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A Place to Stand on Your Own Two Feet: The Role of Community Housing in Immigrant Integration in Montréal, Quebec

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Abstract

Research on the housing conditions of immigrant households has tended to focus on their spatial distribution in metropolitan areas, the discrimination they face in the search for housing, and their housing trajectories, in particular their access to homeownership. Little research has been done on what role, if any, housing plays in their integration in their host society. This research tests the hypothesis that community housing, in which tenants participate actively in the management of their buildings, gives immigrants social contacts and skills that help in their integration. The authors conducted interviews and focus groups with renters, homeowners and housing specialists in order to understand better what respondents understand by “integration” and to investigate the possible causal relationship between life in community housing and social integration. The findings both support and contradict the original hypothesis and are the basis for recommendations for community housing developers. The most important lesson to be drawn from the research is that participation in in-house activities in community housing are not necessarily a positive factor in social integration—it may actually be perceived negatively by some immigrants—and are clearly secondary to questions of housing quality and affordability.

Keywords: Community housing, immigrant integration, social services, homeownership, housing stability

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Résumé

La recherche sur l'habitat des ménages immigrants porte surtout sur leur distribution spatiale dans l'espace métropolitain, la discrimination dont ils font l'objet dans leur recherche d'un logement et leurs trajectoires résidentielles, en particulier leur accès à la propriété. Peu de recherche porte sur le rôle éventuel que le logement joue dans leur intégration à leur société d'accueil. Cette recherche étudie l'hypothèse selon laquelle le logement communautaire, dans lequel les locataires participent à la gestion de leur immeuble, donne aux immigrants des contacts et des habilités qui peuvent les aider dans leur intégration. Les auteurs ont mené des entrevues et des groupes de discussion avec des locataires, des propriétaires et des spécialistes du logement pour mieux comprendre ce qu'ils entendent pas "intégration" et pour étudier la relation causale possible entre la vie en logement communautaire et l'intégration sociale. Les conclusions contredisent l'hypothèse en partie et la confirment en partie et sont la base de recommandations faites aux développeurs de logements communautaires. La leçon la plus importante que l'on peut tirer de cette recherche est que la participation à des activités internes au logement communautaire n'est pas nécessairement un facteur positif dans le processus d'intégration sociale—elle peut même être perçue de manière négative par certains immigrants—et que les facteurs de qualité et d'abordabilité du logement sont nettement primordiaux.

Mots clés: Logement communautaire, intégration des immigrants, services sociaux, accès à la propriété, stabilité résidentielle

Introduction and Overview

The relationship between housing and integration has been the object of attention in the urban-studies literature at varying geographical scales. At the neighbourhood scale, scholars have studied the access of immigrant households to services (e.g., Alba, Logan & Stults 2000; Ray 1999; Rosenbaum & Friedman 2007) and their exposure to substandard housing and discrimination (e.g., Haan 2007; Mattu 2002; Murdie 2002). At the city level, they have investigated the spatial distribution of immigrant communities in order to evaluate their degree of isolation in 'enclaves' and their relative participation in housing markets (e.g., Hiebert and Mendez 2008; Leloup 2007; Leloup and Apparicio 2010; Qadeer 2003). At the metropolitan level, they have paid attention to immigrants' access to homeownership as a means to, and a symbol of, integration (Haan 2005a, 2005b; Immigration.ca 2007). All authors note the importance of spatial factors in the living conditions and opportunities available to immigrants and, hence, in their integration in the country where they relocated. Carter and Polevychok present a compelling argument on the general link between housing and immigrant integration:

Adequate, affordable housing with security of tenure becomes an important facilitator of integration into a new society [...]. It provides an environment that enables refugees and newly arrived immigrants to rebuild their personal and cultural identity and facilitates the building of a new "home" and community. It also enables them to build new informal social support networks. (Carter and Polevychok 2004: 18)

All in all, Carter and Polevychok conclude, "housing profoundly influences adaptation and life chances in the new society" (ibid.)

Despite this general attention paid to the housing conditions of immigrants, little work has been done on the direct relationship between housing models—that is, the tenure, organisational structure and programming of housing—and integration. The first factor has been the object of attention with respect to homeownership (see above and further below), but the last two have, to our knowledge, received hardly any attention. One piece of research did anticipate our study of the impact that residency in community housing may have on the well-being of people who are facing difficulties (Doyle et al. 1996). The population that was surveyed in that study was made up of single parents (mostly women) who, like immigrants, were experiencing challenges of poverty and/or marginalisation. Given that many immigrants are poor and socially marginalised, there is much overlap between urban research on immigration and urban research on poverty and exclusion.

As local organisations work to expand the supply of affordable housing in the community sector and as immigrants represent a sizable share of the population where such housing is being built, it is worthwhile to investigate the relationship between the community housing sector and the lived trajectories of immigrants.

By examining the impact of a specific community-housing model on immigrant experiences in a Montreal neighbourhood, this paper begins to fill a gap in the literature.

The research presented here was conducted under the umbrella of *Metropolis*, a joint initiative of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. From 2000 to 2012, *Metropolis* brought together scholars, policy-makers and service providers to engage in “comparative research and public policy development on migration, diversity, and immigrant integration in cities in Canada” (*Metropolis* 2012a).

The research was also developed in partnership with *Hapopex* (*Habitations populaires de Parc-Extension*), an organisation that develops community housing in the Montréal neighbourhood of Parc-Extension, one of the key destination neighbourhoods for new immigrants in the city. *Hapopex* draws on the co-operative model to set up its projects. It builds them thanks to government subsidies, supplies units at an affordable rate pegged to renters’ income, provides the services of a social worker (also subsidised by the Québec government) directly within some of the buildings and, most important, gives residents opportunities to become directly involved in the management of their building. The element of participation was introduced in the housing model on the hypothesis that, alongside access to a social worker, involvement in project management will facilitate the economic and social integration of immigrants (and other people). Participation in management activities, it is expected, helps immigrants (and others) develop a variety of skills and connections that amount to valuable social and economic capital. This research was designed to test this hypothesis by determining whether the *Hapopex* community housing model could indeed play a role in facilitating the integration of newcomers to Canada. (In this paper, ‘integration’ and ‘social integration’ are used interchangeably; the focus is not on economic integration through the workplace.)

The research findings suggest that while the affordability and social support provided by *Hapopex* housing are extremely valuable to new immigrants (as they are to the poor and to other people in a position of vulnerability), the requirement to participate in building management activities, though well-intentioned, is not the best way to facilitate integration. Though volunteering and network-building were certainly understood by participants as key facilitators of integration, it appears that the home may not be the best place to provide such opportunities. Instead, community housing is best understood as a space where newcomers can “stand on their own two feet” (as one participant put it) and go forth to access resources in the broader community by participating in neighbourhood- or city-wide activities. These findings are of particular importance to community organisations and governments working to develop and fund appropriate housing for newcomers.

In the pages that follow, we present the geographic and institutional context of the research, frame the research question by means of a literature review on housing and immigrant integration and explain the methodology that was used. Next, we present the main findings of the research and discuss their meaning in detail, with respect to several themes. Finally, we provide conclusions and make recommendations to community housing providers.

Local Context of the Research

As mentioned above, this research took place in the neighbourhood of Parc-Extension, in Montreal, and in partnership with *Hapopex*, a local community housing development organisation. As one of the key destination neighbourhoods for new immigrants in Montréal, Parc-Extension is a particularly interesting place to study to understand the dynamics of housing consumption and social integration. It is an inner suburb of Montréal, part of the lower-middle-class borough of Villeray—Saint-Michel—Parc-Extension (fig. 1). It is also adjacent to two high-income neighbourhoods, the Montreal borough of Outremont and the independent municipality of Town of Mount Royal.

Parc-Extension has a typical Montreal street grid of long blocks and is defined by strong physical barriers formed by transportation infrastructure: railway lines to the (Montréal) east and south, a highway to the north and a major thoroughfare to the west. These spatial characteristics, combined with a distinct history resulting from waves of immigrant settlement, have given the neighbourhood a strong physical, social and cultural identity. The physical and socio-economic characteristics of Parc-Extension make it an interesting location to study the relationship between housing and immigrant integration as well as to consider the way that this relationship is embedded within neighbourhood processes of transition, stability, and identity.

A major destination for Southern-European immigrants, especially from Greece, from the 1950s to the 1980s, the neighbourhood now welcomes immigrants from a wide range of countries and continents (Poirier 2006). Immigrants from the Indian subcontinent account for over a third of the population, displaying a fairly strong level of spatial concentration in Montréal (Hou 2004, Ray 1999). Nearly two thirds of the population of Parc-Extension was born abroad, and nearly one third of these immigrants arrived in Canada in the past five years. Close to half of the population does not speak French, while about one quarter does not speak English. Thus, with its multi-ethnic population, Parc-Extension contributes to the “kaleidoscopic reality” of Montréal as a “pluralist city” (Germain 2000: 9, authors’ translation; see also Leloup 2007). Low employment and low incomes also define Parc-Extension: according to Statistics Canada (whose data from the household survey of 2011 was compiled by the local economic development group CDÉC Centre-Nord [2014]), labour-force participation is below the Montreal average (52.4% vs. 63.2%), unemployment is above the Montreal average (16.6% vs. 10.0%) and household income is well below the Montréal average (\$35,512 versus \$57,717 for Montreal and \$69,150 for Greater Montreal); about a third of income comes from government transfer, on average.

Figure 1: Parc-Extension and surrounding neighbourhoods of Montréal



Source: Lindsay Wiginton (open source data)

Housing in Parc-Extension is relatively affordable—the average rent in 2011 was \$609—but the very low level of household incomes still makes housing expenses proportionally high. Housing quality is a concern as well, as over 40% of units require minor or major repairs and over 20% are overcrowded. Parc-Extension is extremely dense for a North American neighbourhood, with a density of close to 18,000 persons per square kilometre and over 2.5 persons per housing unit. The vast majority of housing units are located in multi-unit buildings and are part of the rental market; only 21% of households own their homes in Parc-Extension (CDÉC Centre-Nord 2014).

A large number of local organisations have been working for many years to improve the living conditions and foster the integration of immigrants in Parc-Extension (Boudreau, Germain, Rea and Sacco 2008). The presence of these organisations also plays an important role in giving Parc-Extension its identity and, as will be discussed later in this paper, in generating a feeling of attachment or belonging among some residents.

One of the community organisations of Parc-Extension is Hapopex, Habitations populaires de Parc-

Extension. This not-for-profit housing developer was created by the leaders of a local grassroots planning organisation, the Regroupement en aménagement de Parc-Extension (RAMPE), as a means of implementing its goals in the area of housing. These goals are to improve housing conditions for low-income people, to give them access to affordable units, to foster their social integration and to give them greater access to neighbourhood resources (Hapopex 2014). In recent years, Hapopex expanded its activities into other neighbourhoods (Villeray, to the east, and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, to the west) and, at the time of writing, owns and manages a total of 331 units in fifteen buildings located in three neighbourhoods with high proportions of immigrants (*ibid.*). It should be noted that Hapopex aims to provide affordable housing to a variety of households, not specifically to immigrant households; the latter being very numerous in Parc-Extension, they constitute a large share of Hapopex tenants. Government support for Hapopex's work likewise comes in the form of Québec subsidies for affordable housing and social services, not for immigrant integration per se (for which other programs exist, mostly in the realm of language and education).

As mentioned, Hapopex promotes a particular model of community housing: housing that is provided at affordable rents, that includes social services (through dedicated staff) and is organised so as to involve residents in communal decision-making and the operation of the buildings. Both the development of the units (through purchase or new construction) and the provision of services are financed by the provincial government, with additional support from the city of Montréal. As per the contract between Hapopex and the Government of Québec, at least three members of the board must be tenants; beyond this, tenant participation is encouraged but not mandated by the government or by Hapopex. Tenant participation matters for Hapopex because it is believed that it can help new immigrants develop skills and connections that can ultimately facilitate their integration in Québec society. Thus tenants are invited to participate in meetings of the board of management, in social events and in maintenance activities. This research sets out to investigate whether the hypothesis of Hapopex leaders on the link between building participation and social integration is indeed valid.

Immigrant Integration and Housing

The term 'integration' is typically used in a normative manner, to describe the desired outcome of immigrant settlement in the host society, but it is rarely explicitly defined (Li, 2003). Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) uses the following definition:

Integration can be conceptualized as a multidimensional two-way process in which newcomers and the host society work together to eliminate barriers and facilitate the full engagement and participation of immigrants in all aspects of Canadian life. Integration does not imply forced assimilation or require a loss of cultural identity. (Gilkinson, 2009: 7)

Under this perspective, both immigrants and members of the host society are responsible for taking steps to achieve the former's integration (Belkhdja, n.d.).

In theory and in policy, integration is generally considered to have multiple domains: economic, political, residential (spatial) and social (Li, 2003; Gilkinson, 2009). CIC considers the following to be some indicators of integration: feelings of belonging to the local or national community and pride in Canada; an absence of discomfort due to ethnicity, culture, or race; an absence of hate crimes and discrimination; and participation in associations, networks, the education system, politics and civic activities (Gilkinson, 2009). It is often difficult to distinguish indicators of integration from factors that help to bring about the condition of being integrated. For example, employment, homeownership and involvement in community activities are believed to be facilitators of integration while at the same time being seen as signs that integration has occurred. This tension was further explored in this research, where participants of focus groups were asked to convey their understanding of the term 'integration'.

Both the dwelling unit and its surroundings are deemed to be important factors in the integration of immigrant households, both for their intrinsic qualities and for the access they provide to various resources:

Access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing is an essential step in immigrant integration. Immigrants first seek a place to live and then look for language and job training, education for their children, and employment. Housing is also an important indicator of quality of life, affecting health, social interaction, community participation, economic activities, and general wellbeing. (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly, 2008: 10)

It is not altogether clear exactly what role housing plays in the process of integration, practically speaking, i.e., what causal impact it has on the level of integration (versus what power it has as an indicator). To a large extent, one assumes that housing provides a bundle of resources, from shelter itself to all the services, amenities and facilities that are within reach from the unit.

The direct relationship between housing and integration has been the object of some attention, under different perspectives. Scholars have studied the patterns of spatial distribution of immigrants in Canadian cities in order to measure levels of segregation and discrimination, i.e., to assess their degree of isolation in ethno-cultural enclaves and their free participation in housing markets (e.g., Hiebert and Mendez 2008; Kim, 2009; Leloup 2007; Leloup and Apparicio 2010; Qadeer 2003). In this evaluation, the very desirability of residential integration is contested. On the one hand, ethnic enclaves offer shared norms and mutual trust that are important to immigrants in the early stages of integration and provide access to networks through which immigrants can feel welcome, find shelter and employment, and maintain a connection with their roots (Rose & Séguin, 2006; Putnam, 2007). On the other hand, ethno-cultural concentrations can inhibit group members from accessing outside resources and from building connections with the wider social fabric (Lewis, 2010; Putnam, 2007).

Because of its links to other resources, researchers indeed see housing within the larger urban fabric. They see the neighbourhood scale as a key geographic scale for analysing problems and possible solutions in matters of immigrant integration (Germain 2000). The neighbourhood is the place where different immigrant groups express their norms and interests in the conduct of their daily life, in particular with respect to the planning, management and use of public spaces and facilities. It is also the place where individuals can develop a sense of belonging and learn to participate in public affairs (Perry 1929). Yet it is rarely clear how, exactly, the neighbourhood ought to be defined, conceptually and spatially. Germain writes:

. . . in the growing body of literature on the impact of neighborhoods on people's life chances (be they immigrant, poor, children, or be they associated with other socially fragile categories), the neighborhood concept is often used as a "black box" . . . It is in fact very difficult to identify exactly which neighborhood attributes have an impact on the studied population and how this impact is produced. Nor can quantitative research determine what pertains to specifically social characteristics and what points to the local environment as a whole. There seems to be some confusion concerning spatial scales if we are to consider the different dimensions associated with the concept of neighborhood. (2000: 7)

In addition to conceptual and methodological problems, the meaning of neighbourhood factors may need to be questioned insofar as the role of spatial proximity in sustaining community identity has been weakening (Webber 1963). Musterd's research in the Netherlands has shown that the link between residential segregation and social integration is weak (Musterd 2003). In Canada, despite the "increased level of residential concentration of visible minority groups" (Hou 2004: 23), it is unclear whether the networks on which immigrants rely to achieve greater integration are local or city-wide (or even metropolitan) in character. The broadening spatial scope of immigrant integration is visible in the realm of electoral politics, as immigrant communities are becoming better represented in city halls. In Montreal, members of visible minorities have changed the face of city council in the past fifteen years. In the realm of employment, which is seen as a major factor of social integration, Balakrishnan and Hou found that "the association between occupational and residential segregation is weakening in Canada" (1999: 215). Maintaining or improving access to affordable transportation will be a key factor in sustaining this trend (Foth et al. 2013). Access to public services, in particular to information that may be obtained from service providers, is also a critical variable in the lives of immigrants and other marginalised populations (Caidi & Allard 2005). But "access" means much more than physical proximity; mental and cultural barriers may separate some people from services that are available nearby.

Access to homeownership, too, has been the subject of sustained scholarly attention in the field of immigrant integration. Generally speaking, homeownership is supposed to give people both symbolic capital and assets for economic activity (Perrin 1977; de Soto 2000). The purchase of a home is seen by many immigrants as both a means and a symbol of integration (Haan 2005a, 2005b; Immigration.ca 2007); it is the expression of a desire to become part of the host society. However, immigrants from different backgrounds may ascribe different meanings to the home and to homeownership or face different levels of discrimination in their pursuit of

housing independence (Balakrishnan and Wu 1992; Haan 2007; Laryea 1999; Lopez 2003; Owusu 1998). Such findings have been clearly echoed in this research, as will be discussed later.

Much less research has been devoted to the relationship between the type of housing in terms of management, on the one hand, and social integration, on the other hand. Doyle, Burnside and Scott (1996) surveyed single parents (mostly women) on the East Side of Vancouver who lived in market-housing and in social housing (i.e., co-op housing, not-for-profit housing and public housing). Reflecting on what they heard from the single parents living in social housing, they write:

The benefits of social housing appear to be highly contingent on the quality of management or, in the case of co-operatives, the strength of the democratic management process. A key issue is whether the “role” assigned to residents is one that carries respect or one that reinforces their sense of helplessness and failure. Since these single parents have virtually all experienced powerlessness and marginalization, they are very vulnerable to insensitive use of power by housing managers or co-op boards. Conversely, opportunities to develop confidence in their own ability to undertake action, to make their opinions known, are highly effective in improving wellbeing. (Doyle et al. 1996: 7)

The participatory model of co-op housing seemed particularly beneficial to making marginalized individuals feel empowered. We will come back to their study in the analysis of our own findings.

From the perspective of immigrant integration, Parc-Extension presents an interesting case: although immigrants constitute the majority of its population, it is a small territory with an unusual level of diversity among immigrants (both in geographic origin and in time of arrival in Canada) and with a dense fabric of public services and community groups (whose staff is mostly made up of members of the *québécois* majority). This situation creates de facto cohabitation among ethno-cultural groups and places them in proximity to outside resources.

Like their colleagues in other immigrant neighbourhoods, officials and professionals in Parc-Extension face a dilemma. They want to maintain a steady supply of affordable housing units for newcomers and at the same time promote the development of community institutions among immigrants. A certain amount of turnover is desirable, whereby immigrant households make room for others once they have found their bearings and increased their income, but so too is the stabilisation of the population so that the neighbourhood can function as long-term place of residence where immigrants contribute to the community as volunteers, merchants, religious leaders or elected officials. To achieve this second goal, a greater array of housing types and prices is necessary than is often provided in settlement areas. The role of transition neighbourhoods and the desirability of stability were also explored in this research.

Methodology

After an initial review of the literature and discussions with Hapopex representatives, the research team sought to understand better what certain concepts such as “integration” meant in the Montréal context and what the landscape of immigration and housing was in Montréal. For that purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five community organisers or social workers active in the field of immigrant integration and/or housing. Their insights helped to formulate research questions and develop a research strategy.

Drawing on the model of community housing promoted by Hapopex in Parc-Extension, the review of the literature and the five interviews with community organisers, and with the aim to explore the role of housing in the integration process of immigrants, the hypothesis underlying this research was formulated as follows:

decent, affordable units
 + participation in in-house activities
 + support staff

 = increased integration

That is, this research began with the prediction that the provision of appropriately-sized and affordable units, combined with the opportunity to participate in building management activities and the ability to access social services will provide immigrants with skills and networks that will facilitate their integration, however they themselves may define it.

The next phase of the research involved the administration of a survey questionnaire among tenants of Hapopex units in Parc-Extension (and only in that neighbourhood, i.e., not in Hapopex housing projects elsewhere). A research assistant left questionnaires with the tenants of all 84 Hapopex units in existence in Parc-Extension at that time. In light of the low response rate, she came back in person and, with the help of the social worker employed by Hapopex, was able to have 31 questionnaires filled out by respondents during meetings at their homes. The survey assessed integration by gathering information on individuals' participation in non-work-related social activities at the level of the neighbourhood or city; their level of participation in such activities was deemed to be a reliable indicator of social integration (as opposed to economic integration). The intensity of social activities and, therefore, the assumed level of social integration were found to be positively correlated with respondents' level of participation in Hapopex activities. This finding, though interesting, presented two problems. First, the small sample size made it impossible to identify statistically significant correlations. Second, there was no clear sense of causal relations that might be at play between housing-related factors and integration: it was not clear, based on the limited amount of data, whether participation in management or social activities within Hapopex *fostered* greater integration in society at large or whether it in fact *expressed* a higher level of integration.

To obtain a more in-depth understanding of key concepts and especially of causal mechanisms at play, focus groups were conducted with four groups of participants: immigrant and non-immigrant tenants in community housing in Parc-Extension, immigrant renters in Parc-Extension, immigrant homeowners from multiple neighbourhoods, and community workers active in multiple neighbourhoods other than Parc-Extension. (The presence of immigrants and non-immigrants in the Hapopex focus groups was due to the inability of the social worker to gather a sufficiently large group of immigrants; this weakness is in part compensated for by the fact that the non-immigrants present in the focus group experienced similar problems of economic hardship and social isolation as immigrants due to low skills, poor health and similar factors.)

Combined, the four groups made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of conceptions and experiences related both to housing type, as residents from community housing, market rental housing and owned homes were involved, and to neighbourhood, as the homeowners and community workers provided perspectives from outside of Parc-Extension. Table 1 provides more detail on the composition of the respondent pool. Participants were identified and contacted by the Hapopex social worker, who knew people inside Hapopex, in private housing outside Hapopex and in the professional community. No person selected by the social worker was denied participation in a focus group; the only criterion for selection and for participation was whether the person belonged to one of the four categories at stake (Hapopex tenant, immigrant renter in Parc-Extension, immigrant homeowner, community organiser).

Discussions in focus groups were conducted in French and/or in English. They were led by one of the authors, in the presence of the other two authors, who took notes. Discussions were recorded; the recordings were not transcribed but were used to clarify specific points raised in the notes or ensure that quotations were *verbatim* representations of what had been said. Participants were asked questions related to:

- their understanding of the term 'immigrant integration' and of the idea that someone is 'integrated'
- their views on the advantages and disadvantages of community housing, in particular in relation to integration
- their views on homeownership and residential stability, again in particular in relation to integration

Notes by the different researchers were harmonised to form a common set of data for analysis. Using basic content analysis, the researchers identified common themes and differences in participants' views.

Table 1. Composition of Focus Groups

Participant group	Neighbourhoods	Composition
Tenants in Hapopex community housing	Parc-Extension	7 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 are immigrants, 4 Canadian-born - 5 have special needs
Private-market renters	Parc-Extension	5 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all are immigrants, wide a range of origins - most are affiliated with a tenants' rights organisation
Homeowners	3 Montréal neighbourhoods including Parc-Extension	3 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 are landlords in addition to homeowners - all immigrants have lived in Montreal for over 20 years
Community workers	4 Montréal neighbourhoods, excluding Parc-Extension	4 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all work for a non-profit organisation that specialises in immigrant settlement and/or housing - 2 are also immigrants

Findings

Discussions in the focus groups were rich in content. When statements made in these discussions are summarised and cross-compared, they reveal areas of agreement as well as interesting differences in perspectives on the three themes of integration, community housing and residential stability.

The Meaning and Dynamics of Social Integration

The notion of social integration was the first theme discussed with the research participants in order to elucidate a more nuanced understanding of the concept. Respondents were often surprised to be asked to define integration; it seems that the term is used often but is rarely questioned or defined explicitly. The answers given by members of the four groups of respondents varied in significant ways, but they also displayed some interesting common themes.

Many immigrants—among community housing residents, market renters and homeowners alike—viewed integration primarily as a one-way process of adaption to the host society on the part of the immigrant. Integrating

into the host society was primarily defined as being open, being able to relate to others and sharing one's daily life with neighbours and members of the host society. Some respondents described the possible tension between maintaining one's culture and participating in the culture of the host society (Table 2, column 1).

Table 2. Participants' Conceptions of Integration

Descriptions of integration	Factors that facilitate or hinder integration
Taking part in the 'Canadian way of life' (employment, community volunteering)	Employment and economic stability
Openness to others	Learning the local language (French)
Knowledge of the host society's values	Learning about the host culture
A process that takes time	Volunteering
A one-way street for immigrants (community housing residents)	Making social connections; combatting isolation
A two-way street for both immigrants and native Canadians (housing professionals)	Adapting to the winter climate
	Getting information about services and housing
	<i>Lack of adequate housing and slumlords (renters)</i>
	<i>Ethnic enclaves (homeowners)</i>

Long-term, home-owning immigrants, in particular, placed the emphasis on the agency of the individual. One stated: "You have to decide to do the work to integrate. [...] Immigrants have to take the first step; they don't have a choice, because people do not know them." This perspective stands in stark contrast to the ideas espoused by Canadian policymakers (see above), and by the community professionals who participated in this study. Indeed, the professionals emphasised the "exchange" or "give-and-take" aspects of integration, describing it as a "two-way" process whereby the host society must also be expected to welcome newcomers, adapt to their presence and eventually change in the process. Thus a conception of the host society as a multicultural and multiethnic society and as constantly changing society is required for integration, and also results from it.

All participants emphasized the role of time in integration. Respondents agreed that there is a difference between the younger and older generations in their ability to integrate; young people are seen as being more open or able to learn new languages (in fact, young and second-generation immigrants in Montréal are usually multilingual) and to adopt the values of the host society.

Participants were also asked to identify facilitators and barriers to integration (Table 2, column 2). Community professionals, in particular, portrayed employment as a key means to access other resources that facilitate integration. In a similar vein, immigrant homeowners evoked the necessity of volunteering in organisations and serving on committees. In fact, all of them had significant records of community involvement throughout their time in Montreal, and all felt strongly about the role of volunteering in forging connections, learning about other cultures and opening up employment opportunities. However, community professionals added the caveat that immigrants are often expected to be more involved and knowledgeable than 'native' residents, which implies a perhaps unfair double standard. Getting to know one's neighbours was also mentioned: for women, especially mothers who are not employed outside the home, getting out of the house and having social contacts was seen as crucial to integration and to quality of life in general.

Lack of knowledge of the local language was identified as a key barrier to integration, which presents a particular challenge in Quebec. Other barriers to integration include the cold winter climate, a lack of information about programs, services and housing, and prejudice toward immigrants.

Housing was mentioned by all respondent groups as a key factor in integration. Immigrants, like all residents, require a place to live that is decent, affordable, safe, healthy and appropriate to one's family size. This is commonsensical. What is more relevant is the fact that, as other researchers have noted (e.g., Carter & Polyvechok 2004; Doyle et al. 1996), good housing is not seen as something that in and of itself improves integration, but as an *a priori* condition for integration: securing decent and appropriate housing enables participation in other activities which in turn foster integration. In the words of a community professional: "When we deal with the question of housing, when that part is taken care of, everything else becomes more

manageable.” This idea foreshadows this study’s ultimate findings about the relationship between community housing and integration. Although homeownership may be viewed as a sign or at least a symbol of integration, homeowners were the least likely among the respondents to connect housing to integration; they placed much more emphasis on connections, way of life and community involvement.

At the same time, respondents attributed significant value to the neighbourhood as a place of integration. Community professionals thought that immigrants first develop a sense of belonging in a particular neighbourhood and eventually extend that sense of belonging to the host society as a whole. Immigrant renters in market housing, too, saw strong feelings of attachment to the area of initial settlement in a positive light. Residents in community housing, however, emphasized the temporal aspect of integration, whereby newly arrived immigrants cannot be expected to show high levels of integration in their arrival area. One of them stated: “If you go a little more outside of Parc Extension people are more integrated, but here they are people who just came [to Canada], they are not integrated.” Homeowners, most of whom had left Parc-Extension, saw living in an ethnic enclave as counterproductive for integration. For them, there is a fine line between reliance on co-ethnic networks in order to adapt, on the one hand, and isolation within co-ethnic communities, on the other.

Community Housing and Integration

Participants were asked about their perspectives on, and experiences in, community housing. Community housing was defined for all participants by a researcher reading aloud a paragraph that explicitly mentions the dimensions of resident involvement and of support services. Tenants in Hapopex buildings could speak from personal experience; other respondents shared perceptions of community housing which were usually based on the experiences of family or friends.

The first topic raised in the discussion of community housing was that of building type. Hapopex buildings are nearly all multi-unit (apartment) buildings, while the majority of Parc-Extension residents live in duplexes or triplexes (i.e., small buildings with two or three units). Respondents made a strong connection between community housing and large buildings and noted problems of cleanliness and maintenance in such buildings, citing concerns about cockroaches and other such issues. On the other hand, the idea was also raised that living in close proximity with others present an opportunity to form relationships in the building and to engage in mutually supportive activities such as childcare.

A second point of discussion was unit affordability and size. There was a general agreement, especially among Hapopex residents themselves, that low rents are a key asset to community housing, especially at a time of rising real-estate prices and upward pressure on rents. The availability of large units, appropriate for large families, was also seen as an important factor. It was clear to all that these factors do not pertain to immigrants per se, but to all households. Low rents, sufficient space, and a respite from the difficult rental market—the most obvious benefits of community housing—were summed up in this telling statement by a Hapopex resident:

These buildings give you power to stand up on your feet. If you’re ready, you go out; if you’re not ready, you stay here.

Access to affordable, sufficiently spacious housing gives people a good basis for studying, looking for work, participating in community activities and otherwise building their future. Again, this statement applies to native residents as much as it does to immigrants.

The cultural implications of living in community housing were a third important topic of discussion. Apartment-style housing is not thought to be appropriate for all immigrant groups. One homeowner stated: “I am allergic to [apartment] buildings, which is why I like triplexes.” He ascribed similar feelings to “many immigrants in [his] culture.” Cultural considerations were also evoked in terms of daily practices in the home (for example, some immigrants wish for a backyard garden to grow vegetables) and of proximity among neighbours with different lifestyles and habits. Some respondents saw the presence of multiple ethnic groups within a building as a source of tension and shared stories from other co-operative housing situations where ethnic “clans” and power struggles existed.

A fourth point was the participatory element of community housing. Although participation in building management activities is a key element of the Hapopex model and although survey respondents with higher rates of participation in Hapopex activities also had higher rates of activity in the community at large (see phase one of the research), respondents in the focus groups did not provide evidence in their statements of a

direct link between in-house participation and social integration. Respondents living in Hapopex units saw activities in their building as opportunities to get out of their homes and see others but did not envision them as opportunities to build skills and connections needed for their integration. Among all respondents, in fact, there was a perception of participation in building management as a burden rather than as an opportunity. A community worker emphasized that “the co-operative model is extremely demanding; not everyone is made for it.” Similarly, an immigrant homeowner recounted the story of a laundry co-operative set up by immigrants in Parc-Extension that had failed because its members did not have the time to invest in managing the operation. This person explained that immigrant households must give priority to meeting basic needs: “. . . people [in Parc-Extension] are more concerned about making ends meet [and] getting food on the table, not about a co-op; they don’t have the time.”

Longer-term immigrants and the community workers also reflected upon the fact that bonds made in community housing do not necessarily give immigrants the wider connections they need to become more integrated. In fact, one community worker hypothesised that a high level of involvement in community housing may be detrimental to integration by taking time away from other kinds of involvement in society at large.

Finally, focus group respondents discussed the availability of social services in community housing. While they did not provide positive feedback on the participatory element of the Hapopex housing model, they did see the second element—the provision of social services in the building—as a strong asset. Current Hapopex residents expressed a strong attachment to the service provider and felt grateful for the organization’s willingness to assist them in difficult times. One person testified:

In Hapopex [...] they do care about their tenants. If I have a problem, even if it’s not about the building I can pick up the phone and call [the social worker] for advice. And I don’t have many other people I can call and ask.

The element of in-house service provision in the community housing model is clearly important.

Homeownership and Neighbourhood Stability

Respondents’ ideas about homeownership confirmed the symbolic value that is attached to owning a home in the housing literature. Many understood homeownership as the immigrants’ ‘dream’ and the epitome of integration. As one respondent explained:

It is like steps: you are born, go to school, . . . save money, then you buy assets. So [homeownership] is part of a sequence.

Homeownership is seen as an expectation and as an expression of success.

Beyond its symbolic nature, homeownership is also understood as a source of many material and cultural benefits. Owning a home is a way of escaping the stresses that come from renting, such as coping with landlords and lacking long-term stability. Other advantages are related to the larger size of homes and the financial benefits of investing in real estate, such as having access to credit and therefore opening other financial doors. The main barrier to homeownership that was identified was the high cost of real estate. (This formulation of the problem may seem odd: the high cost of real estate is not a barrier to homeownership when household incomes are high or assets are large. Clearly, for most immigrants, lack of income is the main obstacle.)

Ironically, although homeownership was strongly linked to integration, some felt that it can actually cause immigrants to turn inward and develop or maintain fewer ties. They cited examples of immigrants they knew who had stopped participating in communal activities since they became homeowners. One participant stated:

The disadvantage [to homeownership] is that once someone is in their own place, they turn their back on everybody . . . and they forget the others that are in the same situation they were in before.

Thus, while homeownership can be a symbol of integration, the autonomy it brings and the costs it imposes can also lead to forms of social isolation.

Ambivalent feelings were expressed not only about homeownership but also about neighbourhood stability. As was seen earlier, some participants believe that true integration does not occur in the area of initial settlement

while others see that first neighbourhood as a critical element in the dynamics of integration. Neighbourhood characteristics no doubt play a role in this respect. One respondent mentioned the “human warmth” of Parc-Extension (as opposed to the coldness of more upper-class neighbourhoods) and added: “I wouldn’t leave it [i.e., Parc-Extension] for a castle.”

Thus, there is a particular social dynamic in Parc-Extension that causes some immigrants to want to stay. This feeling was prevalent among market renters, who were also more involved in their community, than among Hapopex residents. Given that opportunities for access to homeownership are very limited in Parc-Extension (except for those who can buy a duplex, triplex or apartment building and live in one of the units), homeowners typically do not associate the neighbourhood with their long-term plans. They also doubted the value of ‘ethnic enclaves’ for integration. Community workers, for their part, stated that in the long term it is desirable to aim for some level of neighbourhood stability in order, as one professional put it, “to build a feeling of belonging among the new arrivals.” Although the various groups of respondents perceive the value of Parc-Extension as a destination neighbourhood differently, they share a general desire for initiatives that generate greater residential stability in the area by giving people the option to stay if they want to.

Discussion

This research showed that the role ascribed to the neighbourhood in the integration of immigrants is dual. On the one hand, it can provide a place of transition where immigrants find short-to-medium-term housing stability, a basis on which to build their lives in a new country; on the other hand, it can be a place of long-term residence where immigrants grow social ties and develop a sense of belonging. Immigrants’ choice to stay in a neighbourhood, according to the housing professionals, is a reflection of the ability of the neighbourhood to provide for their needs. In this respect, Parc-Extension, with its numerous government- and community-based service organisations, appears to be a highly valued place.

The research confirms the value of affordable housing in social integration, for non-immigrants and immigrants alike. Respondents pointed out that adequate housing is not, in and of itself, a factor of integration but a basic condition, which, once secured, allows marginalised people to engage in other activities that will help them integrate. Community and social housing thus contribute to social integration by providing a certain stability for people who are experiencing a period of difficulty—and the years following immigration must be considered such a period—giving them an opportunity to “land on their feet.” In particular, community housing gives respite from the challenges of the rental market by providing units that are affordable, of good quality (especially in terms of maintenance and repair) and, in some cases, spacious enough to accommodate large families, which are more prevalent among immigrants. Its main disadvantages stem from the fact that it generally consists of large apartment buildings, with their problems of noise, lack of privacy and potential for conflict.

These findings echo those of Doyle, Burnside and Scott (1996), whose study was mentioned in the introduction and in the literature review. Doyle et al. found that single parents, another group of vulnerable individuals, benefited from the affordability of rents in social housing (community housing and public housing) as a condition for the realisation of personal or household objectives in education, employment and social life. They also reported that social housing made their respondents feel less isolated and offered them a certain amount of support, for example in child-rearing, but that this came at the price of a loss of privacy.

Beyond the stability it brings, community housing has the potential to foster integration through the in-house provision of social services (a factor that Doyle et al. do not mention). The local presence of a social worker is seen in an unambiguously positive manner by respondents, especially by those who benefit directly from her services. These services clearly enable some tenants to overcome difficulties and stabilize their lives, in part by giving them access to resources outside the building and neighbourhood. This finding may be seen as commonsensical as well: social services are clearly an asset to vulnerable individuals and households. But the coupling of housing and social services is not yet taken for granted in public policy. It is an idea that is gaining ground in the realm of homelessness policy: the tilt toward services is being counteracted in the “housing first” strategy, which really calls for a joint emphasis on both housing and services. A similar approach seems to be warranted for other vulnerable groups, including recent immigrants.

Most important, our research findings do not support the idea that community housing aids immigrant integration through the provision of opportunities to participate in management and other building activities.

Although the survey of thirty-one Hapopex tenants suggested the existence of a correlation between participation in in-house activities and participation in community activities, no causal relationship was discovered. In fact, focus group discussions suggest that in-house activities should be considered with great care in the dynamics of participation and integration. First, the general potential for interaction in community housing is not seen in a uniformly positive light: on the one hand, interaction among residents can be a positive factor in the lives of immigrants in need of contacts, information and support; on the other hand, relations among neighbours in a large building can be a source of tension and conflict. Second, a more important, a number of respondents expressed the concern that participation in in-house activities is the wrong type of participation to begin with: engaging with people living in the same place and, often, under the same circumstances can be less beneficial for integration than forming connections with individuals from different income levels, other ethnic groups, other parts of the neighbourhood and other parts of the city. Thus, participation in the management of one's building may be a form of involvement that is more appropriate for immigrants who already display a high level of integration. To raise that level for community-housing tenants, activities outside the residential setting are deemed to be much more important. Worse, the expectation to participate in in-house activities is seen by some as a burden for people who already have a lot on their plate.

Owing to the small number of people involved in the focus groups, these findings should be accepted with caution. Still, at the very least, they force proponents of community housing themselves to exercise caution in their discussions of the benefits of their projects. Participation in in-house management and other activities seems to be at best a secondary factor in the creation of support systems for recent immigrant and at worst a hindrance to their efforts at integration. Findings from the focus groups also are limited by the fact that discussions did not explicitly address the question of spatial scale in the process of integration; i.e., discussions did not yield much understanding of the different territories (e.g., building, neighbourhood, city, metropolitan region) in which integration can be pursued and achieved. For instance, it is unclear from our research where, exactly, opportunities ought to be provided for volunteering, for receiving social services, for obtaining employment training or for contributing to political decision-making. The presence of a social worker on the premises was seen as a definite plus by tenants of Hapopex units; but volunteering in in-house Hapopex activities was seen as a burden more than as an opportunity.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Community Housing Developers

In this research project, we tested the hypothesis that community housing, defined as affordable housing that provides the opportunity or expectation for residents to participate in management and other activities, would facilitate the social integration of immigrant newcomers. In particular, we expected to uncover evidence of the following causal mechanism: (1) community housing provides residents with affordable, quality housing that meets their needs, thereby offering housing stability; (2) participation in in-house collective activities enables tenants to develop new skills; (3) together, residential stability and new skills facilitate participation in economic and civic activities and thereby aid in social integration.

Ultimately, our hypothesis was partly confirmed and partly refuted. The residential stability provided by affordable, well-maintained and sufficiently large units seems to enable immigrant (and other) households to envisage, plan and carry out activities that will foster their integration (e.g., education, work, volunteering). However, participation in management and other activities in the building or organisation is not seen as a positive factor in social integration. If participation in in-house activities and participation in civic activities in the neighbourhood or city seem to be correlated, there does not seem to be a causal link between them. According to some respondents, significant participation in management activities may actually inhibit integration in society at large and should therefore be better left to immigrants who are already well integrated. Thus, a revised hypothesis would read:

decent, affordable units	
+ support staff	
= residential stability	
+ other resources	
= opportunities for participation in civic and other activities, hence for integration	

With this revised hypothesis in mind, we draw the following conclusion for community housing developers. We believe that they should devote their attention and resources to housing quality rather than to resident participation in in-house activities. Among respondents, the expectation to participate in building management was perceived at best as an invitation to partake of one social activity among others, and at worst as a burden. Although resident participation is officially mandated by the government and enables tenants to be heard in the management of their building, community developers should focus resources on social services rather than on participatory activities in order to foster residents' integration in social and economic networks. The role of the social-service provider within the housing project also speaks to the duality of internal and external assets: while the social worker helped to deal with issues between tenants and Hapopex, she was valuable first and foremost as a link to outside resources.

In summary, immigrant (and non-immigrant) households who are in a precarious socioeconomic situation clearly benefit from access to affordable, well-maintained housing of an adequate size, and they use the resulting residential stability to pursue activities that facilitate their integration in the host society. Although social activities are linked to social integration through the development of connections and skills, it seems that one's place of residence is not an appropriate location for such activities.

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