The Negotiation of Social Housing in the Context of the Inclusionary Housing Strategy
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Research Aims: How is the inclusion of social housing in large scale developments negotiated, in Montreal? This project will answer this question by looking at the experience of planners, community groups and developers working with the Montreal Inclusionary Housing Strategy.

Context: Adopted by the City of Montreal in 2005, the Inclusionary Housing Strategy recommends that any private housing project exceeding 200 units include 30% for lower income residents: 15% in the form of affordable homeownership and 15% in the form of non-profit community (social) housing. The strategy is not obligatory, and is only negotiated when the developer requires a change in the zoning. This regulatory approval moment gives borough officers and community groups an opportunity to negotiate the inclusion of affordable and social housing in the private development.

Research objectives: This research project sheds some light on this complex process. More specifically the research objectives are:

a) to identify patterns in the negotiation processes occurring between borough planners, community groups and developers towards the inclusion of affordable and social housing;
b) to understand how the policy framework affects or defines the identified negotiation patterns.

Further, the research will investigate how the different actors position themselves in relation to the inclusion of social housing and the strategies they use to bargain in the process. The research will look at how these different positions and interests translate into “negotiating equations” leading to specific results in terms of the number of affordable and social housing units that are included in the projects.

Key results to date: Based on a review of the literature, the following variables are likely to be important in the negotiation process: the expected profits from the project, land ownership, the timeframe for the project, the position held by the city, documented need for social housing in the neighbourhood and the presence of community groups advocating for social housing. The relevance of these and other factors will be explored via key informant interviews.

Some of the patterns that we observed so far in successful negotiations include: the formation of neighbourhood-level project-focussed community coalitions (often in the form of tables de concertation, in the Montreal context), the hiring of mediation experts, agreement at city and borough level on advocating for the inclusion of social housing, the participation of two or three different public agencies in the negotiation and the mediation of interests. The logic of economic viability given constrained public financing is also a common theme.

Other preliminary findings suggest that some community advocates seek to make the Inclusionary Housing Strategy mandatory and not dependent on a negotiation process. However, others are arguing that developers should be allowed to make cash payments towards a social housing fund, but not be required to include low-income housing inside a market-priced housing project.