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Cooperative housing and the social integration of immigrant households

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This research was carried out under the umbrella of the Québec Metropolis Centre, Housing and Neighbourhoods Domain.

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Summary

The goal of the research was to understand what role, if any, access to a unit in community housing can play in the integration of immigrant households. The impetus for the inquiry lies in the long-standing collaboration between the principal investigator and a community organiser in Parc-Extension, one of the primary destination neighbourhoods for immigrants in Montréal. The organiser's experience in community housing (he helped to set up Hapopex, a community organisation that caters primarily to recent immigrants) raised the hypothesis that certain forms of housing could be more conducive to the social integration of immigrants in the host society. In particular, it was hypothesized that community housing, in which tenants participate actively in their buildings through management or other activities, could provide immigrants with more social contacts and enhanced skills that would facilitate or accelerate their overall integration.

During the first phase of the research in 2009-2010 a survey questionnaire was administered to the tenants of Hapopex units. From the responses of 31 individuals, it appears that social integration, as measured by participation in non-work-related social activities (at the level of the neighbourhood or city), is positively correlated with a number of factors, including length of residence in the neighbourhood, the presence of children in the household, level of education, and participation in Hapopex activities.

Yet these findings were interesting but inconclusive, due to several methodological limitations: there was no control group to determine whether findings were different from those for the general population, the sample of respondents was too small to perform statistical analysis (only one-quarter of households responded), some of the terms were ill-defined (especially social integration) and, as a consequence, some causal factors were poorly accounted for (in particular the relationship between length of tenure and participation in Hapopex activities, on the one hand, and social integration, on the other hand). In order to overcome these limitations, the researchers conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with renters at Hapopex, renters in the private sector, as well as homeowners and housing specialists during the second phase of the research.

The purpose of this second phase of research, conducted in 2011-2012, was threefold: to better understand how respondents understand social integration, to probe more deeply into the possible causal relationship between life in community housing and social integration, and thereby to determine what community housing development organizations should prioritize in order to foster the integration of immigrants.

The additional findings yielded by the second phase of research both support and contradict the hypothesis of the community partner. On the one hand, to the extent that community housing offers affordable, well-maintained units with a certain security of tenure, it does provide vulnerable households a good basis on which to pursue social integration. On the other hand, the relationship between participation in Hapopex activities and social integration is one of correlation but not of causation: people who are generally inclined to be in the public sphere and to volunteer are more likely to participate in social activities both outside and inside Hapopex buildings. Stability and affordability, not participation in housing management per se, are the key factors in helping immigrants find their bearings in the host society and undertake activities that will foster their social integration. Still, the presence of a social worker within Hapopex was seen as a great asset in terms of access to information and services which, in turn, could assist with the integration process.

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Introduction

The research presented here was carried out between 2009 and 2012. In the first phase, one research assistant (Rebecca Lazarovic) helped with the literature review and with initial interviews with RAMPE¹ administrators. Another research assistant (Raphaëlle Aubin) participated in the design of the questionnaire, conducted the survey of Hapopex tenants, analysed the data, and put together a PowerPoint presentation to present the research findings at an academic conference (Aubin and Fischler 2010). In the second phase, two other research assistants (Sarah Kraemer and Lindsay Wiginton), organised and ran the focus groups (with the precious assistance of Karima, the in-house social worker at Hapopex), analysed the information they yielded, wrote up the first draft of the findings for that phase, and provided feedback to the lead author on the full report.

The research was done in the framework of the Metropolis project, a joint initiative of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The Metropolis Project began in 1996 and recently came to an end in 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 project also had an international component with partners from across North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, as well as in Africa and Latin America. For the third phase of the project, which was carried out between 2007 and 2012, research was organised into the following six priority areas: culture, work, family and children, housing and neighbourhoods, justice, and host communities (Metropolis 2012b). Research was also organised geographically across the five Metropolis Centres in Canada (Atlantic, British Columbia, Ontario, Prairie, and Québec). The research project on which we are reporting here was carried out under the umbrella of the Québec Metropolis Centre and the Housing and Neighbourhoods priority area.

¹ Le Regroupement en aménagement de Parc-Extension

I. Housing, Neighbourhoods and Immigrant Integration

Housing, taken to include both the dwelling unit and its immediate surroundings, is an important factor in the experience of immigrant households:

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 well-being. (Hiebert, Mendez and Wyly, 2008: 10)

For Annick Germain, director of the Québec Metropolis Centre, the neighbourhood is a key geographic scale for analysing problems and possible solutions in matters of immigrant integration (Germain 2000). It is the place where different immigrant groups express their interests and the practices of their daily life, particularly 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 the conduct of public affairs (Perry 1929).

Given the importance of spatial factors in the living conditions and life chances of immigrants (and others), the distribution of immigrant households in urban and metropolitan areas and their access to or exclusion from the neighbourhoods of their choice have received a great deal of scholarly attention (e.g., Alba, Logan and Stults 2000; Ray 1999; Rosenbaum and Friedman 2007). Unequal access to housing, and especially unequal exposure to substandard housing, is a critical issue, particularly for “visible minorities” who are disproportionately affected by discrimination in the housing market (e.g., Haan 2007; Mattu 2002; Murdie 2002). Research has also focused on access to homeownership, which brings people both symbolic capital and assets for economic activity (Perin 1977; de Soto 2000). The purchase of a home is seen by many immigrants as a symbol and a means of integration (Haan 2005a, 2005b; Immigration.ca 2007), as well as the expression of a desire to become part of the host society. According to Beenstock (1996: 950) who studied Israeli society, “[t]he propensity to remigrate...increases if the immigrant has not acquired permanent housing.” Cultural differences also seem to matter in that immigrants from different backgrounds may ascribe different meanings to the home and to homeownership (Balakrishnan and Wu 1992; Haan 2007; Lopez 2003; Owusu 1998).

The relationship between housing and integration has been studied from a variety of perspectives. Many scholars have looked at the patterns of spatial distribution of immigrants in Canadian cities in order to evaluate their degree of isolation in enclaves and their participation in housing markets (e.g., Hiebert and Mendez 2008; Leloup 2007; Leloup and Apparicio 2010; Qadeer 2003). Residential segregation has been linked to occupational segregation (Ley 1999), but the link between them has been found to be weakening in Canadian cities (Balakrishnan and Hou 1999). Musterd's research in Europe suggests that the link between housing and social and/or economic integration is not as strong as some would believe (Muster and Anderson 2005). Except in extreme cases, "participation in the domains of education, labour, social arenas, and politics" does not appear to be strongly affected by spatial segregation (Muster 2003: 638). Immigrants' access to information and services, and exposure to discrimination were found to have a major impact on integration (e.g., Caidi and Allard 2005; Simich 2005; Ozuerken and van Kempen 2002).

Still, the housing unit and its surrounding environment play an important role in immigrants' quality of life and will have an impact on their integration in the host society. In that respect, officials, professionals and scholars interested in fostering integration in urban areas face a dilemma. On the one hand, it is necessary to increase the number of housing units available to immigrant households, particularly low-rent units that low-income immigrant households can afford. In this context, a certain amount of turnover is desirable: as immigrants find their bearings in the host society and increase their income, they will likely move to higher quality housing and areas, thereby freeing up space in affordable housing for more recent newcomers. On the other hand, people interested in immigrant integration would like to see neighbourhoods that attract a large number of international immigrants as more than places of transient settlement that are being managed by members of the majority on behalf of (or even irrespective of) members of immigrant communities. Thus, the goal is that immigrants themselves become involved in the development of their neighbourhoods, whether as volunteers, merchants, religious leaders or elected officials. For this to be accomplished, people need to remain in the same place for a long time and for residential stability to be possible, households need to find housing units that meet their needs and budgets. For renters, this means, above all, apartments that are large enough for their families, well-maintained, and affordable. For buyers, this means condominiums or houses that

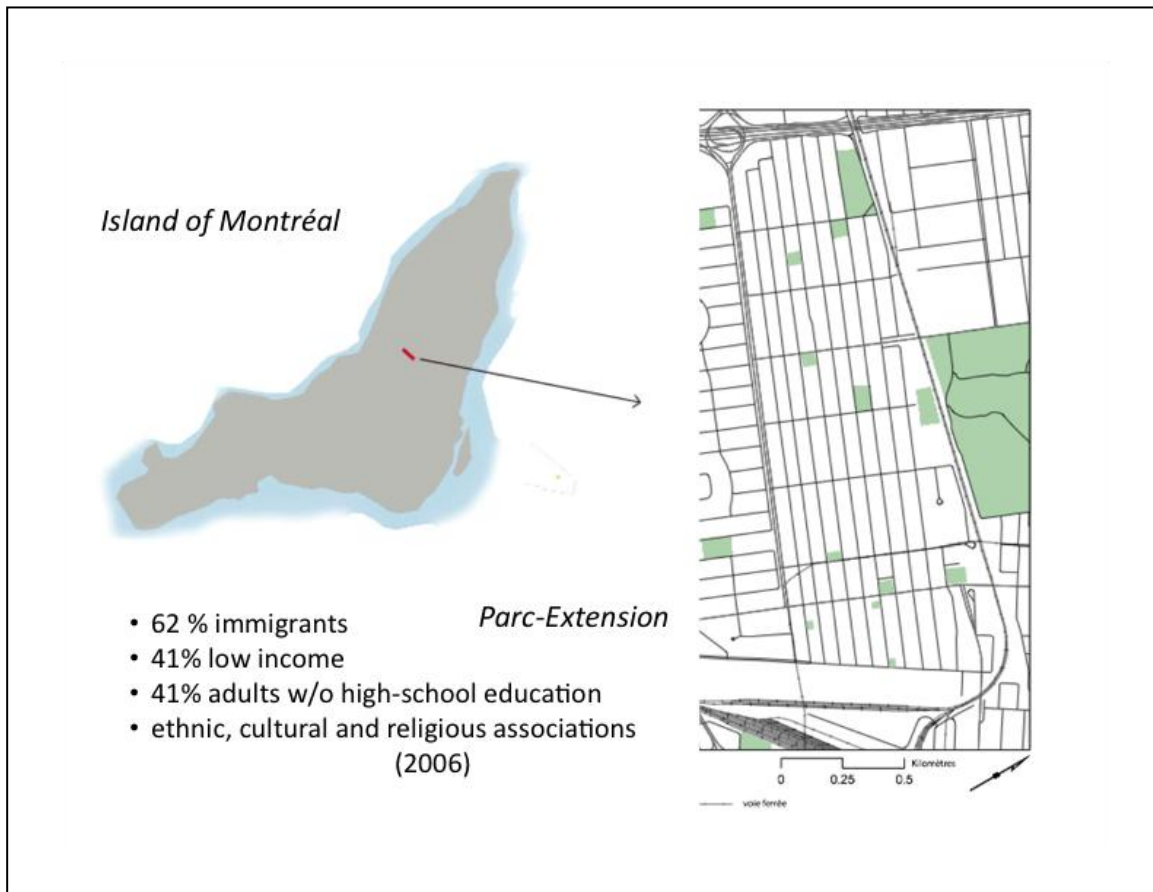
are affordable and offer good value for money (Campanile 2009). This situation presents a policy dilemma: while immigrant destination neighbourhoods should be areas of transition, where housing units open up for new immigrants, they should also be areas of integration, where the immigrant population plants deep roots and participates in local governance.

The goal of this research was to better understand how the community sector can contribute to making destination neighbourhoods for immigrants into places of long-term integration in the host society. In particular, it aimed to explore the role that community housing could play in that process. The researchers and their community partners were guided by the following research questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses of various forms of housing (community rental housing, cooperative housing, market rentals and owned properties) as factors in the process of immigrant integration? What factors in housing tenure and living conditions influence the locational choices of immigrant households the most? What lessons can we learn from the experience of community-based housing organisations for housing policy and community planning?

1.1 The Area of Study: Parc-Extension

In order to answer these questions and to complete the research with limited funding, we decided to perform exploratory research on the experience of the community-based housing-development organisation Hapopex, in the neighbourhood of Parc-Extension. This neighbourhood is an inner suburb of Montréal, adjacent to the high-income neighbourhoods of Outremont and Town of Mount Royal, but part of the lower-middle-class borough of Villeray—Saint-Michel—Parc-Extension (Figure 1). Three features make it an interesting area of inquiry for our purposes: first, a clear spatial identity (due to the presence of permanent barriers from road and railway infrastructure) combined with a changing social and cultural history (as immigrant groups settled there in different waves); second, a very large population of immigrants who have recently arrived in Canada and are trying to integrate in the host society in part through local activities; third, a large number of local organisations, some with a specialised mission, others with a more general mandate, that have been working for many years to foster the integration of immigrants and to improve their living conditions (e.g., Boudreau, Germain, Rea and Sacco 2008).

Figure 1: Parc-Extension, its location on the island of Montréal and key demographic features



Source: Statistics Canada

Once the primary destination for Southern-European immigrants (mainly from Greece) during the 1950s to 1980s, Parc-Extension now welcomes immigrants from a wide variety of countries across different continents (Poirier 2006). Census data from 2006 (Statistics Canada) indicates that the neighbourhood has a high population density, with over 30,000 residents in an area of 1.67 square kilometres occupying 11,940 housing units (i.e., over 18,000 persons per square kilometre and over 2.5 persons per housing unit). About 62% of the population is foreign-born and nearly one third of these immigrants arrived in Canada in the past five years. Over 60% are members of a “visible minority” and nearly half do not speak French (while about one quarter does not speak English). The most important group in terms of region of origin is made up of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, representing 37% of the population with a fairly strong level of spatial concentration in Montréal (Hou 2004, Ray 1999). The average household income is well below the Montréal average and

varies from about \$36,000 to about \$42,000, depending on the census area. The proportion of income that comes from employment varies from 58% to 63%, while the share of income from government transfers varies from 30% to 37%. In this built-up urban area, 81% of housing units are rental housing, 83% were built before 1970, 97% are in buildings with more than two units (triplexes, apartment buildings), and over 40% require minor or major repairs. However, rents remains relatively low, with an average rate below or around \$600 for a two-bedroom unit. In short, Parc-Extension is an immigrant destination neighbourhood, a relatively poor one, with high population density, but also a diverse one, with affordable housing and good transit service. With its multi-ethnic population, Parc-Extension contributes greatly to the “kaleidoscopic reality” of Montréal as a “pluralist city” (Germain 2000: 9, authors’ translation; see also Leloup 2007).

Parc-Extension also has a wealth of community-based organisations. Their work has been highlighted by researchers interested in the way in which local actors manage local diversity and contribute to urban and social development in immigrant neighbourhoods (Al-laire et al. 2007; Germain et al. 2003; Sénécal et al. 2002).² One of the local organisations is the Regroupement en aménagement de Parc-Extension (RAMPE), consisting of a group of organisations active in various areas of community development in the neighbourhood such as youth services, women’s rights, tenants’ rights, and public health. RAMPE has outlined a neighbourhood development plan, which identifies targets for public improvements and collective action. This document acts as a framework when RAMPE deals with local government and other stakeholders. One goal of RAMPE is to improve housing conditions and research is one of its means of action on that front: surveys of housing quality and maintenance in the local housing stock have revealed severe problems in some buildings and have informed calls for the better enforcement of municipal by-laws on health and safety.

The organisation has also created its own housing development arm, Hapopex³. This not-for-profit, community-based entity has used provincial subsidies to build 161 units of affordable housing. One of its buildings also benefits from government support for in-house social services for vulnerable residents. Tenants can participate in building activities,

² Information used in this paragraph and the next one also came from the first author’s participant observation as advisor to RAMPE from the late 1990s on.

³ Habitations populaires de Parc-Extension

including meetings of the board of directors, social events, and maintenance. As per the contract between Hapopex and the Government of Québec, at least three members of the board must be tenants. For the rest, tenant participation is neither mandated by the government nor required by Hapopex.

In their work to improve local living conditions, supply affordable housing, and involve tenants in building activities, RAMPE and Hapopex are in fact trying to make Parc-Extension into a neighbourhood of immigrant integration, both in the sense of long-term settlement (as opposed to short-to medium-term residency until one's economic situation improves) and in terms of civic participation (for instance, in RAMPE's planning processes). A large majority of Hapopex residents are immigrants who moved there from other buildings in Parc-Extension, with the aim of finding a larger, more affordable and/or better maintained unit and achieve a certain degree of residential stability (Campanile 2009).

As one of the key destination neighbourhoods for new immigrants in Montréal, Parc-Extension is a particularly interesting place to examine the dynamics of housing consumption and social integration for this population. In this context, the residents of Hapopex buildings constitute an interesting case study in order to determine whether stable housing and, in particular, stable community housing can foster better integration in the host neighbourhood and increased civic participation. At the same time, the leadership of Hapopex, RAMPE, and other local community organisations, as well as government agencies form a group of key informants who were able to assist us in assessing existing and possible housing policies and programs to encourage immigrant integration and involvement.

1.2 Research Questions and Methodology

The idea for this research came from Hapopex. The general question posed to the principal investigator was this: to what extent, and how, can housing be a factor of social integration? More specifically, what role can community housing (defined as affordable housing that offers residents opportunities for participation in their building) play in enabling immigrants to become active, long-term residents of a neighbourhood, rather than transitory residents who are excluded from public life and decision-making processes? The hypothesis behind the research is that residential stability and participation in building management, which Hapopex offers to its tenants, will foster their social integration. The idea is that resi-

dential affordability and quality provide households with a stable basis upon which to build a communal life and that experience in building management will promote civic participation. An additional hypothesis was that providing in-house services to immigrant households was also important. A final, less formal hypothesis was that affordable homeownership would be the logical next step for housing providers and for immigrant households in an attempt to make immigrant households into more visible stakeholders in local decision-making.

The first step in the research was devoted to a review of the literature on the following topics: spatial distribution of immigrants in North American cities, immigrants' housing conditions, the links between housing and integration, and the strategies of public, community-based and private actors in providing housing to immigrant households. Special attention was given to the scholarly literature on these questions as it pertains to Montréal and, more specifically, to Parc-Extension (e.g. the work of Francine Dansereau in Germain et al. 1995).

The literature review, together with informal interviews with key respondents, yielded the following factors of immigrant integration:

Employment

Language

Education

Number of children in the household

Neighbourhood services and amenities

Personal attributes

Prior experience

Openness to the host society (and openness of the host society)

Involvement in or communal activities

Some factors, such as employment, openness to the host society and involvement in civic or communal activities, can be both cause and effect of integration. Among them, the last factor seemed particularly interesting as an indicator of integration. It is both highly relevant to the study of the immigrant experience at the neighbourhood level and can be measured by simple survey instruments. In addition, it is of direct relevance to the aims of the researchers' community partners and their community planning efforts. Involvement in civic activities—those activities that are neither private nor economic in nature and that represent social activity outside the home and the workplace—thus became our dependent variable. The hypothesis that we wanted to test can be represented in the following way:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{decent, affordable units} \\ + \text{ participation in building activities} \\ + \text{ support staff} \\ \hline = \text{ increased integration} \end{array}$$

where the result (integration) is defined in terms of participation in neighbourhood organizations and activities. This definition was left open and so we did not differentiate between leadership in a broad-based community organisation, volunteering in a religious or ethnic association, and participation in public festivities. All forms of activities that brought a person or household into the public realm, outside the home or the workplace, were deemed to be reflections or facilitators of social integration.

Phase I: Hapopex Residents Survey

To test our hypothesis, we set out to survey the tenants of all four buildings owned and operated by Hapopex. The second step in the research, after the literature review, was therefore devoted to preparing a survey questionnaire and planning its administration. We decided to perform structured interviews rather than simply asking residents to fill out the questionnaire and sent it back to us because we feared that the response rate would be too low. We hoped that asking specific questions about respondents' backgrounds, housing trajectories and social involvement would enable us to look for correlations between factors in these different areas. However, it turned out to be quite difficult to schedule meetings with many tenants so our sample of respondents consisted of thirty-one households. In the third

step of the research these thirty-one households, each represented by one person, were interviewed by a research assistant. After signing consent forms, respondents answered questions read to them by the researcher who recorded their replies in a survey questionnaire on a laptop. The fourth and fifth steps consisted of analyzing the data and writing up and presenting the research findings. This concluded the first phase of the research.

The results of this first phase were less than satisfactory. Much interesting data was gathered on residents' household characteristics, housing trajectories, and social activities. For instance, the respondents as a whole reported higher rates of participation in civic or communal activities since moving into a Hapopex unit. But the small number of respondents, the broad definition of social integration used, and the absence of a control group made it difficult to assess whether the increased rates of participation in civic activities were simply due to length of residency or specific factors related to Hapopex. Thus, a second phase of research was necessary to address this limitation.

Phase 2: Focus Groups

The second phase followed the same steps of literature review (update), research design, implementation, data analysis, and presentation of findings. The method of choice in this case was the focus group. In order to refine our understanding of social integration, to compare Hapopex tenants with other Parc-Extension residents, and to analyse causal mechanisms (rather than correlations) between housing and integration, we decided to hold four focus groups: one with Hapopex tenants, one with immigrants living in private rental units in Parc-Extension, one with immigrants who own a home, and one with key informants (professionals) in the community housing sector in other neighbourhoods. The first focus group with Hapopex tenants was meant to give us more in-depth information about their definition of social integration and their perception of causal relations between housing and integration. The focus group with non-Hapopex tenants was expected to shed light on these questions as well, but from the perspective of people who did not have access to the benefits provided by Hapopex in terms of housing affordability, quality, and stability, as well as communal activities. The focus group with local homeowners was planned to see whether stability of tenure was seen as a factor of social integration and involvement. The focus

group with housing professionals from other neighbourhoods was expected to add to the comparative dimension of the analysis by providing information about the experience of immigrants in other areas of Montréal. Again, the aim was to explore what role immigrant households and professionals attribute to housing, particularly community housing with organised activities and services, as a factor of integration.

The focus groups were not equally successful. Due to a misunderstanding, only three out of seven participants were foreign-born. Because it proved difficult to find Parc-Extension homeowners willing to participate in the research, we ended up interviewing three homeowners from different neighbourhoods and performed individual interviews with them rather than bringing them together in a focus group. Overall, the respondents in the second phase of research included the following:

- Hapopex tenants, Parc-Extension (7 participants):
 - three immigrants, four Canadian-born citizens
 - five participants are residents of a Hapopex building for tenants with special needs, who have access to a social worker and whose rents are subsidised
 - they have a very limited number of years of education on average
- Private-market tenants, Parc Extension (5 participants):
 - all are immigrants, with a wide variety of national origins
 - all are affiliated with the Comité d'action Parc-Extension (tenants' rights organization)
- Homeowners, variety of neighbourhoods (3 participants):
 - one respondent is from Parc-Extension, one from Mercier, one from the Plateau Mont-Royal
 - two are landlords in addition to being homeowners

- all three have been in Canada for a long time (for 50, 20 and 30 years, respectively) and have lived in the same neighbourhood for the majority of the time spent in Montréal
- Community workers, outside of Parc-Extension (4 participants):
 - two are immigrants themselves
 - all work for a not-for-profit community organisation (an “OSBL,” in French) in Montréal and are specialised in community organizing and housing and/or immigration

The focus group discussions were conducted in French and/or in English. Participants were free to express themselves in either language of preference. In one case, one participant provided English translation for another participant who was a recent immigrant.

For all groups of respondents, the first topic of discussion was the meaning of the expression “immigrant integration”. The second was the potential contribution of housing to the integration process, and the third was the potential importance of community housing in particular. In order to ensure that respondents fully understood what we meant by community housing, we read them the following definition:

Community housing is provided by a non-profit group or organization and at an affordable rate. The key factor that differentiates community housing is that there is an explicit mandate to involve residents in communal decision-making and in the operations of their building. Often, too, there are social services and support services, which are offered directly in the building. Multiple kinds of tenure can be considered community housing. For example, in the Hapopex housing in Parc-Extension, tenants pay rent and do not have any kind of ownership or shareholding status. On the other hand, some housing co-operatives where tenants have ownership status can still be considered community housing. The key is that residents can get involved in management and decision-making within their housing.

With its emphasis on resident involvement in building management or other activities, this definition explicitly placed the emphasis on the question of participation in communal activities. The fourth and final issue that was raised in all focus groups was that of homeownership, particularly its advantages and disadvantages for immigrant households.

II. Research Findings

2.1 Phase I

Among the thirty-one respondents who were interviewed, 80% were immigrants and belonged to an ethnic minority, 60% spoke only a non-official language at home (i.e., neither French nor English) and 50% belonged to a family household. Although their average level of education was higher than the averages for Parc-Extension and for Montréal, their participation in the labour force was much lower: only 33% were employed and 15% were looking for work. Another 13% were studying, while 39% were not part of the labour force or education system. A large majority (71%) of respondents lived in Parc-Extension before moving into their Hapopex unit and half of them had spent five years or more in a Hapopex building. Nearly half (48%) had been dissatisfied with their previous housing conditions and most (83%) were satisfied with their current conditions. An even larger proportion (90%) felt that, overall, moving to Hapopex had improved their residential situation.

Respondents' answers to questions about their participation in communal activities indicate that levels of participation increased during their tenure at Hapopex. While 59% of all household members (not just respondents themselves) were involved in some kind of communal activity (social, cultural, religious, and political) before moving to Hapopex, 70% were now very active. A significant proportion of the increase seems to come from increased participation in recreational activities in the neighbourhood. To what extent such behaviour truly represents social integration is debatable. Equally open is the question of whether life at Hapopex had any causal influence on the increased rate of participation in activities outside the home and the workplace. It could very well be that the length of time spent in the neighbourhood increased residents' familiarity with existing services and allowed them to feel more comfortable using them. Even if familiarity and comfort may signify integration, they would be due to length of time rather than to residency in community housing. When we correlated the level of participation in communal activities with household characteristics (both before living in a Hapopex unit and since living in such a unit), length of stay in Parc-Extension, we found that the presence of children and a higher level of education were the factors most strongly associated with social activity. In addition, a smaller presence of the respondent's ethnic group in Parc-Extension was associated with a higher rate of participation in communal activities outside the neighbourhood. However, em-

ployment status seemed to have no relationship with participation in social activities. Most importantly, a high rate of participation in civic activities was generally accompanied by a high rate of participation in Hapopex activities. Some 44% of respondents said they took part in some of these activities and they are overrepresented among those who also claimed to be active in the neighbourhood and/or in the city.

In short, the rate of participation in social activities was higher for Hapopex residents who:

- have lived in Parc-Extension for more than five years
- have children
- have post-secondary education
- participate in Hapopex-organized activities

These findings are consistent with our expectations. But it remains to be seen whether the last factor is simply associated with increased participation in civic activities or stands in a causal relationship with it.

To answer this question, we asked respondents to tell us whether they felt that their life at Hapopex had influenced their participation in social activities. For 57% of them, the answer was “no.” The reasons for that negative assessment are interesting. Respondents claimed that the level of participation had little or no relation to their housing situation (but more with the number of years spent in the neighborhood or in Montréal) and some even claimed that their housing situation made them feel more alienated or isolated. However, 43% of respondents stated that living at Hapopex had made them more socially active. The reasons for that were multiple as well, mainly because they had friends in other Hapopex units, received more invitations to events and activities, and/or were involved in building activities, including management and maintenance activities. These responses indicate that some respondents have a more active social life as Hapopex tenants, but they do not prove that these individuals have achieved a higher level of social integration in society at large.

2.2 Phase 2

To achieve a higher level of understanding and certainty about the questions that motivated this research, (the relationship between housing and social integration) it was necessary to overcome three weaknesses of the first phase of research:

- limited representativeness of the population sample
- absence of a control group
- lack of definition of social integration from the respondents themselves

These weaknesses, in turn, made it difficult to assess the possible causal link between housing conditions and social integration. In order to remedy these problems, we needed to enlarge our sample size, undertake a comparative analysis of attitudes among people who live in Hapopex units and people who live in rental units in the private market, and perform in-depth interviews with immigrants on their understandings of social integration. The first course of action was not an option due to budgetary constraints so we pursued the last two strategies.

2.2.1 Defining Immigrant Integration

As described earlier, the notion of integration remained rather ill-defined in the first phase of the research project. A key objective of the second phase was to gain a better understanding of how members of the community, both lay people and professionals, understand this concept.

Respondents were often surprised to be asked to define integration. It seems that it is a term 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 common themes.

Hapopex Residents

As mentioned earlier, only a minority of Hapopex respondents were immigrants: four of seven participants in the community-housing focus group were born in Canada, though some were second-generation immigrants or were married to immigrants. This dif-

ference in experience among participants resulted in significantly varied opinions on the definition of integration. Many viewed integration primarily as a one-way process of adaptation to the host society on the part of the immigrant (rather than as a two-way process of mutual adaptation). They emphasised the tension that may exist throughout that process, between maintaining one's culture and participating in the culture of the host society. With regards to this, they cited the problem of differences in lifestyles and values (such as respect for property) as a source of conflict in Hapopex buildings where immigrant and non-immigrant residents of various origins live together. To a certain extent, these problems could be linked to the fact that many immigrants have arrived in Montréal only recently. As one respondent explained,

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.

Much of the discussion in this focus group pertained to the challenge of social integration in Québec. The need to have French-language skills was presented as one of the key barriers to integration in Québécois society, and Québec was seen as a host society that poses particular integration challenges. In the words of one respondent,

In Québec, what I really find is, it is the language [that matters] and an ethno-centricity [around it].

The role of time in integration was also emphasised. Finally, respondents seemed to agree on the great difference that exists between the younger and older generations in their ability to integrate: young people are seen as being open to learning new languages (in fact, they are multilingual for the most part) and to adopting the values of the host society.

Private-Market Renters

Among renters in Parc-Extension, 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. This includes feeling comfortable where one lives, as well as knowing the language and sharing social values. Feeling well in one's neighbourhood was important to one respondent, who would not have traded Parc-Extension for either of the bourgeois areas of Outremont or Westmount:

Quand je vais à Outremont, je ne suis pas intégrée, à Westmount non plus. Ce n'est pas mon quartier, c'est un peu guindé pour moi, je les trouve froids. Alors qu'ici il y a la chaleur humaine. C'est tellement riche ici, ce quartier, je ne le quitterais pas pour un château.

For this person, individual integration is as much a matter of class culture as of political culture. The importance of human warmth was echoed by another respondent:

On a tendance à aller au-delà des barrières comme le froid, l'hiver, les transports, on pousse pour trouver cette chaleur humaine-là.

Adapting to the cold winter environment is a challenge to integration, as is having accessible transportation and getting to know people in one's building. For women, especially mothers who are not employed outside the home, getting out of the house and having social contact was seen as crucial to quality of life and integration. Employment was noticeably absent as a theme in the discussion with this group. Housing was perceived as very important to integration. Having a place to live that is decent, affordable, safe/healthy, and appropriate for a family's size is a key factor in the eyes of all respondents. In that respect, immigrants' lack of knowledge of their rights as tenants and landlords' negligent or abusive behaviour were often cited as barriers to integration. Ideas for improvement ranged from having more social housing and more affordable family-sized units to regulating landlord-tenant relations better in order to prevent the abuse of renters.

The strong focus on housing in this group may be due to the presence of several members of a tenants' rights organization based in Parc-Extension. However, it is important to note that good housing was presented not as something that makes for better integration in and of itself, but as an *a-priori* condition: a good housing situation enables one to engage in other activities which, in turn, foster integration. This idea was shared by all other respondent groups.

Homeowners

More than any other respondent group, homeowners emphasized the agency of the individual in his or her social integration. According to one of them :

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.

Thus, “taking the first step” was seen as crucial. Integration was understood in part to mean taking part in the “Canadian” way of life. Young immigrants can experience strong social pressure to become more similar to members of the host society. A differentiation was made, however, between “integration” and “assimilation.” Integration was viewed as essential to surviving and avoiding isolation in a new country.

Homeowners also brought up elements of integration that had been identified in other focus groups, including learning the language, respecting the law, volunteering, and working on committees. In fact, all of the homeowners interviewed had significant records of volunteerism and community involvement throughout their time in Montréal. Their experiences included volunteering at a second-hand clothing store, working at a welcome centre, hosting new immigrants through a home-stay program, getting involved in their children’s schools, and working in a church. Each felt strongly about the role of volunteering in forging connections, learning about other cultures, and opening up employment opportunities.

A main barrier to integration identified by respondents included the lack of information available to immigrants on topics such as obtaining a lease and opening a bank account. While co-ethnic networks were considered to be a potential source of support in adapting to the host society, living in an ethnic enclave was also seen by some as counter-productive to integration. Thus, there is a fine line between reliance on co-ethnic networks in order to adapt and isolation within co-ethnic communities. Prejudice toward immigrants was also identified by one respondent as a barrier to integration.

Perhaps paradoxically, homeowners were the least likely among the focus-group participants to connect housing to integration. They placed more emphasis on connections, way of life, and community involvement.

Housing Professionals

The community workers emphasized the idea that integration is a process that occurs in stages over time. First, immigrants feel a sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, as a place that is familiar to them and where they feel at home, and eventually they feel a sense of belonging to the host society as a whole. This self-identification as part of the host society

can be expressed by the use of “we” instead of “us” and “them”. Participation and involvement in civil society, as well as knowledge of one's rights and responsibilities, were also cited as important aspects of integration. However, respondents added the caveat that immigrants are often expected to be more involved and knowledgeable than “native” residents, which implies a perhaps unfair double standard.

The professionals also placed much emphasis on the “exchange” or “give-and-take” aspects of integration. They described integration not as a process of conforming to the host society, but 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. According to one housing professional :

Une personne [intégrée est quelqu'un] qui peut participer à part entière à notre société, qui se trouve une place dans notre société. Mais [l'intégration] c'est aussi une affaire qui se passe de l'autre côté. Il faut que ces personnes soient acceptées, qu'on reconnaisse que la société est composée de personnes différentes.

In other words, a different conception of the host society, as a multicultural and multiethnic society, facilitates integration and results from it.

Since they work on issues of integration on a daily basis, the professional respondents were also able to identify many factors that facilitate it. They stressed the economic dimension of the problem and portrayed employment as a means to access other resources. Yet they also saw housing as a basic need which, once satisfied, brings stability and makes it possible to focus on other things, such as employment. As one respondent mentioned,

Quand on peut régler [la question du] logement, quand cette partie est réglée, tout le reste devient plus gérable.

Once proper housing is secured, other problems become more manageable. However, which factor, housing or employment, is most important or what relationship exists between the two remain topics of debate.

Other important factors that influence integration are situated at the individual level and include the skills and experience that immigrants bring from their country of origin, as well as their level of self-confidence, sociability, and extroversion.

2.2.2 The Role of Community Housing in Integration

Having established that housing can act as an enabling factor in the process of integration, discussion in the focus groups was shifted to the role of community housing in particular. As mentioned earlier, the definition of community housing used in this study (one that emphasizes resident involvement and support) was read to all participants. As they reflected on the merits and drawbacks of this type of housing for immigrant integration, focus group participants provided a number of important insights, which varied due to the wide range of individuals involved.

Hapopex Residents

Community-housing residents were able to think about this housing model on the basis of their own, direct experience of life in a Hapopex building. They cited affordability as being the most important benefit. Both immigrants and non-immigrants among them portrayed Hapopex buildings as places that enable people to find their bearings in difficult times. One of them said,

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.

Having some respite from difficult living conditions, living in a safe environment, and being able to pay a lower rent gives people the chance to improve other aspects of their lives.

In a similar vein, respondents viewed Hapopex units more as a temporary residence than as long-term housing (although this sentiment may have been specific to residents of the special-needs building). Hapopex was also identified as a place where immigrant families with many children can find adequate space. The challenge faced by large families in finding adequate housing and the potential of community housing to meet that need was a recurring theme among Hapopex residents, renters in the private market, and homeowners.

Of the two factors in community housing that could potentially foster integration, i.e. involvement in communal activities and access to services, respondents highlighted only the latter. They provided no evidence that community housing could act as a catalyst to

broader community involvement⁴. Respondents described Hapopex activities largely as social activities—“good because you communicate with people,” as one person put it—rather than as activities that would provide them with the skills and connections that they view as necessary for integration. They felt motivated to participate in building events in order to have “something to do.” However, some stated that the expectation to participate had actually encouraged a few people to leave the community housing arrangement.

Several participants in this focus group expressed a strong attachment to the service provider who works in their building. They felt grateful for the services offered and for the willingness of the organization to work with people individually and help them in difficult times. As one participant explained,

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. At the same time, some pointed out that living in a building with a concentration of individuals with special needs did not help them in their integration process. Rather, they felt that being surrounded by others with similar problems may lead to negative feelings. Many respondents also spoke of tensions that arose among residents. In particular, the way in which different people got access to a Hapopex unit was an object of contention: some residents of Hapopex were referred by a social worker, whereas others were accepted by “regular applications.” Some feel that immigrants and others with special needs get accepted more quickly. In this context, some residents are seen as “taking advantage” of the system.

Overall, in contrast with the private-market renters, immigrants living in Hapopex units were more inclined to see Parc-Extension as a place of transition rather than a place where they would like to put down roots. However, this attitude may be more related to their relative lack of community ties and involvement in community networks than to the type of housing they occupy.

⁴ It should be noted that since the majority of respondents were from Hapopex's special-needs building, they may not have represented the average case of Hapopex residents.

Private-Market Renters

Renters in the private market in Parc-Extension were asked to share their reflections on community housing even though none had ever lived in such a setting. Longer-term residents who were more actively involved in the community had heard of the concept (though the term “community housing” was not necessarily familiar to them), while more recent immigrants were unaware of it. Most of the responses given in this group were based on the impressions gathered by respondents from acquaintances that had lived or were currently living in community housing.

The advantages of community housing, according to respondents, include the opportunity to participate in activities and to interact and form relationships with others in the building. Opportunities also arise for mutual support, such as the availability of other tenants to assist with child care. However, the expectation to contribute to collective activities in community housing is seen as a potential burden. Respondents also worried about social contacts in community housing becoming negative. They told stories of ethnic “clans” and of power struggles within community or cooperative buildings.

L'inconvénient c'est que, comme dans toutes communautés, il y a des petites chicanes. [...] Surtout si c'est des communautés [ethniques] différentes. La différence fait qu'il y a des chicanes.

The very presence of various ethnic groups can lead to disagreements and fights. In addition, respondents pointed out that some immigrants may want to keep to themselves. One participant pointed out that there is a measure of self-selection in community housing based on willingness to interact:

Les gens qui sont solitaires n'aiment pas trop ça [le logement communautaire]; ils sacrifient leur revenu pour être tranquille dans leur coin.

For others, community housing is most beneficial to the poorest immigrants, because it enables them to find their bearings as they struggle to make ends meet and develop a new life in a new environment.

Another key disadvantage of community housing mentioned by respondents is that it generally comes in the form of large apartment buildings. Most respondents live in duplexes or triplexes, and they made a connection between community housing and large buildings in

general because of problems of cleanliness and maintenance. They cited the presence of cockroaches and other issues related to health and the quality of housing. Respondents also mentioned the size of units as an issue, believing that single tenants in community housing are usually not given a one-bedroom apartment and must content themselves with a studio unit.

Homeowners

Like other respondents, homeowners felt that community housing can be beneficial because it is affordable, includes units for larger families, and facilitates the creation of bonds among residents in the building. Like the private-market renters, they pointed out that neighbours in a building who may be from different cultures can share information and help each other. But they, too, were concerned with the disadvantages that come with living in large apartment buildings and some cultural groups avoid these buildings altogether. Vermin, noise, lack of respect for rules and lack of control over the living space were matters of concern to them. According to one participant,

I had heard about [community housing] and I knew it was cheaper, but I am allergic to [apartment] buildings, which is why I like triplexes. [...] many immigrants in my culture don't like this type of housing.

Moreover, respondents argued that the bonds made in community housing do not necessarily give immigrants the wider connections that can be useful in the integration process. Although they can find practical support and perhaps even new friendships in their building, immigrants need, above all else, contacts that will lead to jobs and other economic opportunities.

Finally, the homeowners echoed the concern of other respondents with the burden of participation that is placed on immigrant families in community housing. One person cited a laundry co-operative set up by immigrants in Parc-Extension which had failed because its members did not have the time to invest in managing the operation. According to this individual, new immigrants do not have the time because they are often more concerned about meeting the basic needs of their families.

Housing professionals

Community workers active in the field of housing commented that the expression “community housing” is generally used in practice as part of the broader expression “social and community housing.” They did not view community housing as a distinct housing model. Respondents in this group attributed several benefits to this type of housing beyond affordability, such as access to in-house services and communal space in the building, as well as the opportunity to get involved in communal activities. Moreover, they see community housing as a living environment where immigrants do not have to face the many problems associated with the rental market.

However, the professionals also stressed the fact that the expectation to be involved can be a burden and may not be appropriate for some people, depending on their employment status, family situation, and skills. Indeed, cooperative housing is particularly demanding :

La coopérative est extrêmement exigeante, tout le monde n'est pas fait pour ça.

The requirements to participate in the management or in the daily life of the building places extra demands on people who generally are already facing difficulties in life. In addition to requiring the expenditure of time in meetings and collective activities, life in the cooperative may also require the expenditure of energy in dealing with the conflicts that arise in those meetings and activities. According to the professionals, some people are simply not suited to be members of a coop, while others will need training in order to be able to participate. In fact, as one participant hypothesised, a high level of involvement in community housing may have adverse effects:

Quand on a beaucoup d'implication ailleurs, ça peut nuire [à l'intégration] dans certaines situations.

The respondent meant that greater involvement in the housing cooperative may shunt much-needed time and energy away from other realms of life, for instance from social networks at the level of the neighbourhood or of the city, and thereby be detrimental to integration in society as a whole.

In general, these respondents agreed that participation in community housing is best suited for those who have already had some time to settle, and that it is important to tailor the level of involvement to the skills and schedule of those involved. One person stated that co-operative and community housing leaders often have had experience in other forms of social involvement *before* assuming their role in the housing sector, and that in this sense, co-operatives are somewhat of a “second-stage” form of involvement.

Overall, professionals felt that there was no specific evidence, in their experience, of involvement in one’s housing complex leading to integration. Although housing involvement can provide crucial training for immigrants, other forms of community participation were seen as more important in finding employment or making links to society. Housing involvement does not necessarily facilitate the creation of connections with individuals in other income or ethnic groups, nor does it help to make connections to the neighbourhood or city at large.

In terms of residential trajectories, community workers felt that having immigrants stay in a neighbourhood over the long term is a worthy objective. As one of them explained :

Au niveau d’un quartier, c’est intéressant d’avoir des gens qui restent, si on veut bâtir un sentiment d’appartenance parmi les nouveaux arrivants.

Sense of belonging and, hence, social integration, are facilitated by long-term stability. For all members of this focus group, social housing, community housing, and co-operative housing can have a positive influence on neighbourhood quality of life and contribute to neighbourhood stability.

2.2.3 Homeownership and Immigrant Integration

Finally, focus group discussions touched on the concept of homeownership and its relationship to integration. Only the private-market renters and the homeowners discussed the subject in detail.

Private-Market Renters

All the respondents said they dreamed of homeownership: *Nous rêvons tous d’avoir une maison*. They see homeownership as the epitome of integration, since it fixes one in a

place. Owning a home is a way of escaping the stresses that come from renting, such as coping with landlords, and a lack of long-term stability. Other advantages are related to the larger size of homes (including duplex and triplex units) as it is important to have enough space for the whole family and to be able to host guests. Finally, ownership means having a good economic investment.

The main disadvantage or barrier to homeownership identified by the renters is its high cost. According to one participant :

Beaucoup [de personnes] m'ont expliqué qu'avec les taxes, si on calcule tout ça, on dit 'vaut mieux rester dans notre petit logement et payer tranquillement'. On n'a pas à s'ajouter d'autres problèmes.

The addition of property taxes and of the cost of maintenance and repair makes homeownership an excessive burden for some, turning homeownership into an added stress.

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

Les désavantages, c'est juste qu'on est chez soi, on tourne le dos à tout le monde, on est plus précaire. Et on oublie les autres qui sont dans la situation où on était avant.

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

Participants were generally not satisfied with the experience of being renters on account of the poor quality of units and the lack or slow speed of enforcement of regulations. One participant even nicknamed the Housing Board (Régie du logement) the Slow Board (Régie du lentement). But they did not see homeownership as an urgent need, and they expressed a strong attachment to Parc-Extension, which one respondent called her "village." They generally expressed the desire to remain there in the long term.

Homeowners

More than any other respondent group, immigrant homeowners emphasized the cultural factors that make homeownership desirable. For example, having a yard in which to

grow vegetables is extremely important to some groups. Moreover, cultural forces can also influence the decision to buy within the context of Montreal. Immigrants may choose to purchase a home in an area where others with similar backgrounds are also present. Homeownership is also seen as an expectation and as an expression of success. As one respondent put it,

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

The main advantage of homeownership, according to respondents, is economic: once you own a home, you can get credit, which opens the door to a host of other financial opportunities. Yet, home ownership comes at a high cost, which constitutes a major barrier. For that reason, one respondent recommends to other immigrants that they buy duplexes and triplexes, in order to use one unit for their own family and rent out the other(s). This way, they can have a source of revenue as well as own their own home. In addition, for older or single homeowners, maintenance can be a real burden and source of stress.

Despite the fact that the homeowners have on average been settled in their respective Montréal neighbourhoods longer than the renters have been settled in theirs (Parc-Extension), only one homeowner expressed a strong desire to stay put past retirement. Reasons cited for a possible move included wanting to have a quieter setting or wanting to leave a stigmatized neighbourhood.

III. Discussion

Some common understandings of the notion of integration emerged from the discussions with community-housing residents, private-market renters, homeowners, and housing professionals. Integration is a process that takes time and consists of different stages through which individuals will pass at different rates depending on their age, socioeconomic situation, individual personality, and a range of other factors. The research findings describe someone who is “integrated” as someone who self-identifies with the host society and who feels a sense of belonging as reflected in the use of “we.”

Where to place the onus for integration—on the host society or on the newcomers—is a source of disagreement. Community workers tend to portray integration as a give-and-take process (or a two-way street) in which the host society bears an important responsibility. Some immigrants and some non-immigrants tend to place more responsibility on the newcomer, especially the responsibility to “take the first step.”

Knowledge of the local language and respecting local norms and values are understood to be key factors for integration. Further, language is an especially important issue given the unique situation in Québec. Volunteering and being active in the community were also cited as important strategies in the integration process because these types of activities allow immigrants to develop skills, add experience to their résumé, and make connections which can lead to jobs, housing opportunities, and other resources.

Integration is widely understood to have an important relationship to housing. The literature review indicated that housing can be both an enabling factor and an indicator of integration. Respondents see housing first and foremost as a basic condition: once adequate housing is secured, immigrants can engage in other activities that will help them along in the integration process. The idea of housing as an enabler was expressed by the Hapopex residents, the private-market renters, and the housing professionals. Homeowners spoke less of housing than of language and shared values as key factors of integration, but this may itself be evidence that once housing conditions are stable and good, immigrants can turn their attention to other matters. In short, stability in one’s housing situation is a condition that can pave the way for integration, but housing in and of itself does not help immigrants become more “integrated”.

The contribution of community housing to immigrant integration is seen primarily in terms of stability. Community housing can provide people who are experiencing a difficult period in their lives the opportunity to get back on their feet. Its main benefits are widely understood to be its affordability, quality (especially in terms of maintenance and repair), its ability in some cases to accommodate large families and because it can provide a respite from the challenges of the regular rental market. Its main disadvantages stem from the fact that it generally consists of large apartment buildings which can pose certain challenges, such as problems of noise, conflict, and lack of privacy.

Community housing involves two main factors that have the potential to influence integration: the opportunity to participate in building management and other activities and the in-house provision of social services. Very little support, if any, was given to the idea that participation in formal management activities matters to social integration or even the personal trajectory of tenants. Much more attention was paid to the less formal activities that tenants can share with one another. But the richer social life that may exist in community housing is perceived in different ways. Interaction among residents is seen as a positive factor for immigrants in need of contacts, information, and support, but the expectation to participate in activities is seen as a burden for people who already have a lot on their plate. Moreover, social relations within a building can be a source of tension and conflict in addition to being a source of learning or support. The social-service dimension of community housing is considered in an unambiguously positive manner, especially by those who benefit from them. Nevertheless, it clearly enables some tenants to overcome difficulties and stabilize their lives.

Not only is participation in community-housing management seen as a secondary issue to that of service provision, it is also perceived in a negative way by some. A number of respondents expressed the concern that participation in building activities is not very helpful in the integration process. They felt that it is more important to form connections with individuals from different income levels, other ethnic groups, and other parts of the neighbourhood and city than to engage with people living in the same place and, often, experiencing similar issues. Thus, participating in the management of one's building may be a form of involvement that is more appropriate for immigrants who are already quite far along in the integration process.

Overall, then, community housing does not appear to be a direct catalyst for immigrant integration. Rather, affordable housing and access to information, and support in general can set the stage for broader social participation by helping to meet basic needs.

Respondents confirmed that homeownership is seen by many as an indicator of integration given that it provides many advantages, including making financial credit available, providing respite from the difficulties of the rental market, and meeting particular cultural

needs. However, there is a major barrier to home ownership, namely its high cost, which makes it unaffordable for the vast majority of immigrants.

Finally, some findings emerged on the topic of neighbourhood stability. Interestingly, only residents of Parc-Extension (the Hapopex residents and the private-market renters) expressed a strong sense of connection to their neighbourhood. Others were more open to the idea of changing neighbourhoods should the need arise. According to the housing professionals, the choice to stay in a neighbourhood 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. Community and social housing, and affordable housing in general, are positive factors in this respect as well, which contribute to neighbourhood stability and quality of life.

Conclusion

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 facilitating housing stability; (2) this stability, combined with the connections and skills obtained through participation in building activities, would enable residents to participate better in civic, voluntary, and community organisations in the neighbourhood and in the city and beyond. This hypothesis was developed in collaboration with a community partner in the research, the not-for-profit organisation Hapopex. This community housing development organisation is based in Parc-Extension, a major immigrant destination area in Montréal.

In the first phase of the research, an in-person survey with 31 individuals living in Hapopex buildings (of whom 80% were immigrants) revealed that social integration, as measured by participation in non-work-related social activities, is positively correlated with participation in Hapopex activities, but also with the length of residence in the neighbourhood, presence of children in the household, and level of education. In the second phase of the research, focus groups and interviews with residents in various types of housing and with professional community workers who specialise in housing made it possible to clarify some questions that remained unanswered after phase one.

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 plan ahead for other activities that will foster their integration (e.g., education, work, politics). 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 internal and civic activities in the neighbourhood or city seems to be correlated, there does not, however, 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 would be more suitable for immigrants who have already

achieved a certain level of integration. The link between housing and integration is therefore indirect: housing stability allows individuals to focus on elements of the integration process such as language training, higher education, and the search for employment, which are indeed catalysts to social integration.

We also found that the notion of immigrant integration is a contested one. Whereas some immigrants (generally those who see themselves as “integrated”) emphasize the agency of the individual and his/her responsibility in the integration process, others (professionals working in the community housing sector) emphasize the role of the host society. Likewise, the role ascribed to the neighbourhood in the integration of immigrants is dual: They can provide a place of transition where immigrants find short-to-medium-term housing stability, a basis upon which to build their lives in a new country, but they can also be places of long-term residence where immigrants become leaders.

The findings of this research clearly indicate that community housing has a vital role to play in immigrant integration insofar as it provides affordable, quality housing of an adequate size where immigrants and their families can find stability. Newcomers can use this stability to pursue activities that facilitate their social, as well as economic and political, integration. However, it appears that community housing developers should not place excessively high hopes on the benefits of participation in community housing. The expectation to participate in building management activities was perceived at best as a social activity, and, at worst, as a burden. We did find that civic, voluntary, and community participation is indeed linked to social integration through the development of connections and skills, but it appears that the setting of one’s own subsidized dwelling is not an appropriate place for such activities. However, the in-house provision of social services appears to be a strong asset of community housing. Thus, community housing developers should focus resources on social services rather than on participatory activities in order to foster residents’ participation in civic activities in the neighbourhood and the city at large.

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