social welfare and social investment approaches has led to a split social service system with one stream of programs directed at welfare and another stream of programs directed at education, which has in turn has created “regional inequality in access – what recent literature has labelled childcare ‘deserts’– as well as inequities in access based on family income and other factors” (2019, p. 60). Ultimately, according to Prentice and White, “a history of inadequate public funding is the primary explanation for why licensed childcare services are rare and/or expensive in Canada” (2019, p. 67). Prentice argues that Canada’s market-based childcare patchwork is not a true system at all, because there is no coordination amongst regions and scales of government. She writes that “outside Quebec, a completed circuit for childcare from the national, through the provincial, to the local level has yet to be constructed. In consequence, a national system of early learning and childcare currently is structurally unobtainable” (2006, p. 522).

A further barrier against the creation of a unified national childcare program is that childcare in Canada is primarily regulated by the provinces. The legacy of the Canada Assistance Plan, which placed the provinces in a key position of responsibility for childcare, has meant that federal government has had little impetus to either develop a national childcare strategy or to give more power to the municipalities where childcare is actually delivered. After the CAP was cancelled in 1996 in favour of neoliberal restructuring, the dominant position of the provinces continued, with a focus that began to shift towards social investment rather than welfare (Mahon, 2006, p. 458). As a result

of these federal policies, every province treats childcare differently, with Quebec having a universal system but almost no local control over childcare, and Ontario giving considerable responsibility for childcare to its cities through a budget-sharing policy (Mahon, 2006, p. 458). According to Mahon, British Columbia falls somewhere between Quebec and Ontario, with cities having no mandated role over childcare (2006, p. 459).

Childcare proponents have called for Canada to adopt national legislation as early as the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women (Prentice, 2006, p. 525). However, although Canada has come close to creating a national childcare strategy on several occasions, these initiatives have not yet come to fruition (McKenna 2015). A 2004 Throne Speech under Prime Minister Paul Martin promised to create “a truly national system of early learning and child care” (Governor General of Canada, 2004, p. 8). However, despite initiating an ambitious \$5 billion initiative of bilateral agreements with Canada’s provinces and territories, Martin’s childcare initiative did not materialize. According to Prentice, previous attempts to create a national childcare program have been hampered by Canada’s provincially regulated, market-based policy structure, in which childcare policy varies considerably between provinces, and which relies on market mechanisms to deliver childcare services. Prentice comments that “as a result, there is a significant disconnect between the newly announced national political vision for childcare and existing mechanisms for local implementation” (2006, p. 522). More recently, in a September 2020 Speech From The Throne, the Government of Canada promised to “make a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system” as a crucial aspect of pandemic recovery efforts, which will “build on previous investments, learn from the model that already exists in Quebec, and work with all provinces and territories to ensure that high-quality care is accessible to all (Governor General of Canada, 2020, p. 13). Although childcare advocates are tentatively hopeful about the prospect of a new national childcare program, it remains to be seen whether these promises come true (Kennedy, 2020).

Even if a universal national program is established, it will require considerable effort and time to unwind the damage caused by Canada’s history of underinvestment. Social service funding at the federal level was decimated by neoliberal restructuring in the 1990s, culminating in the replacement of the CAP with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996, which resulted in reduced overall social service spending, and increased devolvement of power to the provinces (Pasolli, 2015, p. 170). As Pasolli

explains, in spite of the gains made by the women's movements of the mid-twentieth century, "child care and other women's services that enjoyed tenuous public support were made most 'vulnerable' by the CHST" (2015, p. 170). The result of this reliance on the market has been a severe lack of available high quality, licensed childcare across most of the country outside of Quebec. My research findings suggest that, in the absence of support at higher scales of government, cities were placed in a position of having to pick up the slack if they truly wanted to address childcare availability.

The impacts of these policy choices on childcare availability in Canadian cities have been profound. Macdonald, conducting quantitative research on licensed childcare availability across Canada, found that coverage rates are low throughout nearly the entire country, with 42% across the City of Toronto, 35% across Metro Vancouver, and Saskatoon at under 25% (2018, p. 20, 24 & 14). Only in the province of Quebec, where a large number of childcare spaces were created following the establishment of universal childcare in 1997, do coverage rates approach anything above 50% (Macdonald, 2018 p. 26). Quebec's much-studied system, which uses the same mixed market of non-profit, for-profit and school-based facilities as the rest of Canada but with substantially higher subsidies than other provinces, is often held up as a model for social investment in childcare. Indeed, the rollout of universal childcare across the province increased the number of licensed spaces from 77,000 in 1997 to 210,000 in 2010 (Lefebvre et al., 2011, p. 1) and led to substantial growth in female workforce participation (Baker et al., 2008; Lefebvre et al., 2011). However, Prentice and White comment that in Quebec, "despite the many real gains in access, quality levels remain troublingly low (as in the rest of Canada), with more lower income children in lower, rather than higher, quality settings" (2019, p. 63). These issues suggest that policymakers in British Columbia could stand to learn from Quebec's missteps as they move towards their stated goals of increased childcare availability and universal childcare.

4.1.2. The effects of provincial policies on childcare in Vancouver

Childcare policy in British Columbia has historically tracked alongside federal policies, with a focus on market-based provision. As Pasolli comments, "with a remarkable degree of consistency over one hundred years, an ambivalence about

working mothers was embedded into the rocky landscape of BC child care” (2015, p. 5). As early as the late 1970s, provincial reliance on the market to create childcare spaces, along with a lack of consistent budgetary support for childcare centres, has meant that it has at times been difficult for childcare centres in British Columbia to keep their doors open (Pasolli, 2015, p. 157-158). As a result of these policy choices, childcare availability has become a deeply entrenched, systemic problem throughout British Columbia.

Not until 2018, under an NDP minority provincial government, was there significant development on childcare policy in British Columbia with the release of a new provincial childcare strategy allocating a \$1 billion investment over three years (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 3). The strategy encompasses a range of aspects of childcare under the broad categories of affordability, availability and quality, including fee reduction programs for childcare providers, training for early childhood educators, and wage subsidies. It also promises 24,000 new licensed childcare spaces over three years using a combination of provincial and federal funding, along with low-cost childcare pilot programs and increased wages and support for early childhood educators. The strategy is explicit in its goal of eventually achieving universal childcare in British Columbia, openly admitting that “the current market-based system is not meeting the demand for spaces, resulting in higher prices, lower quality and fewer choices for parents” (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 5). The Province plans to move away from the longstanding market-based patchwork provision of care and “towards universal child care that is affordable and available for any family that wants or needs it” (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 6). This shift towards a universal system is reflected in several aspects of the strategy, including pilot programs that deliver low-cost childcare regardless of income, fee reduction programs for childcare operators, and increased wages and support for early childhood educators.

In declaring a shift away from market-based provision and towards universal childcare, the Province appears to align itself with Esping-Andersen’s category of social democratic regimes, in which publicly funded, publicly operated services are made

available to all citizens (1990).⁴ According to Esping-Andersen, social democratic states “pursued a welfare state that would promote an equality of the highest standards, not an equality of minimal needs as was pursued elsewhere” (1990, p. 27). Esping-Andersen explains that “the principle is not to wait until the family’s capacity to aid is exhausted, but to pre-emptively socialize the costs of family-hood (p. 28). The social democratic state “takes direct responsibility of caring for children, the aged, and the helpless. It is, accordingly, committed to a heavy social-service burden, not only to service family needs but also to allow women to choose work rather than the household” (p. 28). These ideals are reflected in the Province’s strategy, which invests heavily in childcare affordability, availability and quality, as well as increasing wages for workers, ultimately leading to a future vision of establishing “a system of governance for universal child care in British Columbia” (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 22). However, the Province, like the federal government, has shied away from adopting a fully universal system in which childcare is publicly funded and publicly operated (as is the case in social democratic countries such as Norway), instead choosing to build on top of the existing market-based patchwork of care with increased funding to childcare operators and tax incentives for families.

British Columbia’s recent shift towards a universal approach is, to a large extent, attributable to longstanding pressure from childcare activists. Although there have been several childcare advocacy movements in British Columbia, the \$10aDay Child Care campaign, initiated by the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC) and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) in 2010 (Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC & Early Childhood educators of BC, 2019a, p. 4), is of particular importance for this research project as it deeply informed the Province’s current strategy. The campaign’s Community Plan For A Public System Of Integrated Early Care And Learning (known colloquially as the “\$10aDay Plan”) now in its 8th edition (February 2019), encompasses childcare availability, affordability, and access, and calls for Indigenous self-determination and strong investments in early childcare educators,

⁴ Esping-Andersen also identifies a third type of welfare state, the conservative-corporatist welfare state, which does not apply to this discussion. In these states, “what predominated was the preservation of status differentials; rights, therefore, were attached to class and status. This corporatism was subsumed under a state edifice perfectly ready to displace the market as a provider of welfare; hence, private insurance and occupational fringe benefits play a truly marginal role” (1990, p. 27).

backed up by sustained funding from federal and provincial governments. This campaign has succeeded where previous movements did not, in part because its authors “make their case on multiple levels”, including supporting childhood development, supporting women, reducing child poverty, and a carefully researched economic rationale, all of which are supported by the campaign’s universal childcare framework (Pasolli, 2015, p. 177). While making a strong case for the economic benefits of universal childcare, the campaign was also careful to avoid overly relying on what Prentice calls “the business case and its association of childcare with prosperity” (2009, p. 687) by keeping the focus on universality and access. My research findings, specifically my interview with Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC spokesperson Sharon Gregson, will discuss the role of the \$10aDay Child Care campaign in greater detail.

Although British Columbia’s new provincial strategy is a major achievement, it still retains several aspects of a liberal welfare state despite its reach towards universalism, including a focus on income-tested tax breaks for parents; keeping childcare in the realm of “welfare” under the Ministry of Children and Family Development rather than moving it to the Ministry of Education; retaining grants for private businesses to improve their properties to create childcare; and the lack of publicly run childcare spaces. The \$10aDay campaign criticizes these particular aspects of the Province’s plan, explaining that “the current approach to space creation does not ensure that public funds create publicly-owned assets available to meet community needs over the long term. This is expensive, risky, and unaccountable” (Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC & Early Childhood educators of BC, 2019b, p. 2). According to the \$10aDay campaign, these approaches perpetuate ineffective market-based strategies which will “undermine government’s commitment to universal child care” (Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC & Early Childhood educators of BC, 2019b, p. 1). There is still a long way to go, considering that licensed childcare is available for only 19.5% of children in British Columbia as of 2019 (Anderson, 2020). Unwinding a systemic problem of this size will take time: both the BC government, and the \$10aDay Child Care campaign, agree that it will take years to achieve a universal system in the province (Province of British Columbia, 2018, p. 4; Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC & Early Childhood educators of BC, 2019a, p. 2).

Within this context, local governments in British Columbia have historically been left to decide whether or not they wish to engage in childcare policymaking, and in the

case of many cities outside of Vancouver, the answer has been to leave this responsibility to the Province even when the Province did not make any significant provision for child care. More recently, following the release of the Province's child care strategy, municipalities that did not address childcare earlier have found themselves in the position of needing to recalibrate to find the best ways to use funding that has been recently made available through programs such as the Community Child Care Space Creation Fund and Community Child Care Planning Program.⁵ My research findings will discuss how and why Vancouver, to a much larger extent than most other municipalities in British Columbia, chose to tackle childcare at the local level, and what the results and impacts of these decisions have been.

⁵ The Community Child Care Space Creation Fund and Community Child Care Planning Program are two programs that were administered through the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), using provincial and federal funding. Under this program, local governments could voluntarily apply for funding to support the creation of and planning for new childcare spaces. The programs were active in 2019 and 2020 and are not currently accepting applications as of 2021. More information about these programs can be found at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children/running-daycare-preschool/community-child-care-space-creation-program> and <https://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/funding/lgps/child-care.html>.

Chapter 5.

Research findings

My study asks, *how has the City of Vancouver been able to play a meaningful role in addressing licensed childcare availability at the local level, despite its lack of jurisdiction in this provincial responsibility?* The previous sections have laid out the problem of Vancouver's childcare shortage and have examined how the inferior position of municipalities with respect to social services fits into the larger context of federal and provincial approaches to childcare in Canada and British Columbia. I will now present my research findings on how the City of Vancouver has attempted to tackle childcare, the reasons for its active approach in comparison with other local governments in British Columbia, and the outcomes and limitations of this approach.

As the following pages will explore, the City of Vancouver has consistently engaged in a range of strategies to create childcare spaces despite its lack of an official requirement to do so. My interviewees reiterated that the City of Vancouver has taken a uniquely active role in addressing childcare availability when compared to other municipalities in British Columbia, and that this active role has positioned Vancouver as a leader in childcare policy in the province. This positive regard for Vancouver's actions was evident when I spoke with spokesperson for Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC Sharon Gregson, who emphasized that "I think it is important to note what a leader Vancouver has been historically. And still is even today. I think that really cannot be overstated." Similarly, according to Marylyn Chiang, Senior Policy Analyst for the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, "the City of Vancouver, in many ways, and in childcare as well, is a leader in the field. They're first out of the gate, they have access to funds and are able to invest in childcare spaces, so in many ways they are the leaders in this, and there is much to learn from them." According to former City of Vancouver Civic Children's Advocate Rita Chudnovsky, the City of Vancouver "had childcare a bit on its agenda long before others did." Niki Sharma, a former Vancouver Park Board Commissioner, former Senior Ministerial Assistant to the Minister of State on Child Care and current BC MLA Vancouver-Hastings, told me that "just knowing the state of

childcare in B.C. [...] I would just say you picked a good city to figure out.” Sharma adds that building childcare spaces is “the most direct and the most interesting” way that municipalities in British Columbia can contribute towards childcare, “because that is where the city legally has a lot of tools to do that. And also knows the community more than the province. So I always felt like that was the first and most impactful thing that we could do together with municipalities, is try to get spaces for families and communities.”

Although municipalities in British Columbia have no formal responsibility for childcare, the existence of the Vancouver Charter, which gives Vancouver greater powers of self-governance than other municipalities in the province (Punter, 2003, p.13), has paved the way for the City’s unique efforts, such as including childcare spaces in its Local Area Plans and using money from real estate developers to fund childcare spaces at the municipal level. In 1990, the City of Vancouver adopted a Civic Child Care Strategy which committed the city to be “an active partner with senior levels of government, parents, the private sector and the community in the development and maintenance of a comprehensive child care system in Vancouver” (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 13). This commitment was put into action through measures such as the appointment of a Child Care Coordinator within the city’s social planning department, and through arrangements with non-profit childcare operators such as the Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres (Mahon 2006, p. 460-461). These efforts have been instrumental in marking Vancouver as a leader in municipal childcare policy in British Columbia and across Canada. However, the City of Vancouver, like other Canadian municipalities, faces limitations in its ability to take action on childcare availability without support from higher levels of government.

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, the City of Vancouver estimates a licensed childcare shortfall of 16,299 spaces as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). This estimate is based on census data and mothers’ participation in the labour force, among other factors, as compared with the number of existing licensed childcare spaces in the COV (City of Vancouver, n.d.-a). However, this is inherently a fluid number that can be affected by a number of factors, including changing population patterns and workforce participation rates, as well as the number of new licensed childcare spaces created and the number of childcare facilities that cease operations. As Sharma, speaking from a provincial perspective, comments, “The reality is, who knows about ten years from now. It’s based on the needs of

families.” Regardless, a general consensus emerged through my interviews and document analysis that there is a significant ongoing licensed childcare shortage in the City of Vancouver, and that the city’s metrics provide an accurate and useful target. Today, childcare targets and needs assessments are included in Vancouver’s Local Area Plans⁶, a practice that was established by the Civic Childcare Strategy in 1990, (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, pg. 22).

This study looks at the levers that City of Vancouver staff and elected officials have tried to pull in order to practically and creatively solve the childcare availability problem given their limited resources as a local government. I will ask whether these efforts have actually led to increased childcare availability in Vancouver as compared with other municipalities in B.C., and the factors that may affect these outcomes. My research findings are structured in two main sections. First, I examine the strategies that the City of Vancouver has deployed to address childcare, using a framework of partnerships, investment and advocacy. Although these roles have been outlined in City of Vancouver documents, my study aims to examine the City’s strategies in detail in order to better understand the successes, challenges and limitations that COV staff and officials faced in attempting to take action on childcare availability. The second section of my research findings explores the reasons why the City of Vancouver chose to take a more active approach to addressing childcare than is required of local governments in British Columbia, as well as the outcomes of and limitations to this approach.

5.1. Strategies used by the City of Vancouver to address childcare availability

Childcare availability is discussed in a number of the City of Vancouver’s public-facing planning documents, including its Local Area Plans and Healthy City Strategy.⁷ The language used to describe Vancouver’s role varies from document to document, but, in general, positions the city as a subordinate partner in addressing childcare. For

⁶ Local Area plans are a key public-facing planning tool used by the City of Vancouver, which does not have a city-wide plan.

⁷ Vancouver’s Healthy City Strategy (2014) is a key social planning document for the city. Childcare is discussed under the Strategy’s first core pillar, “A Healthy Start”.

example, the City of Vancouver's website states that "although childcare is a senior government responsibility, we're trying to make a modest impact and provide leadership in demonstrating the role that a municipal government can play in childcare" (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b). A local planning document offers more specific information, explaining that (emphasis mine) "the provision of childcare is primarily a senior government responsibility. While the City of Vancouver does not directly deliver childcare services, it *forms partnerships, advocates, and invests* in creating accessible childcare spaces which are operated by non-profit partners" (City of Vancouver, Grandview-Woodland Community Plan, 2016, p. 236).

Similar language is used, with slight variations, in other municipal documents, such as the Downtown Eastside Plan, which states that "while the City does not directly deliver childcare services, it advocates, forms partnerships, and invests in childcare spaces through direct operating grants, capital grants, maintenance, and financing growth policy and tools" (City of Vancouver, 2018a, p. 82). The City of Vancouver's website explains that "recognizing that childcare is a public amenity intended primarily to support working families", council and staff address childcare by partnering with nonprofits, facilitating the creation of infrastructure to support family services, using "financial tools to leverage facilities and land, and offset some operating costs", and by advocating to senior governments (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b). A May 2020 Early Learning and Childcare Month update includes a list explaining that the City's roles are to "plan, monitor, incentivize childcare development to align need and supply; advocate to/partner with senior levels of government; grant funding for coordination, quality, affordability, access, and system building; facilitate planning and development of new childcare facilities; convening stakeholders" (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 12). While the language used in this last document is somewhat different from that used in Local Area Plans, it still aligns with the basic characterization of the City of Vancouver's primary strategies being to form partnerships and to engage in advocacy and investment.

Given that municipalities in British Columbia have no mandated responsibility over childcare, how did the City of Vancouver arrive at the decision to address childcare using the core strategies of partnerships, advocacy and investing? Rita Chudnovsky describes how, during her time as Vancouver's Civic Children's Advocate in the 1980s and 1990s, during the height of neoliberal restructuring at the federal and provincial

levels, she “put a fair bit of energy into looking into what levers the City had to try to make a difference.” Chudnovsky explains that (emphasis mine)

broadly, we focused on three areas. *The first* is capital planning, and so the city did have the capacity that not all municipalities had to require developers as a condition of redevelopment to build childcare and convey it to the city. That had been used sporadically, but became really entrenched in the city policy. And with that came the city’s inclusion of childcare into its neighbourhood planning question. So while there was a bit of a formula about when do we need to build a new school, where do we need to build a library, where do we need to build community centres, we worked hard to get childcare on that list. The formula isn’t quite as clear because we are so far away from meeting the need. But from a capital perspective we were able to get childcare on the agenda, get developers to either build facilities or contribute funds for the development of facilities, and also for the city to increasingly include childcare space in the seismic upgrading of schools, in the community centres, something we’re still working on. So that was one focus. *The [second] focus* was on really trying to support the capacity of existing childcare programs to enhance quality particularly childcare programs that were meeting and are meeting the needs of marginalized communities. So there are a whole series of civic childcare grants [that] started with the civic childcare policy and the identification of the civic childcare budget to enhance the quality and support childcare programs to try and keep them affordable while enhancing quality particularly in the areas most needed. *And the third* was that the civic government needed to play a role in advocating to the provincial and federal governments about what they needed to do and put themselves forward as a willing partner if and when the funds were available. The City of Vancouver was a leader on that municipally in British Columbia, was one of the first municipalities to endorse a \$10aDay plan, and through various political shades of civic government, have continued to play that advocacy role.

Although Chudnovsky’s language is slightly different from the language used in the City of Vancouver’s recent planning documents, it aligns with the same three core strategies of partnerships (“support the capacity of existing childcare programs”), investment (“capital planning”) and advocacy (“advocating to the provincial and federal governments”) described in the City of Vancouver documents above. Chudnovsky’s work as Vancouver’s Children’s Advocate led to the creation of Vancouver’s Civic Childcare Strategy, approved by Council in 1990, which proposed a mandate of capital programs, planning for childcare, operating assistance and program support, development and administrative support, and advocacy (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 15-16). This mandate laid the groundwork for many of Vancouver’s ongoing childcare planning practices, such as including specific childcare space targets

in Local Area Plans and Public Benefits documents and budgets, supported by the city's childcare social planning team.

In the sections that follow, I explore partnerships, advocacy and investment as a framework to understand the ways in which the City of Vancouver has made efforts to play a meaningful role in addressing licensed childcare availability. Specifically, I am interested in understanding the reasons why the COV took on this active role, the factors that allowed it to do so, and the challenges that staff and elected officials encountered. Furthermore, even the stated role in childcare laid out by the COV, such as determining childcare space creation target numbers on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, demonstrates considerable efforts by social planning staff and goes far beyond what municipalities in British Columbia are required to do. In this way, it is clear that there is a difference between the rather limited role of the City of Vancouver as stated in public-facing written documents and the actual roles of local stakeholders, including city staff, in addressing local childcare availability. This discrepancy between the stated functions of local governments and their actual actions on the ground is reflected by Leibovitz, who comments that the majority of scholarship on local governments in Canada “has tended to follow rather traditional lines, focusing on either formal state institutions, mostly municipal government, or on the property development industry as the major interest-group in urban politics” (1999, p. 199). Leibovitz argues that it is necessary to pay “closer attention to the way 'local' governance is in reality a manifestation of the juxtaposition of governance processes operating at various geographical scales” (1999, p. 199-200). According to Leibovitz, “the inferior constitutional position of municipalities may invoke a notion of straightforward patterns of intergovernmental relations in Canada. In reality, however, intergovernmental relations take place within a complex and diversified environment” (1999, p. 201). In alignment with Leibovitz, I believe that the story of Vancouver's role in addressing childcare is one of complex and often messy interactions between various levels of government, as well as other stakeholders at the local scale, and were necessitated by a historical lack of support from the Province.

5.1.1. Partnerships

Partnerships are a core component of the City of Vancouver's approach to addressing childcare availability. The Grandview Woodland Community Plan offers a tidy

explanation of partnerships within Vancouver’s social service landscape, stating that “certain areas like housing, childcare, social and recreational programs that build on innovative partnerships with senior levels of government, charities, and non-profit organizations will require strategic alignment and coordination with partner entities” (City of Vancouver, 2016, p. 252). Other Local Area Plans also discuss the role of partnerships in addressing childcare availability, including the West End Plan, which states that “the City, Park Board and School Board are committed to increasing the number of childcare spaces and have forged a strong partnership with non-profit childcare operators” (City of Vancouver, 2017c, p. 121).

This section focuses specifically on partnerships within and below the local scale, including the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Park Board, nonprofit childcare operators, and other groups. Typically, in Vancouver’s landscape of municipally supported childcare facilities, the City provides funding and acts in a planning, regulatory, and facilitation capacity, while partners provide physical space and take on the responsibility of operating childcare facilities (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 11). Although the Vancouver School Board and the Vancouver Park Board are entities of the municipal government, they are governed by their own publicly elected boards and are characterized as ‘public partners’ in documents such as the COV’s May 2020 Childcare Update (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 12). It is notable that neither the City of Vancouver, nor the Vancouver School Board or Vancouver Park Board, are currently in the business of directly operating childcare facilities, a task that is typically given to non-profit organizations. Some examples of childcare facilities that have been created through the COV’s joint efforts with partner organizations include a childcare facility at the newly redeveloped Lord Nelson Elementary school, which is located on Vancouver School Board property and is operated by Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House; a childcare facility on the 7th floor of Woodward’s in downtown Vancouver, which is operated by the YMCA, and childcare in the Shaw Tower, which is operated by the Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres.

Central to the City of Vancouver’s efforts in creating partnerships is the Joint Childcare Council (JCC), a group of key partners and stakeholders involved in addressing childcare at the local level. The JCC includes representatives from City Council, Park Board, School Board, City and Board staff, the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, the Chief medical officer from Vancouver Coastal Health, the

University of British Columbia's Human Early Learning Partnership, and other groups (City of Vancouver, 2018b, p. 2). At present, its primary function is to "provide advice directly to staff that aids in their efforts to achieve the targeted number of new childcare spaces, and in ensuring the policy goals in Healthy City and other policy documents relating to early care & learning are met" (City of Vancouver 2018b, p. 1). As Reimer explains, "the City has money, school has kids, parks has space, so it made sense to coordinate somehow."

The existence and purpose of the Joint Childcare Council has been contested as political regimes have risen and fallen in the City of Vancouver. The group was not proposed in Vancouver's Civic Childcare Strategy, nor was it proposed in the COV's 2002 childcare strategy update document, *Moving Forward*. Rather, the JCC was first established in 2004 under COPE Mayor Larry Campbell "as a joint initiative of the City, Park Board and School Board to advise City Council on how to accelerate the building of childcare on municipally-owned lands" (City of Vancouver 2018b, p. 1). The Joint Childcare Council was disbanded after the 2005 civic election, which saw Mayor Sam Sullivan of the Non Partisan Association (NPA) municipal political party come into power. Vancouver's 2005 municipal regime change coincided with a federal childcare accord issued by then Prime Minister Paul Martin, who pledged \$5 billion to create a national childcare system. According to Reimer, who was the Chair of the Joint Childcare Council from 2009 to 2018, when the Vancouver NPA local government became aware of the federal childcare accord, they responded with a sentiment that "'the national government is finally going to fund childcare'. And so that was the excuse the NPA used, that we need to get out of this. And so they didn't renew the JCC, they stopped putting money into childcare as a municipality, and then of course the [federal] government fell and that never came to pass."

The Joint Childcare Council was subsequently reestablished in 2008 under Vision Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson. As a result of prior discontinuity in the existence of the JCC, according to Reimer, "what happened was that we had a lot of childcares in crisis." During her tenure as Chair of the Joint Childcare Council, as a measure against the possibility of the JCC being disbanded due to changing municipal government regimes, Reimer "made sure that the JCC was in bylaw." The continued existence of the Joint Childcare Council underscores the City of Vancouver's commitment to addressing childcare at the local level, but it also underscores how

difficult it can be to keep childcare on the agenda even at the local level given changing municipal regimes.

Given that childcare is officially a provincial responsibility, it is notable that the representation on Vancouver's Joint Childcare Council is primarily at the local or sub-local scale, rather than at an intergovernmental scale. The closest thing to a provincial representative on the JCC comes from Vancouver Coastal Health, a body of the Province of British Columbia which is responsible for health and safety monitoring of childcare facilities. In establishing the JCC, the City of Vancouver appears to have made a clear case for the importance of local leadership in childcare policy, including both the importance of listening to key partners and stakeholders in order to address childcare availability at the local level, and the necessity of acting in a central coordinator role amongst these partners and stakeholders. According to Gregson, this endeavour has been successful and has set Vancouver apart from other municipalities in British Columbia: "even the fact that Vancouver has a joint childcare council that brings together all the partners with elected people and community partners, that was way ahead of its time when it started."

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) occupies, according to Reimer, a "linchpin" position on the Joint Childcare Council. Despite not being discussed in the Civic Childcare Strategy, the VSB has been a key partner for the City of Vancouver in creating childcare spaces. As of May 2020, there are over 4,000 school-age childcare spaces, and a smaller number of preschool spaces, "in leased VSB spaces, run by community operators" (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 12). These include "414 City-owned full-day childcare spaces in 6 seismic replacement projects", with more in the planning stages (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 12). These spaces have been operated by nonprofit childcare operators. As Reimer explains, the VSB "had this program of seismic renewal, so while they weren't new schools for capacity being built, they were new schools, like renovations and replacements, I mean now it's so common, every single school that can have childcare has childcare now and it is automatically understood when a new school gets built that the city and the school board will work together on that."

Gregson clarifies the nature of partnerships between the Vancouver School Board and the City of Vancouver, explaining that "the city provides capital to the school

district to create appropriate space in school age childcare, which is... one of the reasons why we have so much childcare in schools.” According to Gregson, “the partnership between the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board for the creation of new childcare in schools, the memorandum agreement that they have, that was revolutionary at the time, and when that was negotiated, it was really important.” However, despite this clear alignment between the assets of the VSB and the goals of the COV, the COV has historically expressed reluctance to engage in directly operating childcare services. According to Gregson, “the City of Vancouver has no interest in being a childcare operator.” Despite the COV and VSB’s accomplishments, a considerable shortage of school-age spaces remains. A report from the City of Vancouver estimates a shortfall of 8,650 licensed out of school spaces for ages 5-12, based on December 2019 data (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7).

The Vancouver Park Board has also been an important partner in creating childcare spaces on civic properties, with over 1,000 preschool and 3-5 spaces in Park Board community centres, including 114 City-owned spaces (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 12). While this partnership has been productive, it has taken considerable efforts for the City of Vancouver to coordinate amongst partner entities for efficient use of space and resources. During Sharma’s tenure as an elected member of the Vancouver Park Board from 2011 to 2014, there “was a lot of work on having the Park Board, City and School Board work together. And it was bigger than just childcare. But the whole idea was efficient utility, efficient use of resources.” Sharma explains that, in the past, the Park Board, City and School Board were more siloed off from each other and, as a result, “there were all these crazy things that would happen because we were different jurisdictions. So for example, a sports field that the school board couldn’t use.” During her time on Park Board, a new conversation emerged, as representatives of the Park Board, City and School Board asked, “why don’t we coordinate as these different jurisdictions to figure out like how we can equalize our space, and childcare was one of them.” The COV’s emphasis on trying to create childcare spaces within community centres speaks to the utility of finding physical spaces to create childcare centres within a variety of city-run facilities.

Nonprofit childcare operators

Nonprofit childcare operators are key partners for The City of Vancouver in addressing childcare. The City does not directly operate any of its childcare facilities, a decision that was established by the Civic Childcare Strategy, which concluded that “an assessment of the current Vancouver situation suggests that direct operation of programs is likely to create a significant imbalance in daycare programs throughout the city, minimize parental input and place unnecessary strain on current City services” (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 28). Instead, the strategy proposed creating a nonprofit to manage childcare spaces created through rezoning and development, justifying this decision as the best way to “meet the criteria for enhancing quality and financial viability” while simplifying administrative challenges (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 27-28). This proposal led to the creation of the Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres (VSOCC), an organization that was created in 1995, amidst the height of neoliberal restructuring, to manage childcare in City-facilitated spaces. As Gregson notes, VSOCC “was created specifically by the City of Vancouver to ensure that there was a not-for-profit operator” for City-facilitated childcare sites. Today, VSOCC operates sixteen group childcare locations with a total of 772 licensed childcare spaces, mainly in Vancouver’s downtown core (Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres, 2020, p. 6). The group is one of several non-profits that operate City-facilitated childcare sites.

Although there is currently a clear structure for the development of municipal partnerships in creating childcare spaces, with the Vancouver School Board, Park Board, and real estate developers providing physical space for childcare centres that are operated by nonprofits, this has not always been the case. Rather, Vancouver’s partnership practices took considerable time and effort to establish. According to the 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy, Vancouver’s efforts to address childcare had historically been “on a case-by-case basis with little or no enabling policy, accepted mandate, stable programming or consistent standards” (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 13). An illustration of some of the complex partnerships that emerged from the period of the 1990s, which was marked by social service budget cuts at the federal and provincial levels, comes from Reimer, who recounts how in the 1990s, following concerns at City Hall that families were leaving Vancouver, former city councillor Carole Taylor released a report that “hypothesizes that Vancouver could help build childcare.” According to Reimer, Taylor “created this structure that is now commonplace where through new

developments, there's a requirement to have either a capital contribution of space or a financial contribution to help build the spaces." As Reimer further explains, "so these spaces were going to get built." According to Reimer, the question then became "how are we going to run these childcares?" The result was the creation of the Vancouver Society of Children's Centres.

Reimer's account demonstrates how the partnerships involved in creating childcare spaces at the municipal level are often built in an ad hoc way in response to needs that arise as stakeholders figure it out. As Shields and Evans comment, "the reality is that there exists a "complex web of relationships" linking the state sector to the third sector" of nonprofit organizations (1998, p. 91). In the historical absence of adequate funding at the provincial and federal levels, various stakeholders at the local and sub-local scales have had to collaborate in order to make up funding and resources required to both build and run childcare spaces. Depending on one's perspective, these partnerships can be seen either as: a positive way to build stronger connections within communities by linking local assets together in a more complex, varied and resilient local fabric of care; or as a way that stakeholders have had to compensate within a larger system that did not adequately support them, despite the real need they saw on the ground level. Certainly, proponents of neoliberal economic restructuring might argue that such partnerships spur greater community control, and perhaps, in some ways, greater resilience. This may very well be true, especially with childcare, a service that works well within small, locally run facilities. However, these advantages are negated if local organizations are not adequately funded.

In general, the use of nonprofit childcare operators has been viewed favourably by social science researchers, especially when compared with for-profit operators. According to Prentice, not-for-profit childcare operators have generally been found to offer higher quality services than for-profit operators (2006, p. 527). However, despite the advantages of nonprofit over for-profit childcare in terms of quality, "non-profit child care, like for-profit child care, is private, not public" (Friendly et al. 2020, p. 84).. A December 2019 briefing note from the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Early Childhood Educators of BC cautions that "current capital expansion relies on inviting applications from others (non-profit, for-profit, and public sector organizations) to independently create new spaces. This reactive approach does not allow government to achieve economies of scale or cost-effective investments in public infrastructure, nor

does it ensure that spaces are created and maintained where the need is greatest” (2019b, p. 1). Although not-for-profit childcare operators are crucial partners in enabling the City of Vancouver and other communities to address childcare availability, there are limitations to the ability of such groups to adequately address childcare availability within a market-based patchwork provision of childcare. According to Prentice (2006, p. 533), not-for-profit childcare operators, part of the “third sector” of Canada’s economy, are still a part of this market-based patchwork, alongside for-profit operators. Prentice writes that “despite enormous challenges – summed up by government practices premised on the assumption that childcare is essentially a private- or voluntary-sector responsibility – third-sector initiatives have built what stands as Canada’s childcare system.” Prentice explains that

this third-sector reliance is unstable and increasingly untenable. As more women enter the labour force and more parents seek out the benefits of early childhood care for their young children, childcare services are under increasing pressure for expansion. Yet the establishment of new services only occurs when communities self-organize to deliver non-profit care or when entrepreneurs open new commercial operations (2006, p. 533).

For the City of Vancouver, given its limited resources, the choice to partner with third sector organizations has represented the best possible option given the City’s limited jurisdiction, as these organizations are below the local government scale and can operate as independent partners. The development of productive partnerships, and the maintenance of relationships between stakeholders, has been instrumental to Vancouver’s success in addressing childcare. The variability of partners and stakeholders described above demonstrates the complexity that is created by the patchwork provision of social services in British Columbia. Whether these partnerships are creating a stronger, more intricately connected web of community partnerships – or a complicated mass of relationships that creates a lot of administrative headaches – is unclear. What is clear is that the stakeholders who wish to address childcare availability – with City of Vancouver planning staff and elected officials as a central, driving force – are creating these relationships out of a creative need to find ways to create childcare facilities amidst what has historically been a severe shortage, and are looking for places that have suitable physical space, as well as for organizations that have the capacity to operate them.

5.1.2. Advocacy to senior governments

The City of Vancouver has long positioned advocacy to senior levels of government as a core component of its approach to childcare, with advocacy roles being outlined in the 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy, which aimed to “actively lobby senior levels of Government and other sectors of the community to implement policies and programs that support a comprehensive childcare system” (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 16). The practice has continued, with the COV’s May 2020 childcare update stating that one of its key roles is to “advocate to/partner with senior levels of government” (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 11). Similarly, the West End Community Plan states that “the City continues to advocate for the participation of the Federal and/or Provincial Governments in the delivery of childcare services” (City of Vancouver, 2017c, p. 121). Several other Local Area Plans, including the Marpole Community Plan, Mount Pleasant Community Implementation, Downtown Eastside Plan and Grandview-Woodland Community Plan, also mention advocacy as a key aspect of the City’s efforts in addressing childcare availability. However, these more recent documents do not elaborate on the specific tools and strategies that staff and officials have used to advocate to senior levels of government.

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM), an advocacy organization for local governments, provides a key role in advocating to senior levels of government. As Senior Policy Analyst Marylyn Chiang explains, “we take our direction from local governments. So over the years we’ve received many resolutions that are endorsed at our annual convention with respect to childcare.” According to Chiang, municipalities “have various asks, for both the Provincial government and the federal government. So as a body, our members look at those resolutions, they decide whether or not to endorse them, and then once they’re endorsed they become UBCM’s policy position and our advocacy position. So then we take that position and we speak to the provincial government about it, and we speak to the federal government about it.” Separate to the work of the UBCM, the \$10aDay campaign engaged in efforts to have city councils across British Columbia, including the City of Vancouver, officially endorse their plan, thus giving municipalities a simple and very effective venue through which to advocate to the Province. With both the UBCM and the \$10aDay campaign, municipal voices became stronger when pooled together in an effort to convince the province to pay more attention to childcare.

This practice of municipal advocacy to senior governments echoes the complex scalar hierarchies discussed by Mahon, in which local governments are more than “puppets on a string” in addressing provincially regulated childcare (2006, p. 452). Mahon discusses how Vancouver’s 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy “committed Vancouver to be ‘an active partner with senior levels of government, parents, the private sector and the community in the development and maintenance of a comprehensive child care system in Vancouver’ (2006, p. 452). The Civic Childcare Strategy thus lays the groundwork for both the civic advocacy, and the partnerships, that the City of Vancouver engages in today. Former City of Vancouver Children’s Advocate Rita Chudnovsky emphasized the importance of this advocacy, telling me that “the civic government needed to play a role in advocating to the provincial and federal governments about what they needed to do and put themselves forward as a willing partner if and when the funds were available. The City of Vancouver was a leader on that municipally in British Columbia, was one of the first municipalities to endorse a \$10aday plan, and through various political shades of civic government, have continued to play that advocacy role.”

Beyond the optimism of these sentiments is the reality that cities have been increasingly burdened with handling social programs that are ostensibly provincial responsibilities. The Civic Childcare Strategy opens its section on advocacy to senior levels of government by stating that “to some degree, the City has viewed its initiatives with regards to childcare as a direct result of the failure of the federal and provincial governments to recognize and address the needs” (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 10). According to Leibovitz, “from the perspective of municipalities, ‘downloading’ has meant that the provincial government has transferred new responsibilities to local government without adequate financial support” (1999, p. 202). As such, it appears that much of the advocacy engaged by the City of Vancouver has been a reaction to the historical neglect of the provincial and federal scales. According to Pasolli, “the diminished capacity of public child care programs has continued to take place within a retreating and restructuring welfare state” (2015, p. 173). Given this history of provincial and federal disinvestment, it appears that municipal staff and officials in Vancouver were increasingly burdened with the real effects of the childcare shortage: parents who left the workforce, or left the city; parents who reached out to the City to voice their complaints; and families who were unable to access much-needed

social supports. In the face of these pressures, my research suggests that COV officials were placed in a position of needing to advocate to the provincial and federal governments, as their ability to fully address the problem on their own was limited.

Reimer describes how the relationships between elected officials at the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia have evolved over the years, opening up the possibility of another type of advocacy, one that is less easily captured in written documents because it comes from informal conversations between stakeholders at the two levels of government. According to Reimer, the relationship between the city and province during her first term as a city councillor, beginning in 2008 under a Liberal provincial government, was “not fantastic, although we did talk.”

Vancouver’s efforts to engage not only in advocacy, but also in directly creating childcare spaces, are a contrast to many other municipalities across British Columbia, which have focused on advocacy only. According to Chiang, “there are some local governments that do not feel this is local government jurisdiction. They would like the province and the health authorities and post-secondary institutions to address those needs, but not have it be something that local governments are mandated to do. Because it is not a core service for local governments.” Similarly, Sharma comments that “a lot of cities would say, it’s not our problem. It’s under provincial jurisdiction.” Sharma adds that “\$10aDay got lots of city councils to endorse the \$10aDay plan, but that’s just the advocacy role to get the province to enact it.” Further, she comments that “it’s an interesting thing because you could say that some of the other municipalities are right, that it is squarely something that [the province] neglected. So there are some people who would argue that that’s the right stance, that it’s not our job, we just advocate.” The reasons for the City of Vancouver’s active role in going beyond advocacy to engage directly in creating childcare spaces will be discussed in section 5.2 of this project.

Effects of Vancouver’s advocacy efforts on the Province of British Columbia’s 2018 Childcare Strategy

As a part of my efforts to fully understand the City of Vancouver’s role in addressing childcare availability, I was curious to know whether Vancouver’s long-standing advocacy and leadership in addressing childcare availability, which precedes

the current provincial government and endured years of provincial and federal neglect, might have “trickled up” to inform the Province’s 2018 childcare strategy. As the previous sections of this project demonstrate, during the long years of neglect when British Columbia’s Provincial government relied on market forces to provide childcare, local stakeholders in Vancouver were busy creating partnerships, advocating to senior governments, and investing in infrastructure to create new childcare facilities. Amidst the complex, tangled and interdependent scalar relationships described by Mahon, “causality does not begin at the smallest scale but runs in all directions” (2006, p. 455). According to Sheppard and McMaster, “Social collectivities and individuals are mutually constituted so causality can run in all kinds of directions within and across scales” (2004, p. 261). Thus, it is at least theoretically possible that the work of City of Vancouver staff and officials had at least some bearing on the new provincial strategy. Sharma told me that although the City of Vancouver did not necessarily make direct contributions to the provincial plan, the City’s longstanding leadership meant that it was more prepared to receive the increased provincial funding when it became available. According to Sharma,

Vancouver was known as a leader in childcare, so we did meet with them. I wouldn’t say that they were involved in thinking of the [2018 provincial] plan; I think that was done very provincially, on a provincial level, but certainly the thing that was noted about Vancouver was that they were more ready because of the groundwork and the policy they had over years, for them to take the funding on. Like a lot of other municipalities, if you wanted to help work together to build spaces [...], there was more to do, before that partnership could be actionated. Whereas the City of Vancouver had a lot going on in terms of its childcare policy already. And most municipalities hadn’t even talked about it.

Chudnovsky adds that a variety of factors converged to enable the Province of British Columbia to move towards its current childcare strategy, with the City of Vancouver playing a minor role:

around the question of what role they [the City of Vancouver] had to play, of course we could never identify one action that kind of tips the scale, so there are a whole set of factors that led to the NDP running on a platform in the last provincial election to implement the \$10aDay plan, our analysis is that we built a broad enough breadth of support with as many votes attached to it, and, hopefully they believe it, that tipped the balance that made it a political issue. And I would definitely say the City of Vancouver’s leadership over the last decade is a piece of that but clearly not in and of itself the only thing.

In contrast to Sharma and Chudnovsky, Reimer suggests that the COV's advocacy led to an indirect shaping of Provincial policy. She states that when the original provincial NDP minority government was elected in 2017,

because we'd been squeezing every inch that we could find out of our system to try and make it work and pull together all these partnerships and collaborations and research and weird funding mechanisms and develop this huge array of things, when they came in, they were like, 'you've already piloted all of it' and they just basically took this model and expanded it around the province. So we saved them probably three or four years of piloting time.

Reimer goes further, suggesting that the provincial plan is "basically an upscaling of Vancouver's strategy. With actual tax dollars behind it. Because they have progressive taxes they can access. We do not." The connection Reimer sees between Vancouver's longstanding actions and the Province's strategy is likely true more in spirit than in function: although the Province's strategy and Vancouver's longstanding practices share a spirit of focusing on creating childcare spaces, the two levels of government vary considerably in terms of the scale at which they deliver services and the funding mechanisms available to them to advance childcare availability (Community Amenity Contributions vs. provincial tax dollars). Still, Reimer's suggestion that the provincial plan is inspired by the City of Vancouver's practices bears some weight, as the city has a longstanding history of taking effective action on childcare, as evidenced throughout the findings in this project. Whether or not the province was directly influenced by the city, it is probably more accurate to say that the City paved the way for taking action on childcare as a social service, as it was working on this through the long years of provincial neglect. As such, Vancouver has provided a model of local action that can be scaled up to different communities.

Furthermore, it is likely more accurate to say that the Province was influenced by work and communication with the \$10aDay child care campaign and other activist groups which have directly advocated with the province by providing recommendations which were largely adopted by the 2018 childcare strategy. The \$10aDay plan also garnered endorsements from over fifty local governments, providing an example of advocacy from municipalities to the province (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC & Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2019, p. 27). Although it is uncertain whether the City of Vancouver's efforts to develop strategies to address childcare availability had a direct

effect on provincial policy, it does appear that Vancouver was better positioned, compared with other municipalities in British Columbia, to accept the new Provincial funding once it came on board. Through the use of advocacy, the City of Vancouver has been able to assert the importance of childcare availability to higher scales of government.

5.1.3. Investment

Investing in creating licensed childcare spaces has been a core aspect of Vancouver's involvement in childcare and is perhaps the strategy that contributes most directly to addressing childcare availability. The COV accomplishes this through the use of two main tools, Development Cost Levies (DCLs) and Community Amenity Contributions (CACs), both of which allow the City to finance the creation of childcare facilities using money from the real estate development industry. These approaches were laid out in the 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy, which attempted to systematize what had previously been a "reactive and ad hoc" approach to capital programs (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 15). Today, the City of Vancouver has used DCLs and CACs to build 3,000 licensed childcare spaces between 2009 and 2019 (City of Vancouver, 2019, p. 5). Looking ahead, the COV plans, along with additional support from the Province of British Columbia, to deliver 2,300 new childcare spaces by 2022 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. C-158).

By using DCLs and CACs, the City of Vancouver has been able to get around some of the limitations that can face municipal governments in attempting to finance childcare facilities. Vancouver is positioned more favourably than other municipalities in British Columbia due to the presence of the Vancouver Charter, which "gave the city much greater powers of self government than other British Columbian or Canadian cities, which remain subservient to provincial municipal acts" (Punter, 2003, 13). The Charter allows Vancouver to raise capital through the use of Development Cost Levies (DCLs), which use property developer money to partially fund costs for a range of community benefits, including childcare facilities (City of Vancouver, 2019, p. 6; Queen's Printer, 2021, part Part XXIV-A). Development Cost Levies, along with Community Amenity Contributions (CACs), have been essential in Vancouver's efforts to create

childcare spaces.⁸ However, despite these increased powers of self-governance, Mahon notes that “the Charter neither indicated that ‘social services’ like child care should be part of the city’s mandate, nor did it provide the resources to finance this. What makes the Vancouver story so interesting therefore is that the city did come to play a very active role despite this” (2006, p. 459).

According to Gregson, Vancouver’s strategy of investing in childcare through developer funding has marked Vancouver as a leader in childcare planning amongst British Columbia municipalities. When I asked her about the city’s use of developer money, she told me that “judging by the amount of childcare that Vancouver has and that other cities don’t have, I think it’s been really successful. It’s created high quality brand new facilities up to a high standard. Just look at the amount of childcare in the downtown core.” In Vancouver, a dense and expensive city, the property development industry functions not only a source of funding, but also as a partner in providing space, especially given Vancouver’s longstanding planning practice of building family housing in high rise developments. According to Chudnovsky, the period of the 1980s when the COV first began using developer money to fund social services was also a time when planners began envisioning an urban core that, unique amongst North American cities, would be friendly to young families. Chudnovsky explained that

with all of the development on the north shore of False Creek, which was Expo and undeveloped land at the time, the City said ok, this is going to be developed and we actually want it to be a community that works for families with children. A lot of people were very skeptical that families would choose anything other than single family residential, and I and other people in planning kind of led a kind of a “small c” campaign to say if we provide the amenities there, if we build childcare there, if we build family housing with more than one or two bedrooms, families will come. And that has proven to be the case.

⁸ Friendly, Beach, Mohamed, Vickerson & Young explain that in the City of Vancouver, “Child care facilities that result from new development are typically secured through a long-term lease arrangement between the developer and the City and secured at a nominal rate. These facilities may take the form of a head lease, air space parcel or ground lease or in some case such as a public institution ownership is retained by the developer. Once secured, the City enters into a sub-lease with a non-profit organization to operate the child care facility for a total of a 15 years (three - five year terms) at a nominal rate, typically \$10 per year. The sub-lease may set out service objectives, operational expectations and maintenance requirements of both parties” (2020, p. 52-53).

In a similar vein to Chudnovsky, Sharma comments that the City of Vancouver's use of developer money has been a positive force given Vancouver's high proportion of families living in condos. According to Sharma, "that's a reason why the CAC thing has been kind of a smart policy I think, because if you're building more density in a neighbourhood, it's an opportunity to provide those services to families. So if you couple that with having family-friendly buildings, then [it's a] good thing for the city." Sharma adds that

the affordability issues of Vancouver trickle down to the spaces discussion. Because I think that the community amenity contribution was something that from the provincial perspective you would probably want all municipalities to look at, like how do you get decent policy integration of childcare spaces. And I think there has definitely been some success on it. Because buildings that wouldn't have taken childcare opted to. Especially downtown.

Furthermore, Sharma suggests that placing childcare facilities within real estate developments also helped to solve an affordability and tenure issue, as well as a spaces issue for childcare operators. Sharma comments that "the margins of running childcare are pretty thin." As a result of these thin margins, childcare facilities are "vulnerable not only being kicked out, which changes the cost structure so they can't afford it. So the sustainability of the space is because of affordability, and I think it was a huge issue."

It is notable that the City of Vancouver's widespread use of developer money to fund community benefits came into practice during the 1980s and 1990s (City of Vancouver, 2019, p. 6). This era was marked by the "hollowing out' of the welfare state" at the federal level in Canada, culminating with the replacement of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1996 (Pasolli, 2015, p. 170). At the provincial level in British Columbia, the federal disinvestment of the 1980s and 1990s was, to a certain extent, counteracted by progressive provincial governments that made efforts to prioritize childcare spending. Pasolli notes that "British Columbia's child care programs certainly felt the effects of federal restructuring, but the NDP governments of the 1990s helped to ensure that child care funding and space creation were not as severely reduced in British Columbia as they were in other provinces by the end of the decade" (2015, p. 170). Less examined, however, has been the role of Vancouver's local government in responding to the effects of federal restructuring. Mahon notes that three interconnected factors emerged during

the 1990s that were crucial in enabling the City of Vancouver to invest in childcare: the appointment of a civic childcare advocate; the invention of DCLs and CACs; and the hiring of childcare-specific staff in Vancouver's social planning department. According to Mahon, "development cost levies and community amenity contributions have played an important role in strengthening the foundations of Vancouver's child care system" (2006, p. 461). Mahon asserts that, because of these fundraising tools, "Vancouver has thus been able to establish the foundations for the kind of child care system" that the Civic Childcare Strategy envisioned (2006, p. 461).

Despite the positive regard that my interviewees expressed towards Vancouver's use of CACs and DCLs to fund childcare facilities, critics from across the political spectrum have argued that the City's reliance on developer money has skewed Vancouver's rezoning process towards one that encourages inappropriately large and expensive real estate projects in a process that lacks transparency. In a 2018 article for *The Tyee* entitled "Was Vision Vancouver 'Addicted' to Selling Rezoning?", writer Christopher Cheung quotes Ray Spaxman, Vancouver's chief planner from 1973 to 1989, who told him that "the formula shouldn't be people adding density under the demand for amenities" (Cheung, 2018). According to Cheung, "critics say that Vision's desire to reap the revenue from rezonings has led to a willingness to approve projects despite negative effects on communities" (Cheung, 2018). Although CACs have been in use in Vancouver for decades, they are particularly associated in the public imagination with the Vision Vancouver local government under mayor Gregor Robertson from 2008 to 2018. According to Cheung, "throughout Vision's tenure, the City of Vancouver's capital plan has had an increasing dependence on development contributions from CACs and development cost levies" (Cheung, 2018). It is worth noting here that my interviewees Andrea Reimer, Niki Sharma and Sharon Gregson have held elected positions with Vision Vancouver. While this may affect their views, it is also the case that these were some of the key people who were able to move the dial on childcare development in Vancouver and BC. According to Cheung, "Vision Councillor Raymond Louie, who chairs the city's finance and services committee, said that people who complain about CACs often forget about the amenities they paid for. Without CACs, 'it means you don't get them, or taxes go up,' he said. 'I think this ensures that the development community is appropriately paying their fair share'" (Cheung, 2018). This was, essentially, a way to get around the limitations imposed by inadequate funding from

higher levels. There are tradeoffs here, and despite the problems caused by reliance on developer money, it is, arguably, unlikely that the City of Vancouver would have been able to contribute to childcare if it weren't for CACs.

A recent high-profile example of the COV's use of developer money to fund childcare is a newly opened 74-space childcare centre atop the Gastown Parkades, a City-owned property, operated by the YMCA of Greater Vancouver. Although the Province and the UBCM contributed \$1 million towards the project, the remainder of the funding for construction of the \$17 million project was provided by the City through Community Amenity Contributions (City of Vancouver, 2021). Much has been made of the facility's high construction costs, which come out to \$260,000 per childcare space (Chan, 2021). According to a May 18, 2021 Daily Hive article by Kenneth Chan, along with extra expenses garnered by the facility's LEED Gold and Passive House certifications, "the construction costs were higher than a conventional project as it involved modifying existing structures, including adding two dedicated childcare entrances with elevators and a staircase — one entrance on Water Street, and the other on Cordova Street" (Chan, 2021). While these costs have raised eyebrows, the COV states that the facility, which is the first in Canada to be located on top of a parkade, represents "an innovative solution to underutilized space and the lack of space for childcare in Vancouver's downtown core" (City of Vancouver, 2021). Furthermore, according to the COV, "this creative model is part of our broader commitment to increasing childcare supply by reimagining how city space can be used" (City of Vancouver, 2021). In other words, the project, which was funded primarily at the municipal level, was, at least in part, a response to the challenges of creating childcare space in Vancouver's dense and expensive urban core. This project is both emblematic of Vancouver's commitment to liveable density, and a unique example of provincial-municipal partnership and use of COV land that can provide a model for future development. The Gastown Parkades and other CAC-funded childcare facilities demonstrate how childcare has emerged as a critical aspect of Vancouverism's success which has impelled the COV's active approach to addressing childcare availability. Vancouver's densification and city living plans, like those of other major Canadian cities, make it critical for City officials to provide the facilities needed for urban "liveability," thus decoupling them from smaller local governments that have not been taking such an active role in childcare.

While the funding of childcare facilities through CACs and DCLs is the most high-profile aspect of Vancouver's contributions to childcare, it is not the only one. Another core strategy that the City of Vancouver uses to invest in childcare has been issuing grants directly to childcare providers. Currently, the COV issues grants to non-profit licensed childcare providers for childcare enhancement, program development, childcare stabilization, research, and school-age care expansion. Such is the case with the childcare facilities at the Gastown Parkade, which has received a \$60,000 annual City grant, along with funding from the BC Affordable Childcare Benefit and the YMCA, to provide no-cost childcare for twenty-four families (City of Vancouver, 2021). Although these municipal grants are "modest" in the City's own words (City of Vancouver, 2017c, p. 96), they can help to provide services that might not otherwise be available and can have an important impact on childcare centres that had been left struggling in the wake of disinvestment from higher levels of government. For Chudnovsky, the City of Vancouver's grants were an important part of Vancouver's early participation in supporting childcare facilities:

The focus was on really trying to support the capacity of existing childcare programs to enhance quality, particularly childcare programs that were meeting and are meeting the needs of marginalized communities. So there are a whole series of civic childcare grants... [that] started with the civic childcare policy and the identification for the civic childcare budget to enhance the quality and support childcare programs to try and keep them affordable while enhancing quality particularly in the areas most needed.

Beyond the creation of and financial support to childcare facilities, a key aspect of the City of Vancouver's ability to invest in childcare has been the hiring of dedicated social planning staff. My interviewees noted that Vancouver is unique in being able to hire a full team of childcare planners, and that this owes largely to the city's higher revenues as compared with most other municipalities. According to Gregson, "the fact that there are social planners devoted to childcare, the fact that when there are new developments, there are CACs and development cost levies where childcare is included, is so different than almost everywhere else in the province." Sharma recalls "being impressed about the neighbourhood breakdown of childcare, they have a map of Vancouver that shows exactly where there was a deficit of childcare spaces... so I remember when the new Mayor Kennedy Stewart was elected, talking about how that was a huge tool to actually say where can we put in childcare, like they'd done the research about where there were deficits" in childcare across the city, including specific

breakdowns according to neighbourhood and age group. Sharma explains that one outcome of this planning work is that the City of Vancouver was more ready than other cities to accept provincial funding when it increased after 2018: “So when you’re thinking about that the Province has come up with a whole bunch of capital to apply for spaces, and you know exactly where your spaces are needed.”

Why would the City of Vancouver put so much money and energy into supporting childcare facilities within a market-based, provincially funded system? My research suggests that the COV’s active approach to tackling childcare speaks to the degree to which local staff and elected officials responded to challenges that they saw at the ground level in the form of childcare centres that were in danger of closing due to a lack of funding, leading to a childcare availability crisis that in turn threatened the local economy and community. Given Vancouver’s high cost of living and the resulting pressure on parents to remain in the workforce, it is likely that the city felt both a strong imperative to support the creation of childcare spaces, and an increased ability to do so due to its relatively large budget and enhanced ability to raise funds afforded by the Vancouver Charter. In doing so, staff and officials at the COV demonstrated considerable political will in responding to a unique challenge and evolving crisis. Furthermore, funding childcare has helped to strengthen Vancouver’s signature brand of progressive urbanism.

As demonstrated above, CACs and DCLs are effective but flawed tools to help fund childcare and other social amenities at the municipal level. Unlike many of the other amenities that are funded by CACs and DCLs, such as community centres, libraries and parks – which fit neatly under the laundry list of municipal responsibilities – childcare is somewhat of an outlier as it is not just a physical space, but a social program that falls under provincial responsibility (along with affordable housing). I argue that these tools are what the City needed to do to achieve its goals of supporting childcare and other social programs amidst the absence of adequate funding from higher levels of government. However, this approach comes with downsides, including pushing Vancouver towards a city that has become dominated by high-density real estate developments that are not affordable for the majority of residents. In order to avoid the downsides of CACs and DCLs, the provincial and federal governments need to adequately fund childcare programs.

5.2. Political will as a motivating factor for Vancouver's active role in addressing childcare availability

As the preceding sections have demonstrated, City of Vancouver staff and elected officials have undertaken a level of involvement in capital planning, advocacy, and building local partnerships around childcare that go beyond the mandated responsibilities of municipalities in British Columbia, and have done so to a greater extent than most other municipalities in the province. Furthermore, Vancouver's focus on childcare has endured multiple changes of government and governance in the city and has lasted for decades. This high degree and continuity of involvement marks Vancouver as a leader within British Columbia in local government action on childcare availability.

In exploring the possible motivations for Vancouver's unique approach to addressing childcare availability, political will came up as a key theme in my research, particularly through my conversation with Sharma, who told me that "the City of Vancouver, to me, is an example of how political will can really change thought. Because the years that they put into committing to childcare for the people of Vancouver led to a lot of creative solutions. That was the best they could do because they are a municipality." When I asked Sharma if provincial neglect prior to the current provincial government spurred the City of Vancouver to become more creative in its efforts to address childcare availability, she told me that "to me, that comes down to political will too. Because a lot of cities would say, it's not our problem. It's under provincial jurisdiction." Furthermore, Sharma told me that

it was political will in my view that got them [the City of Vancouver] to use their tools to actually fix the problem, because they could've just played an advocacy role, or they could've just ignored it. They could've said we're going to just keep advocating for the government to change this for us. I think that if you compare [Vancouver with] other municipalities in B.C., there's a huge difference between even any action.

The meaning of the term 'political will' is notoriously slippery. Post et al., attempting to devise a clearer definition, explain that "although frequently invoked as a rhetorical tool in political discussions, 'political will' remains ambiguous as a concept" (Post et al., 2010, p. 653). According to the authors, "an oft-cited culprit when government does not take action is a lack of political will" (Post et al., 2010, p. 654).

Furthermore, “the way the term ‘political will’ is bandied about is a reflection of its presumed centrality in achieving policy change, but such casual usage is troublesome for those concerned with crafting, promoting, implementing, and analyzing public policies” (Post et al., 2010, p. 654). Although “some people initially view political will as an individual-level concept roughly meaning individual commitment to a particular preference that happens to relate to politics or government”, the authors “argue against an approach that equates political will with individual volition” (Post et al., 2010, p. 656). They propose a new definition of “political will” that takes into account the collaborative nature of political decision-making and the practical implications of the work it takes to change policies. Their suggested definition incorporates “four major component areas: 1. A sufficient set of decision makers 2. With a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda 3. Is committed to supporting 4. A commonly perceived, potentially effective policy solution” (Post et al., 2010, p. 671).

Post et al.’s definition is useful to a discussion of childcare in Vancouver because it acknowledges that political will is not necessarily the result of the heroic actions of individuals going against the grain of the status quo, but, rather, can be the result of a consensus of committed actors working to advance specific policy positions that align with a government’s existing goals. In the case of childcare policy actors in Vancouver, political will can be more accurately described not just as the actions of individual internal champions, but as policy innovation within a political context wherein supporting childcare helped the COV to achieve its goals as a city whose leadership has long billed itself in terms of a progressive, lifestyle-focused municipal brand. In this context, there appears to have been both a well-established view amongst COV officials that advocating for childcare could dovetail with the city’s goal of progressive urbanism and liveable density fueled by robust municipal amenities, and also address a dire need for childcare because of the city’s high cost of living and resulting high parental workforce amidst a background of longstanding federal and provincial underinvestment.

In Sharma’s comments above, we can see how political will led to the civic strategies discussed earlier in this project. The provincial and federal disinvestment in childcare that reached its apex in the 1990s appears to have set the stage for several innovative local planning tools, including the development of the Civic Childcare Strategy, the inclusion of childcare in neighbourhood planning documents, and the zoning requirement for family-friendly multi-bedroom units in apartments and

condominiums. The presence of internal champions required to create these policies was evident when I spoke with Chudnovsky, who, speaking to her early days as Vancouver's Children's Advocate during the 1990s, told me that "everybody knew childcare was my passion, so I put a fair bit of energy into looking into what levers the city had to try to make a difference." The solutions that she and other stakeholders came up with during the early 1990s, which are now well-established social planning strategies within the City of Vancouver, took considerable effort to initially put into place. Somewhat more recently, political will can also be seen in the intensive work of the City of Vancouver's Joint Childcare Council to rescue individual childcare centres which were in danger of closing due to a combination of provincial and federal disinvestment and rising rental costs and renovations in Vancouver. According to Reimer, when the Joint Childcare Council re-formed in 2008, "the first thing the JCC did was triage, like it felt like this endless list of childcares in crisis, that we were having to figure out how to shore up and just keep them going." She explains that the factors leading to these childcares in crisis were wide-ranging, including issues with staffing, rent and more:

In the six years before I was elected, [there] was the single highest raise in rent in the last 50 years. Homelessness was increasing by 25% per year, and it was intense [...]. And the people who felt it the most were the people at the bottom of the economic scale, which includes childcare workers. So people were leaving the field so they didn't have workers, they didn't have agreements because those had all been kind of left too, so they were getting kicked out by community centres and schools who were like "we need the space", or "we just don't want the liability of it", and there was no money. And then the provincial Liberals had, I mean, the 35% cuts applied there as much as to education or any of the other departments. So it was pretty much in free fall crisis at that point. So we spent, easily two and a half of the first three years trying to stabilize existing childcares in crisis.

Against this backdrop of societal changes and provincial and federal underinvestment, a major motivating factor placing pressure on Vancouver's civic leaders to create childcare space, and underpinning the political will they demonstrated, has been the perception that families were in danger of leaving the city. This worry is echoed by Fumano, who, as discussed in the Introduction of this project, said that a lack of available childcare runs the risk of driving families out of the city (2019). This concern emerged as early as the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period during which Chudnovsky says that "there was concern at the political level about the declining number of families with children living in the city." She explains that then-mayor Gordon Campbell "had quite an interest in looking at why we were losing families with children from the city."

During this period, city counsellor Carole Taylor struck a task force on children and families in Vancouver which laid much of the groundwork for Vancouver's current policy structure. Although Reimer is skeptical of whether or not Vancouver has ever been truly in danger of losing families – she told me that “of course, people say that from time to time, it's never been actually true, it's just sort of like a perception more than a reality” – concerns about Vancouver losing families have continued, as evidenced in the Housing Vancouver Strategy, which states that “There are already early signs that Vancouver's families are choosing to leave. The most recent census revealed that the population of young children in the city is falling – with the population of children aged 0-4 declining by 1 per cent since 2011. This trend, if it continues, has serious implications for the city's economy and vibrancy long-term” (City of Vancouver, 2017a, p. 15). While declining family populations can be attributed to many complex factors, including housing costs, immigration and job availability, childcare represents an area where the COV was able to take direct action in attempting to create a more family-friendly city. The danger of families leaving Vancouver, whether or not it is an accurate perception, threatens not only Vancouver's economy and community, but also its ability to position itself as a progressive city with a liveability focus, a long-held aspect of Vancouver's planning efforts.

Underpinning Vancouver's active approach to childcare is the presence of internal champions who have lived experience with the challenge of finding childcare. Reimer told me that her lived experience as a parent and as a former trustee of the Vancouver School Board positioned her as a “natural leader” for the Joint Childcare Council: “I had a kid who was like, ten by that point, but we'd just lived through the childcare wars [...] I think everyone felt like a younger woman might be a more effective spokesperson.” As Reimer further explains, “so anyway, I brought the motion forward. And then, from that day forward, became ‘the childcare person’” on City Council. Similarly, Chudnovsky reflected on her lived experience, telling me, “I was a faculty member at Douglas College from the mid-'70s, then in '78 I had a child, and went looking for childcare and was very fortunate to find childcare, but having understood from my involvement in the women's movement that childcare was an issue, this was an issues that kind of struck me in my gut, and as a parent at Simon Fraser Childcare I got involved on the board and started to become active with other parents around the need for childcare.” This work as a parent and community activist eventually led Chudnovsky

to become Vancouver's Children's Advocate. Because challenges with accessing childcare are such a widely shared reality of living in Vancouver, the experiences of Reimer and Chudnovsky underscore how individual challenges experienced by internal champions have informed a popular political position.

The existence of strong interpersonal relationships amongst stakeholders has, according to my interviewees, been a key aspect of the political will that enabled Vancouver's success in addressing childcare availability. According to Reimer, "a lot of it is personal relationships." She describes how Sharon Gregson, who started as a childcare provider with Collingwood Neighbourhood House and later became a school board trustee before turning to her current role in advocacy, was a "thread" who held together deep knowledge of childcare policy and diverse stakeholder relationships with her varied involvements. These threads extend further, with Reimer describing long-standing connections to Minister of State on Childcare Katrina Chen. According to Reimer, "you had this situation where you could pick up the phone and talk to each other at any point. And the staff would be like, who should we talk to about this, that or whatever, and I was like, call this person. So you didn't just have a willing government, you had a government with the personal connections."

In the stories of my interviewees, political will was generally described not as the action of a single, enterprising policy entrepreneur, but as the result of a network of stakeholders who, in varying capacities, were in a position to recognize and champion childcare availability. Chudnovsky, who played a pivotal role during the 1990s as the City of Vancouver's first Children's Advocate and author of the civic children's strategy, was careful to acknowledge that she was a part of a larger team: she told me that "while my name appears on a few of the documents, I don't take individual credit or ownership over any of it, it's all collective work, with various people bringing their skills and knowledge to the table." Similarly, Reimer was careful to acknowledge Carole Taylor for initially imagining that Vancouver could be involved in creating childcare spaces, even when no one thought it was possible. Despite their accomplishments, these internal champions in childcare do not always get the kind of public recognition one would expect. These are the people who keep things running, cleaning up the childcare mess that had been left by a legacy of underinvestment from the federal and provincial scales.

Taken together, these factors, along with the powers afforded by Vancouver's large tax base and the presence of additional funding tools afforded by the Vancouver Charter, have contributed to Vancouver's long-term 'eager beaver' approach to tackling childcare at the municipal level. Was this active stance on childcare a sincere effort to address childcare availability? Or was it more about branding Vancouver as a progressive, lifestyle-focused urban centre? According to Reimer, "childcare is super fascinating in Council. It was always very... everyone desired to be seen as being good on childcare." As Mahon comments, Vancouver's achievements

came as a result of child care advocates' ability to seize a favourable municipal political and economic opportunity structure. In the 1970s and 1980s, the city was being transformed from a centre for processing resources to a postindustrial economy. This generated the need for child care and the opportunity to build it. This coincided with the appearance of reform-oriented parties ready to take a pro-active stance. Child care activists were able to convince them that children (and working mothers) had a place in this 'livable' city" (2006, p. 461).

The political will demonstrated by Vancouver's internal champions speaks to the larger role of childcare in as a social service that is fundamental to building healthy communities. According to Reimer, "there's much larger issues here about how we value children and caregivers and... I don't think those are specific to Vancouver, I just think that you can't paper over them here [in Vancouver]. Because there's so many other pressures that they become very obvious." Gregson speaks to these larger issues, and to the importance of cultivating political and social buy-in from all scales of government, explaining that her organization, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, has always recognized

that childcare is inherently political. And so it isn't enough that childcare is good for children when it's done well, it's not enough that it's an important part of brain development, it's not enough that it's important for social cohesion, it's not enough that it's good for women's equality, it's all those things plus we've had to prove that it's good for the economy. And once we did that, then it was easier to get political interest and political buy in, and over 40 years, we had built a lot of credibility and a lot of relationships and so when we launched the \$10aDay plan it was easier to go to the City of Vancouver, or allies around the province, and say this is the solution. And people believed us because we had the history and the credibility. So we were able to explain and convince the economic arguments to John Horgan when he was leader of the opposition, that this was a good plan for him to support. We tried to share the plan with Christy Clark when she was Premier, and with her minister of children and family development,

Stephanie Cadieux, they were not interested, even though we explained the benefits, and so when John Horgan became premier, he had already committed to the plans so it was a natural next step that he would move forward on implementation. Even if he doesn't call it the \$10aDay plan.

Political will is at the root of the City of Vancouver's ability to play a meaningful role in addressing childcare availability despite the fact that childcare is formally a provincial jurisdiction. The presence of strong internal champions, many of whom had lived experience with the city's childcare struggles, helped to solidify the city's active stance on childcare, which in turn complemented Vancouver's stance as a city focused on the idea of liveability. In short, the City of Vancouver needed the political will to create the positions to find the data on childcare that allowed them to seize the moment when funding from the Province finally emerged. Sharma confirms that "if any city in the province was poised to try to solve it, that did what they could, I think it would be the City of Vancouver."

5.3. Formal policy vs. informal action

As discussed earlier in this study, the City of Vancouver uses three main strategies – partnerships, advocacy, and investment – to address childcare availability at the local level. These strategies have been enabled by Vancouver's relatively large tax base and the special powers granted by the Vancouver Charter, as well as by the presence of long-standing political will that nudged Vancouver towards tackling childcare in the face of historical neglect from higher levels of government. Although Vancouver's 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy was instrumental in setting up many of the key practices that exist to this day, it is notable that this document has not been updated in recent years. While the COV subsequently released a report in 2002 authored by Childcare Coordinator Carol Ann Young, entitled *Moving Forward*, this document focuses primarily on creating neighbourhood hubs for children's services and is not a wholesale update of the original Civic Childcare Strategy. Today, the current landscape of the COV's written childcare policy is spread throughout several different texts, including the Healthy City Strategy, Local Area Plans, budgets, planning standards for childcare, and annual childcare updates delivered from city staff to Council each May. This is perhaps unsurprising given that childcare is a formal responsibility of the Province, which has its

own childcare strategy in place. However, another possibility emerged from my interview with Reimer: that Vancouver's relative lack of formally written childcare policy has enabled the city to act with increased flexibility and creativity in order to focus on practical results that address the needs of communities. As Reimer reflects of her time on Vancouver City Council and as the Chair of the Joint Childcare Council, "did we actually change policy? We didn't really need to." She explains that City Council motions at the beginning of each council term that set target numbers for childcare space creation

really drove everything, because in order to achieve that number of spaces, they needed to turn over every stone essentially to be able to find where they were going to put these spaces. So things like putting childcare into every public building wasn't a policy, but a necessity if you were going to meet this policy of 500 spaces, or 1,000, or whatever it was.

This openness to informal, unwritten policy is echoed by Tindal et al., who state that "public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not do" (2017, p. 347). This suggests that "policy" need not be formally written. Reimer argues that much of the work of COV staff and officials in addressing childcare during her tenure "was driven by the metric as opposed to policy." In other words, the core focus was on facilitating the creation of a specific number of new childcare spaces within the city. Reimer notes that, although a report on childcare is presented by COV Social Planning staff to City Council each May, "most of it wasn't new, it was updating, expanding, tightening up." She goes on to explain that

I would never argue that policy is bad, I think it's really important, but my experience both outside government but especially inside [is that] if you say you must build childcare in every new building, you can actually hold up a ton of buildings while they try to solve for that problem. And there's arguments about, 'well what about my art thing' and it becomes very contentious and slows everything down. But if you say you have to build 1,000 childcare units, suddenly it enables the flexibility to take advantage of the opportunity. So you need some minimum standards obviously, and those are the space standards that we have, but within that, just let staff take advantage of opportunities to do it. And if they come and say hey, there's nothing left within existing policy that we can do to achieve this metric, we need new policy, that was open to them to do, but we never hit the wall.

In contrast to the City of Vancouver's longstanding and relatively informal approach to advancing childcare availability, a number of other municipalities in British

Columbia have recently created written childcare policy documents in response to increased funding provided by the Province of British Columbia's Community Child Care Planning Program, administered by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). For example, the District of Squamish, a rapidly growing community that has been especially hard-hit by childcare availability issues with space for only 21% of children as of September 2019, published an updated Child Care Action Plan in 2020 (Gillespie, 2020, p. 11). Many of Squamish's goals mirror the City of Vancouver's existing strategies, including working with property developers, recreation facilities and the local school board to build new childcare facilities. Other cities that have municipal childcare plans include the City of New Westminster, the City of North Vancouver, the Saanich Peninsula, and the Township of Langley, among others. Chiang notes that many of these communities are catching up to the work that Vancouver has already pioneered. She explains that the City of Vancouver is used as a reference in materials that the UBCM is currently developing for local governments wishing to create childcare spaces. According to Chiang, "the City of Vancouver is used as a reference for many of these things, and their templates are being used. They are the ones sharing that information with smaller local governments who don't know... anything about childcare."

The City of Vancouver, by being willing to engage in informal action rather than relying on the development of written policies, has been able to pilot and test to figure out what strategies are most effective for municipalities that wish to engage in addressing childcare availability. According to Chiang, for cities that are just beginning to address childcare now, "there's a lot to be learned from the City of Vancouver." It is striking, therefore, that Vancouver does not currently have a stand-alone childcare policy document available at the public level. Indeed, a look at the childcare page on the COV's website links not to municipal policy documents, but rather to the Province's Childcare Strategy, and to the \$10aDay plan (City of Vancouver, n.d.-c). This is perhaps unsurprising given that childcare remains a jurisdiction of the Province, but is striking when compared with smaller municipalities such as Squamish that have recently released municipal childcare plans. In making the choice to point towards the Province's plan, rather than to a municipal plan, the City of Vancouver appears to be drawing clear jurisdictional lines around municipal versus provincial responsibilities, despite its own significant accomplishments.

5.4. Limitations to Vancouver's approach

The City of Vancouver has, as of May 2020, supported the creation of 4550 childcare spaces in City-owned or City-facilitated facilities (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 12). These spaces form a sizeable component of the 10,901 licensed childcare spaces that exist in Vancouver as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). Despite these accomplishments, there are still significant structural limitations to the City of Vancouver's ability to meaningfully tackle its ongoing childcare shortage. Even with the extra capital-raising tools afforded by the Vancouver Charter, the City of Vancouver, like other municipalities in British Columbia and indeed most of Canada, is limited in its revenue sources, with developer funds, including Development Cost Levies and Community Amenity Contributions, being the main sources of local funding that the City of Vancouver uses for childcare and other social benefits. As a result, during the many years of provincial and federal neglect that existed prior to the Province's 2018 Childcare Strategy, the COV's efforts have been relatively small in comparison to the size of Vancouver's licensed childcare availability shortfall, which sits at 16,299 as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). According to Reimer, the City of Vancouver's efforts were, during the years of provincial neglect prior to 2018, "sound as an emergency stopgap measure." However, she cautions that "the city could never have sustained" its efforts to address childcare availability without increased provincial support.

A major challenge for Vancouver and other cities in investing in childcare and other social services is that the need for these services has grown faster than the size of available revenue. According to Tindal et al., "while their responsibilities and costs have grown in response to greatly changed conditions, municipalities continue to rely on the historic real property tax as their main source of revenue. The only other major local revenue source available is user charges or user fees. While other revenue sources exist, municipalities do not have any authority to exercise them unless authorized by their provincial government" (2017, p. 177). In this way, a foregrounding issue in understanding how municipalities deploy funding for childcare has been to consider the increasing budgetary pressure that cities face to fund social services in the wake of both economic restructuring and increasing societal challenges, both of which place

increasing pressure on cities to solve more problems with less money. Chiang highlights some of the pressures that municipalities face in BC when allocating social service money:

local governments are provided with eight cents of every tax dollar, and the province and the feds get the rest of that money. So they are supposed to be doing a number of things with that money, and local governments are using that eight cents of every tax dollar to build roads, and get water supplies, pick up garbage, and do these very basic things, and their budgets are very stretched because they have to then take on some of the social issues. So, in essence, it's up to each local government to decide if they want to be involved in childcare.

Chiang adds that “the City of Vancouver takes these things on because they can. They have a separate charter, they have a Vancouver Charter that governs only them, they have money. They have DCCs [development cost charges], they have money from CACs that they can apply towards these things. Many communities don't have that luxury, and don't have the money to invest in childcare.”

As Chudnovsky comments about her tenure as Vancouver's Children's Advocate during the 1990s, “there was always hesitation about downloading the responsibility to the city because the city didn't have the revenue sources”. These limitations are reflected by Mahon, who wrote in 2006 that in Vancouver, “despite considerable effort, levels of coverage – 11 per cent of 0–12 year olds, 10 per cent of preschool children – remain low” (p. 461). These numbers have improved significantly since 2006, with licensed childcare spaces available for 40% of children in Vancouver age 0-12 as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). However, the fundamental problem with what Mahon calls “the limits imposed by interscalar arrangements” (2006, p. 461) remain: childcare is delivered locally, but funded and regulated provincially.

Beyond the structural constraints brought by Vancouver's limited ability to raise funds at the municipal level, the city faces additional specific challenges given its high real estate costs and lack of physical space to build childcare facilities. Reimer adds that this lack of physical space causes competition amongst various social services:

Every square inch of Vancouver is fought over. Land is worth a lot of money. And any publicly available land will be... there's a lineup miles long of arts organizations and recreation, social services, you name it.

Everybody wants access. And childcare is in the lineup with the rest of them trying to get access to it. And even if you get the access, you still have to come up with the operational dollars to run them.

Chiang comments that this lack of available space has led the City of Vancouver to become more creative in finding places to build childcare facilities, such as the 74-space childcare centre on the rooftop of the Gastown Parkades, discussed earlier in this project. According to Chiang, in order to find childcare space, the City of Vancouver is “going into these really unique situations where they’re working with school districts, which is awesome, and they’re building childcare centres on top of a parking garage, which is awesome, but they’ve had to think outside of the box.” Reimer adds that a compounding challenge in finding physical space for childcare centres has been that the City of Vancouver has higher requirements for outdoor space than the Province of British Columbia. According to Reimer, “I would continue to argue that even if it meant less childcare spaces, it is better to have fewer children in quality care” than it is to have a larger number of children in lower quality facilities. Reimer adds that “I do think that you could unquestionably build more spaces if you were willing to significantly compromise the outdoor [space], because that’s where it really gets complicated, but I don’t think it’s the role of government to provide [lower quality] services.” The City of Vancouver’s outdoor space requirements, while an important cornerstone of ensuring quality childcare facilities, has placed some specific limitations on the municipal efforts to envision alternative spaces for childcare centres. For example, Reimer describes how

an example of one of the things we looked at is [that] there are all these condos where the common rooms are pretty much empty during the day, so you could have home daycare in all these things, in theory. So you’ve got a woman at home with a kid who might be able to take in three, four, five or six more kids, maybe even twelve with a helper, and there’s a common room there, and there’s bathrooms and sinks, and all the things you need, except for the outdoor space.

Alongside the City of Vancouver’s challenges in finding adequate space for childcare centres has been a parallel problem of ensuring that childcare facilities are distributed equitably across the city. Although childcare planners in Vancouver make efforts to address childcare on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, childcare coverage rates across the city have been uneven. According to Macdonald’s 2018 study of childcare deserts for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the neighbourhoods of “Kitsilano, Kensington and Riley Park are all largely child care deserts”, whereas other

parts of the city, such as the University of British Columbia area, have one licensed space per child (2018, p. 25). Macdonald explains that “in the provinces where child care is provided by the market, it is market participants, and not public policy, that largely decides where new spaces are built. Those spaces may well be built in areas where coverage rates are already high and not in areas that might benefit most from more spaces” (2018, p. 8). Given that the City of Vancouver has established a practice of childcare needs assessments and forecasting, as established in the Civic Childcare Strategy and in its Local Area Plans, addressing these ongoing discrepancies at the neighbourhood level would likely require a larger realignment at the provincial scale away from market-driven approaches and towards publicly funded, publicly run childcare – a realignment that the Province has, so far, been reticent to take on. Thus, I would argue that ongoing disparities in childcare availability at the neighbourhood level speak to the scalar limitations of what cities have the power to achieve within a market-based system. The City of Vancouver can set neighbourhood targets and can approve city-facilitated spaces, but it can’t stop for-profit or enterprising nonprofit childcare facilities from being built in areas where availability is already relatively high.

An additional limitation to Vancouver’s ability to address childcare availability has been attracting and retaining childcare workers. According to Sharma, housing affordability “really affects everything, because how can you support an ECE [Early Childhood Educator] worker who only makes however much money, living in Vancouver?” Beyond the straightforward barriers faced by low-paid childcare workers in a city with famously high housing costs, Reimer offered a surprising explanation for some of the challenges in retaining Early Childhood Educators in Vancouver. When I asked Reimer if worker rights issues are especially intense in Vancouver because of housing costs, she commented that “it’s housing costs, but it’s also competition for workers. The kinds of people who could be childcare workers have a lot of other options here, whereas in a place like Calgary right now with the economic downturn, there’s not a lot of other options.” Reimer adds that “and then labour costs are going to be higher here cause there’s more jobs, I mean the economy is booming [in Vancouver], so the competition for workers is very high, which means labour is going to be more expensive.”

Chiang points out that the challenges in retaining childcare workers vary considerably from municipality to municipality:

it's very different in different communities what their challenges are. So in the Peace [River] region, they're oil and gas, you can get more money working at a Tim Horton's than you can working in a childcare centre, and if you're working in childcare, you are responsible for children and it is a difficult and physically exhausting and emotionally exhausting job. And if you had other skills, you'd work in oil and gas and make a hundred dollars an hour. So everywhere has its own challenges that are very unique and different, and the City of Vancouver has its own challenges.

Sharma adds that although the COV has been able to make inroads with childcare availability, they were not able to have a significant effect on the closely related issue of childcare affordability. According to Sharma, the City of Vancouver

already had adopted, to the extent that the municipal jurisdiction could do it, a policy of creating more childcare spaces. I think the major thing that they couldn't do, even though they tried to, with their tools, was effective affordability, so I think municipally it's really hard to do that, but they had a lot of sound policies about future developments involving childcare.

Furthermore, Sharma relates the City of Vancouver's challenges in advancing childcare availability back to a broader point about historical provincial neglect, emphasizing the disinvestment that took place under provincial Liberal governments from 2001 to 2017: "if this had been taken seriously over the sixteen years that it wasn't, we wouldn't be in this hole that we're in in regards to affordability and spaces." Sharma explains that childcare availability cannot be fully addressed in isolation from other aspects of childcare policy, including affordability and Early Childhood Educator training and wages. According to Sharma, "each of them kind of have to move together. Because you can also build a space and not have a worker, an ECE, that would be willing to do it, so that's why some of the program actually went into the workforce too. Training, more ECEs. It's almost like it all has to move together." Sharma adds that "the size of the challenge is huge; there's no getting around it. The fact of the matter is without both parents working, you can't afford to live in a lot of the places that we live. So we need to have childcare for so many people and the system just hasn't kept up." This is further compounded by the high costs of childcare in Vancouver, which Sharma notes is some of the most expensive in the province. Sharma adds that "communities only have certain capacity to absorb the spaces. There's only a certain amount of new buildings, a certain amount of churches that can hold it, or schools or community centres." These limitations mean that progress in creating new childcare spaces cannot

happen overnight, as space creation efforts must be tied to the availability of both physical spaces and childcare workers.

My interviewees acknowledged the limitations of Vancouver's ability to meaningfully address childcare, but consistently framed them against a backdrop of Vancouver's positive efforts. According to Gregson, "part of the problem of course is that childcare is not a municipal responsibility. So we're very fortunate that the City of Vancouver has stepped in to be so involved in childcare." Similarly, Sharma states that "obviously they [the City of Vancouver] are limited in the fact that they don't have the same tax base [as the Province], they don't have the same tools in their legal kit to do it, but certainly it makes them, as a municipality, ideal partners to step into the Province that finally cares about childcare. To say, let's do this. Let's figure out how we can get going on building more spaces and actually driving the price down." Sharma adds that "without the province and the federal government stepping in to say this is a priority – which is changing, because the feds also gave us money in the province for childcare – there was a limit to what you could do, right, a municipality can only do so much, and Vancouver has more tools [than other municipalities], because they have the City charter. So I think there's a lot of good policies in there that there are trying to push to get childcare." Given these positive sentiments, the story of the City of Vancouver's approach to childcare can be seen as one of the considerable impact that "eager beaver" municipalities can have in advancing social services that are ostensibly the jurisdiction of higher scales of government.

5.5. Outcomes of Vancouver's approach

As the research findings above have demonstrated, the City of Vancouver has made significant efforts to address licensed childcare availability at the municipal level, despite having no formal mandate to do so. This section will now ask whether the City of Vancouver's efforts have actually led to increased childcare availability in Vancouver as compared with other municipalities in BC, and the factors that may affect this outcome.

In comparison with the Province of British Columbia as a whole, the City of Vancouver has significantly better licensed childcare availability. According to City of

Vancouver data, 40% of licensed childcare space needs have been met as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). This is considerably higher than the overall childcare coverage rate across the province, which is 19.5% as of 2019 (Anderson, 2020, table 1). Although there are many factors that contribute to this discrepancy between the childcare availability rate in Vancouver and the childcare availability rate across BC, my research suggests that the strategies Vancouver implemented, empowered by political will, have had a notable impact. However, although the outcomes in the City of Vancouver are better than in the province overall, this does not mean that the City of Vancouver is without its problems. There is still a shortfall of 16,299 licensed childcare spaces in the city as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7 & 12).

Beyond the actual childcare numbers themselves is a broader and less quantifiable outcome of Vancouver's unique stance: the strategies that City staff and officials have established has meant that Vancouver has been more prepared, compared with other municipalities, to accept increased provincial and federal funding that has become available as of 2018. As discussed earlier in my research findings, the proactive approach of local staff and officials enabled the City of Vancouver to be more ready than other municipalities in the Province when provincial funding finally aligned to more robustly support the creation of childcare spaces. This is an important step, meaning that the work the city did on its own, during the years of provincial and federal neglect, will now help to support ongoing multiscale collaboration efforts.

Moving forward, Vancouver's ability to close the gap on licensed childcare availability will depend, to a large extent, on the degree to which senior governments follow through on their promises to advance an agenda of establishing universal childcare across Canada and British Columbia. As of writing, it is now 2021, exactly three years after the release of British Columbia's landmark 2018 Child Care Strategy. Given that the Strategy promised to create 24,000 spaces in three years using a combination of provincial and federal funding, it is now a crucial time to assess the Province's progress. Lynell Anderson, a childcare public policy researcher, comments in her analysis of childcare progress in British Columbia that "the NDP government's September 2020 news release indicated that 'more than 20,000 new licensed spaces have been approved for funding.' However, most of those spaces (or others) will have to open by March 2021 to fulfill the 2017 election commitment on time" (Anderson, 2020).

Anderson's research shows that 6,431 new childcare spaces opened in the first 1.75 years since the BC NDP announced its childcare space creation commitment. Although more recent public data was not available at the time of Anderson's analysis, these numbers suggest that considerable work will be needed for the province to stay on track with its childcare space creation goals. Anderson comments that "recently, the NDP government began to partner with municipalities and school districts to plan for and create new spaces at a local level, rather than individually. This is an important step forward, yet more action is required to cost-effectively and efficiently create spaces that meet the diverse needs of BC families" (Anderson, 2020). These timelines directly affect local communities and families who still face challenges in accessing licensed childcare.

In summary, the outcomes of the City of Vancouver's efforts to play a role in addressing licensed childcare availability have been impressive, despite the city's lack of jurisdiction in this provincial authority. Vancouver has developed a number of robust strategies to help create childcare spaces, resulting in a meaningful impact on the city's shortfall. However, the city is still far from fully meeting its childcare needs. This is not necessarily a failing on the City of Vancouver's part, but a recognition of the fact that municipalities are limited in their ability to fund social services. Furthermore, the COV has faced a number of unique challenges, including lack of space, high real estate costs, and trouble retaining workers, that have complicated its ability to create enough childcare spaces. The story of providing adequate childcare coverage is far from over in Vancouver and across British Columbia. What is clear is that local governments can play important roles in the provision of social services, including childcare. According to Chudnovsky,

cities are responsible for land use and planning at a neighbourhood level. Childcare needs to be delivered available to people at a neighbourhood level. Cities are the ones that oversee development, so all new development needs to bring a family and children and childcare focus to it. They have those levers, they collect property taxes, they build tremendous numbers of civic facilities, and [...] they're a level of government that people feel very close to. So for all of those reasons, in terms of the planning, the ability to bring communities together, the vision of what a neighbourhood looks like, municipalities have a strong role to play.

Chapter 6.

Discussion

In considering the implications of Vancouver's active approach to childcare, a further question emerged for me: *should* cities take on social services that are not actually within their official jurisdictions? Or, would a more appropriate stance have been for Vancouver to focus primarily on advocacy, as many other municipalities in British Columbia have done? The argument in favour of Vancouver's 'eager beaver' approach is that, as demonstrated in the Outcomes section of this project, Vancouver's policy innovation appears to have contributed to increased childcare availability in the city as compared with the average childcare availability rate across the province. Furthermore, in taking on this active role, Vancouver has asserted the relevance of childcare as a locally delivered, community based social service, confirming the importance of local planning efforts in ensuring that childcare is accessible to community members.

However, as Mahon cautioned in 2006, this active approach to childcare has not, on its own, been sufficient to resolve Vancouver's childcare availability challenges (p. 461). This continues to be true today, as the city still tackles a shortfall of 16,299 licensed childcare spaces as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). As Sharma commented earlier in my research findings, "a lot of cities would say, it's not our problem. It's under provincial jurisdiction." Further, she adds that "it's an interesting thing because you could say that some of the other municipalities are right, that it is squarely something that [the province] neglected. So there are some people who would argue that that's the right stance, that it's not our job, we just advocate." This quote bears repeating here, as it underscores how the City of Vancouver's active approach to childcare was a choice that it decided to take on despite having no obligation to do so. Furthermore, by taking on childcare, the City of Vancouver has diverted funds that could have been contributed to sectors that are more formally part of a municipal government. It could also be argued that, by taking on this responsibility itself, as BC's largest and most prominent city, Vancouver may have given the province an excuse to not take action sooner.

As a way to further answer to the question of *'should cities take on childcare?'*, it is critical to consider, *'what happens when cities don't take on childcare?'*. As Macdonald has emphasized, local planning efforts are a crucial, if ultimately limited, way to help ensure that childcare is available not only in sufficient numbers, but in the specific locations within a community where it is most needed. Vancouver's leadership in this regard is evident in the city's higher rates of childcare availability compared with other communities in British Columbia. Therefore, although it might be easy to dismiss the role of local governments in childcare, this study makes an emphatic case for cities as playing a role in the transition to universal childcare, and particularly in ensuring equitable access within communities. Without sufficient local planning, the market dictates where childcare facilities are located, leading to systemic inequities and chronically low availability. Although this point about market failures has been made by many scholars (see Prentice, Macdonald, and indeed the majority of childcare researchers discussed in this project), the link to local planning has been relatively less explored. My study demonstrates that by using the strategies of partnership-building, advocacy and investment discussed in this project, aided by robust local planning and forecasting tools, the City of Vancouver has been able counterbalance existing market forces to some degree. Now, as the provincial and federal governments align to support childcare, local planning is even more important because cities need to deploy the increased funding in a targeted way.

In order to truly achieve sufficient childcare availability, robust civic planning processes will need to be met with adequate funding from higher levels of government. As Vancouver's Civic Childcare Strategy explains, "the solution to the childcare crisis in our community requires a multi-faceted approach and active participation of all levels of government, parents, business and labour and the community at large" (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, p. 1). Chudnovsky conveyed the importance of intergovernmental cooperation, telling me that "at the broad philosophical level, for us to move from the current market based patchwork of fragmented childcare services to a public system, everybody has a role to play." By "everybody", she means municipal governments as well. This sentiment of a shared intergovernmental role is reflected in a Manager's Report that is tucked into the back of Vancouver's 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy: discussing the municipal role in childcare, the report muses that "this section might be termed 'why us?', and not the Provincial or Federal Governments? Simply put,

all levels of government have a role to play. Clearly, we have attempted to articulate the civic responsibility and are recommending that the City take on its responsibilities AND at the same time advocate, work with and press other levels of government to take up their appropriate role” (City of Vancouver Social Planning, 1990, Manager’s Report, p. 1). Tindal et al. explain the importance of intergovernmental cooperation by summarizing a 2002 discussion paper by Neil Bradford entitled *Why Cities Matter: Policy Research Perspectives for Canada*, which “argues the pivotal role of cities in determining the quality of national life demands close collaboration among all levels of government. In his view, it is not just a matter of helping municipalities handle their responsibilities but of ensuring federal and provincial policy interventions benefit from insights provided by the local level” (Tindal et al., 2017, p. 160).

When childcare is not available in sufficient numbers, it causes real problems for families, impacts marginalized populations most acutely, and can leave some families with the decision to either leave the workforce or leave the city, all of which have negative impacts on communities. Although the high point of neoliberal restructuring may now be decades behind us, and although the pendulum of the current BC provincial government has decisively swung towards a social democratic philosophy marked by the endorsement of universal childcare and open criticism of previous market-based approaches, the legacy of underinvestment in childcare has left a severe shortage of childcare spaces which both the Province and the \$10aDay childcare campaign say will take years to correct (Government of British Columbia 2018, p. 4; Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC & Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2019a, p. 2). Prior to 2018, the lack of adequate, stable funding from the Province to create a true childcare system has necessitated that childcare stakeholders in Vancouver cobble together different sources of both funding and physical space. This can be contrasted with the BC school system, which is fully taxpayer funded at the provincial level and operated by locally elected school boards. To a large extent, the growing multilevel interest in childcare represents a long overdue shift in social attitudes about the role of childcare in society. When I asked Reimer what it would take, at both the provincial and municipal levels, to fully address the City of Vancouver’s childcare shortfall, she told me that “my ultimate feeling is that society needs to change the way it values both children and also the caregiving role. And without that you’re not going to solve this problem. And you can’t legislate that.”

6.1. Recommendations

Although the City of Vancouver has taken significant actions to address childcare availability at the municipal level, there are still some ways in which it can further develop its approach, especially in light of increased provincial and federal funding. The COV has identified updating its Childcare Strategy as a goal (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 30). My core recommendation is for the City of Vancouver to ensure that updating the strategy remains a priority, and that the resulting new strategy is robust enough to respond not only to recent changes in provincial and federal funding, but also to unique challenges and opportunities at the local level. Although my research findings have suggested that formally written policies are not always necessary or optimal to take effective action on childcare, I believe that it is important at this stage to update the strategy in order to provide a roadmap for the City's future actions. As discussed in section 5.3 of this project, part of Vancouver's success has been that it has focused on childcare space creation goals rather than on formal policy over the past number of years, an approach that made sense in the past given the historical lack of support from the province. However, as senior governments are now stepping up to establish universal childcare, an updated written strategy may become more important as a negotiating tool to help ensure that Vancouver receives an appropriate share of childcare funding from the province going forward. This updated civic childcare strategy would provide more detailed information than the Local Area Plans and annual childcare update that the COV creates each May and would provide clarity on future childcare planning.

In line with the original Civic Childcare Strategy, the updated strategy should include a framework, goals, and space creation targets using the specific strategies that are within the City's jurisdiction. This document will help to give clearer, public-facing targets for future work addressing childcare and would make a stronger case for continued work in creating childcare spaces. It should discuss the City's achievements so far, their relationship to provincial and federal strategies, and potential challenges. The updated Civic Childcare Strategy should include updated childcare space creation targets for each neighbourhood in the city with specific short-term and long-term space creation goals, similar to the information of Local Area plans, but more comprehensively focused across the city.

As part of the updated strategy, the City of Vancouver should engage in public consultation to understand the needs of families and the challenges they face. This could take place through instruments such as Talk Vancouver Surveys or public engagement booths. Public consultation appears to be missing from current childcare planning efforts at the municipal level, and indeed at the provincial and federal levels. Although the situations and challenges of families will inevitably be very diverse, this work would be essential in understanding the key types of needs that different families face, such as childcare that accommodates shift work, employer-based childcare centres, special needs, cultural needs, and beyond. Although there are limitations to this type of public consultation process, it can also be a useful tool to take the pulse of a community and is one of the unique ways that municipal governments, as the level that is closest to the people, can be responsive to the needs of their residents.

In addition to shaping the City of Vancouver's future action on childcare, an updated Civic Childcare Strategy will have the added benefit of providing useful guidance to other local governments that are just beginning to address childcare. Many of the City of Vancouver's actions are replicable for other municipalities, including creating a joint childcare council, childcare planning, forecasting, and including childcare as a condition of rezoning. These strategies, which have been discussed throughout the findings of this research project and which could be further explored in an updated Vancouver Civic Childcare Strategy, can provide a useful roadmap to other local governments wishing to address childcare availability. However, it is also important to exercise caution, as the City of Vancouver's approach may not necessarily be fully applicable to other municipalities. For example, the City of Vancouver's use of Development Cost Levies to fund childcare facilities, which is enabled through the unique powers afforded by the Vancouver Charter, is not accessible to other local governments in British Columbia. Additionally, some of the strategies that the City of Vancouver has used, such as creating a nonprofit society (VSOCC) to operate many of the childcare facilities created through municipal efforts, may be unwieldy for smaller communities. The City of Vancouver also faces specific challenges, such as high real estate costs, high living costs and a lack of available physical space to build childcare facilities, which may not apply to other communities. Furthermore, other cities may face their own unique challenges, such as rapid population growth in Squamish. As such,

other local governments should be sure to conduct their own research into which strategies are most appropriate for creating childcare in their communities.

It is worth noting that groups such as \$10aDay have also offered a number of policy recommendations for the advancement of childcare availability, such as shifting towards public delivery of care, but these are mainly aimed at the provincial level of government. Some of their recommendations, such as creating modular childcare spaces to meet short-term demand, may be applicable to local governments – indeed, this particular recommendation also appeared in Vancouver’s 1990 Civic Childcare Strategy and could potentially be reconsidered by the COV at this point. Several advocates have argued for a shift towards publicly delivered childcare that would be funded by federal and provincial governments and administered by local governments.⁹ This idea is promising but may be challenging to achieve as it requires a significant reimagining of Canada’s childcare system.

⁹ See, for example, Friendly et al., 2020, for a detailed discussion on this topic.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

My study asks, *how has the City of Vancouver been able to play a meaningful role in addressing licensed childcare availability at the local level, despite its lack of jurisdiction in this provincial responsibility?* As discussed in my research findings, the City of Vancouver is an acknowledged leader within British Columbia in municipal involvement in creating childcare spaces. In the absence of adequate support from the Province prior to 2018, the city has established a range of strategies, including developing partnerships, engaging in advocacy to senior governments, and using local funding tools to invest in the development of childcare spaces. These strategies have been empowered through the existence of unique powers afforded by the Vancouver Charter and through the City's ability to leverage money through real estate developers. Perhaps equally as importantly, my research suggests that these strategies would not have been possible without the existence of political will and creativity amongst City staff.

Although childcare availability remains a significant issue in Vancouver, the story of the City's involvement in childcare can generally be viewed as a success, demonstrating that local governments can have significant effects on social services even when they are not formally part of municipal jurisdiction. The City of Vancouver recognized long ago that childcare is a key part of building healthy communities and economies, and worked to take action even in the absence of support from senior governments. Vancouver's longstanding research and commitment to childcare meant that the city has been better positioned than other municipalities to take on the new funding that has recently become available because they already have a childcare planning team and robust local planning tools in place. Currently, the COV's strategies present a useful model for other local governments, which may not have strong childcare planning strategies in place, to follow. However, questions remain: will Vancouver's accomplishments mean that other, more underserved communities receive the bulk of future funding, and, if so, to what extent should Vancouver advocate for its share of funding given that its childcare availability rate is higher than the provincial average? As

British Columbia moves towards a universal childcare model, will the City of Vancouver need to continue to rely on community benefits from development to directly create childcare spaces at the municipal level, or will its role in change to one that is more squarely focused on childcare planning? At this point, a clear ongoing role for the City of Vancouver has not been fully articulated.

In spite of its successes, childcare availability remains an ongoing issue in Vancouver. Despite the political will demonstrated by staff and elected officials over the years, the City of Vancouver has faced a number of challenges in successfully increasing childcare availability rates, including its limited ability to raise funds, lack of available space for childcare facilities, and challenges attracting and retaining childcare workers. While internal champions within the City of Vancouver achieved as much as they possibly could, they did so in an environment where even their best efforts only achieved 40% coverage as of December 2019 (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 7). This is perhaps unsurprising, given the limitations faced by municipal governments in taking action on social services that are officially the mandate of the province.

Furthermore, it is possible that Vancouver's progressive brand of liveable density, which, as I have argued in my research findings, underpins local advocates' political will to create childcare spaces, may have had unintended consequences. While the City of Vancouver's relationship with the real estate development sector has helped to create childcare spaces and other high-quality community amenities, it has also led to Vancouver having some of the most expensive housing in the world. In effect, Vancouver's efforts to create childcare may be enmeshed in a vicious cycle of contributing to unaffordability that necessitates a higher rate of working parenthood, and, therefore, a higher rate of enrolment in childcare. Although an examination of the extent to which Vancouver's high real estate prices have driven regional migration within BC is beyond the scope of this project, it is likely that some of the childcare challenges in suburban communities across Metro Vancouver as well as communities further afield are driven by families from Vancouver moving to more affordable municipalities. As Friendly et al. point out, responsibility for childcare planning has largely fallen to local governments with little provincial coordination, as "child care is not identified or alluded to in any of Canada's provincial planning acts" (2020, p. 46-47). As British Columbia

moves towards its goal of universal childcare, a role for regional or provincial planning may become more important given the fluidity of population patterns.

Moving forward, childcare policy at all three levels of government will be shaped not only by British Columbia's provincial strategy, but also by COVID-19 recovery efforts, which have thrown the importance of childcare as a foundational aspect of economies and communities into sharp relief. Although the relevance of childcare, an area of social service provision with a long history of social ambivalence and neglect, was beginning to be recognized in 2018 with the Province's strategy, the pandemic greatly accelerated societal understanding of childcare not just in BC and Canada, but around the world. Chiang is hopeful that the pandemic will result in the increased development of childcare policies: she told me that "childcare now has been identified as a real crisis by all the parties. So I don't think that there will be the rollback of investment by the provincial or federal governments any time soon. Regardless of the elected party." The early months of the pandemic caused drastic temporary closures of childcare facilities and schools, resulting in stunning reversals in women's work rates, as many working mothers were forced out of the workforce due to gaps in childcare access, lost employment, or health and safety concerns, while others worked on the front lines as essential workers in risky public-facing jobs. Igluka Ivanova, a senior economist and researcher for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives¹⁰ and author of *Inequality, employment and COVID-19*, found that "unpaid caregiving demands following the spring 2020 closures of schools, child care programs and other services, weighed heavily on parents, especially mothers with younger children and single parents, making it more difficult for them to fully participate in paid work. The result is a substantial increase in labour market inequality among workers and families" (Ivanova, 2021, p. 4). Ivanova notes that "among women who have been impacted by the pandemic, low-income women, Indigenous and racialized women, mothers with young children (especially single mothers), recent-immigrant women and young women have been particularly hard hit" (Ivanova, 2021, p. 4). As a core part of British Columbia's economic recovery, Ivanova recommends that "redoubling the province's commitment to build an affordable, quality, universal child care system with well-paid workers will enable parents with young children, in particular

¹⁰ Ivanova has also conducted extensive economic analysis on childcare in British Columbia, including *Solving BC's Affordability Crisis in Child Care: Financing the \$10 a Day Plan*, published by the CCPA in 2015. Her work has been an important contribution to the efforts of childcare advocates in the province.

mothers, to return to work or pursue education; will support children’s healthy development; and will create good, family-supporting jobs for women” (Ivanova, 2021, p. 7). Indeed, the provincial and federal governments announced an agreement in July 2021 to accelerate the development of \$10 a day childcare across the British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 2021). While the announcement has received widespread praise, including from the \$10aDay Child Care campaign, the five-year timeline required to fully realize this bilateral deal means that families will need to see how it plays out, and whether the political winds shift before universal childcare access in BC can be accomplished.

Vancouver’s attempts to address childcare in the absence of robust provincial support prior to 2018 are admirable and represent considerable creativity and accomplishment, even if the city used problematic tools to achieve this outcome, and ultimately has not had the power to fully correct its own childcare availability problem. The role of local governments in childcare has long been overlooked in academic circles, and this project seeks to highlight the range of activities that municipalities undertake. Beyond childcare itself, my study highlights the tangled scalar hierarchies that can exist between multiple levels of government with regards to social services in Canada. Some of the lessons from this study can be extrapolated to other social services, such as housing, that are primarily funded and regulated by the provinces, but that are highly local in their effects and in the needs of communities, and operated by nonprofits.

Overall, my project makes a strong case for municipal involvement in childcare planning. However, this must be met by adequate funding. In the most practical sense, as the Province gears up for increased provincial support, it is important for municipalities to undertake robust research at the city planning level to understand their community’s needs.

7.1. Areas for further study

As a qualitative study of the strategies that the City of Vancouver has used to address childcare availability at the municipal level, this project does not attempt to provide a quantitative analysis of the number and location of spaces created and their relationships to Vancouver’s population patterns. Furthermore, this project does not

attempt to provide an ethnographic study of the effects of childcare availability, or lack thereof, on families in Vancouver. I believe that both of these topics would provide fascinating and valuable areas for further study. Furthermore, as discussed in my research methods, a limitation of this study is the small number of people I was able to interview. As such, I hope that this study is followed up with additional, more robust inquiries into municipal efforts to address childcare availability.

The field of childcare policy is changing rapidly in response to increased provincial and federal funding and in response to pandemic recovery efforts. Through the course of completing this study, I encountered a number of fascinating topics related to municipal childcare policy that did not fit into the scope of the study or whose effects were too early to study. These include the opportunities and challenges presented by the possibility of publicly delivered childcare; how municipalities can assess the need for employee-based childcare; how municipal governments can address the need for non-standard hours childcare; the opportunities and challenges of creating more childcare spaces in schools; and the need for special needs and culturally focused childcare.

As British Columbia moves towards its goal of establishing universal childcare, a key area for further study is in developing strategies to ensure that this system is resilient to future challenges. The pandemic, as well as extreme heat events, fires and air quality issues caused by climate change, have had considerable impacts on BC's fragile childcare system, with significant interruptions to childcare access and anxiety amongst parents and staff. It is no longer a given that children will have access to safe and supported childcare. As always, the effects of these challenges have been disparately borne depending on families' income levels and access to resources. While developing a robust universal childcare system is very important, even the best childcare systems in the world do not currently have the tools to adapt to these kinds of societal shocks in the future. The City of Vancouver has stated that it plans to make resilience a priority and will "work on childcare as an essential service with a focus on support for equity and strength to withstand future shocks and stressors" (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 30). However, the COV does not specify how it actually plans to apply this resiliency lens to childcare. Like 'political will', 'resilience' is a buzzword that lacks a clear definition, and understanding how it is defined and applied in practical terms at the community level presents a key area not only for further study, but for immediate action at the community level.

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Appendix A.

Sample interview questions

1. First of all, can you tell me a bit about your role, and your involvement with childcare policy in Vancouver and British Columbia?
2. Do you see the City of Vancouver as having been more active than other cities in BC when it comes to childcare planning and advocacy?
3. Why do you think Vancouver was able to focus on childcare to such a large extent?
4. How much of this municipal activity had to do with a historical lack of support from higher levels of government?
5. To what extent, if at all, did research and advocacy conducted by the City of Vancouver inform the Province's 2018 childcare strategy?
6. Why is it important that cities be involved in childcare, even though it's technically a provincial issue? Why not just leave it to the province?
7. How do you view the role of the Vancouver School Board in creating childcare spaces? What are some successes or challenges there?
8. According to Vancouver's Local Area Plans, the City of Vancouver's role in addressing the childcare shortage is to advocate, form partnerships, and invest in creating accessible childcare spaces which are operated by non-profit partners. From your perspective, how accurately does this reflect the actual work of municipal officials on the ground?
9. What are some specific or unique challenges that Vancouver faces in supporting the creation of childcare space? E.g., high density, high housing costs and population pattern changes.

10. What is your vision for a thriving childcare system in Vancouver? What would it take to get there?

11. What else should I ask you that I haven't asked already?

Appendix B.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on childcare availability in Vancouver

While the bulk of my initial research was conducted in 2019, this project was primarily written in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still ongoing as of the time of writing. The emergence of the pandemic was a shock to the childcare system not only in Vancouver, but across British Columbia, Canada, and the rest of the world. I witnessed, both as a researcher and as a parent, as families scrambled to adapt to the pandemic's effects on their access to, and choices around, childcare.

Although it will likely take years for the full outcomes of the pandemic on childcare availability to be understood, it is clear that there were temporary reductions in childcare enrolment across most of Canada. A survey conducted by Martha Friendly and David Macdonald for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which included both centre-based childcare facilities and licensed in-home childcare, observed an enrolment drop of 13% in Vancouver between February and September-November 2020 (Friendly & Macdonald, 2021, p. 6). While this decrease is striking, it is lower than the majority of other cities across Canada, with many municipalities in Ontario seeing enrolment reductions of over 40% (Friendly & Macdonald, 2021, p. 6). During Friendly and Macdonald's study period, many childcare providers across Canada reported that they had excess space available to enroll more children. The authors note that "it is worth pointing out how unusual this situation is. In previous surveys, we have found wait lists were the norm, with centres sometimes charging parents a fee to have their name on a wait list" (Friendly & Macdonald, 2021, p. 15). According to the authors, "in the time of COVID-19, this situation has been turned on its head. Now many centres are able to enrol additional children because they have vacancies and waiting lists have evaporated. The situation for many providers is dire; in some centres surveyed, enrolment had fallen from 20 to 30 children down to fewer than five", leaving the long-term viability of childcare centres in jeopardy as a result of lost revenue (Friendly & Macdonald, 2021, p. 15-16).

To some extent, the temporary enrolment reductions described by Friendly and Macdonald can be attributed to provincial policies. According to the authors, “provinces and territories varied substantially on how regular child care funding and additional funding were made available (for example, several jurisdictions covered lost parent fees in closed centres). As well, these variations shifted multiple times as infection rates and medical knowledge shifted over time” (Friendly & Macdonald, 2021, p. 12). In the case of British Columbia, childcare did not fully shut down at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. This is a marked contrast to elementary and high schools in the province, which closed in March 2020 and did not reopen until September. Rather, childcare was eventually deemed an essential service and remained open for the families of essential workers, including those with school-age children who were unable to attend school. From the beginning of the pandemic until August 31, 2020, the Province of British Columbia gave childcare centres the option of applying for Temporary Emergency Funding which allowed facilities to remain operational, with reduced capacity (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-b). Beginning in September 2020, the Temporary Emergency Funding ended and the majority of childcare facilities were allowed to return to their normal capacities with enhanced health and safety protocols, with parents required to pay full fees (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-b).

The City of Vancouver took several key actions during the early days of the pandemic, including partnering with Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre and the Vancouver School Board to provide temporary referrals and childcare spaces for the children of essential workers (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 20). A May 2020 report from the City of Vancouver’s office of Social Policy and Projects points to a number of short-term disruptions to childcare access during the early months of the pandemic, including the temporary closure of over 10,000 childcare spaces, temporary layoffs of ECE workers, and effects on the development sector which will slow the progress of Community Amenity Contributions and Development Cost Levies for childcare (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 16). The May 2020 report describes childcare as an equity issue, stating that “vulnerable children and families most impacted by lack of care” caused by temporary closures (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 20). Furthermore, the report places emphasis on building resilience, aiming to “continue the City’s work on childcare as an essential service with a focus on support for equity and strength to withstand future

shocks and stressors” (City of Vancouver Social Policy and Projects, 2020, p. 30). Exactly how the COV will achieve these goals remains to be seen.

While it is likely too early to understand the longer-term effects on childcare availability in Vancouver and elsewhere, including the degree to which childcare enrolment has bounced back, my personal, anecdotal experience, gleaned through parent groups on Facebook and discussions on the playground, suggests that, as the pandemic wore on, a large proportion, though not all, families eventually returned to some form of childcare, and that waitlists and challenges in accessing licensed care are once again the norm in Vancouver. These variations in family choices around childcare during the pandemic, the socio-economic and personal factors surrounding them, and their long-term implications for working families, present an opportunity for future research. As the economy rebuilds, it is possible that the short-term reversal in childcare enrolment may have longer-term effects on childcare staffing availability, and in turn may pose serious threats to local and municipal goals of expanding childcare availability. According to Friendly and Macdonald, “when this pandemic is finally over, parents will need and want child care for their children but many spaces may no longer be available because of closures. This will have a real impact on the recovery, particularly for women attempting to fully return to full-time work” (2021, p. 36).