

**Social Mix and Canadian Public Housing Redevelopment:  
Experiences in Toronto**

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*Résumé*

Depuis son émergence en Angleterre dans les années 1800, la notion de la mixité sociale dans le contexte de l'aménagement occidental a connu un succès varié. La mixité sociale a eu un regain de popularité après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, et encore dans les années 1960 et 1970, pour enfin devenir durant les années 1990 une idée très à la mode dans la notion et la pratique de l'aménagement urbain. Récemment, on a tendance à faire appel à la mixité sociale pour justifier le réaménagement des communautés à faible revenus et des lotissements publics. J'ai essayé de démontrer que l'utilisation récente de la mixité sociale a plus en commun avec les stratégies néolibérales de gérance urbaine et les principes d'une idéologie néolibérale que de liens avec les principes progressistes et égalitaires sous-entendus dans la promotion historique de l'idée. La poursuite de la mixité sociale par les organismes engagés dans le réaménagement des lotissements publics (à Toronto et ailleurs) a réussi à détourner les critiques de leurs projets en faisant appel à l'idéal puissant de la mixité sociale.

**Mots clés:** mixité sociale; embourgeoisement; lotissement public; Regent Park; Toronto

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*Abstract*

The idea of social mix in Western planning thought has fluctuated in popularity since it emerged in Britain in the 1800s. Support resurged after WWII, again in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1990s social mix emerged as part of a 'new' conventional wisdom in planning thought and practice. Most recently, appeals to social mix tend to justify the redevelopment of low-income communities and public housing projects. I have tried to show that recent applications of social mix ally more with neoliberal strategies of urban governance, and the principles espoused by neoliberal ideology, than they do with the progressive and equality-oriented principles behind historic promotion of the idea. The pursuit of social mix by agencies undertaking public housing restructuring (in Toronto and elsewhere) has successfully deflected criticism of their projects by appealing to this powerful planning ideal.

**Key words:** Social Mix; Gentrification; Public Housing; Regent Park; Toronto

**Introduction**

The redevelopment of Toronto's Don Mount Court public housing project, approved in 2004 and now well under way, will be the first of its kind in Canada. The second such project, under way in Toronto's Regent Park, will be Canada's largest. In both projects, the existing low-income populations, the housing stock they live in, and the physical layout of their community will be entirely transformed. On the razed footprint of these neighbourhoods, brand new communities will rise, with a socially mixed population, public and private housing, mixed land uses, and updated notions of urban design.

Toronto's foray into socially mixed public housing redevelopment is the practical implementation of an urban planning and policy-making philosophy that has become the new conventional wisdom in North America and beyond. Across Europe, Great Britain, Australia, the United States and Canada, policies guided by social mix, diversity, mixed uses, and environmental sustainability are being applied to new urban developments, existing neighbourhood revitalization, and, as in Toronto, public housing rejuvenation. Explicit promotion of social mix is most strongly associated with this last type of project.

Social mix typically implies "income or socio-economic mix, sometimes with ethnic or racial mix as a subtext" (Rose 2004, 280). Social mix policies are those intended to increase socio-economic diversity in an urban area, typically to correct the over- and under-representation of certain groups in comparison with the wider city (Van Kempen and Ozuekren 1998). Despite the popularity of the social mix approach to public housing redevelopment in both practice and in theory, there is little evidence suggesting that it is merited by socially beneficial outcomes. Particularly nebulous are the benefits of social mix policies for low-

income populations, upon whom mix is often imposed when wealthier people move into their neighbourhoods. Rose argues that “the unifying discourse presenting social mix as a taken-for-granted virtue needs some ‘unpacking,’ since social mix arguments can be made in pursuit of various agendas—progressive or not—and “can be embraced by those espousing ideologies ranging from egalitarian to neo-liberal” (2004, 280). This paper looks at social mix philosophy and its ideological underpinnings as it has evolved throughout Canadian planning history, and briefly considers the role of social mix in plans to redevelop public housing projects in Toronto, Ontario.

### Social Mix in Canadian Planning History

While strategies to demolish public housing complexes and replace them with new “socially mixed” communities are recent inventions, the social mix ideal in planning is not new. In a 1976 article, Wendy Sarkissian traced the Western origins of planned social mix to schemes of utopian visionaries and paternalistic factory owners in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. She argued that “romantic and conservative” strands of Victorian thought—marked by anti-urbanism and nostalgia for an idealized pre-industrial village life, combined with utilitarian goals to improve urban function—influenced the development of early social mix schemes. In the 1840s numerous plans were drawn up for experimental socially-mixed British towns, including J.S. Buckingham’s Victoria and John Cadbury’s Bournville, which was actually built around 1890, with the paternalistic guiding goal to “raise the workers’ standards of health and morality” (ibid., 234).

Ebenezer Howard, who came to have tremendous influence on Western planning thought after his 1902 publication *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, was heavily influenced by Cadbury’s Bournville.<sup>1</sup> When the first garden city was built at Letchworth, however, Howard eschewed the heterogeneous mix he had seen in Bournville, and instead advocated segregation by income and class at the finer scales of neighbourhood and block. Social mix would be present at the coarser town scale (Sarkissian 1976, 234). ‘Limited residential social mix’ was promoted until the First World War, and while some Garden City advocates argued for a fine-grained social mix, Howard’s socially segregated prototype gained more currency, and became the model that was replicated in basic form across Great Britain and imported by North American planners (ibid., Sewell 1977a). While North American suburban development was quite different from the Garden City model, land use and social segregation were faithfully replicated.

Two sets of goals motivated early social mix strategies. The first includes abstract and utopian aspirations of promoting social harmony, reducing social tensions, and raising the standards of the lower classes by nurturing a spirit of emulation (Sarkissian 1976, 232-233). Cited by paternalistic factory owners, intellectual utopians, and social reformers, these goals were often accompanied

by a condescending but well-meaning approach towards the poor (*ibid.*, 236). The second set were utilitarian or “hard” objectives for social mix: to provide community leaders in all urban areas, to provide a diversified employment base and economic stability, and to maintain essential services at a minimum expense through mix in housing (*ibid.*, 233).

### Post-war Interest in Social Mix

In Britain, enthusiasm for social mix policies resurfaced after WWII, as part of a general movement towards a stronger welfare state and principles of universality. Britain’s Minister of Health hoped that Council Estates would become “the living tapestry of a mixed community,” mirroring an idealised English village (Cole and Goodchild 2001, 353). Post-war ‘New Towns’ policies also promoted social balance, but by the 1960s, interest in social mix had waned and the New Towns actually built in Britain exhibited segregation by class at the neighbourhood scale.

According to Sarkissian, optimism and a general spirit of post-war camaraderie in the United States bolstered support for the social mix ideal, which was given “a specifically sanctified place in planning texts” at this time, “although neither the degree of mix nor the means of achieving mix was spelled out very clearly” (1976, 241). The USA was further spurred into social mix policy-making by the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that segregation was unconstitutional, after which planning and housing policy would formally promote neighbourhood-level social mix as a way towards equality of opportunity (*ibid.*, 240). Urban renewal programs in the 1950s were also “decidedly pro-mix,” with goals to re-value what were seen as decaying inner-city properties, and to stem ‘white flight’ to the suburbs. Despite these broad policy goals, residential segregation persisted in the United States, and the outcomes of urban renewal overwhelmingly benefitted middle-class residents over the poor (*ibid.*, 241).

In Canada, the immediate post-war period saw the beginnings of a fledgling planning profession, influenced heavily by American and British planning ideas. While early planners envisioned socially balanced new suburbs, post-war suburb construction in Canada was largely homogeneous, featuring low densities, open spaces, car-oriented transportation systems, and segregated land uses (Sewell 1977b).<sup>2</sup> The zoning codes and land-use plans of the post-war era formalized this type of urban landscape, which has been built ever since. Homogeneity-by-design was also achieved by Canada’s Urban Renewal program, which financed large modernist-style public housing complexes for an exclusively rent-subsidised population during the 1950s and 1960s.

Policies of social mix during the post-war period supported a number of goals. Aspirations for social harmony and equality (if mandated by legal imperatives, as in the U.S. case) were put forward, as were pragmatic goals to improve urban function and maximize urban spatial use and infrastructural investment. In the

United States, the middle classes were viewed as necessary for ‘community stability’ in urban areas—to maintain well-funded schools, and support transit systems, police services, and fire services. They would also bring *social* stability, by reducing population turnover, improving standards of maintenance, and enforcing ‘proper’ standards of behaviour. As in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, social mix was expected to provide benefits to the urban poor by enhancing equality and allowing for the downward transmission of middle-class values.<sup>3</sup>

While abstract support for social mix was present in this period, academic research provided unsteady support for the idea. In 1961 sociologist Herbert Gans was one of the first academics to re-open the social mix debate, offering lukewarm support. He advocated *limited mix* within a roughly homogeneous area of class and incomes, assuming that social conflict would result from anything more drastic (Gans, 181).<sup>4</sup> By the early 1960s, critics less hesitant than Gans were increasingly reacting to modern planning and to the homogeneity of the burgeoning post-war suburbs. Most notable was Jane Jacobs, whose ideas of mixed-uses and diversity gathered momentum and a strong following throughout the decade.

#### **Social Mix in the 1970s: Reactions to Post-war Modernism**

Jane Jacobs’s 1961 publication of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was profoundly influential. Jacobs condemned slum clearance, urban renewal, and suburban homogeneity, and promoted social mix as one of the pillars of diversity, her cure-all for floundering cities. Jacobs promised that cities would be lively and vibrant if they had a fine-grained mixture of diverse land uses, buildings of diverse ages, and short city blocks—all concentrated at medium- to high-densities. Once in place, these conditions would lead to social and economic vitality, and a vibrant, bohemian urban landscape.<sup>5</sup>

While Jacobs’s ideas were not entirely novel, her language and prescriptions were persuasive, and her passion for the subject was inspiring. Adherents of Lewis Mumford, who had been arguing in favour of fine-grained social mix since the 1920s, found a new champion in Jacobs (Sarkissian 1976, 237). Her ideas were echoed in another influential urban theory and design text, Oscar Newman’s (1972) *Defensible Space*. Both authors argued that *diverse* urban spaces would foster safer urban environments, through passive policing and the presence of eyes on the street (Jacobs 1961, 3).<sup>6</sup> The ideas in these books captured the imagination of a generation of urban theorists, activists, and planners; and would sustain the movement against modernist planning and urban renewal that was building steam in the late 1960s.

The growing popularity of social mix and opposition to urban renewal in the late 1960s and early 1970s was occurring at the same time as broader movements of social resistance. In Britain, local governments bowed to community pressure as protest groups fought expressways and slum clearance (Harvey 1989).

Urban unrest in the United States spurred governments to redistribute income by improving housing, health care, and access to education for the poor. Ideologically, 'egalitarian liberalism' and Keynesianism were at their strongest—enabling a “massive shift in governance toward a stronger, more openly regulatory nation state” in the United States (Hackworth 2007, 7). Canada's social welfare state was approaching a more universalistic model based on progressive understandings of the structural causes of poverty and unemployment. In these heady times, opposition to modernist planning was mounting across Canada, and the federal Urban Renewal program was cancelled in 1969 and replaced with housing rehabilitation and community planning legislation.

In Toronto, a movement for social mix was at the leading edge of this wave of political and social change in the 1970s. Downtown residents “infected with the idealism of the 1960s” fought to protect the old City Hall from demolition, opposed plans for a downtown expressway, and challenged urban renewal proposals for downtown neighbourhoods (Sewell 1993, 178-180). This 'reform movement' unseated the development-oriented majority on council in the 1972 municipal elections, leading to a 'reform council' headed by Mayor David Crombie. Social mix was at the top of the reform council's planning agenda. Urban renewal policies were scrapped and replaced with downtown-focused preservation policies and neighbourhood planning (Caulfield 1994, 61).

The physical manifestation of this thinking, and legacy of the period is the St. Lawrence neighbourhood in east downtown Toronto (Ley 1985, 174). St. Lawrence was built as a mixed-use, mixed-income infill community, connected to the city and patterned after 19<sup>th</sup>-century Toronto neighbourhoods. Progressive Toronto activists would continue to press for the similar redevelopment of homogeneous low-income neighbourhoods into the 1980s. Plans to replace modernist housing projects with mixed-use, mixed-income neighbourhoods were drawn up (but never implemented) in 1987 for Edgely Village in Toronto's Jane and Finch area, and also for the Finch / Birchmount project in northeast Toronto, the downtown Moss Park community, and in 1996, for the northeast corner of Regent Park (Sewell 1993, 229-232).

Across Canada, the federal government supported innovative social housing programs in the 1970s, including co-operative and non-profit housing. In 1979, federal support for income mix in social housing was promoted through Section 56.1 of the National Housing Act (NHA), viewing mix as “desirable” for two reasons: “First, a mix of assisted units with tenants paying market rents would contribute to the financial viability of the projects. Second, social problems associated with projects which contained high concentrations of low-income households would be reduced” (CMHC 1983, 162). From the government's perspective, social mix would provide financial and social stability in one shot. In 1983, CMHC decided that income-mixed social housing was too expensive, and in

1986 amendments to the NHA targeted assistance towards those in 'core housing need' and away from social mix (Sewell 1994, 173). Through co-op resident surveys, CMHC later found no evidence of "a positive relationship between project-level income mix and benefits accruing to low-income residents" (cited in Prince 1995, 731), and in 1992 the program was cancelled entirely.

### Social Mix After the Mid-1970s

While there had been enthusiastic support for social mix, mixed-uses, and diverse city-building from activists and intellectuals in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the practical implementation of these ideas was not widespread. In Toronto, 'phenomenal' growth in suburban development during this period was still "stuck with the precepts of modern planning," and entirely unaffected by downtown-oriented movements in favour of social mix (Sewell 1993, 201). While support for social mix would re-emerge in the early 1990s—with stronger foundations, wide-ranging support, and slicker packaging—mainstream enthusiasm for social mix was in retreat in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The dampening of support for social mix occurred within the context of global economic restructuring and the neoliberal shift during this period. Beginning in Britain and the United States, and followed not long after by Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, national governments retreated from the redistributive Keynesian welfare model, from the idealism of the 1960s, and from the political left. Ideologically, a return to classical liberal principles of the free unfettered market, individual freedom over collective responsibility, and limited government intervention resulted in welfare state restructuring, social spending cutbacks, and projects of privatisation and deregulation (Jessop 2002; Hackworth 2007). At the urban level, these changes have reoriented governments to take an 'entrepreneurial' approach—emphasizing public-private partnerships, global inter-city competition, localized mega-project development and the public absorption of economic risk (Harvey 1989, 7).

In Canada, cities have been saddled with increasing responsibility for social programming through federal and provincial government downloading. This responsibility clashes with the new imperative for cities under neoliberalism—to "lure highly mobile and flexible production, financial, and consumption flows into its space" (ibid., 11). Rather than "meeting local needs and maximizing social welfare," cities in Canada and elsewhere are fighting to *appear* as "innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place[s] to live or visit, to play and consume in" (ibid., 16 & 9). Public welfare spending is increasingly being seen as an impediment to competitiveness, and redistributive social programs are being replaced with attempts to create the *image* of a 'liveable' city (Jessop 2002, 454). In the Canadian housing field, federal funding commitments were frozen in the early 1990s. The housing sector was further "neoliberalized" in Ontario, where responsibility was

devolved from provincial to municipal control by Mike Harris's Conservative government in 1995 (Hackworth and Moriah 2006, 515).

Renewed support for social mix which emerged in the 1990s rose within the context of these changes. Enthusiasm for socially-mixed public housing redevelopment gathered steam in a period when "structural understandings of poverty gave way to individual and behavioural explanations for the cause of poverty" (Crump 2002, 583). Michael B. Katz explains that "[h]ow we think about poverty and what we do (or don't do) about it emerges as much from a mix of ideology and politics as from the structure of the problem itself" (1989, 5). The mix of ideology and politics since the mid-1970s has moved policy-makers away from notions of collective responsibility for the poor, and towards individual-level explanations for poverty, 'entrepreneurial' governance, and welfare-state retrenchment. The popularity of social mix in the 1990s accompanied this neoliberal shift.

### **Social Mix in the 1990s: The New Conventional Planning Wisdom**

By the end of the 1980s, a movement to embed social mix ideals in routine professional practice (even for the suburbs) was emerging in Toronto. In 1991, one of the city's biggest consulting firms agreed to plan a compact, socially diverse, grid-patterned suburb in the town of Oakville, and another large developer released a 'manifesto' claiming that "the conventional suburban land use plan is no longer valid" (Sewell 1993, 238-240). By mid-decade the City of Toronto was incorporating the ideas of mixed-uses, compact urban form, and diversity into a rewrite of its official land use plan—indicating institutional acceptance of the ideas that had been pushed by progressive urban reformers in the 1970s.

It was during this time that a new 'conventional wisdom' rose to prominence in urban planning and policy-making thought and practice, replacing the post-war planning orthodoxy that Jane Jacobs and others had so strongly condemned. This new wisdom is built on the shared principles of several movements that had gained popularity by the 1990s: including growth management, Smart Growth, New Urbanism, Sustainable Development, and Transit-Oriented Development. Social mix is only one element of this new wisdom that espouses mixed land uses, diversity, compact urban form, transit-oriented development, and environmental sustainability as key tenets. This battery of planning principles has replaced modernist planning wisdom as the new orthodoxy in planning thought.

The New Urbanism (NU) has powerfully shaped this shift in planning thought and practice in recent years (Grant 2002, 73). NU began in the mid-1980s, and with several high-profile founders and promoters, its anti-sprawl message and promotion of walkability, traditional design, and housing diversity has been incredibly well-received. Knaap and Talen note that the principles of NU have been "gradually integrated into the curricula at the top planning and architecture schools" in North America (2005, 109). Its rise in popularity has caused observ-

ers to call it the new “gospel” and “the new orthodoxy” (Grant 2002, 73; Hall 2005, 20). While focused primarily on design, NU has been reinforced by and complemented with the success of Smart Growth, which gained popularity over the same period.

Building on growth management strategies of the 1970s and 1980s, Smart Growth (SG) has been promoted by a diverse network of advocacy groups in the United States since the 1990s. Focused on managing growth to mitigate the impacts of sprawl, SG supporters promote mixed land uses, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods, and diverse housing options (Talen and Ellis 2002, 42). Both SG and NU benefitted from the mainstream awakening of environmental consciousness in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>7</sup> Applying the principles of SG and NU is seen as a way to strive for more sustainable urban form—that is economically more efficient, environmentally less damaging, and socially more equitable (Grant 2002, 73). The shared principles behind SG, NU, and sustainability movements were vigorously adopted in Canada during the 1990s, influencing policy debates at academic conferences and professional meetings, and inspiring the re-write of city plans across the country (ibid., 75).

Since the 2002 publication of Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class*, the principles of this new conventional planning wisdom have also been promoted as an economic development strategy for cities, assuming that a city’s future depends on its ability to attract “creative” professionals to bestow a competitive economic edge upon places that cater to them. According to Florida, the creative class is drawn to downtown living environments with mixed uses, compact form, a diverse population, and a vibrant bohemian street life (2002, 304). Creating socially balanced, mixed-use, New-Urbanist-style neighbourhoods is now, according to Florida, a necessity for continued regional economic growth. To these ends, creativity strategies have been enthusiastically adopted across North America.

In Toronto, these new conventional planning ideas have been well established since the mid-1990s, a time when the Jacobs-inspired ideas of the 1960s and 1970s became institutionalized in mainstream thought and practice. Toronto’s 1996 *Official Plan* celebrates mix as the first “principle for a successful Toronto”, explaining that “as in nature, diversity is our key to social, economic, and cultural life” (City of Toronto 2006, 1-2).<sup>8</sup> City policies require housing mix in brand new neighbourhoods, which must have a minimum number of affordable units, and support for the new conventional wisdom is evidenced by several high-profile projects currently underway in Toronto.<sup>9</sup>

### **Social Mix and the New Orthodoxy**

Social mix is just one of the principles promoted under this new conventional wisdom in planning, but it is not the most prominent goal of the movements

that gave rise to it. Smart Growth debates centre on sprawl, the environment, and urban form issues. Sustainability discussions tend to focus on the environmental and economic “pillars” of sustainability. New Urbanism, which has been most influential in shaping the new planning orthodoxy, is design-oriented and concerned minimally with social mix. Amidst economic, urban design, and image-oriented goals, imperatives of improving social equity are easily overshadowed.

In fact, the ‘social justice’ goals commonly associated with social mix pursuits do not emerge so much from other elements of today’s planning orthodoxy. Larsen found that New Urbanist inner city revitalisation schemes in the United States were “able to reinforce economic goals ... to the detriment of equity goals ... often increasing property values that result in gentrification” (2004, 796). Critics have also noted that although creative city literature promotes ‘tolerance,’ it may be that the *image* of diversity is all that is really sought. Damaris Rose highlights the superficial commitment of such strategies to equality-oriented goals for social mix:

Since the image of the ‘liveable city’ has become a key aspect of the city’s ability to compete in a globalised, knowledge-based economy ... post- industrial cities have a growing interest in marketing themselves as being built on a foundation of ‘inclusive’ neighbourhoods capable of harmoniously supporting a blend of incomes, cultures, age groups, and ‘lifestyles’ ... [this leads to a] desire to control the most extreme and visible forms of socio-spatial polarization, which diminish the city’s ‘liveable’ image. (2004, 281)

Recent attempts to promote social mix, then, may be motivated by an *economic* imperative more compelling to policy makers than abstract goals of social harmony and equality. Driven by this imperative, particular assumptions regarding who has a right to the city underpin these policies. Engaged with improving the *image* of a liveable city to meet economic goals, social mix policies may perversely promote social *exclusion*, by necessitating the removal of ‘undesirables’ in order to achieve a desired social composition (Blomley 2004, 354).

Discussing this trend in Britain, Cole and Goodchild note that, “under the discourse of inclusivity, the ‘balanced’ community became paradoxically a means of leaving some unwanted participants out” (2001, 354). A similar observation was made by Blomley in his study of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, where attempts to bring middle-class residents into the low-income community have been justified with appeals to social mix. Blomley explains that “property-owners have deployed a language of balance in service of exclusion” (2004, 99). In other words, the pursuit of social mix justifies giving the right to space and property to certain groups of people, while taking it away from others.

While social mix is part of a broader array of diversity-oriented precepts (which are now embedded in mainstream planning thought), explicit support for social mix *on its own* is typically raised to justify projects of neighbourhood renewal and revitalization in poor areas, and low-income public housing projects in particular. It is rarely argued that social mix is needed in homogeneous middle- or high-income communities (Slater 2006, 750). This is particularly true in Toronto, where specific commitment to social mix is most evident in redevelopments planned for downtown areas inhabited by poor or marginalized communities, such as the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, which is being redeveloped into a socially mixed community; in South Parkdale where anti-rooming-house legislation has been enabled in the name of social mix (Slater 2004); and with the redevelopments planned for downtown public housing communities.

### **Social Mix and Public Housing Redevelopment**

In 1992, the U.S. department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) unveiled HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere), a new program intended to deal with ‘problem’ public housing sites. The program funded redevelopment through the demolition of projects and their reconstruction as socially-mixed communities. Tenants would be re-housed on-site or given vouchers to rent in the private market. Part of the theoretical justification for HOPE VI drew from sociological literature on poverty, which argued that urban problems could be ameliorated through the dispersion of concentrated poverty (Wilson 1987). Social mix policies, then, are seen as one way of achieving poverty deconcentration.

The American “deconcentration by demolition” approach to redevelopment (Crump 2002) has served as a model for public housing agencies around the world, and influenced similar approaches to redevelopment in the United Kingdom (Atkinson and Kintrea 2001), France, Germany, Sweden, Finland (Musterd and Andersson 2005), the Netherlands (Kleinhans 2004) and Australia (Arthurson 2002). In 2002, Canada joined this list, as plans for the redevelopment of Toronto’s Regent Park and Don Mount Court communities got underway.

Despite the popularity of this approach, researchers have questioned whether it provides equitable outcomes for tenants. One multi-city study of HOPE VI projects found that “thus far, the effects have been mixed, with some former residents clearly better off, others experiencing substantial hardship, and still others at risk of not being able to make a successful transition out of public housing” (Popkin et al. 2002, 407), and an Australian study found that redevelopment destroyed tenant networks and social capital (Arthurson 2002). The net loss of 51,172 subsidized units through HOPE VI (which does not require one-for-one unit replacement) will most certainly have a negative impact on low-income tenants (Hackworth 2007).

Critics of the HOPE VI approach to public housing redevelopment have pointed out its neoliberal trappings (Hackworth 2007; Crump 2002). Justified by appeals to social mix, HOPE VI programs have been accused of promoting gentrification by removing public housing concentrations in hot real estate markets (Goetz 2000; Bennett and Reed 1999). Deconcentration-oriented redevelopment approaches are also involved with neoliberal creativity strategies that seek to improve 'liveability,' and aid in "the reimagining of the city as a safe zone for commerce, entertainment, and culture" (Crump 2002, 582). Concern with *image* in redeveloped HOPE VI sites is evidenced in HUD's decision to hire the Congress for the New Urbanism to draft guidelines for redevelopment (Larsen 2004).

While significant criticism has been levelled at HOPE VI, the concept of 'social mix' has remained relatively unscathed. Blomley notes that critics of displacement and gentrification face difficulty raising opposition to social mix, "an immensely persuasive concept," (2004, 90) imbued as it is with notions of equality and social harmony. Regardless of the objectives actually sought by public housing redevelopment, justifying it with appeals to social mix is a successful strategy for deflecting criticism.

### **Social Mix, Public Housing, and Redevelopment in Ontario**

In Toronto, the idea of social mix has been brought on board to help justify the most advanced incarnation of public housing restructuring in Canada. Hackworth and Moriah note that Ontario's housing sector has been thoroughly 'neoliberalized.' In 1995, support for 17,000 planned social housing units was eliminated by the Harris government, housing responsibility was devolved to 47 (mostly) municipal service providers, and attempts were made to privatise as much as possible (2006, 515). For most small- and medium-sized service providers, the outcome has been disastrous: with resources harder to come by and innovation more difficult to achieve. Only large service providers have become "successfully" entrepreneurial under this restructuring. The largest housing operator in the province (with a portfolio of over 58,000 units) is the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), which owes its status as "most entrepreneurial" to its sizeable downtown landholdings which have enabled it to "sell off part of its portfolio to fund new development, rent out space to commercial tenants, and transfer some of its properties to homeownership-based units" (ibid., 522).

While the TCHC has been most "successful" in adopting an entrepreneurial approach, this may come at the expense of general social equity and positive tenant outcomes. Several Ontario service providers interviewed by Hackworth and Moriah (2006) agreed that "privatizing resources is no sign of success when it threatens the future accessibility of a housing unit" (522). Kipfer (2005) offered an unfavourable description of TCHC's entrepreneurial approach, which

involved “adopting a business management style, ramping up evictions, contracting out jobs, and legitimizing its corporate strategy with tenant management schemes” (8).

Despite these criticisms, the TCHC’s redevelopment plans have been generally well-received, perhaps due to the progressively-toned language of social mix which permeates descriptions of the projects. The TCHC explains that “in social terms, [Regent Park] will be transformed from a solely RGI community to one that mixes incomes and cultures and becomes a social and cultural microcosm of the larger city, more intimately connected to its surrounding neighbourhoods” (Regent Park Collaborative Team 2002, 64). Physically, Regent Park will be “reconfigured into a more traditional urban neighbourhood containing a diversity of residential building forms,” and the TCHC promises ‘eyes on the street,’ better integration, ‘diversity,’ and enhanced “community health and cohesion” (ibid.). A similar design approach has been taken in Don Mount Court. Indeed, much of what is planned seems to fall in line with the directives of Jane Jacobs, and seem at long last to fulfil the wishes of 1960s-era progressive reformers who were opposed to the homogeneity of urban renewal public housing and its design features.

The TCHC’s hopes for social mix echo the poverty-deconcentration objectives of HOPE VI. In the *Regent Park Revitalization Plan*, paternalistic and condescending goals for mix are cited with approval. “Mixed-Income housing,” the plan notes, “is seen as an antidote to the conditions of social and economic isolation brought about by traditional public housing development. Behavioural patterns of lower-income tenants will be altered by interaction with higher income neighbours. For example, social norms about workforce participation will be passed on to lower income residents” (ibid., 77). A representative involved with Regent Park’s revitalization put it this way, “the only way to start addressing the concentration of poverty is to introduce into the mix some market units” (Regent Park planner, personal communication Dec. 13 2006).

While the updated design planned in Regent Park looks attractive, the influx of a new middle-income population will likely have a profound impact on the existing Regent Park community and its surrounding area. Once complete, there will be approximately 5,100 housing units in Regent Park. The TCHC is required to replace 65% of the demolished rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units on site, meaning that as little as 27% of the re-built housing stock in Regent Park will be subsidized (City of Toronto 2005).<sup>10</sup> The majority of the housing units in the redeveloped community will be available for sale on the private market, and will likely be far from affordable, in line with general trends in downtown Toronto. As such, the redevelopment is poised to open up east downtown Toronto to gentrification, a process that has been held off in the

area largely due to the presence of Regent Park. The TCHC's own desire to achieve the successful gentrification of this area is evidenced by the title of a speech delivered by TCHC's Board President in 2005, *Unlocking the value in east downtown Toronto: The revitalization of Regent Park* (Kosny 2005).

The financial realities brought on by neoliberal housing management restructuring in Ontario have contributed to the TCHC's embrace of socially-mixed redevelopment as an entrepreneurial strategy. A report on Don Mount Court suggests the entrepreneurial incentive for mix: "Simple replacement of the [RGI] units would underutilize the site ... There is an advantage to building market units on site as well as RGI ... The sale of market units would recover development value of the land not required for replacement units" (TCHC 2002, 10). Financially, TCHC's redevelopment plans *depend* on the attraction of middle-class residents for their market units. It is recognized that in Regent Park, "there is a need to generate more income through the proportion of private housing" (Revitalization planner, personal communication Feb. 01, 2007). The push for poverty deconcentration may be linked to ensuring the attractiveness and marketability of non-public housing in the redeveloped communities. Residents from Lawrence Heights, a third community TCHC is planning to redevelop, are raising early concerns about gentrification. As one community member put it, "Prime real estate, that's what this is all about" (Vincent 2007).

It would appear that the priorities driving the TCHC's approach are rooted more in a desire to be entrepreneurial and to capitalise on its valuable landholdings than in concerns for tenant outcomes. Given that gentrification tends to negatively affect low-income citizens in gentrifying communities (Atkinson 2004), and that social mix and poverty deconcentration approaches to public housing redevelopment hold questionable promise for delivering equitable outcomes, the TCHC's embrace of this approach in Regent Park and elsewhere in its portfolio is cause for concern. Public housing agencies in Canada that might look to the TCHC's approach as a potential model for the redevelopment of their own stocks should proceed with caution, and ensure that they select a strategy that prioritizes positive outcomes for tenants above all else. In addition, strategies that pursue 'social mix' as a way to improve the lives of public housing tenants and improve disinvested communities should be approached critically, given that renewed interest in the term has emerged from a political and ideological climate quite different than the progressive era it is typically associated with.

## Conclusion

The idea of social mix in Western planning has fluctuated in popularity since it emerged in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. Popular support resurfaced in the post-war period, and flared up again in the mid-1970s, fuelled by the heady idealism of the

times and guided by the iconic figure of Jane Jacobs. By the early 1990s, social mix had become part of a new conventional planning wisdom—built on principles of diversity, mixed-uses, environmental sustainability, and the tenets of New Urbanist design. In its most recent phase of popularity, appeals to social mix have typically surfaced to justify the redevelopment of low-income communities and public housing projects. The idea of social mix receives strong support from the general public,<sup>11</sup> associated as it is with images of social harmony and equality. I have tried to show that recent applications of social mix ally more with neoliberal strategies of urban governance, and the principles espoused by neoliberal ideology, than they do with the progressive and equality-oriented principles behind the historic promotion of the idea. The pursuit of social mix by agencies undertaking public housing restructuring (in Toronto and elsewhere) successfully deflected criticism of their projects by appealing to this powerful planning ideal.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This was initially printed in 1898 under the title, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.

<sup>2</sup> According to John Sewell, the original plan for Don Mills (the suburb in Toronto that became a template for similar development across the country) rested on a principle of social equity and neighbourhood balance, formulated by idealistic suburb planners. The planners' principles were scrapped, however, in favour of increased profit potential when the suburb was actually built.

<sup>3</sup> Social mix policies tend to avoid an explicit discussion of scale. While it is assumed that benefits will accrue to tenants via interactions with higher-income neighbours, Cole and Goodchild (2001) note that 'the street' is the scale where interaction takes place, not the broader 'neighbourhood.' Most social mix programmes, however, seem to focus on the 'neighbourhood' or (the rather vague) 'community' level. There is hesitance to mix too closely (at the building or street scale, for example) perhaps due to research findings that suggest 'tension' results from "the artificial imposition of 'social mix' at too fine a spatial scale" (Rose 2004, 281).

<sup>4</sup> According to Cole and Goodchild, it was critiques like the one offered by Gans that led to a dampening in enthusiasm for social mix policies in the UK, and waning of social mix promotion there in the 1960s (1999, 353).

<sup>5</sup> Jane Jacobs promoted social mix in *Death and Life*, but perhaps less explicitly than other forms of diversity. Jacobs is an opponent of segregation by income and the segregation of public from private housing (324). She treats income

diversity as a condition for other types of diversity in her discussion of ‘unslumming’ (286), and promotes the ‘self-diversification’ of neighbourhood populations. In her discussion of subsidized dwellings, Jacobs argues that a “mix of income levels” is one “means of abetting stability of the population and diversity of the population,” and this helps to create “lively, safe, interesting, and varied streets and districts...” (333).

<sup>6</sup> Newman promoted social mix explicitly in his 1981 book, *Community of Interest* (23-25).

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, after the release of the World Commission on Environment and Development report in 1987, *sustainable development* became a ubiquitous policy goal in Canada and elsewhere.

<sup>8</sup> In the City’s official plan, ‘social mix’ is not explicitly referred to. Instead, the mixing of aspects of the physical environment (land uses and building types), of housing types (single-family and multiple-family dwellings), and income-levels (market and affordable housing) are promoted.

<sup>9</sup> Two examples include the new-urbanist style East Bayfront and West Don-Lands communities which will soon rise on under-used industrial land in south-east downtown.

<sup>10</sup> The TCHC must replace 65% of the original 2,087 RGI units on-site (i.e. 1,357 units). If the minimum is replaced, this will mean  $1,357 \div 5,100 = 26.6\%$  of the units will have RGI subsidies attached to them. The TCHC is required also to replace 85% of all social housing units (with or without RGI subsidies). In Regent Park, all social units without RGI subsidies (a minimum of 414 units) will be operated as ‘Affordable Rental’ properties, available at or below the city’s average rent. The remaining RGI-subsidies and social units must be replaced within east downtown Toronto (City of Toronto 2005).

<sup>11</sup> In Toronto, this can be noted by the near absence of criticism for the Regent Park revitalization (see Kipfer 2005, 9).

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