



# **Inclusion and Social Housing Practice in Canadian Cities: Following the Path from Good Intentions to Sustainable Projects**

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## **Abstract**

This research project describes and analyzes the policy, planning and design processes that led to the creation of three recent socially-mixed projects in the regions of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. There is general agreement among policy analysts and housing managers that social inclusion is an important goal for social housing sustainability. It is also well-established that the realization of socially-mixed projects is generally more complex. Yet, we do not know exactly how good design outcomes come about in practice. This paper first exposes the similarities and differences in the planning and design of the projects based on site visits and morphological analysis. The author then reconstructs the policy context and design process that led to each outcome through interviews with different players involved in each case and through secondary sources. A synthesis of the three cases reveals that they have in fact much in common in terms of the preparatory process and that there seems to be “ingredients” which greatly facilitate planning and design, such as a transparent planning process, a pro-active yet not invasive local government, and a set of experienced and dedicated individuals who understand the reality of social mixing. It is recommended, among other things, that local governments take an active role in ensuring a “proper mix” at the project level without using coercive measures and that the experience of providers and consultants be considered in project selection and transmitted more effectively.



## Executive Summary

- Despite the concerns raised by many scholars interested in social policy regarding the principle of – and theoretical justification for – social mixing, the practice of income and household mixing in housing has gained more and more credence in Canada over the last 30 years and is now widely regarded as a core principle of social sustainability in housing development. Concomitantly, it is also recognized by most actors in the field of housing that the planning and design of socially-mixed projects is generally more complex than that of unmixed social housing projects. Among the design principles “for a successful social mix” cited in the literature, we find the importance of physical and functional integration with the surrounding urban fabric, the provision of shared open spaces that are legible and defensible, and a mix of unit types as well as income levels.
- Yet, although the theory of social mixing has been carefully studied and debated at length in the literature, the practice of social mixing has received comparatively little attention. Furthermore, the design principles “for success” cited above do not fit all projects; they must be adapted and made relevant to each specific case.
- To better understand how good design comes about in practice, three recent “exemplary,” medium-sized, socially-mixed projects were selected in three different Canadian metropolitan regions and used as case studies:
  - The first case study investigates the realization of the the Lavo – NO. V. O project in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve borough of Montreal, Quebec, a medium-density mixed-income project comprising co-op housing for families, non-profit housing for singles as well as affordable and market-rate condominiums;
  - The second case study describes the planning and design of the Blue Heron Co-operative in the Kanata Ward of the City of Ottawa. The project is of medium-density and comprises market-rate, BMR as well as RGI units, distributed between a medium-sized apartment building and a number of row houses;
  - The third and final case study looks at the Millbrook Place project in Mississauga, Ontario in the Region of Peel. Millbrook is a high-density project which includes 120 senior suites as well as 43 bachelor units targeted at the working poor. Half of the senior units are RGI, and the bachelor units are priced at approximately 70% of the market-rate.
- A synthesis of the three case studies uncovered a number of key elements in the planning and design process; in particular, the three projects have in common a clear and transparent planning process, a pro-active yet not invasive local government, a set of experienced and dedicated individuals who understand the reality of mixed-income projects and who know and trust one another, and a bit of creativity to squeeze out “extras” wherever possible.
- A number of policy implications were derived from the synthesis of the case studies as well as from the literature review. The main policy recommendations yielded from this analysis are that:

- *Municipalities and local governments involved in housing provision should be proactive to ensure that new projects have a mix of units that 1) answers a real housing need, 2) contributes to the overall diversity of an area and 3) is likely to be socially sustainable;*
- *No coercive municipal policy regarding income-mixing is often the best policy as innovative planning and design schemes are more likely to be devised under flexible policy frameworks where the specific characteristics of a project are appreciated and taken into account;*
- *Mechanisms should be put in place to allow providers (or developers) to meet with the community, the municipal planners and the elected representatives and to work as a coalition so as to facilitate the planning process and legitimize the project as a whole;*
- *The composition of a project's team (what projects they have done and where, whether they have worked together, etc. ) should be seriously taken into account when selecting projects as the experience of the individuals involved may be an important factor for success;*
- *An organizational model should be devised to help collect and share the collective experience of providers, consultants and architects with social mixing so that this "institutional memory" may be preserved and made available when needed.*

Finally, issues that could be investigated in future research include the relationship between theory and practice in the field of social housing, the role of social capital among co-op and private non-profit housing developers in "getting things done" and "making things work," the relationship between income mixing and design quality and finally, the political and economic motives behind social housing policy in general and social mixing policies in particular.



# **Inclusion and Social Housing Practice in Canadian Cities: Following the Path from Good Intentions to Sustainable Projects**

## **1. Introduction**

There is general agreement among New Urbanists, smart-growth advocates, sustainability theorists and other urban scholars that we must design places that are diverse and inclusive – economically, socially, ethnically, culturally and functionally. Following this line of reasoning, policy analysts and housing managers in Europe and North America have argued in favour of social mixing and called upon social housing providers to try and “offer a varied menu” so as to accommodate the needs of different types of households. There is also a sense among these various players that social housing, if properly designed, can in fact be used to prevent the ills of social segregation by maintaining a “healthy” balance within both projects and neighbourhoods. Thus, in the same way that social housing contributes to the viability, liveability and diversity of neighbourhoods, social mixing at the site level contributes to the social sustainability of housing complexes. In other words, social inclusion can be seen as a way to ensure the long-term viability of projects, which is itself essential to preserve the social fabric that the underprivileged are part of and depend on. Not surprisingly, social housing practitioners do have different ways to conceptualize and plan for social inclusion and hold different opinions as to what constitutes “genuine integration”; nevertheless, social inclusion in housing is generally seen as a desirable outcome.

What is more, planned social mixing is not merely a fad. The inclusion of both market-rate and “social” units in housing projects today is part of a long tradition of “inclusionary” planning which goes back several decades. In fact, social mixing was explicitly stated as a goal of city-making as early as the mid-19th century, and has since been questioned, debated and discussed at length in academic and policy circles in both Europe and North America (Dansereau et al., 2002). The ideology behind social inclusion has somewhat changed over time, and the normative goal of place diversity has been supplanted in many instances by other more pressing issues, but the principle has remained more or less unchanged. In the 19th century, as today, planned social mixing came as a response to unplanned – and often extreme – social segregation. In many industrialized nations, “social mixing” as policy disappeared after the war as the gap between rich and poor narrowed somewhat but re-emerged at the end of the 20th century in the face of mounting social exclusion and segregation and diminishing municipal budgets in the 1970s, 80s and 90s (Dansereau, 2003).

In Canada, the history of “social mixing” as policy really only began in the 1970s, when the federal government legally created a new form of non-market housing provided through community-based and municipal non-profit organizations and aimed at a wider range of income levels (Rose, 1980). Early on during this new policy era, private non-profit social providers sprung up in every city and a large number of housing co-operatives were created which usually targeted both low and moderate income tenants. In addition, several large-scale, medium density, socially-mixed “neighbourhoods” were created in Canadian cities with the explicit aim to build diverse and complete “communities” and reverse the trend of social decay observed in several “projects” built in the 40s and 50s. These complexes – False Creek in Vancouver, St. Lawrence in Toronto, Angus Yards in Montreal, to name only three of the most prominent – were integrative in their approach and by and large proved to be relatively sustainable (a review of these projects is provided in Section 3.2.1).

Time has passed and policy environments have changed, but the issue of segregation is as current as ever as our cities become more and more diverse, yet less and less integrated socio-economically. Indeed, large Canadian cities have seen in the last twenty years a rising spatial concentration of poverty (CHRA, 2004) as well as a transformation of the urban landscape whereby new suburbs were created in which only one type of housing exists and mixing is *de facto* not a possibility. Indeed, while “social mixing” is re-emerging as an important goal of urban and housing policy throughout the Western world, the urban landscape of industrialized cities reveals “a pressure towards enclave-style residential development, a continuing suburban flow of households fleeing urban problems and a general absence, where possible, of affordable or social housing” (Atkison, 2005). Meanwhile, there are those who have no other choice but to “stay behind” and who may as a result lose out. According to MacLennan (2006), it is likely that up to one in ten Canadians now live in relatively poor and unmixed neighbourhoods “that hold them and their children back” (p. 4) as a result of the lack of access to services and opportunities. Clearly, social mixing as policy objective is still relevant today. Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged that design-for-mixing neither guarantees social integration, nor in itself solves the problems associated with the lack thereof, it is now recognized that social diversity can – and should – be planned for.

But the question remains, how do socially-mixed projects actually come about? More than two decades after the completion of False Creek and other large mixed-income developments in Canada and at a time when large-scale projects such as Regent Park in Toronto are being re-designed, it is perhaps timely to ask ourselves how design-for-mixing comes about in practice. On the one hand, the principle of mixing or inclusion has now become “official” policy in most large Canadian municipalities and has even made its way into a few regulations. What is more, we more or less know what works and what doesn’t in terms of planning and design. On the other hand, the design of socially-mixed projects is generally more complex and the path which leads from policy to the actual realization of a project remains somewhat obscure, even though it is paved with good faith and intentions. In particular, it is not entirely clear how the different components of a socially-mixed project come together in practice, and what roles housing practitioners play in the planning and design process. In other words, we know that municipalities, service managers and housing providers all have laudable intentions and that most of them have the know-how to bring mixed-income projects from conception to inception, but we do not know exactly how – in the post-program era – these intentions and this knowledge translate (or fail to translate) into socially-mixed and sustainable housing projects. It is important, therefore, to appreciate the difference between design “intentions” and design “outcomes,” as there is much that happens in between.

Consequently, a number of questions beg to be asked: How are socially-mixed products different in different Canadian cities? How is social mixing defined in the literature and conceived of by different municipalities, service managers and housing providers? What role does each of these players take on in the elaboration and implementation of guidelines for social mixing? Are these guidelines based on past experience and principles found in the literature? Who is involved in making planning and design decisions? And more importantly, how does good design-for-mixing come about?

This research project aims to describe and assess the policy, planning and design processes that led to the creation of three “successful” (later defined) recent socially-mixed projects in the regions of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. In Part I, the literature on planned social mixing is reviewed and the most recent findings on the topic are summarized. An overview of three important social mixing experiments in Canada is also provided. Part II is composed of three exemplary case studies, one from each city-region cited above. Each case is first described separately, and a subsequent synthesis of the three cases exposes the similarities and differences between them in terms of the planning and design process. Based on this reconstruction of each case, and on an assessment of the design outcomes, the strengths and weaknesses of each approach to social-mixing are highlighted and discussed. Finally, some lessons for housing policy and planned social mixing in the Canadian context are proposed.

## **2. Methodology**

The general methodological approach of this study, the format for the case studies and a brief description of each are described below. An explanation of the evaluation criteria used for their assessment is also provided.

### **2.1 General Methodological Approach**

In this research, I start from the premise that the policy and design process leading to the realization of socially-mixed projects is usually far from straightforward, given the complexity of inter-governmental relations, the number of different policy tools and the varying constraints involved. It makes sense, then, to take completed projects as our point of departure to see how they actually function, how they were originally conceived, who was involved in their design and in what capacity, and whether this process was effectively framed and/or pushed by policy.

To retrace the path from the finished product back to the funding application whence it originated, this research uses both primary and secondary sources.

- First, a literature review of social mixing experiments, policies and guidelines was undertaken to better understand how social mixing has been conceptualized, made into policy and implemented in the past.
- Second, a recent project of 75 or more units was selected in each region (Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa) based on the literature review and preliminary interviews with key informants. The rationale for choosing these specific locations is explained in the introduction of Section 4.
- Third, the communities, geographical settings and general contexts in which the projects find themselves were described.
- Fourth, the outcomes of these social mixing initiatives were evaluated in terms design and site planning based on site visits.
- Fifth, interviews with municipal planners, service managers and housing providers were used to clarify the workings of the different organizations involved and permit the reconstruction of the actual elaboration and realization of each project.

## 2.2 Brief Description of Case Studies

The format of the case studies presented in Part III is as follows: a description of the context and background of each project, followed by a description and assessment of the physical outcome in each case in terms of each meta-criterion, and finally by a reconstruction of the planning and design process that lead to each project's realization. Below is a short description of each case study selected:

**Projet Lavo – NO. V. O – Montreal, Quebec** – The *Lavo* social housing project and *NO. V. O.* affordable condominium development are the two main components of a medium-density mixed-income project that occupies two large blocks just south of Ontario Street in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood, east of downtown Montreal. The social component, which was inaugurated in 2006, includes two components: a large family co-op taking up most of the western block, as well as a more modest complex of low-income rental units for singles (comprising five buildings on three different lots around the site). On the eastern edge of the site, taking up most of the eastern block, is a market-rate development, comprised of three condominium buildings inaugurated later the same year. There are a total of 204 units on the site, 71 of which are co-op units, 40 of which are for low-income single people and young families and 93 of which are condominiums for sale. Of the 93 condominiums, 67 (or 72%) were priced so as to be “affordable” (in this case affordability was defined as what a two-person household with a combined annual salary of approximately 55,000\$ can afford, or 170,000\$). Half of the co-op units (or their occupants) are eligible for “rent supplement,” which is more or less equivalent to rent-geared-to-income (or RGI), and the other half are priced at about 95% of the market-rate. The remainder of the units are below-market-rate (BMR). In addition to their close proximity, the “social” and the “private” blocks share a pathway that runs along the southern edge of the residential development, and crosses the main street north of the site ending at a new public square. Both the co-op and the condominium buildings have well-landscaped common courtyards, while the backyard space of the low-income rental buildings is consumed by surface parking. Both components of the residential development take the place of former industrial buildings, one of which still remains at the southern edge of the site.

**Blue Heron Co-op – Ottawa, Ontario** – The Blue Heron Co-op is a medium-density project inaugurated in 2006 and located in Kanata, a ward of the City of Ottawa located outside of the city's greenbelt, to the west. The project is comprised of two main physical components: a relatively large four-story apartment building located closest to the arterial on which the project is sited, and five small blocks of row houses located at the back. The project comprises a total of 83 units divided in the following way: 21 RGI units, 15 units at market-rate and 47 units at below-market-rate (which was established in this case at 70% of the market-rate). Although the co-op offers a range of unit sizes and charges three different levels of rent, the different tenants (paying either rent that is geared-to-income, below-market-rate or at market-rate) are not assigned to particular units based on how much they pay. There is ample open space around the buildings, including a temporary playground on an unused section of the parking lot as well as a lawn with various plantings and a creek. Every unit has either a balcony (in the apartment building) or a large patio and garden (in each row house). There is also shared indoor space in the main building, which includes an office meeting room suite, a common kitchen, a common room with table-tennis and other games, a laundry room as well as an indoor bicycle storage facility. The site is bounded by a residential district on the south side, by a church, special needs

school and cemetery on the east side and finally by farmland on the north side. Blue Heron Co-op is a green field development project, as it occupies land formerly used for grazing horses.

**Millbrook Place – Mississauga, Ontario** – Millbrook Place is a high-density infill project in a single building, inaugurated in 2004 and situated on Dundas Street in the Regional Municipality of Peel, directly west of the City of Toronto. The building in question is a 10-storey brick building comprising of a majority of senior suites as well as a number of bachelor efficiency units; more specifically, the project includes 120 seniors' apartments (35 two-bedroom, 85 one-bedroom), and 43 bachelor units, for a total of 163 units. Half of the senior suites are subsidized RGI units and the other half are priced at about 80% of market-rate, while all bachelor suites are below-market rate (which is in this case approximately 70% of the market-rate). Millbrook Place offers several indoor and outdoor shared facilities for residents including: outdoor walking and seating areas, a multi-purpose room, laundry room, lobby and lounge, as well as underground parking. It is interesting to note that the efficiency apartments are located in an adjoining wing of the building where residents have access to their own entrance and amenities; this separate wing was conceived as a building inside a building, but this internal separation is not immediately apparent from the outside. Immediately adjacent to the site is another affordable housing project built by the same developer in 1994. The land on which the project is built was formerly occupied by a motel, which had been demolished a number of years prior.

Although the three projects differ from one another in many respects, they are by and large comparable in size and unit mix and all three include some collective amenities. They were also all initiated and realized in the last five years, and had similar financial constraints (although these were dealt with differently). There is an important difference between them that should be noted, however: the Millbrook Place project is a not within the limits of the City of Toronto proper, whereas Blue Heron is located on the outskirts of Ottawa and Lavo-NOVO is in Montreal proper, about six kilometres from the downtown core. Nevertheless, this author believes that the initial objectives and physical outcomes of the three projects are similar enough to warrant a comparative study.

### **2.3 Evaluation Criteria**

The evaluation criteria that are used to assess the design outcome of each project are based on a synthesis of the relevant literature. These criteria target those site planning and design features that have been found to have an impact on the success, functioning and long-term viability of planned social mixing initiatives. It is on the basis of these criteria that the three projects selected were deemed “successful.” It is important to note that the projects selected for this study all have strengths and weaknesses, and that none of them scores perfectly on all criteria. However, they are considered “exemplary” because there was a conscious effort in each case to produce high-quality design and plan specifically for mixing.

A detailed description of each criterion and underlying rationale is provided in Section 2.1, following the literature review and preceding the presentation of the case studies.

### 3. The Theory and Practice of Social Mixing

#### 3.1 Social Mixing in Theory: What, Why and How?

As hinted to in the introduction of this paper, the theory of social mixing is fraught with many dissensions and definitional difficulties. Yet, there are a number of identifiable trends and principles and a few clear, solid findings which can serve as a basis for policy. In the following, I will first settle on a few important definitions before setting out in a review of the literature. I will then take up the general arguments made against and in favour of planned social mixing, and I will subsequently review existing policies and summarize the literature on the relationship between social mix, planning and design.

##### 3.1.1 A Few Definitions

Seeing as social mixing is usually proposed as a solution to “segregation” and “exclusion” and as a means of achieving “diversity,” it is important to clarify the meanings of these various concepts. Dansereau (2002b) notes that exclusion, like poverty, is necessarily a relative concept and that it must be defined in relation to other benchmarks. Yet, exclusion is different from poverty in that it implies not only a low level of educational attainment and a lack of financial means, but also a lack of access to information, employment, services, collective amenities and decision-making processes. Determining what level of “access” (or lack thereof) constitutes exclusion might involve debate; however, there is no question that exclusion, which is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, is the “bad” that inclusionary policies aim to avoid or mitigate.

The definition of segregation, and its significance for our purposes, is less clear. It usually refers to the spatial concentration of human groups according to class, race or some other characteristic. However, as pointed out by Atkinson (2005), we need to “differentiate between ghettoised poverty, and enclaves which reflect areas of concentration derived from social affinity and choice” (p. 8). Indeed, segregation may be voluntary, as when privileged groups assemble spatially, and even necessary for immigrants or other groups to gain social support. This being said, the word “segregation” will be used in the present study to describe spatial separation (whether voluntary or involuntary) *that leads to some form social exclusion*. It is a given, then, that the segregation referred to here is undesirable.

Conversely, it is important to define, or at the very least outline, the normative goal (or normative view) of “place diversity.” For Talen, who has operationalized the concept, “it includes all forms of social and economic mixing – the combination, in particular places, of people of varying incomes, races, genders, ethnicities, household sizes, lifestyles, and, in addition, non residential activities comprising different uses and functions of land” (Talen, 2006: 234). As is apparent from this definition, “diversity” can take an infinite number of shapes and forms, and be measured in numerous ways; for this reason, diversity is defined here as what it does, and not as what it is. Following Kevin Lynch’s definition of the good city form, diversity is taken here as that quality of an environment that allow human groups to become “more complex, more richly connected, more competent, acquiring and realising new powers – intellectual, emotional, social and physical” (Lynch, 1982: 116). Needless to say, we are interested here in the possibilities for mixing within social housing developments. By “social

housing” we mean all forms of non-market housing sponsored, owned and/or managed by public, private non-profit organizations or co-operatives.

Having defined those concepts which frame the idea of “social mix,” we can more easily approach the concept itself. As might be expected, the term does not actually carry a formal definition in the field of housing; in fact, it originated in Europe and was transplanted here out of its context. Therefore, it means different things to different people and varies by housing market (Brophy and Smith, 1997). However, some authors have approached the concept of social mix pragmatically so as to find a workable definition. Alex Schwartz and Kian Tajbakhsh, for example, differentiate between mixed-income projects that are mixed at the site level and the ones that are mixed at the neighbourhood level, and more generally categorize them according to whether the sponsors and/or owners are public, private, or a combination of the two (Schwartz and Tajbakhsh, 1996).

I take a similar view and define social mixing for the purposes of this project as any mix of social housing units (whether in the form of public housing, co-operatives or other forms of non-profit housing) and any other unit types (whether condos or townhouses, for rent or for sale, affordable or not), whatever the ratio. These different units will be deemed “mixed” (as opposed to separate) if there is continuity between one type of units and the other (or others) either architecturally or otherwise, and as long as this continuity is explicit and easily legible.

This being said, a few words of caution are in order. It is recognized by this author – and stated as a premise – that the mixing of unit types does not ensure “social mixing” per se. In fact, as noted by Dansereau, even though the objective of mixing is to mix social groups, inclusionary policies aim primarily to provide housing units that can accommodate households with different needs, which itself usually takes care of mixing different socio-economic groups. It is also important, when discussing social mix, to distinguish between physical integration and actual social integration (Hulchanski, 1984). Social integration (or “social cohesion”) may be the stated aim of certain planned social mixing projects, but it is difficult to define and measure and it is usually ideological-driven more than anything else; in effect, as pointed out by Dansereau (2002a), it may be unrealistic and naïve to expect socially distant neighbours to interact spontaneously when social interaction is difficult to observe even in socially homogeneous residential districts. Besides, it has been argued by some that social cohesion may not be as “good” as it seems as it is often about discrimination and exclusion as much as it is about social support and stability (Kearns and Forrest, 2000).

This study, then, deals exclusively with *physical* integration, which “exists when heterogeneous groups of people occupy adjacent physical space.” This, in turn “creates the *potential* for actual social integration” (Hulchanski, 1984: 9, emphases added), which neither forces social interaction nor guarantees social cohesion. This non-deterministic approach to the study of physical design has obvious limitations, as it effectively ignores the perspective of current tenants and users. It also leaves room for a wide range of different “mixes,” and may render generalizations difficult. However, this author believes it is necessary to consider a wide range of possible mixes as it is precisely the point of this research to compare and contrast these varying approaches. Also, given that we are interested in recently developed projects, the experience of users, who have generally only spent a few months in each place, may or may not be informative.

Finally, it is important to note that the use of the word “project” in this report to describe mixed-income developments is not derogatory in any way, and does not imply that those developments referred to herein are akin to the housing projects of the 1950s and 60s. Although the expression does have certain connotations when used in describing social housing developments, it is defined here as any type of housing complex, whether subsidized or not.

### **3.1.2 Why Is Social Mixing Important?**

There is no doubt that mixed-income projects contribute to the long-term viability of social housing, but the exact role of “mixing” in this is not exactly clear. On the one hand, if our aim is to support the creation of “genuinely mixed communities” (Hills, 2007), then social housing must necessarily be used as a tool in support of that goal – and not against it (ULI, 2003). From this perspective, social inclusion in housing is a *sine qua non* condition of social sustainability. For advocates of diversity, then, it is sufficient to know *what* mixing does and it matters little *how* it does it. As worded by Duyvendak and Veldboer (2005: 96), planned social mixing seems to many like the appropriate centripetal response in a world pulled apart by so many centrifugal forces, such as the retrenchment of state, the concentration of wealth and the dissolution of place-based communities. In the face of these changes, the desirability of some degree of mixing- if only to preserve a veneer of social cohesion – is rarely contested.

On the other hand, social mixing has almost acquired among certain of its advocates the mythical standing of panacea. It is often looked at in isolation – as a stand-alone intervention – and talked about as the ultimate “cure” for what Oscar Lewis termed the “culture of poverty.” Indeed, it is often presumed that mixing, in and of itself, can benefit the underprivileged and help them “lift themselves” out of poverty. What is more, these presumed benefits are many: Epp, for instance, affirms that “employed persons will provide role models for children and the unemployed” and that “communities will likely be more stable” as a result of income-mixing (1996: 95). Among other oft-cited goals (and therefore presumed benefits), Wood (2003) cites the promotion of social interaction and cohesion, the creation of social capital and the attraction of additional services to the area. Yet, according to several critics, it is questionable whether mixing itself is responsible for any of these outcomes. What, then, is the role of mixing in social housing sustainability? It is possible to say that mixing itself is a worthy goal for housing policy? The following section reviews and weighs the general arguments against and in favour of “planned” and “programmed” social mixing. It then summarizes the evidence and clarifies the role of mixing in promoting social housing sustainability.

To start with, there are a number of critiques of the social mix concept. A first line of critique qualifies inclusionary goals and objectives as naïve, under-theorized or simply imprecise. For example, it has been argued that a “social mix” in social housing is simply not workable as it will necessarily create more conflicts in what is already a “conflict-ridden” environment. Newman (1972), who was writing in the early 70s, felt that the introduction of a mix of people with different lifestyles, aspirations and backgrounds could only further complicate the “problem” of social housing. Others have suggested that inclusionary policies have been pursued first and foremost out of concern for the middle-classes and not primarily to answer the housing needs of the poor; Duyvendak and Veldboer, for instance, suggest that mixed-income initiatives are often implemented to bring middle-class households to central cities where there are already supposedly “enough” low-income residents (Duyvendak and Veldboer, 2005). Some have even



argued that low-income tenants are the ones who stand to benefit the least and to lose the most from poverty de-concentration initiatives (see for example August, 2007). Concomitantly, these initiatives are often criticized for the lack of clarity of their goals and objectives. In his analysis of recent British and Australian experiments in mixed tenure, Wood (2003) notes that the objectives of mixed-income projects are often not very explicit; many of these initiatives, it seems, are carried out without real justification.

More to the point, though, when the objectives of social mixing are explicit, they do not necessarily face up to the facts; this is the main tenet of the second, more substantial, line of critique. Indeed, certain presumed benefits often cited by advocates of social inclusion seem to be ideological wishes more than social “goods.” For one thing, a review of several literature reviews on the subject provides little evidence showing that socially-mixed environments independently contribute to the emancipation of underprivileged individuals or groups. In fact, the bulk of the evidence suggests that social mixing does not promote interaction (see Atkinson, 2001; Jupp, 1999; Forrest, 1999; and Visser, 1984), nor socializing to middle-class norms (Briggs, 1998; Brooks-Gunn, 1993; Chamboredon, 1970). A more recent review of theoretical justifications for mixing and empirical findings in support of these justifications comes to similar conclusions: mixing may improve the quality of life of low-income residents through greater informal social control, but it does not in and of itself improve their socio-economic prospects (Joseph, Chaskin and Webber, 2007). Furthermore, as pointed by Wood (2003), the argument that inclusionary policies increase the availability of services also seems to falter somewhat, as the level of services is often determined according to the median household income of an area, which means that a higher median income might actually have the unintended effect of decreasing the level of services. As for deciding whether social mixing contributes to higher levels of actual or perceived safety, it seems as though the jury is still out. Some researchers seem to think so (see for example Hills, 2006 and Rosenbaum, 1998), however others point out that there is little evidence that mixing is linked to crime and suggest that other factors (such as better policing and higher levels of investment) may be more important (see Atkinson, 2005; Kennedy, 1985; Nyden, 1998). Finally, the contention that socially-mixed environments give poor people access to social capital is also contested. Briggs (1998), for example, remarks that the mere fact of living close to a middle-class family does not automatically give a young man or woman any more social leverage (by which he means the ability to pull strings and use social contacts to get ahead).

These results, taken as a whole, reiterate the importance of differentiating and qualifying the goals of – and the likely benefits from – mixed tenure experiments, but they do not invalidate or reject social mixing altogether. Some researchers have taken the critique of the social mix principle one step further and contested the very idea that neighbourhood effects (linking specific neighbourhood conditions such as income mix to specific outcomes in individuals) can be observed (see Galster and Zobel, 1998). Paul Cheshire, of the London School of Economics, goes as far as to argue that creating mixed neighbourhoods treats a mere symptom of poverty, and not one of its causes as it is our socio-economic status which determines where we live, and not the other way around (Cheshire, 2007). In spite of these and other similar claims, however, there are reasons to believe that mixing in fact *does* make a difference at both of the site and neighbourhood levels. Indeed, Crane (1991), Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) and other authors have suggested that neighbourhood effects in fact appear when a certain threshold of

“deprivation” is crossed or when a critical mass of underprivileged residents is reached. Thus, it may be the case that neighbourhood effects manifest themselves only negatively and only when disadvantage is highly concentrated in particular localities. This, in turn, suggests that some form of social mixing in housing may after all be desirable.

This “concentration” thesis (also referred to as the “clustering of disadvantage”) is largely supported by the research in this area, which rejects the notion that poverty alone makes neighbourhood disadvantage. First, there is growing evidence that housing is a socio-economic determinant of health (Dunn et al., 2003) and that living in a deprived environment negatively affects a number of social and human development outcomes, such as self-efficacy, health, education, criminal record, etc., over and above the influence of socio-economic status (Acevedo-Garcia 2000; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Diez-Roux et al., 2001; Waitzman and Smith, 1998). There is also evidence that people living in deprived areas have lower expectations and lower chances of starting a job as well as lower chances of leaving poverty, even when controlling for personal characteristics (Buck, 2001). In other words, increasing the degree of mixing may have little or no direct effect on immediate social outcomes for poor residents, but it may effectively prevent the negative effects of segregation (Dansereau et al., 2002). Indeed, as proposed by Buck (2001), the neighbourhoods we live in affect our life-chances by making “incremental contributions” to our social capital or alternatively to our social burden; it is the cumulative effect of these contributions which makes a difference, and not any one of them in particular. In effect, it is widely accepted that no one aspect of segregation taken in isolation explains negative social outcomes; rather, it is the compounded effects of location, milieu, lack of access to services and opportunities, etc. that matter (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001). Wood (2003), who himself questions the validity of arguments made in favour of tenure diversification, also implicitly recognizes that a social mix may at the very least prevent the further ghettoization (or segregation according to race) and residualization (or tendency to house only those who have little choice in where they live) of social housing projects. For the underprivileged, then, social mixing may not be a universal “good,” but social segregation is definitely a universal “bad.” It is in this sense that the relationship between place and exclusion can be understood as bi-directional and that mixing may be seen as a precautionary measure.

Concomitantly, mixed-tenure and mixed-income projects may create new possibilities and new options for those who generally have little choice. First, scholars have proposed that a better quality and less stigmatizing living environment, which is often an direct consequence of design-for-mixing, contributes indirectly to the long-term economic and social mobility of low-income residents (see for instance Berube 2006; Piper and Turbov, 2005; Popkin et al., 2004; Salama, 1999). Another important argument in favour of social mixing within new housing developments as well as within neighbourhoods is that it ensures a diversity of options to local residents, which can in turn mitigate the effects of gentrification (Charbonneau, 2007). Social mixing, in many ways, is about creating affordances for all types of households, not only with respect to housing but also in terms of employment, transportation, leisure, and other services (Briggs, 1998). Therefore, if well-planned and well-designed, mixed-income and mixed-tenure projects can make possible new relationships, new opportunities and new possibilities. Furthermore, by changing negative perceptions associated with traditional social housing estates, mixed projects may elevate stigmatized areas to “relatively unremarkable normality” (Allen et al., 2005), which may in itself be a signal of success both in terms of inclusionary policy and in

terms of the aspirations of residents to achieve this kind of “normality.” Mixing policies may be hypocritical, as suggested by several authors, but they may still do more good than bad. Pendakur summarizes this conundrum quite well when he writes that “social mix is a design guideline – a way of creating social housing that is politically acceptable to local residents, who neither want nor understand social housing” but that it is nevertheless a policy “well-worth pursuing, because its use can increase the quality of life of a wide range of household groups” (1987: 114).

Finally, as hinted to earlier, income mixing may also support financial sustainability; as reported by the CHRA, “non-profit projects established before 1986 have a greater probability of operating viability because they have a higher level of income mixing and more units close to market rent. The market (or low end of market) rental revenues help to sustain their economic viability.” (CHRA, 2006: 4) In fact, depending on the strength of the housing market, the implicit subsidization of mixed-income initiatives may work to make entire projects feasible (Brophy and Smith, 1997). Changing the mix of revenues is therefore a possible solution to financial unsustainability, albeit one that requires a substantial portion of new units to be at market-rate. As for the argument that mixed-income projects slow down development in an area, it does not seem to hold up against reality; despite the common belief that mixed-income housing brings down surrounding property values, there is no evidence that this is indeed the case (ULI, 2003: 19). Social inclusion for financial sustainability, however, is not the main focus of this research.

In summary, social mixing is not a panacea nor a simple cure as it does not ipso facto *solve* the problems associated with segregation and exclusion. Furthermore, the real motivations behind social mixing may not be as altruistic as they appear. However, social mixing is important as a both a precautionary measure and as a way to raise the overall quality of new social housing and create new possibilities for social housing tenants. Mixing may not cure social exclusion, but the bulk of the evidence suggests that it can both prevent it and afford ways out of it.

### **3.1.3 How Do Goals and Objectives for Social Mixing Become Policy?**

Even if it can be agreed that some kind of social mixing is beneficial, the issue is yet far from resolved. In effect, there exist many different types of policies, with varying goals and objectives which tend to vary from place to place. Although it is not the principal aim of this research to compare and contrast the different “mixing” policies in place in North America and Europe, it is still important to outline the main approaches to “planned” social mixing as well as their implications. Dansereau (2003), in a piece on “Social Mix as Public Policy and Private Experience,” describes the main French, British and American “mixing” initiatives of the last three decades. Among the approaches presented, four main ones can be discerned.

**Poverty dispersal** usually takes the form of vouchers or housing benefits, which are distributed to households living in areas of concentrated poverty to allow them to move out from the neighbourhoods “that hold them back.” It is allegedly the growing concerns over the dangers of concentrated poverty in early 1990s that have caused a shift in the US federal housing authorities’ policy approach away from new social housing “projects” to individualized shelter allowances giving choice to those who don’t usually have any (Dansereau, 2003). It was seen as necessary in the United States to break the so-called “cycle of poverty” and literally uproot poor

people from their milieu. As noted by Dansereau, though, this strategy might not be appropriate in the Canadian context given that segregation is much less severe than it is in the United States.

**Development and redevelopment** strategies, in contrast, attempt to work with existing projects and communities and confront social exclusion and physical separation directly. This approach generally consists in inserting a new project in the existing urban fabric or remodeling an existing housing complex, which may involve total or partial demolition of existing buildings. Both types of projects generally include some kind of income mix (of tenure mix) to avoid concentration effects as well as new services and community facilities to both revitalize the site and connect it with the surrounding community. Some households may be displaced in the development or redevelopment process, but the main objective is generally to let those residents who want to stay to be able to do so. Among the new services and activities offered in these sites, we often find education and job-training programs, recreational facilities as well as employment opportunities designed to help low-income households become economically self-sufficient.

As was explained earlier, this research focuses mainly on recent mixed-income projects – i.e. newly developed housing complexes that include both subsidized and market-rate units – as these initiatives offer more scope for “planned” social mixing. Although the outcomes of development and re-development can be similar, the process by which they come about is likely to differ.

**Incentive-based measures**, on the one hand, attempt to make the “inclusion” of affordable and social rental units if not profitable, then at least more enticing for developers. The different “tools” that municipalities and other governments can use include financial assistance (which can effectively even out the extra cost of building social units), density bonusing, the relaxation of construction and zoning regulations, etc. A number of studies have shown that these incentives should be enough to amortize the cost of building affordable and social units (see Calavita, Grimes and Mallach, 1997), however it has also been noted by researchers that the paperwork and bureaucratic hurdles often discourage small developers from even trying (Tomalty, Hercz and Spurr, 2000). Thus, the efficacy of these incentive-based programs depends largely on their ease of use from the developers’ point of view.

**Inclusionary zoning and other coercive measures**, on the other hand, attempt to establish a minimum requirement of “affordable” or “social” units in housing developments of a certain size. These measures usually impose a number of constraints (usually the construction of a set proportion of affordable housing units) to ensure that private developers will contribute to the provision of housing for low and moderate income earners. There are three main problems with measures like this. First of all, they are not likely to work unless they are accompanied by other incentive-based measures (Dansereau, 2002a); in those cases where the inclusion of a given percentage of units is only required in developments of a certain size and where there are no other incentives, developers will likely sidestep the obligation by keeping developments smaller. Second, following the first point, the effectiveness of inclusionary zoning depends largely on the strength of the market; when economic conditions are favorable for developers, they might develop affordable units regardless of inclusionary “obligations” (Calavita, Grimes and Mallach, 1997; Cooper, 2007), but when they are not, they will most likely avoid them. Lastly, most

inclusionary zoning measures do not actually ensure an income mix at the site level, as they usually allow developers to produce their required “share” of social units off-site. It follows that these kinds of measure may or may not support the goal of social mixing as defined in this research.

In sum, it is difficult to say which policy approach is more efficient and effective, as it really depends on the kind of incentive proposed, their ease-of-use, the specific economic context and the strength of the real estate market in a particular place at a particular time. However, it is certainly the case that both approaches have been tried in Canadian cities and that both have had successful outcomes. What is less clear is the way in which housing providers, planners and development consultants can influence the physical outcome of a project.

### **3.1.4 How Can Planning and Design Practices Support the Goal of Social Mixing in New Housing Projects?**

“[...] the aversion to designing for diversity should be addressed by proclaiming what the limitations of design are – having a clearer sense of what can or cannot be accomplished – but not foregoing the idea that physical design has a legitimate role to play in enabling diversity. The appropriate question for planners is not whether the built environment *creates* diversity, but whether diversity thrives better, or can be sustained longer, under certain physical conditions that planners may have some control over.” (Talen, 2006: 242)

The overall goal of social mixing in housing is not uncontroversial, but it is nevertheless generally accepted as a worthy policy objective. In turn, different policy approaches to ensure the inclusion of affordable and social units have been tested and validated, and it is clear that certain policies work better in certain contexts. “Planned” social mixing, in short, has been talked about, regulated and implemented. However, the mere completion of a given mixed-income project does not guarantee that the mix will coalesce. In fact, there is ample evidence that not all mixes are equally as effective, and that the site planning and design of a project may make the difference between success and failure. Indeed, as concluded by the United Nations Economic commission for Europe, “adequate spatial planning and architectural design contribute greatly to the sustainability of social housing and are important for successful social housing policy.” (UNECE, 2003 p.150). Moreover, it is becoming more and more obvious that we can attract and retain both moderate and higher income tenants “through high quality management, improving neighbourhood conditions and services, and diversifying the options open to them” (Hills, 2007: 8/23).

The HOPE VI program in the United States exemplifies the importance of careful planning in design in the development and redevelopment of mixed-income housing complexes. As summarized by Dansereau (2002b), a preliminary review of HOPE VI projects suggests that successful mixed-income developments must be well located and excellent in their design and management if they are to attract and retain tenants who have location choices. In fact, some researchers have argued that the design of mixed-income projects (and of social housing in general) may actually be more important for the satisfaction of tenants than mixing per se (Sarkissian, 1986). Speaking in economic terms, Tiesdell suggests that good design can first enhance positive externalities and second mitigate or even eliminate negative externalities

imposed by the site itself (Tiesdell, 2004). In other words, good design can enable providers to make more with less.

Therefore, those involved in social housing development, insofar as they are involved in site planning, design and other aspects of provision, have an important role to play in making mixing work. Which brings us to the core of the issue: what characteristics make for a high-quality and sustainable living environment and how can housing practitioners achieve this? What aspects of the design of a mixed project are likely to enhance the positive attributes of a site and reduce or eliminate the negative ones? Research in this area is not unanimous, but the main findings do tend to converge, allowing us to highlight certain general trends. This following section reviews and synthesizes the recurrent principles and guidelines for social mixing that are found in the literature.

**First, successful design outcomes usually come out of transparent and inclusive design processes.** Indeed, there is evidence that a degree of community involvement throughout the planning and design process may both lead to better design outcomes and facilitate the realization of the project by reducing opportunities for friction (Barrett, 2007). As argued by Sarkissian (1986) and Dansereau (2002a), the realization of a new mixed-income project will likely seem more acceptable to its neighbours if they were involved and informed from the start. According to Barrett, who reviewed a number of recent mixed-income projects, the involvement of non-designers “experts” (such as housing researchers, sociologists, social workers, etc. ) may also enrich the planning and design of socially-mixed developments if given the opportunity to contribute. Although this first guideline has more to do with the “how” than the “what,” there is evidence that they are in fact closely linked.

**Second, mixing should aim at both income groups and household types if social mixing is to be sustainable;** in other words, it is not enough to offer only one unit type at different rates (market and non-market) as it cannot possibly cater to the needs of an evolving and ageing population, which is a necessary condition if we aim to afford residents the possibility of staying in the same community throughout their life course. Therefore, as hinted to earlier, it is important that social providers offer a “varied menu” (Hills, 2007: 193) in terms of unit type, as another way of ensuring a social mix is to provide housing of different standards (number of rooms, floor area, access to a backyard, etc. ) that respond to the housing need of different households.

**Third, a certain measure of homogeneity is important within each component of a mixed-income project.** Indeed, it has been suggested that a mix of units is necessary, but that each project should “pick its battle” and focus on two or three aspects of mixing at a time (Sarkissian, 1986). This idea was first proposed by Gans, who found in his classic study titled “The Balanced Community: Homogeneity or Heterogeneity in Residential Areas?” (1961) that a mixing of all age and class groups is likely to produce at best a polite but cool social climate, where instances of conflict are as probable as those of co-operation. Gans’ studies are almost a half-century old, but his insights are largely confirmed by more recent findings. For instance, Phillip Nyden, Michael Maly and John Lukehart (1997) have examined a number of stable, racially-diverse neighbourhoods throughout the United States and found, among other things, that heterogeneity at the neighbourhood level combined with small concentrations of ethnically-

homogenous areas (in the order of one or more city blocks) supported stable yet diverse communities. In the same line of argument, a number of researchers have examined the successes and failures of residential mixes and concluded that spatial proximity does not necessarily reduce social distance (Briggs, 1998; Chamboderon and Lemaire, 1970; Dansereau, 2002b; Pinçon, 1981). According to these authors, it is preferable to avoid mixing lifestyles, household types and income lifestyles all in the same project. Sarkissian (1986), for instance, suggests that it might be perilous to mix bachelors and families of both moderate and low income. “Planned” social mixing, therefore, should afford and support both intra- and cross-status interaction.

**Fourth, shared spaces within projects should be both easily legible and defensible.** Vischer, in the conclusion of his review piece on False Creek (1984), asserts that “the design of an environmental context for a successful social mix involves a delicate balance between privacy and community, a balance that the design of open space can successfully mediate.” However, it is not sufficient to merely provide “shared open space” to mediate between privacy and community. In effect, although perceived social diversity (or social mix) does not significantly increase or decrease feelings of insecurity (except for elderly residents – see Kennedy and Silverman, 1985), it is still important to bring the environment of a project under the control of its residents, both for safety reasons as well as for the collective appropriation and monitoring of these spaces (Schaffhauser, 2005). This, in turn, is said to allow for the well-functioning of the community (as implied by Rosenbaum et al., 1998) and the fostering of a sense of collective responsibility (as argued by Talen, 2006). With that goal in mind, the designer of a project should aim to establish a clear “hierarchy of spaces,” wherein public, semi-public and private open spaces are clearly delineated (Dansereau, 2002a). This “hierarchy,” in turn, serves both to clarify who belongs where and to protect those who are vulnerable, such as the elderly and young children (Sarkissian, 1986). Above all, this demarcation between the public, semi-public and private realms makes it possible for each household to preserve a degree of intimacy, which is also seen as a prerequisite for the success of mixing initiatives (Dansereau, 2002b). This suggestion that different open spaces should be demarcated differently should be not be understood as prescriptive or deterministic, however; as explained earlier, the design of public space only creates affordances and limitations and does not determine. Other design aspects that may facilitate or hinder the self-affirmation of residents and their appropriation of public and shared spaces include the relation of buildings to open spaces and the street, the definition of boundaries, entries and exits, the use of vegetation, the landscaping and maintenance of shared spaces and the ease of movement within the site (Schaffhauser, 2005: 90).

**Fifth, new projects must be integrated as much as possible with social, commercial and other services.** Nyden and colleagues (1997) found that institutions and commercial areas, which they termed “social seams,” often acted as the social cement of neighbourhoods. If this is in fact the case, then the provision of (or accessibility to) communal services should not be seen as an “aside,” but as an integral part of physical design (UNECE, 2003). Indeed, if one of the goals of social mixing is to allow for upward mobility, then easy access to services and opportunities must be a priority (Brophy and Smith, 1997). If these services are not offered on-site, then they should be within walking distance because “the physical, shared resources of a place – what kind and how they are integrated, designed and located – can be looked at as a neighbourhood’s “structural strength” (as described by Ellen, 2000), which might help create cross-status ties and

provide social leverage to low-income residents. For that to be possible, though, the services offered should not target one group only, and should attract a mix of residents (Sarkissian, 1986). This, of course, might sometimes lead to a “chicken or egg” situation, whereby prospective tenants might wait for services to move somewhere and the providers of these services might wait for there to be sufficient demand to offer them. If the project manager is willing to share some of the risk, however, it might be possible to achieve both housing and the provision of services at the same time.

**Sixth, in continuity with the previous point, the location of new mixed-income projects should aim both to attract a diversity of tenants and increase the diversity of the area.** The location of socially-mixed housing projects is crucial, as housing providers who develop mixed-income housing may not be able to attract middle-class residents if all their projects are located in deprived areas (which was the case with community development corporations in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, as reported by Dreier and Hulchanski, 1993). At the same time, a project will likely be more successful if it contributes to make an area more – rather than less – diverse (Charbonneau, 2007) and if it can serve as a “crossroads” of sorts (Dansereau, 2002b). Arguably, the location of any social housing development within a given urban area or neighbourhood is important, but this is especially true of mixed-income housing projects as they must hold the potential to attract both low and moderate income tenants and/or buyers (Brophy and Smith, 1997), to retain them and to “enrich” the surrounding community. There are therefore two important considerations with respect to the location of mixed-tenure housing: on the one hand, it is important to choose an area that can attract tenants of different income groups; on the other hand, any new mixed development should aim to contribute to the overall diversity of a neighbourhood so that a location might remain desirable over time. These objectives are sometimes in contradiction, but they can usually be reconciled.

**Finally, as alluded to earlier, the design of new mixed-income projects should be contextual, rich and uniform.** First, evidence suggests that the quality and richness of design contributes significantly and independently to the satisfaction of project residents (Sarkissian, 1986; Dansereau, 2002a). Second, planning and design may contribute to the long-term viability of social-housing by reducing or completely avoiding stigmatization if the site plan is continuous with the existing fabric and the architecture of the project “contextual” (Briggs 1998; Dansereau, 2003; Rosenbaum, 1998; Sarkissian, 1986; Tiesdell, 2004). Indeed, there is now general agreement that social housing developments should not be perceived as separate or self-containing, and that they should be embedded architecturally to their surroundings; likewise, the individual components of a project should not be distinguishable, or at the very least, it should be not be obvious which units are subsidized and which ones are not. The location and site planning of social housing complexes can also favour the “physical integration” of the part to the whole by aligning new streets, if any, with the existing grid and by orienting building to the street. This uniformity in design serves first and foremost the residents of a project, but it is also important from the perspective of private developers; indeed, as pointed out by Tiesdell (2006) and Brophy and Smith (1997), the market-rate units will be easier to sell and/or rent if the “social component” is not obviously different. It follows then that the higher costs incurred because of better design can actually be seen an investment and not merely as an expenditure (Rosenbaum, 1998).



In summary, those involved in the planning and design of mixed-income housing can enhance the overall quality of the living environment and facilitate social integration by

1. involving community members and non-designers in the design process;
2. offering a variety of housing options;
3. planning for a degree of homogeneity within components of the project;
4. avoiding forced interaction while affording social contact;
5. providing or ensuring the proximity of services;
6. choosing a location that is both desirable and relatively unmixed; and
7. including high-quality design features in the project.

It follows, therefore, that housing practitioners can and do affect the outcome of social mixing practices.

It is perhaps important to clarify, before advancing any further, the purported role of design in social housing projects more generally. This author does not intend to diminish the importance of design in unmixed social housing projects; in fact, many if not all of the design principles enunciated above may very well apply to social housing in general. However, it is proposed here that the sustainability and viability of socially-mixed projects is more design-sensitive than that of other projects, and therefore that special attention should be given to planning and design in those cases where a project comprises different social components. Simply put, mixed projects are more complex, and as a result require more sophisticated design solutions.

### **3.1.5 What Aspects of Mixed-Income Projects Are Likely to be Outside the Control of Planners and Designers?**

Despite general agreement on the previous points, there are three important issues regarding the planning, design and implementation of mixed-income initiatives that are far from resolved. These important points of divergence may as a result introduce a degree of variability in projects that providers, consultants and so on have very little control over. To understand both the possibilities and limits and planning and design, it is important to consider these issues briefly.

1) The first of these issues concerns *the exact “mix” of subsidized and market-rate units within a project*; some researchers have suggested that too high a proportion of subsidized units in a project (more than 20% or more than 35%, depending on the source) might jeopardize the marketability of higher priced units, thereby calling into question the financial viability of the project itself (Brophy and Smith, 1997; Tiesdell, 2004). However, social mixing is not an exact science, and the exact mix of a project is often determined by ideological, financial, or political imperatives, and rarely by practical considerations. First, housing managers often want to achieve a social “balance,” but as pointed out by Goodchild and Cole (2001), the very notion of “social balance” is somewhat contradictory as it may be necessary to limit the entry of low-income tenants to maintain the so-called “equilibrium” of a project. Thus, in the name of combating social exclusion, managers might actually have to exclude certain types of tenants from certain projects. Which brings us to the second part of this issue: above and beyond the

decision to include a given proportion of subsidized and market-rate units, there remains the problem of deciding what proportion of subsidized units will be RGI, BMR, and/or affordable for sale. Some researchers have argued that it is easier to mix if there less social distance (Rosenbaum et al., 1998), which would suggest mixing income groups that are relatively close, but others say the opposite (Pinçon, in Dansereau, 2003). Perhaps, as suggested by Brophy and Smith (1997), is it desirable to include a moderate-income tier between the high and low income groups to deemphasize extremes. In any case, the issue stands unresolved; what we do know, however, is that we need a critical mass of higher-income tenants both for financial and social sustainability reasons, and that this proportion may very well vary according to market strength, regulatory controls, eligibility criteria and the availability of funding.

2) The second issue has to do with the *physical integration or separation of units of different types* (and therefore of people of different groups). Without going into much detail, one side of the segregation-integration debate is practical to an extreme, whereas the other side tends to be ideological to the same extreme. The first “camp” proposes separate homogeneous micro-communities within mixed neighbourhoods, arguing that projects will be more financially viable and communities more socially stable if market-rate units are separate from social units (whether or not buildings are the same architecturally), whereas the other camp vouches for total integration, with social and market-rate units “sprinkled” randomly in the different parts of a project and completely indistinguishable from one another. Research on this topic, however, supports neither one of these views completely.

In fact, the Yonkers experiment shows that it is not sufficient to simply move underprivileged project residents to another project in a higher-income neighbourhood; mixing at the neighbourhood scale is not effective if there still is segregation at the site level (Briggs, 1998), as we thereby maintain existing social support, but provide no additional social leverage. Following this same line of argument, salt-and-pepper mixing (where low-income households are dispersed throughout a project or neighbourhood) is also likely to fail as it might provide more social leverage, but almost certainly at the cost of social support, especially if the dispersed households are no longer part of any housing “complex” (Brophy and Smith, 1997). Clearly, both complete integration and complete segregation are problematic. There are scholars who are somewhere between these extremes and argue for a compromise between separate projects and complete integration. Briggs (1998), for example, suggests that “it is quite possible that some middle ground between individual dispersion and large-enclave concentration – six to eight units in a microarea, say – would balance the support and leverage equation” (p. 212). This view is shared by a number of other scholars (see Dansereau, 2002a; 2002b, 2003; Nyden et al., 1997; Sarkissian, 1986), but it is difficult to say where the bulk of the evidence lies.

However, one could argue, it makes no difference what the literature says on the subject because planners, development consultants and housing providers often have little say in the matter. Indeed, the level of integration or segregation is sometimes simply dictated by the market. First, the “need for segregation” from the developers’ perspective varies greatly depending on the strength of the market, as their main concern is the end-value of the market-rate units and not the integration or segregation of units per se. Consequently, they tend to “naturally” place subsidized units further away from amenities, and closer to disamenities, as the price of affordable units is less location-sensitive. Concomitantly, the proportion of subsidized units and

the value-gap between the different unit types may also influence the developer's design strategy; if there is a high proportion of subsidized units, the developer is less likely to integrate them spatially. Likewise, if the value gap between unit types is significant, it becomes more difficult not to distinguish between cheaper and more expensive units (Tiesdell, 2004). This is not to say, however, that private developers prefer to segregate unit types; in fact, it is better for them not to draw attention to the fact that there are social units in their projects. But as explained above, it is often the specifics of the project and the economic context that dictate the level of integration when social housing development is in the hands of the private sector (i.e. in situations where private developers are required to include social units in their projects).

3) This, then, brings us to a third design issue that often evades policy-makers and planners, but which they may have some control over: *who is responsible for building which units and which components of the project*. A mixed-income project may be imagined and talked about as a coherent entity, but it will most certainly look different depending on whether it was built by a single developer (that is, as a single contract) and whether this developer was private, public or non-profit. As remarked by Tiesdell (2004), the profit and non-profit components of a project are likely to differ significantly if they are built separately, as for-profit and non-profit developers think differently and prioritize different things (e. g., private developers are likely to invest in things that can be seen and will therefore increase the market-value of a unit, whereas non-profit developers are more likely to invest in features that will reduce long-term maintenance cost). In contrast, a project is likely to be more visually integrated if it is built by one developer, simply because it is cheaper to have one design repeated many times than two or three different designs.

In summary, although we do know what makes mixing work, there are important decisions in the design process that are not typically based on “best practices” nor on empirical evidence, but that are dictated instead by other concerns. Therefore, housing providers, development consultants and the other players involved in making socially-mixed projects happen certainly have an important role to play, but it is important to keep in mind that they often have little influence on the exact social mix, level of integration and architectural uniformity (or lack thereof) of a project. Often, the policy and economic context weighs equally or more than the project's intent.

### **3.2 Social Mixing in Practice: The Canadian Experience**

After having defined the important terms of the research, reviewed the literature on social mixing, highlighted those design guidelines and principles which are likely to produce a successful physical outcome, it is important to look more specifically at the Canadian experience with social mixing. The following section first provides a brief overview of the history of “planned” social mixing in Canada as well as a short description of three important socially-mixed projects that were realized in the late 70s and early 80s, and then outlines the different roles played by the different players involved in today's context.

### **3.2.1 A Brief History of Social Mixing in Canada**

#### From Projects to Neighbourhoods

Canada as a nation is becoming ever more diverse, and this ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity is most starkly evident in our cities. Yet, as argued by Emily Talen (2006) who writes about the United States, simply because we live in the era of multiculturalism does not mean that our neighbourhoods are necessarily more diverse. Arguably, the observations she makes are not directly or fully applicable to Canada; after all, major urban centres in the United States comprise many more areas of concentrated poverty than do their Canadian counterparts. Nevertheless, the major trends with respect to “diversification” and “homogenization” are the same: there is more and more diversity in aggregate terms, but more and more concentration of poverty in specific localities (CHRA, 2004). Hence, our suburbs may have a higher concentration of low-income and minority residents, but that is not to say that we are integrating people in meaningful ways. As Briggs so eloquently put it, cities of the developed world are more diverse than ever before, but “it is not the fact of containment that changed significantly, just the shape of the container” (Briggs, 2004, cited in Talen, 2006: 235).

In the face of these changes, social mixing practices have slowly but surely become integrated into the official policy toolbox of Canadian municipalities. But how have these policies come to be? And how were they first applied? As pointed out by Rose, the Canadian government has never formally presented the fundamental goals of its housing policies and has instead issued new policy statements with each new or altered piece of legislation or program (1980). As a result, there was never a single, coherent Canadian housing policy, let alone a nation-wide “mixing” or “inclusionary” strategy. But social mixing did have its “golden age.” In the 1950s and 1960s, social housing was mainly provided and managed by public housing authorities, funded by senior-level governments and targeted strictly at low-income households. However, the wind of housing policy changed in the early 70s, and so did the mix of tenants in social housing projects. As in the United States and England, large-scale projects in Canada with high concentrations of low-income tenants started to decline in the 1960s, which led to the stigmatization and labelling of these projects as “ghettos” (Van Dyk, 1995). However, unlike US Federal Housing authorities, which turned to housing subsidies and the private sector as an alternative, the Canadian government reformed the provision of social housing and created a “third” housing sector, comprised of small-scale and community-based non-profit and co-op associations, which was to be an alternative to both the state and the market (Hulchanski and Dreier, 1993). Concomitantly, the 1973 amendment to the National Housing Act (NHA) implicitly called for the inclusion of a broader range of income levels within projects; indeed, “upward” social inclusion was seen as a way to avoid repeating the same problems that had developed in large-scale “projects” in previous decades. This change in policy stance did not come about in and of itself, however. As reported by Pendakur (1987), it is the idea that housing choice is a right, and not a privilege – which was proposed by the Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Development in the 1969 Hellyer report – that paved the way for the creation of non-stigmatized and socially-mixed housing. The Trudeau government at first rejected the recommendations of the Hellyer report altogether, but after the 1972 elections the Liberal government was forced to align with the New Democratic Party to stay in power, which led to the 1973 amendments. Thus, between 1973 and 1985, social mixing officially became part of housing policy, and the eligibility criteria for social housing were relaxed so that projects would

“reflect” the full range of incomes found in the broader society. As Van Dyk put it, the projects of this era were of a different nature; “they were to be projects in which the poor could live – not projects for poor people” (1995: 819).

### Early Experiments in Social Mixing

This period saw the realization of several important mixed-income housing initiatives, which were not small-scale nor community-based, but which were not “projects” either in the sense that they were designed specifically not to replicate the much decried tower blocks of the previous decades. As described by Hulchanski, these new large-scale complexes were “neighbourhoods, not projects” (1984: 6). Three of these projects are particularly interesting in the context of this research as they were the first large-scale mixed projects to be realized in Canada, were created virtually from scratch and as a result became important reference points for later “mixing” initiatives; indeed, False Creek in Vancouver, St. Lawrence in Toronto and Angus Yards in Montreal were social experiments as much as they were planning innovations. All three projects broke with the traditional pattern of urban redevelopment in Canada before 1980, which usually happened site-by-site and was largely market-driven, by taking under-utilized industrial areas and transforming them completely to create residential districts where none existed before. They were also innovative in that they all aimed to create complete communities with a number of shared collective amenities and all included 50% or more units with two or more bedrooms.

There are also important differences between them. For instance, the range of tenure types in the Angus project is approximately 20% non-profit housing co-operatives, 20% other non-profit rentals (including 12% of public housing) and 60% private rental and ownership housing units. In both St. Lawrence and False Creek, in contrast, the mix was approximately 25% non-profit co-operatives, 30% non-profit rentals and only 45% private rental and ownership units. The origin of – or impetus for – each project is also somewhat distinct. The Angus neighbourhood was built on land formerly occupied by a railway material repair plant owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) and first proposed by the Marathon corporation, the real estate development arm of the CP. In contrast, the redevelopments of False Creek and St. Lawrence were spearheaded by the municipalities of Vancouver and Toronto and each involved a coalition involving a variety of political, community and private actors (Dansereau, 2003). Furthermore, whereas the social component of the Angus Yards project was pushed by community groups and the opposition party at City Hall, the two other projects were initiated by newly elected reform councils. However, although both St. Lawrence and False Creek were initiated by elected representatives, the former “resulted from a municipal housing policy in search of building sites” whereas the latter “resulted from a parcel of municipally owned land in search of a land use policy” (Hulchanski, 1984: 11). Finally, the design process that led to the concrete plan for each project also varied significantly from one case to the other: for the redevelopment of False Creek, the City (both members of council and city planners) first decided upon a conceptual land-use plan and then decided to conduct a limited design competition to obtain a more detailed development plan. For the Angus project, in contrast, the City and Provincial Government (who eventually bought the land from the Canadian Pacific) mandated a professor at Université de Montréal to come up with a conceptual plan in consultation with local community groups and other local actors, and then mandated a private firm to come up with the final plan. In the case of the St. Lawrence neighbourhood, finally, a great number of professionals, elected officials,

community groups and outside consultants participated in the design process, but the project was municipally directed, planned and developed throughout.

Despite these notable differences, though, the outcome in each case is similar: a large-scale housing development comprising different types of subsidized and affordable options as well as a range of market-rate units. This suggests that there are several “paths” to the realization of successful mixed-income projects. Indeed, each one of them succeeded in “breaking” with the North American urban renewal tradition as they have effectively become neighbourhoods, and not projects. But how did they fare otherwise? Did physical integration lead to social integration, as suggested by Hulchanski in his early review of St. Lawrence and False Creek? Or did social distance increase as a consequence of spatial proximity? And more importantly, what lessons did we learn from these audacious experiments?

According to a post-occupation study conducted by Dansereau (reported in a conference paper in 2003), the residents of the Angus neighbourhood “seem [...] to have experienced in a rather positive way the realities of social mix” (p. 16) and also appear to have appropriated the shared open spaces created as part of the redevelopment scheme. For this success she cites three main reasons: the fact that community groups and co-operative associations had to negotiate with the City and the government, which created solid bonds among future residents; the fact that social differences are not extreme, that the architecture of different unit types is similar and that tenure forms and income groups change rather gradually within the neighbourhood; and finally, the fact that the project was medium to low density and that the many open spaces effectively served as buffers, which allowed different groups “to find spatial “niches” which they can recognize as their own and in which they can express themselves” (p. 17). Another important point that is highlighted by Dansereau is the fact that the design of Angus did not intend to foster visual and social contacts between residents, which she considers to be one of the factors of its success.

In False Creek, however, the site plan did make provisions for visual and social contact between residents of different social groups; in fact, it was stated in the winning submission of the design competition for the site that “all buildings should be designed as a complementary part” (in Hulchanski, 1984: 149) of the open spaces they relate to, which resulted in doughnut shaped housing clusters with subsidized and market-rate units facing one another. Thus, although False Creek did break with past “projects” in a number of ways, it retained the idea of buildings facing away from the street, which may have contributed to the mitigated reviews it received. Indeed, Vischer made the argument in an early review of the project (1984) that there would be more tolerance on the part of each group if they were not immediately adjacent. He also pointed out that child-oriented public spaces should be “shielded” from adult activities, and that the architectural quality of the different unit types should be roughly the same (which presumably it was not in False Creek).

The St. Lawrence neighbourhood, finally, is generally considered to be a success; according to Hulchanski, who reviewed the project again in 1990, the factors that most contributed to its popularity were its proximity to downtown Toronto, the fact that it was not self-contained but was designed instead as an extension of the existing urban fabric and finally the open and democratic process that led to its realization. A more recent post-occupation study, however, reveals that St. Lawrence might be suffering from its own success; indeed, “because the area is

popular and waiting lists for units are long, it has been difficult for current residents to move into larger (or smaller units) if there is a change in their household size. This has made it difficult for seniors to move into smaller units when their children move out or for couples to find larger spaces if their families expand” (Regent Park Collaborative Team, 2003: 10). Among the few other weaknesses of the project cited by residents in this study, we find the lack of recreational space for children and seniors and the high turnover rate in condominium units, which might have threatened the stability of the area according to some.

By and large, as confirmed by these studies, all three projects have achieved some degree of success, but each project also had its flaws. Taken together, these strengths and weaknesses offer important lessons for the further realization of socially mixed projects:

- the site planning of the project is important, and it must facilitate the integration of the new buildings to the existing fabric;
- the provision of collective amenities is also important, but it must not force interaction nor leave open spaces unprotected;
- the process of getting from conception to inception is just as important as the physical outcome as it allows future residents to appropriate their living environment even before it is built;
- finally, it is important to plan for all residents and take into consideration the varying needs of children, teenagers, adults and seniors.

Although some of these lessons apply to large projects more than to smaller ones, the projects themselves have become important benchmarks against which new mixed developments of all kinds can be measured.

### The Retrenchment of Federal Funding and the Post-Program Era

As alluded to above, False Creek, St. Lawrence and Angus were largely made possible by the political and financial context of the mid to late 70s and early 80s; in effect, it is the combination of the new regulatory flexibility after 1973 and renewed financial commitment on the part of the federal government that made these and other developments possible. By the early eighties, however, there was already less money available for socially-mixed developments, which generally took the form of public or private non-profit ventures with a high degree of public subsidy (Pendakur, 1987). In 1985, the newly elected Conservative government simply put an end to the practice of income mixing as it became clear that the no-income-ceiling policy was neither financially sustainable nor politically acceptable. Although consecutive Conservative governments from 1984 to 1993 did commit to the supply-oriented, third sector approach laid out in the 1973 legislation, they nevertheless shifted the focus of housing policy “away from the social mix concept to one of targeting resources to households in need” (Van Dyk, 1995: 819). As a result, income mixing in federally-funded projects did continue, but only within those households unable to afford private accommodation without having to pay more than 30% of their income (CMHC, 1985). In fact, broader income-mixing was at first actively discouraged by CMHC under the new Conservative policy framework. Therefore, although federal housing programs did continue until 1993, federal programs encouraging income mixing effectively stopped in 1985. As far as developing socially mixed project is concerned, the post-program era had begun.

After 1985, the provinces did have the option of continuing the practice of income mixing, but the federal government would only cost-share in targeted units, thus putting the burden of mixing onto lower level governments. At the time, only Ontario persisted with the inclusion of different tenure types in new housing projects, usually with a 60/40 ratio of subsidized to market-rate units. By and large, however, social mixing as a goal of social housing became less and less of a priority in the 1990s and basically disappeared from the policy agenda as each provincial government struggled to fill the gap left open by the withdrawal of federal funding. However, this abandonment of social mix as an official policy objective did not spell the end of income mixing *in practice*. Although there have been fewer mixed projects built in the 1990s than in the previous two decades, the inclusion of market-rate units in housing projects (or the inclusion of subsidized units in private for-profit real estate developments) was relatively common during this period (Ward, 2007). The impetus for mixing and the scale of projects, however, were (and still are) different from what they were in the 1970s and 80s. For one thing, mixing at the scale of neighbourhoods (as in False Creek or St. Lawrence) has now become much more difficult to do. Indeed, funding is now scarcer, projects are smaller and mixing in most cases is no longer strictly ideologically obligatory but also financially essential.

In Ontario, income mixing at the project level became a matter of necessity, as subsidies were basically nonexistent between 1995 and 2002 and are since limited to one-time start-up grants, which do not help cover operating costs or capital reinvestment costs. Furthermore, no new RGI units were created since the federal transfer of responsibility in 1993. Thus, many non-profit social housing providers had no choice but to play the game of private development and include a market-rate component in every development to make new projects financially sustainable (Boucher, 2007). These new projects, however, have usually been limited to one building and did not usually provide a range of unit types nor collective or shared amenities; hence, they were mixed only in the sense that they offered units at a range of prices. The downloading of responsibilities from the province to the municipalities in Ontario had the effect of both further restricting the means of social housing providers and giving municipalities more leeway in the provision of affordable housing. The results, as far as social inclusion goes, are mixed; for example, the inclusionary zoning measures adopted in Toronto did facilitate the creation of new affordable housing units, but they impacted the “social mix” at the neighbourhood level more than at the site level as developers generally build their required share of social or affordable units off site (Cooper, 2007). Local governments in the province have therefore both more leverage (by virtue of their newfound independence) and less (because they now often have to fund new projects themselves) than they did in earlier decades.

In Quebec, funding for social and affordable housing was interrupted only briefly after 1993, but the new provincial program that came to replace the previous federal programs was mainly directed at the acquisition and renovation of existing buildings. As a result, very few new projects were built from the ground up during the 1990s and those buildings converted into social housing (whether housing co-operatives or non-profit housing) were generally targeted at very specific groups. Despite the fact that funding for social housing in Quebec was not completely withdrawn, then, the practice of social mixing did fade during the years following the federal transfer of responsibilities. Indeed, although there has been some social mixing at the level of individual housing co-operatives during the 1990s, it was not until the provincial program was revamped in 2001 that mixing as an objective of social housing returned to the



forefront of public policy (Gilker, 2007). The ameliorated program has allowed for the construction of new units, and as a consequence several recent projects in the province have included a market-rate or a social component (depending on whether the developer is a non-profit or for-profit housing provider). Contrary to what happened in Ontario, however, the provincial government in Quebec maintained an important role in setting funding criteria.

Given that the seat of social housing policy in Canada is no longer centralized and that both provincial and local governments, in most places, have some authority in the matter, it is difficult to point to the current “trends” in the practice of social mixing. Yet, there are two general tendencies worth noting:

- First, mixing has often become essential for the financial sustainability of new “affordable” housing, with the consequences that it is often dictated by practicality more than by policy and that newer projects generally afford no “frills.”
- Second, social “inclusion” has become bidirectional as the inclusion of social units in private for-profit real estate projects has given way in some cases to the inclusion of market-rate units in social projects. There is of course an important difference between these two “kinds” of inclusion: in one case, the developer seeks to make a profit, in the other he/she is usually trying to break even. However, as we will see, this difference may not be as remarkable nowadays as it was once made out to be.

### **3.2.2 Planning for Social Mixing: Who Does What?**

In answering this question, it is probably wise to start by asking ourselves what *can* be done to achieve a social mix in new housing projects. Clearly, it is not up to the housing provider or manager to decide on the racial and ethnic mix of a project, nor to determine the degree of sexual diversity within the tenant population. As explained earlier, the principal means of mixing available to planners, policy-makers and housing providers in Canada is to include a variety of unit and tenure types. Indeed, planning allows us to regulate the use and the form of buildings, but not their occupants; what we *can* decide to mix, therefore, are the units themselves – and not those who live in them.

However, given that many different players are involved in the elaboration, planning and design of social housing in general, and mixed-income housing in particular, and seeing as each of these players can theoretically affect the outcome, it is important to understand *who* actually does the mixing, *when* in the process each of them enters the picture, and *what* influence they actually have. For instance, although the CMHC is the main reference in Canada in terms of the design and site planning of social housing and may promote certain design strategies for mixing, its influence on actual design implementation is very limited. Indeed, the realization of mixed-income projects – and in fact, of social housing in general – is now usually decentralized and involves a great many different players, some of whom may be completely unaware of precedents and of what researchers in the housing field have published about design and mixing. It is important, therefore, to clarify who typically makes what decision(s).

In theory, there are several organizations with distinct roles and responsibilities; there are municipalities (who review development application and translate project requirements into zoning bylaws and funding eligibility criteria), housing managers (who usually administer programs, sometimes establish eligibility criteria and usually manage the public housing stock), housing providers (who actually build housing units), development consultants (who may coordinate the professionals involved and make recommendations about design, unit mix, etc. ) and architects (who interpret project objectives and design guidelines and translate them into plans). Given these “roles,” a typical project might happen like so: a housing provider puts in an application for funding with a service manager (which is itself in part funded by a municipality), or else directly with the provincial housing authority, as is often the case in Québec. In theory, again, the provider is responsible for all aspects of planning and design, as any other private developer would be, and must simply get his/her plans approved by the municipality’s planning department. In preparing these plans, the provider might hire a development consultant, who might herself subcontract other professionals. Once the plans get approved, the provider hires a general contractor who in theory follows the plan of the architect.

However, as might be expected, the predefined roles of funder, manager, provider and consultant are not always as watertight as they seem. First of all, the housing provider often becomes the manager once the project has been completed (as is the case with projects realized by the municipal housing authorities and certain non-profits such as the *Centretown Citizens’ Ottawa Corporation*). Second, the provider might actually be a minor player if the project is initiated or spearheaded either by a development consultant or a *Groupe de ressources techniques* (GRT) in Quebec; that is to say, the non-profit provider and future manager might be a newly formed co-operative association with very little experience in social housing provision, *on whose behalf* a consultant or GRT does most of the work. Third, some municipalities are much more involved than others in the actual design and site planning of the projects that they fund. Indeed, the planners involved in reviewing social housing development applications may or may not be involved in the conception phase of the project; in some cases, it is in fact the municipality who initiates the project and finds someone to build it while in others, the municipal planner only comes in at the end. Finally, all of the above players may have something to say about design, and may work closely with the architects, but they may also provide little input on design and leave it up to them. Depending on the context, each actor may play a central role in the planning and design process, or may be relegated to the task of approving the ready-made decisions of others. In practice, then, the housing provider does not make all decisions.

Indeed, non-profit social housing providers often play *a part* in the development of socially-mixed projects, but they are rarely the only players involved – even when they are the main promoters. As a result, the very definition of mixing may vary considerably from one project to another *even in the same city, under the same policy and regulatory framework*. The outcome may also vary considerably from one project to the next, depending on *who* developed *what* component. As pointed out by Tiesdell (2004) and as mentioned earlier, public, non-profit and for-profit developers tend to prioritize different aspects of design; private for-profit developers, for instance, are more attuned to what Tiesdell calls “kerb appeal.” Yet, that is not to say that non-profit providers are necessarily less sensitive to attractive design; however, it does mean that a project developed by both a non-profit and a private for-profit developer might not look like

one coherent entity. It is important, therefore, to identify the number of developers involved and the nature of their work to understand who influenced the final product in what way.

There is, finally, another set of characters who may have tremendous influence on the process and outcome of social mixing in housing: the provincial, regional and local elected representatives. Although these players are usually one step removed from the detailed planning and design of new projects, they may privilege such and such a mix of market-rate and social units and weigh in on the important decisions made by city planners and other actors in the early stages of the project. Elected representatives may also be instrumental in legitimizing a project if they publicly support an initiative that is otherwise controversial (Racette, 2007).

As we can begin to appreciate, the planning and design of mixed-income projects – and social housing more generally – is by no means straightforward. Indeed, tracing planning and design decisions back to the person or persons who were responsible is not an easy task; the final design outcome is usually a compromise between the varying priorities of different actors who have slightly divergent interests. This having been said, it is still important to ask ourselves how the physical outcome of social mixing actually comes to be. This is what we will attempt to do in Part II through each of the three case studies.

#### **4. Case Studies**

On the surface, mixed-income housing developments in one place and the next seem similar enough. However, although the principle of social mixing or inclusion is more or less the same in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal, the actual policy and design process varies greatly from one place to another (Legault, 2007). Indeed, there exist in Canada a number of different types of housing managers and providers: some private, some public; some non-profits, some for-profits; and some of which are “municipal” and some of which are not. More importantly though, these funders, managers and providers do not interact in the same way in each place; different municipalities have different ways of handling housing providers and likewise, housing providers in different places have a different history of complicity and/or conflict with local and provincial governments.

Indeed, research into the design of mixed-income projects suggests that the policy and design process leading to the realization of mixed projects is generally convoluted and involves a constant push and pull between regulations or guidelines (i.e. the municipal or master planner), and the desires, interests and tactics of individual designers (Barrett, 2007). More importantly, income mixing does not always come about in the same way; sometimes it is the result of lengthy negotiations between proponents of 100% social and 100% private, sometimes it is the main objective of a project and often it is but a way to break even (Barrett, 2007; Goulet, 2007; Boucher, 2007). Whatever the case, though, mixed-income projects are generally the result of a substantial *process*, and it is that process that we are interested in.

Preliminary findings suggest that the experiences of municipalities in the Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto regions with respect to social inclusion in housing developments are similar in some ways and very different in others. First, whereas Montreal only recently adopted an incentive-based “inclusionary strategy,” both Toronto and Ottawa have experimented with inclusionary

zoning for several years with varying degrees of success (Wilder, 2007). Indeed, there has been and continues to be widespread acceptance of the social mixing principle in Ontario. The region of Peel, although it did not enforce inclusionary zoning, is no exception to this (Ward, 2007). Second, although the provincial governments of both Quebec and Ontario have in recent years provided a substantial proportion of the capital funding for new projects, they are not equally involved. As a matter of fact, even as funding criteria are still determined by the province in Quebec, Ontarian municipalities now have almost complete control over what projects they fund. Third, although the policy and fiscal contexts of Quebec and Ontario have significantly differed over the last 15 years, the creation of new mixed-income developments in all three regions has faced tremendous obstacles.

In this context, housing practitioners in each city have had to find innovative ways to make new mixed projects happen and to devise sustainable solutions to the housing crisis. All three projects selected as case studies and described here are illustrations of this. However, it is not sufficient to investigate the *what*; we must also pay attention to the *how*. Indeed, if we are to better understand how policies translate into tangible and sustainable outcomes, we must better understand how the different players involved respond to the incentives, deal with the constraints as well as with the other players that be. This is what we aim to do next.

The following sections attempt to clarify how mixed projects come to be realized by reconstructing the “story” of three exemplary projects. Section 2.1 outlines the criteria used for assessing the physical outcome in each case, sections 2.2 to 2.4 in turn present the three case studies and section 2.5 synthesizes the three cases and highlights the important findings uncovered in their juxtaposition.

#### **4.1 Project Evaluation Criteria**

The evaluation criteria presented here were used to determine whether the chosen projects were “successful” in their design, that is to say, whether they incorporated some of the features identified earlier as conducive to sustainable social mixing. It is important to reiterate that design here is not treated as the be-all, end-all of social engineering; in fact, the approach that is implicitly advocated in this report rejects environmental determinism. Rather, as argued earlier, we start from the premise that design can and does create affordances (Lang, 1987); design does not determine, it merely enables. Thus, the criteria presented here assess the extent to which a given design outcome *affords* new possibilities, and not whether it *cures* the social ills of exclusion.

No one recipe or set of simple directives is likely to achieve good results in every case; it is important to take the context of each project into consideration. Nevertheless, based on the literature presented earlier, it is still possible to identify general affordances that are crucial factors for success. This author does not propose that these criteria are absolute, nor that a project should necessarily answer to all of these criteria to be successful. Instead, it is suggested here that these criteria be taken as design guidelines or objectives.

It is therefore the design process *in relation to* the physical outcome which is of interest to us, and not just the outcome in and of itself. This assessment of the design process may allow us, in turn, to identify those factors which facilitated good design or made it more difficult.

The following presents three main affordances, or meta-criteria, as well as a number of specific criteria under each meta-criterion in the form of questions (the answer to which should be “yes”). A successful project should allow:

### **1) Embeddedness of the Project in the Neighbourhood /Area**

- Does the project answer directly to the housing needs of local residents?
- Were local residents involved in or informed about the project throughout?
- Is the project architecturally and functionally integrated with the surrounding urban fabric?
- Is the project similar enough to nearby market-rate projects in terms of architectural quality?
- Is the project easily accessible to and from nearby services?

### **2) Possibilities for Interaction and Intimacy**

- Are there shared indoor and/or outdoor spaces?
- Are these spaces well landscaped and/or furnished and buffered from one another?
- Do tenants of different groups share open or indoor spaces?
- Do tenants of different groups have shared spaces of their own?
- Are the housing units generally protected from visual intrusion?

### **3) Defensibility in Public, Semi-Public and Private Spaces**

- Is there a clear hierarchy of public, semi-public and private spaces?
- Are shared open spaces easily accessible and visible from the street?
- Are shared open spaces within eyesight of nearby buildings?
- Is the maintenance of shared indoor and outdoor spaces planned for?
- Are open spaces broken up so as to allow small groups to congregate?

## **4.2 The Lavo – N.O.V.O. Project, Montreal, Quebec**

### **4.2.1 Context and Background**

The Lavo – N.O.V.O. project is located in the Mercier – Hochelaga - Maisonneuve borough of Montreal, a few kilometres north-east of the downtown core. The borough has a population of approximately 125 000, and is one of the least privileged areas of Montreal. Its population is comprised of 88% francophones, 39% one-person households, and only 28% homeowners (while the city as a whole has a homeownership rate of about 34%). More than 43% of tenants in the area spend more than 30% of their income on rent and 38% of households in the borough are below the low-income cut-off, as compared with 35% in the city of Montréal. Furthermore, the average household income in the borough is about 34,000\$, as compared with a City average of

40,000\$ and a Canadian average of 58,000\$ (City of Montréal, 2002). Although in relative terms the neighbourhood did not have in the early 2000s a shortage of affordable housing, many local residents were displaced as more and more rental units were taken out of the rental market and the vacancy rate decreased. Thus, Hochelaga-Maisonneuve at the time of the project's realization was suffering both from the rapid pace of gentrification and a low rate of home ownership (which translates in the low maintenance of buildings).

The Lavo project, which was developed in response to these circumstances, was the result of a long consultation and negotiation process involving the provincial government, the City of Montreal and various community groups in the area. Although the project was officially inaugurated in 2006, unofficial negotiations to relocate the Lavo chemical factory and rezone the land had started in the mid-1990s, when the need to revitalize the Ontario commercial strip and the surrounding neighbourhood came to the fore. According to several of the actors involved early on in the project, it was the provincial MP, who later became a member of the cabinet, who first mentioned the possibility of the site's transformation (Racette, 2007; Gilker, 2007). Given the high number of buildings in disrepair, boarded up or simply abandoned at the time, there was a consensus even in the early stages that the redevelopment of the site should aim both to revitalize the area as a whole as well as increase the number of decent affordable housing options in the neighbourhood.

When the City of Montreal and the provincial government agreed to acquire the land and relocate the Lavo factory in the early 2000s, most community groups were well-aware of the fact that the site would be converted to residential uses and some of them had already formulated and publicly announced their position. According to those involved in the *Instance locale* (or local consultation committee, mandated by the city to approve local social housing projects), it was clear from the start that there would be new social housing built on the site, but it had not been decided how many units would be created and what shape these units would take (Racette, 2007; Bohémier, 2007). At that time, the City, who owned the land, mandated the *Collectif en aménagement urbain Hochelaga-Maisonneuve*, a local grassroots planning organization, to conduct a public consultation with residents, merchants and other local actors as to the future of the site, while the members of the *Instance locale* tried to come to an agreement as to the best mix of social and market-rate units. In parallel to this process, the City mandated a local architecture firm to conduct a study of the site and propose a preliminary design scheme for the revitalization of the entire sector.

Once a consensus had been achieved among the actors and participants involved, the City mandated the GRT *Bâtir son quartier*, a local non-profit social housing development consultant, to propose a site plan based on the recommendations of the members of the *Instance locale* and on the design scheme chosen by the City. The GRT proposed a chequered or "salt-and-pepper" plan wherein social and market-rate units were interspersed within the site. The City asked the GRT to review the proposal and vouched for homogenous micro-areas, both to facilitate social mixing and the attribution of contracts (Davies, 2007). The GRT came up with a second proposal, in which the western block and adjacent empty lots were to have social housing (both co-op and non-profit), and the eastern block was to have market-rate units. The GRT was to be the main promoter of the project and responsible for the realization of the co-op units, whereas the local private non-profit (PNP) housing provider (the *Société d'habitation de l'est de Montréal*,

or SHAPEM) was to contract out the construction of its units to the same architect and builder as the GRT. The central City approved of the scheme, and the zoning changes and plan approvals were finally completed at the borough level (Béland, 2007). In the meantime, the City sent out a request-for-proposal for the eastern block, in which it was specified that most units should be affordable (i.e. less than 170 000\$). A condominium project was finally approved and built independently of the co-op and non-profit units, all of which were built together as one contract.

#### **4.2.2 Project Description and Evaluation**

In terms of **social embeddedness and physical integration** with its surroundings, the Lavo-NO. V. O project is exemplary. Indeed, the project was largely formulated by local community groups and social housing providers, and as a result answers more directly to the needs of local residents and to the objective of neighbourhood revitalization. Community groups, local residents, local merchants and other local actors were involved from early on, so that in the end there was little or no opposition to the zoning change. Both components of the project are architecturally well-integrated, although neither one is an exact replica of the surrounding buildings. Rather, both projects display complex architectural detailing, so that it is in fact difficult to tell which project is “social” and which is “market-rate.” Moreover, the project is within walking distance of a subway station, and located immediately south of a main street offering a range of commercial and other services. The project’s main weakness is its lack of internal cohesion. Other than their scale, the two components have little in common other than a common pathway running diagonally through the site where the railway used to be. In short, although the project’s components are unified enough to appear as different parts of the same project, they integrate much better with their surrounding than they do with one another.

As explained above, the different components of the project have little in common in terms of shared amenities and open space, which limits the **possibilities for social interaction**. Although the pathway does serve to unify the two blocks and connect them with the new public square on the main street north of the site, it does afford social interaction between residents as it was conceived primarily as a public walkway and not as a semi-private shared open space (Gagné, 2007). In contrast, the common courtyards in both the co-op housing complex and the condominium project are well-landscaped and clearly delineated, which affords a certain degree of intimacy. It is apparent that no effort was made to create a shared open space unifying both components; however, this is somewhat understandable given that the social and market-rate projects are on separate blocks and that a public square was created just north of the site as part of the City’s revitalization efforts. It might be argued that this new public space outside the boundaries of the site partly compensates for the absence of shared open space within it. Finally, units are generally protected from visual intrusion from the outside, but the co-op and condominiums do back onto one another.

Finally, the shared spaces that do exist within the site, as well as the public square facing the street immediately north of the site, are generally well **defensible and legible**. Indeed, the courtyards, entrances and walkways are well delineated so that the hierarchy of public, semi-public and private spaces is clear. The walkway that crosses each block is not directly adjacent to the street, but it is visible from it and from nearby buildings. Both common courtyards are easily visible from nearby buildings; however, access and visibility to and from the street is somewhat limited, which in this case may be both a strength and a weakness.

### 4.2.3 Planning and Design Processes

As was outlined above, the project itself was embedded in a larger revitalization initiative and originated nearly a decade before it was finally realized. As was also explained, there were a large number of players involved, many of whom influenced the final design outcome. Three main groups of players were identified: local community groups, the City planners (both at the central and borough level), as well as the architects of the social and market-rate components. It is interesting to note that the GRT, who was the main “developer” of the project, did not have much influence on the outcome other than in the choice of the architect; in this particular case, the GRT played the roles of manager and coordinator more than that of designer.

**Local Community Groups:** The exact mix of social and market-rate units was determined by members of the *Instance locale*, which included a representative from the GRT, someone from the main non-profit housing provider in the area, someone from the local CLSC (or health-center), someone from a public housing interest group as well as a representative from the *Collectif*, who was conducting the public consultation in parallel. Interestingly, although most of them had a vested interest in asking for 100% social housing, many of them insisted that there be condominium units to bring owner-occupiers to the area. In the end, it was agreed that “a significant portion” of the site would be dedicated to social housing, which ended up being approximately 55% of the total number of units built on the site (Bohémier, 2007; Gilker, 2007; Racette, 2007). Interestingly, most of the committee members had either worked together at one time, or were a member of one of the other organizations’ board of directors; doubtlessly, the fact that they knew one another helped them reach an agreement without compromising the project. It is also important to note that the compromise that was presented to the City was not merely the result of a negotiated agreement among members of the local committee, but also the product of a long consultation process conducted by the *Collectif* (who was also involved in the *Instance locale*) through which the 60/40 split was validated by other local stakeholders.

**City of Montreal Planners:** Given that the City owned the land and that the housing project was embedded in a larger “renewal” project, it had the prerogative of choosing a general design scheme. It was the architecture firm hired as consultant that proposed keeping the railway’s former right-of-way in the public domain. The planners involved in deciding on the final scheme did not at first all agree with the firm’s idea, but eventually it was decided that the right-of-way, combined with the revitalization of the public square on its path, could be an interesting unifying element (Davies, 2007; Gagné, 2007). This contribution of the city planners to the overall design scheme may seem trite, but in the stages that followed, important elements of the project became articulated around it and the right-of-way itself became the main distinguishing feature of the project as a whole. Another contribution of the city planners to the overall scheme was in determining how the different unit types should be mixed. It is interesting to note that the architect’s original scheme tried to replicate the design scheme used in the Angus Yard project (Gilker, 2007). Yet, despite the well-advertised success of Angus, the city planners involved decided against a chequered plan partly as a result of the recommendations made in a review of the literature by Dansereau (2002), which was published at around the same time. It is the case, then, that there was a direct connection between theory and policy in this particular instance.



**Private Architecture Firms:** The detailed design of buildings and courtyards in the social and private components was done by separate architects, and built as separate contracts. However, the architects of the condominium projects had received as part of the RFP the plans of the social component, and although it was not explicitly stated that the projects should cohere, it was implicitly expected they would (Goulet, 2007). Furthermore, the architect hired by the GRT did not work independently; rather, he worked very closely with the GRT, the co-op's future board of directors, the director of the non-profit housing provider involved in the project as well as with the planners at the borough office. According to the GRT project manager, the architect received only minimal instructions (Gilker, 2007); however, both the director of the non-profit provider and the borough planner indicated that they specifically asked the architect to pay attention to the context of the project and to build "something of high quality" (Béland, 2007; Racette, 2007). Indeed, it appears as though the oversight of the PNP director (who had no choice but to use the same architect as the GRT) and the borough had an influence on the choice of building materials and allowed for such things as universal accessibility in all units. Yet, the exact site planning and architectural detailing were, so to speak, "contracted out," i.e. they were carried out by individuals who were not directly involved with the conception of the project.

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

The planning and design of the Lavo-NO. V. O. was an iterative and open process whereby the project itself was formulated and fine-tuned and through which various objectives and interests were reconciled. Although the process was rather convoluted and tenuous, there was little or no opposition to the project during the consultation on the zoning change. The fact that most players involved knew one another, were well-informed and had extensive experience in social housing development greatly facilitated the process. The involvement of the provincial government was also a key factor in the project's success, given that the land was contaminated (as are a great number of lots in the central neighbourhoods of Montreal) and that the subsidy could not have covered the costs of decontamination. In sum, the realization of the project was not significantly hindered by any one element; however, the project might have been better integrated if its two main components had been designed by the same architect and built as a single contract.

## **4.3 The Blue Heron Co-operative, Ottawa, Ontario**

### **4.3.1 Context and Background**

The Blue Heron Co-op is located in the former municipality of Kanata (now a ward of the City of Ottawa), which is located about 22 km west-southwest of downtown Ottawa along Highway 417. Prior to amalgamation in 2001, the population of Kanata was about 59,700. As mentioned in the brief description of the case study, Kanata is separated from the former municipality of Nepean to the east by the National Capital Commission Greenbelt. Kanata was mainly agricultural until the 1960s, when it developed rapidly both as a residential community and as a high-tech centre. Although Kanata is generally considered to be a suburb of Ottawa, it was designed along “garden city principles” to have a mix of densities as well as a commercial center in each “community.” Nevertheless, Kanata has a relatively low population density, an average household income of more than 80,000 \$ year (which is about 50% more than the Canadian average and 25% more than the Ontarian average – City of Ottawa, 2007) and consequently few affordable housing options (Trotscha, 2007; Wilkinson, 2007).

As a result, a significant proportion of employees working lower-paying jobs in the high-tech cluster in Kanata cannot afford to live there. It is this state of affairs that was the original impetus for the creation of a new co-op in Kanata. The idea was first proposed in 1998 by a self-organized group of social housing advocates, co-op community activists and other local actors who saw a need for housing targeted specifically at the working poor. However, the general lack of funding in Ontario at the time, difficulties in finding a suitable site in proximity to the high-tech cluster and in getting the high-tech companies on board retarded the realization of the project. In the early 2000s, the group changed their strategy and sought out suitable sites more actively. In 2003, they noticed an empty field behind a church, and approached the parish to enquire about it. The members of the parish “land committee,” who had already discussed the possibility of using the land for ethical purposes, considered the proposition and submitted it to the parish community. It was agreed that the land would be leased to the co-op, but that the parish would retain ownership.

This sequence of events coincided with the release of a request for proposals by the City of Ottawa for the construction of new BMR units. The group secured a loan from the City for pre-development work and hired an experienced development consultant and other professionals to write-up a proposal corresponding to the requirements set-out in the RFP. The co-op group submitted their proposal to the City, who chose to fund the project and approved of the income breakdown. A zoning change was necessary, but there was little opposition to it as the architect and development consultant met repeatedly with the residents of the adjacent development, and made several changes to the plan to meet their concerns. Construction started in 2005 and the project was inaugurated in 2006 after many delays. Planners and politicians also collaborated to make the project work. Indeed, even though the planners imposed similar conditions to the co-op as they do to private developers, they agreed to lower the parking requirement in the rezoning to reflect the nature of the project. Also, according to a former co-op board member, the local elected representative at the time helped to speed up the approval process (Wilkinson, 2007). It is interesting to note that none of the original board members, who were all very involved in the planning process, were interested in becoming resident members, and in fact none of them have applied to become members of the co-op.

### 4.3.2 Project Description and Evaluation

The quality of **embeddedness** of the Blue Heron project in the immediate surrounding community is questionable, as first of all the project is a greenfield development abutting agricultural and church land on two sides, and second as it is situated in proximity to a typical “suburban” subdivision, which makes the project very difficult to integrate with the existing (sub)urban architecturally or functionally. As a matter of fact, it was not an option to connect the project with the existing curvilinear grid; as a result, the project seems at first glance to be self-contained and inward facing. Yet, one might argue, that is precisely what most “garden city” subdivisions in the area are like: self-contained and inward facing. In this respect, then, the project in fact coheres with its surroundings. Furthermore, the project answers to a real, local housing need, it was approved by the parish community and local residents were involved in the project’s conception; it is therefore quite socially embedded. It should also be noted that the building materials used and general architectural detailing of the buildings on the site are quite similar to other similar buildings in the area. The project, therefore, does not “stand out” per se. Its main weakness, however, relates to the project’s accessibility; as might be expected from a project in a suburban location, it is not located within close walking distance of any important services and is not easily accessible by transit. It is interesting to note, however, that a commercial development is planned to start construction 100 meters north-west of the site in the spring of 2008 and that bus service has been upgraded, effective September 1st 2007, to recognize population growth in the community.

With regards to the affordances made **for interaction and intimacy**, the Blue Heron project is an interesting case. On the one hand, tenants paying RGI, BMR and market-rate rent are distributed more or less randomly in the different units on the site (in both the townhouses and apartments). Indeed, other than the fact that tenants paying rent at the market-rate were given first choice, tenants from different income groups were not separated in any way; as a result, tenants of very-low, low and moderate income live side by side in close proximity, and share common entrances, elevators and hallways in the apartment building. This type of design, as was argued by several authors, may eventually exacerbate inter-tenant conflicts. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the project comprises a number of shared amenities, which can be rented for a symbolic amount, and which can therefore be appropriated and used by smaller groups. Moreover, the grounds surrounding the buildings are well-landscaped, and provide ample space for children to play, and for adults to stroll. Although tenants of different groups do not have shared spaces of their own per se, then, indoor shared spaces do allow for both inter-group interaction and intra-group privacy. It is also interesting to note that there was a conscious effort on the part of the consultant and architect to place windows in strategic locations in staircases to afford interesting views and encourage “social lingering.” Finally, all housing units have access to separate balconies and/or patios and gardens, which further provides possibilities for social interaction and intimacy, and are generally protected from visual intrusion.

Public, semi-public and private spaces within the site are generally **easily defensible and legible**. There is also in this case a clear hierarchy of spaces, whereby it is clear which spaces belong to whom (or conversely, who belongs in what spaces). Moreover, all public and semi-public spaces are within eyesight of the main apartment building or of the townhouses. Also, despite the fact that some of the landscaping planned for the open space around the main buildings was postponed due to lack of funds, co-op members have found ways of “breaking up” the space to make it more

usable. Finally, another strength of the project is the constant presence on site of a co-op manager, who ensures the proper maintenance of collective amenities and acts as a liaison between the members and the board. The main weaknesses of the project in terms of defensibility reside in the fact that the back of the site abuts a creek and a cemetery, which means it is not visible or accessible from a street, and in the fact that the project is on the slope, which also makes the back of the lot less visible from the main building which is located a few meters higher. One might argue that these characteristics, *ipso facto*, effectively make this part of the site more interesting as it affords a greater degree of intimacy; yet, as pointed out Schaffhauser (2005), “hidden spaces” in housing projects (whether social, mixed or otherwise) often spell trouble.

#### **4.3.3 Planning and Design Processes**

Although the planning and design process of the Blue Heron project involved a great number of players, it was nevertheless relatively straightforward. Indeed, the overall design of the project in this case was in the hands of the architect, the development consultant and his team, who ultimately made most design decisions. Yet, other actors also influenced the final outcome significantly. The main actors in this case were (in chronological order): the City officials who wrote the RFP and approved the Blue Heron proposal, the development consultant and his team, the co-op’s board of directors and the project’s immediate neighbours.

**City of Ottawa Officials:** The City of Ottawa officials involved in the write-up of the RFP and in the selection of projects obviously had an important influence on the final outcome. Yet, in general, RFPs for new affordable housing projects merely set out a minimum number of BMR and/or RGI units as well as a few procedural guidelines and do not specify anything in particular regarding the provision of shared amenities, or with respect to architectural design. Therefore, although the City did establish what the project’s general characteristics would be, its influence on the overall architectural quality of the project was somewhat limited.

**Development Consultant and Architect:** The development consultant in this case, contrary to the GRT in the previous case, took on an active role in the planning and design of the project. This particular consultant had extensive experience in starting-up co-operatives and mixed-income projects, and was well-acquainted with the City’s project selection criteria. Although he did not design any of the buildings himself, he worked closely with the architect to try and integrate “green” features as well as shared amenities where possible. Interestingly, he had also dealt with the Anglican Church prior to this occasion, which also facilitated the process. As a result of his financial analysis he was able to support sustainable features such as high-efficiency furnaces, energy-saving appliances and lightbulbs, motion-sensored lights and natural storm sewers to reduce water runoff. He also insisted on the inclusion of “amenity space” in the project. The final say, of course, was not his but the board’s; however, given his experience and close relationship with board members, his and the architect’s counsel were seriously taken into account. It is interesting to note that the consultant and his team in this case took on most of the risk that came with a higher-quality – and therefore more expensive – project; in fact, the consultant had to lower his fee in the end to make the project work. The architect of the project also played an important role; he brought to the project extensive experience in co-op design and knowledge of co-op operations. The combined experience of the development consultant and architect, as well as their working relationship, were most certainly determining factors in the project’s success.

**Board of Directors:** As hinted to above, the board of directors was oversee the process but was not directly involved in the important design decisions made during the project's conception. However, it was not for lack of interest that the board left most of the design work to the architect, consultant and his team. In fact, according to a former board member, the board was extremely involved, "right down to paint colour" (Wilkinson, 2007). Yet, it is apparent that the board's involvement was mainly with details (carpets, light fixtures, and things of the sort) and not with site planning or architectural detailing. As explained above, this is due to the fact that several board members knew the consultant personally and largely trusted his and the architect's experience. It may also have to do with the fact that the original board members were volunteers who were involved in the project *because they cared about the issue* and not because they were in need of housing themselves. One might argue that they took their role to heart, but that their involvement in important design decisions was ultimately limited because they did not have a vested interest in what the outcome would be.

**Local Residents:** Realizing a co-op project in a well-off suburban community necessarily involves some give and take with the project's neighbours. Once again, the architect and development consultant had had experience with NIMBYism, and met with the project's neighbours from early on to make sure to have them "on his side" (Trotscha, 2007). Interestingly, one of the neighbours involved was a landscape architect, and he was invited to help find ways to meet the concerns of local residents. In the end, the neighbours had an influence on the kind of fence that would separate the project from the lots abutting it, as well as on the plantings and lights in the vicinity of the fence. These demands were easy to accommodate, and the few changes made to the site plan allowed the project to go ahead unhindered.

#### **4.3.4 Summary**

In the case of Blue Heron, there is no question that the experience and social capital of the individuals involved (namely, the architect, consultant, his team and the board members) were the main facilitators of the process. Indeed, one may hypothesize that the project's realization was possible because it was led by experienced individuals who knew one another and were known to City officials. Furthermore, the project's high-quality was a direct consequence of the consultants' and of the board members' awareness of the importance of design. As pointed out by one of the players involved, there is never very much leeway in terms of design because of budgetary constraints; yet, better design outcomes can be – and indeed, are – achieved with a little ingenuity. The main obstacles to the project's realization was without a doubt the difficulty in finding a suitable location and making the capital and operating budgets work. Interestingly, the project's location relative to the location of services and opportunities is also its main weakness.

## **4.4 Millbrook Place, Mississauga, Ontario**

### **4.4.1 Context and Background**

The Millbrook Place project is located in the City of Mississauga, in the Region of Peel, approximately 10-15 kilometres west of Toronto. The city is the sixth largest in Canada with a population of approximately 700,000. It is also one of the wealthiest, with an average household income of about 80,000 \$ in 2000 (City of Mississauga, 2007). Although the housing stock of the city comprises a large number of apartments, the great majority of units are detached, semi-detached or townhouses. As pointed by Evans (2007), though, Mississauga has not remained a mere suburban bedroom community, but has become “an economic powerhouse of its own, with 57 Fortune 500 headquarters” (p. 6). In fact, the City has embarked on an aggressive branding and self-promotion strategy, and markets itself both as a mixed residential community and as an employment centre.

However, although the city advertises itself as having a “selection of quality housing including townhouses, high-rise condominiums, semi-detached, detached and executive homes to satisfy every income level,” this is not really the case. Indeed, a report released in 2006 by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) highlighted the fact that most of the workers employed in the Region in the service sector or in unskilled manufacturing industries cannot afford to live in the Region without exceeding their basic capacity to pay. Moreover, there is a ten year waiting list for affordable housing in Peel, which is among the longest in the province (ONPHA, 2006). Thus, similarly to Kanata, the Peel region and Mississauga in particular have a shortage of affordable housing, especially for the working poor. As a matter of fact, the situation is so critical that approximately 10,500 people used emergency housing shelters in 2003, many of whom were poor workers who could simply not afford a place to live (CBC, 2004).

The Millbrook Place project was precisely an attempt to provide affordable housing for those who cannot find it elsewhere in the area. The initiator of the project was a private developer who had already built affordable housing in Mississauga and owned land that was legally severed. In the late 1990s, when funding for new construction was scarce and the need for affordable housing increasingly prevalent in the region, he approached Peel Living (the Region’s housing authority) to try and find a way to build affordable units without government subsidy. During the same period, the Peel council had come to the realization that street homelessness was becoming a problem in the region, and that shelters were not a long-term solution.

In the early 2000s, Peel Living sent a formal expression of interest to the developer, making it clear that there would be no subsidy and that he would have to take a financial loss on the land, but that the region would help however it could. Originally, the developer proposed about 120 one and two bedroom units for seniors, but he was eventually able to include 43 bachelor “efficiency” units as well (of about 340 sq feet each). Because of the higher number of units and of their higher profitability, it was possible to lower the rent of the bachelor units (as the market-rate rents of the senior units would subsidize the bachelor units). When the Peel Council was presented with the financial figures they were not ready to lower the tax rate on the building; however, they agreed to make a small capital grant and to eliminate development charges so as to make the project feasible. The Region also paid for the capital costs upfront so as to avoid borrowing money and paying interests. Even so, the developer was at first obligated to lower the specifications of the building’s

interior to be able to break even. However, the developer himself decided to do fundraising on the side to bring the specifications up again and deliver a high-quality project (D'Angelo, 2007). In the end, the developer raised the equivalent of 450,000\$ in "extras" (see below). It is interesting to note that funding for 60 RGI units came through in the end from another program, but that this was not a factor in the feasibility of the project as a whole (Ward, 2007).

#### **4.4.2 Project Description and Evaluation**

The Millbrook Place project is by and large both **physically and functionally embedded** in its surroundings. On the one hand, the project is architecturally and functionally well-integrated with the existing urban fabric; indeed, the 10-story building is located in a high-density area on a main arterial where there are other such residential buildings, its architectural detailing is similar to that of nearby buildings and it is within close walking distance of a variety of commercial and other services and approximately two kilometres from the City's "civic centre." The project, however, may not be as socially embedded as it could have been. Indeed, although the project was put together as a response to a real need for affordable housing, the bachelor units in Millbrook Place are priced at 500\$, which is significantly cheaper than comparable market-rate units in the area but still likely to exceed the capacity to pay of a single person coming from a housing shelter or working in a low-paying position. It is also questionable whether there is an urgent need of affordable housing for seniors in Mississauga, given that the City has a relatively young population and that other groups, namely young immigrants, are more affected by the scarcity of affordable housing (City of Mississauga, 2007). As for the involvement of local residents, the officials at the Region did not feel it was necessary to conduct a public consultation as no zoning change was required and the project is situated in a high density neighbourhood where there are other such buildings. As a result, the project is relatively well-integrated with its surroundings. The 'consultation' occurred in setting the rules for the broader area (Ward, 2007).

The officials of the Region, the developer and the architect found innovative ways to provide **possibilities for both interaction and intimacy**. First of all, the building was designed so as to minimize social friction between seniors and singles; it in fact consists of a building within a building, indistinguishable from the outside but with separate entrances, lobbies, hallways and stairways. Units in both "wings" are therefore protected from both visual and physical intrusion (although there is one door connecting the two wings). As for shared open space where social interaction could occur, there is a small landscaped yard on the side of the building where lawn furniture was installed. It is a well-landscaped site that was designed for both seniors and singles. However, the limited number of benches does not facilitate the congregation of small groups. There is also a recreation room for seniors in their wing of the project. What is lacking is a shared space for singles either inside or outside the building as well as gazebos and/or other benches to break up the space outside.

With regards to the **defensibility of open spaces**, the landscaped yard at the side of the building was well thought-out; it is both visible and accessible from the street and from the parking lot on the side of the building, yet it is sufficiently enclosed to be intimate. In more general terms, it is also clear who belongs where in and around the building, which is important to make seniors feel protected. This is reinforced by the separate entrances for seniors and singles, which are on opposite sides of the building. Finally, the maintenance of the grounds and lawn furniture is taken care of by Peel Living, the owner and manager of the building, through the building's superintendent who lives on site.

#### **4.4.3 Planning and Design Processes**

The planning and design process in the case of Millbrook Place, unlike the processes described above, did not involve a great number of players. Given that the developer, owner of the land (after it was bought from a private developer), funder of the project, and future manager of the building was the same organization (namely, Peel Living), led by a proactive and experienced individual, most (if not all) of the decision-making power was concentrated in a few hands. Yet, in actuality, the project was not entirely designed by the staff at Peel Living; the contractor who built the project, and who had had experience building affordable housing, also contributed to the design of the project. Although both the housing agency and the contractor participated in the project's planning and design, however, the roles in this case were unambiguous: the former set the guidelines and provided the funds, and the latter delivered. It is interesting to note that the City of Mississauga, which is still responsible for zoning and plan approvals, had very little to say about the project, presumably because it was architecturally well-integrated and because they trusted the work of the developer (Ward, 2007). Here is a short description of the respective involvement of Peel Living and the contractor.

**Director and Staff of Peel Living:** Peel Living – as funder, developer, and future manager – had the authority to make the most important planning and funding decisions. This, however, is not to say that they had much leeway in terms of design; indeed, the project was put together during a period where there was no federal or provincial funding available whatsoever and the Region's council had made it clear that they would fund the project's construction if it could sustain itself. As a result, the project's first iteration was quite bare-bones. The household mix (senior couples or singles with low-income singles) was also determined by practical financial considerations rather than by "social fit"; indeed, it would have been financially very difficult to include family units given the financial constraints of the project. Nevertheless, the staff at Peel Living, and the director, in particular, set out clear guidelines for the integration of the different unit types; among other things, they insisted that there be separate entrances but that the building look like "one project." In short, they made sure that the project would "maximize social achievement and minimize social friction" (Ward, 2007), given the set of constraints that they faced. It is important to note that the director of Peel Living was also very pro-active in educating regional politicians to get their support, which assuredly further facilitated the process.

**Private Contractor:** The contractor (who is a private developer specialized in affordable housing) was instrumental in the project's realization. It was him who first approached Peel Living to indicate that he was interested in developing a lot that he owned. After the Region's council gave Peel Living the go ahead, he gave the land at a 30% discount to try and achieve financial feasibility. From there on in, he worked closely with the staff at Peel Living, as well as with his architect, to find ways "to make it work" (D'Angelo, 2007). Eventually, he and his team redesigned the building to increase the number of units and the revenue flow, which ultimately allowed Peel Living to propose a lower rent for part of the units. In re-designing the building, it was also him and his team who thought of creating a "building inside a building" so as to respond to the demands of his client. Finally, as mentioned above, the contractor also influenced the final outcome by raising money on his own to "raise the specs" of the project, which had been lowered significantly to achieve feasibility. These "extras" did not change the outside of the building in any way, but they helped raise the quality of the indoor spaces. More particularly, the contractor obtained better quality furnishings and appliances by asking suppliers to provide



better quality products for the same price. It is worth noting that the project's architect (who worked for the contractor), although he effectively operationalized the ideas of others, did not have much influence on planning and design decisions.

#### **4.4.4 Summary**

The Millbrook Place project stands out because it was undertaken by a regional housing agency, and was initially realized without federal or provincial subsidy and involved a public-private partnership of sorts. More interestingly, perhaps, it was designed to preserve the intimacy and privacy of each tenant group without physically separating them. The main facilitator of the project, as in the previous case studies, was without a doubt the fact that the important players involved knew one another *personally*. On the one hand, the Director of Peel Living trusted that the contractor would deliver a high-quality product; on the other hand, the contractor knew that the Director of Peel Living was experienced and negotiated in good faith. As the contractor explained, "it's easier to take risks if trust is already there" (D'Angelo, 2007). The main hindrance, in this case, was certainly the lack of funding and the limited support obtained from the Region; although it may be argued that this is always an obstacle to "better design," it was especially true in this case as it made it virtually impossible for the developer and the contractor to build those types of unit that were most urgently needed.

#### **4.5 Synthesis of Case Studies**

Taken in isolation, each one of the three cases presented above may seem like the unlikely exception to the "rule," which is that the design of social housing – whether socially-mixed or not – is generally one of the last priorities of housing providers and is therefore relegated to "that which could be done if only there was money." But the three cases juxtaposed next to one another may tell us something different: it is perhaps not a mere coincidence that all three projects were able to integrate exceptional design features and that not one of them faced any strong opposition from local residents. It is also likely not a coincidence that each of them became a model for subsequent projects. Without a doubt, there are common elements which seem to facilitate the process.

The synthesis of the three cases presented here aims precisely at identifying those commonalities, or this common thread in the planning and design which seems to have yielded interesting – albeit different – results in each case. The principal points of convergence are described below.

- In all cases, the project stemmed from a real need, which was identified in all cases by a combination of local actors, local residents and/or other "insiders" (whether community activists, elected representatives, affordable housing developers, etc. ). Each project also grew "from the bottom up," that is to say, because the actors involved felt that the timing was good, the site appropriate and the right conditions in place.
- The local government was pro-active in each case, but not necessarily by setting strict rules or imposing strict planning and design guidelines. The local governments involved had more or less oversight over planning and design depending on the experience and involvement of specific individuals, but in all cases it was the municipality who had final say on the exact "mix" of each project, while the operationalization of the social mix was left to the

developer, consultant or architect. All three projects were conceived by experienced and dedicated individuals who generally had worked with one another in the past and had an already established professional relationship. This “working relationship” seems to have greatly facilitated the process of planning and design itself and made it easier, in turn, for the players involved to take risks and try new things. Concomitantly, the architects who actually designed the buildings of each project did not work in isolation, but closely with their “client” as well as with the other actors involved. It is also worth noting that most of those who participated in planning and design – whether for the local government, as consultants or as providers – were well aware of the importance of design for social sustainability.

- The fact that the projects reviewed here were better designed than most social projects is not merely due to the availability of “extra” funds per se. Each project did find “extra” resources by negotiating with the provincial government (in Lavo – NO. V. O. ), with the Anglican Church (in Blue Heron) or with the owner of the land as well as with corporate suppliers (in Millbrook Place). In all three cases, though, it is not the case that resources were merely “available”; the reason that the three projects were able to achieve what they did is precisely because the projects themselves were well thought-out, well-articulated and promoted by experienced individuals who were all able to effectively “sell” their ideas.

In sum, what the three projects have in common is a clear and transparent process, a pro-active yet not invasive local government, a set of experienced and dedicated individuals who understand the reality of mixed-income projects and who know one another, and a bit of creativity to squeeze out “extras” wherever possible.

The next section will attempt to extract a few lessons for social mixing policy and practice from the review of the literature and the synthesis of the case studies presented here.

## 5. Policy Implications

One might be tempted to conclude after reading the previous case studies that exceptional projects such as these must come about under exceptional circumstances, which cannot necessarily be replicated. There is no doubt that these projects are indeed exceptional; however, as outlined above, their success cannot be reduced to mere happenstance. In fact, the synthesis of the three cases suggests that there are common “ingredients” for success, which means that, in all likelihood, these ingredients may achieve similar results in other situations. Therefore, although exceptional projects do come about under exceptional circumstances, it is not the case that they come about spontaneously.

The three cases point to important policy implications, the most important of which are outlined here:

- **Municipalities and local governments involved in housing provision must be proactive** to ensure that new projects have a mix of units that 1) answers a real housing need, 2) contributes to the overall diversity of an area and 3) is likely to be socially sustainable. They can, for instance, target specific types of projects in RFPs and work closely with non-profit, co-op housing and private developers to develop a set of common objectives and a common vision for social mixing. Planning authorities can also use whatever regulatory controls or leverage at

their disposal to ensure proper architectural and functional integration with the surrounding community.

- This being said, it is perhaps the case that **no coercive policy regarding income-mixing is the best policy**. Although the present analysis is based on only a few case studies, the three cases taken together suggest that the realization of mixed-income projects is usually more complex in terms of planning and design than that of unmixed social housing complexes. If we accept the proposition that complex tasks require sophisticated solutions, then innovative planning and design schemes are more likely to be devised under flexible policy frameworks where the specific conditions of a project are appreciated and taken into account.
- Mixed-income projects are at once more politically acceptable and more contentious as on the one hand they are less likely to be opposed by local residents, but on the other hand may involve several actors who have different objectives and/or interests. It follows that **the planning and design process will likely be more efficient and fruitful if there is already an alliance between developer (or provider), community, planners and elected representatives**. In the absence of a coalition between these actors, it is likely that compromises will be made in the number, size or quality of units to accommodate the varying interests involved, with the effect of reducing the overall quality of the project.
- It is apparent from the analysis of the case studies that **the experience and social capital of the individuals involved is extremely important for the realization of mixed-income projects** as well as to allow for innovation in planning and design. Concomitantly, the developer or provider who carries out the project should ideally be an “insider” in the community where the project takes place. First, the lack of experience of the provider, consultant, planner or architect with social mixing will likely result in a project that achieves only half of mixing, i.e. either affordability at the expense of quality, or “kerb appeal” at the expense of affordability. Second, as explained earlier, the individuals involved are less likely to take risks if they do not know one another – even if they are experienced. Lastly, a project will be more successful if it is carried out by an “insider,” that is to say, by a developer or provider who has established ties in the community or who has already done projects in the area that can serve as a “guarantee.” This suggests that the composition of a project’s team (what projects they have done and where, whether they have worked together, etc. ) may be an important criterion when selecting projects.
- The previous implication points to **the importance of institutional and organizational memory** and of “passing on” experience from one project to another. Indeed, the social capital and the social ties of individuals involved in social housing development must be somehow preserved, lest the social capital and field experience of consultants and providers accumulated over the years is likely to be dilapidated if they retire or exit the field. In this sense, the GRT model in Quebec has worked well in that it has provided an institutional setting wherein social capital, field experience and institutional capacity is renewed and preserved. In contrast, the development of both non-profit and co-op housing in Ontario has relied on the charitable contribution of board members, which is only sustainable to an extent. Given that socially mixed projects are generally more complex in terms of planning and design, it is likely that more projects would be done well if the collective experience of providers, consultants and architects with social mixing was readily available.

In short, the social and market-rate components in socially-mixed projects should not be treated as mere “tokens” in wider social and market-rate projects. Each component should be handled as a project in its own right, but it should also be considered an integral part of the project as a whole. In fact, it does not really matter in terms of planning and design which component includes which, as long as the integration of both components is well-done. There has been much debate as to the right way to “include,” but perhaps it is time for those policy-makers interested in social mixing to move beyond inclusion, which implies that one component “includes” and the other is “included,” and to adopt integration instead.

## 6. Conclusions

As the principle of social mixing in Canada is gaining credence and becoming an integral part of social policy (whether formally or not), many questions and issues regarding the practice of mixing are coming to the fore. Who decides what the “proper social mix” should be in a given situation? What planning and design guidelines are there and how were they arrived at? How much leeway is there *actually* in the provision of collective amenities? Who makes the important design decisions, and based on what? And more importantly, how does good design come about? The present report sought to provide – or at least suggest – the beginning of an answer to these questions.

Vischer, in the conclusion of his piece on False Creek (1984), asserts that “the design of an environmental context for a successful social mix involves a delicate balance between privacy and community, a balance that the design of open space can successfully mediate.” The three projects described in this report have largely achieved this delicate balance: all of them have considered the need to afford both intimacy and interaction in shared spaces and the overall importance of design. Arguably, they were successful precisely *because* those involved in their planning and design conceived a project *for different kinds of people*, and not in spite of that.

In observing the processes that paved the way for each project’s realization, we were able to draw a certain number of implications from social housing policy. However, the case study analysis presented above does not merely speak to the reality of social mixing in the Canadian context; it also points to more general theoretical issues that are indirectly related to policy, but that would be worth considering in future studies.

**First, the analysis of the case studies revealed that many social housing practitioners are not well-acquainted with recent findings in housing policy research.** Even when a planner in Montreal did cite the recommendations made by a well-known academic to justify the separation of market-rate and social components within the Lavo site, it was clear that this planner did not have a refined knowledge of the arguments for and against “salt-and-pepper mix.” Yet, despite the fact that theory and practice seem quite disconnected, most of the practitioners that were interviewed did apply many of the principles outlined in the literature *based on their own field experience*. There are two insights which can be derived from this: 1) social housing practice seems to feed into theory more than theory feeds into practice and 2) attention to planning and design and field experience are probably more important than the theoretical knowledge of details. In other words, if a developer or provider pays heed to the specific housing needs, economic and social conditions in a given place and is attentive to design, then theory is probably going to be of little use *in the realization* of a project. What theory might allow,

however, is to have a benchmark against which to measure the progress of our practice. Given, the limited scope of this study, however, it might be interesting to further investigate the relationship between theory and practice in the field of social housing and to verify the insights proposed herein.

**Second, the analysis presented here suggests that the jury is still out in the non-profit / for-profit debate**, that is to say, in deciding whether mixed-income are “better designed” by non-profit or for-profit developers. In all three cases, there was one or more for-profit developer involved, yet these developers were not “out to get” their clients. Rather, they were members of a coalition and were as dedicated to the success of each project as the board volunteers, non-profit providers, GRTs and public planners. It may be the case, then, that this difference between one type and the other is overstated in the literature; experience, social capital and good faith, it seems, are much more important than the profit motive *per se*. As explained above, the developers, consultants and architects involved in each project were generally acquainted with one another, and probably had quite a bit to lose in terms of reputation and social capital. Therefore, there was a strong incentive for them to *put the interests of the project before their own*, to get along, and to get things done. In future studies, we might learn more about the dynamic of social housing development from studying the precise role of social capital and social relationships in the efficacy and effectiveness of project management.

**Third, the fact that mixed-income housing projects push developers, consultants and planners to be more attentive to site planning and design is perhaps reason enough to integrate units of different types and price whenever possible.** It might be argued that good design should be the rule and not the exception; in other words, it should be available to all social housing tenants and not only to those privileged few who happen to live side-by-side with higher-income tenants. As a matter of fact, it has been suggested by some that this tendency to design better projects when there is a mix of income is pernicious in that it confirms the reverse tendency – that is to say, the propensity to leave design by the wayside when we build for the poor. Yet, as argued by Nyden (1998), if income-mixing is a motivation to make better projects, that in itself may be a sufficient justification for it. Indeed, even if that was the only tangible effect of income-mixing, it would be an important effect in and of itself. This relationship between design quality and income mixing, however, has only been studied scantily and would benefit from more rigorous study.

**Finally, the importance of social mixing for social sustainability may vary depending on the way social housing is conceptualized.** If social housing is seen and conceived of as a permanent (or semi-permanent) form of dwelling, then the objective of social mixing is primarily to prevent and protect against the ills of segregation. If social housing is instead conceived of as a place of passage, or as a way to encourage upward social mobility, then it must be planned so as to afford possibilities and opportunities to “branch out” and must allow for mobility *within each project*. The policy objective may be the same, but the physical outcome may differ. Therefore, if we are to build better projects – and projects better suited to the needs of tenants – policy-makers must have the courage to articulate what it is that they are trying to achieve.



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