A Study of St.Henri: Experiences of Displacement in a Neighbourhood Undergoing Gentrification and Mega-Project Development

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Abstract
Direct displacement refers to instances where residents are pushed out of their housing due to wider neighbourhood changes, such as traditional gentrification or expropriations for mega-projects. Unlike traditional gentrification (i.e. renovation of the existing stock), new-build housing on disused land does not cause direct displacement per se. There may, however, be indirect effects of wider neighbourhood changes on existing residents. The recent proliferation of new-build gentrification has led researchers to emphasize the need to explore the range of potential indirect effects on longstanding residents of gentrifying neighbourhoods. This research report summarizes key findings from a dissertation that developed a four-fold indirect displacement typology sub-dividing the concept into: cultural displacement, social displacement, political displacement and exclusionary displacement. This framework is tested in a case study of Saint-Henri, a gentrifying neighbourhood in Montréal, to assess whether it is useful in understanding the meanings of displacement in the lives of incumbent residents. The case study reveals that in Saint-Henri, social, cultural and exclusionary displacement are all relevant to understanding residents’ experiences in the face of gentrification and mega-project development. There was not however, evidence of political displacement in Saint-Henri to date. Last, this summary documents key findings related to the threat of direct displacement due to the expropriations necessary for the redevelopment of the Turcot Interchange.

Cite as

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Introduction

Many Montreal neighbourhoods are in the midst of demographic changes. Former working-class industrial neighbourhoods are experiencing an influx of more affluent and highly educated residents. This process is called ‘gentrification.’ Traditionally, gentrification involved the upgrading of the existing housing stock, accompanied by increasing homeownership. However, the underbelly of this process is the direct displacement of many existing residents who are pushed out of their housing due to wider neighbourhoods changes. The effects of gentrification on specific neighbourhoods and the consequences for existing residents remain relatively unexplored, due in part to the difficulty of measuring displacement and in locating displacees.

More recently, gentrification is taking on increasingly diverse forms such as new-build gentrification (which will either take place as infill development or as the creation of entire neighbourhoods on brownfield sites). In these cases, developers and municipal governments alike argue that displacement will not occur, as these developments create new additional housing units rather than rehabilitating existing housing as was the case with traditional gentrification. However, there may be indirect effects of such changes upon adjacent neighbourhoods and their existing residents. This idea that although a resident has not been directly displaced from his/her neighbourhood, there may be other indirect effects of wider neighbourhood changes upon him/her is referred to as ‘indirect’ displacement.

This research breaks down this idea of ‘indirect’ displacement into four different types so they could be investigated more systematically in fieldwork. First, social displacement relates to the impact of gentrification processes upon existing residents’ social ties and social networks. This may be experienced by the individual in terms of fracturing of local social networks as friends or family are pushed out of the neighbourhood and in such cases might result in feelings of loneliness or grief. Second, cultural displacement relates to the idea of competing cultures within gentrifying neighbourhoods between longstanding residents and incoming gentrifiers, who may try to refashion the neighbourhood in their image. The neighbourhood becomes a site of contestation between conflicting visions of place held by long-term versus recent residents. Existing residents may experience cultural displacement in a number of ways, including economic and cultural exclusion, inconvenience resulting from commercial service displacement, or conversely appreciation of new local services; and it may also affect levels of comfort in neighbourhood public spaces. Third, political displacement relates to the shifting power dynamics within neighbourhood-based community institutions and organizations and/or the creation of new organizations by incoming residents in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Shifting dynamics within organizations or the creation of parallel organizations by newcomers may result either in political disempowerment or conversely in political empowerment through access to new social capital. Last, exclusionary displacement, occurs through processes underway in gentrifying neighbourhoods, when areas that were once accessible to low and modest income households become inaccessible, as competition from higher income groups push prices beyond their means. Individuals could experience this as increased difficulty finding suitable housing, decreased residential mobility, and/or frustration due to living in unsuitable housing.
Residents’ Experiences of Displacement

The study asked the following questions:

• What are the meanings of displacement from the points of view of long-term renters in a working-class neighbourhood in Montréal, which is experiencing a variety of processes likely to generate displacement at the same time? (E.g. traditional gentrification, new-build gentrification, mega-hospital development and redevelopment of a major piece of transportation infrastructure)
• How do these residents experience displacement (i.e. direct and/or indirect forms)?
• In what ways is it significant to their lives?

The Case Study Neighbourhood: Saint-Henri

Saint-Henri, located in the South-west of Montréal, is one of Canada’s oldest working-class neighbourhoods. The opening of the Lachine Canal in 1826 was key to its development. It is an enclave neighbourhood surrounded by rigid physical barriers on three of four sides: the Lachine Canal to the south, the Turcot Interchange to the west, the Autoroute 720 in the north. Its boundary on the east is Atwater Street where it weaves seamlessly into the surrounding urban areas. The neighbourhood is further subdivided by the Canadian National (CN) railway line, which essentially splits the Saint-Henri neighbourhood in two. Overall, Saint-Henri is well serviced by Metro, with two stations (Lionel Groulx and Place Saint-Henri) within its territory. Historically, the area was characterized as a ‘quartier populaire’ settled predominantly by francophone working-class residents employed in the neighbourhood’s factories. The neighbourhood also boasts several amenities and attractions such as the Atwater Market and the Lachine Canal (which was designated a recreational corridor in 1997 – by Parks Canada). The area has been gentrifying substantially in recent years. In the northeast part of the neighbourhood traditional gentrification (i.e. upgrading of the existing housing stock) has been underway since the eighties, while more recently substantial new-build gentrification has taken place in the areas adjacent to the Lachine Canal. The western tip of the neighbourhood abutting the Turcot Interchange does not show the same indicators of gentrification however (for a detailed analysis of gentrification in Saint-Henri see Twigge-Molecey 2009).

Between 1996 and 2006 there have been substantial changes in the neighbourhood overall. Over this period there has been a 14.6% increase in the number of dwellings in the neighbourhood (see table on page 8). Between 2001-2006 there was a 9.1% increase in population that halted four continuous decades of population decline underway in the neighbourhood since the sixties.

Many of these new residents are owner-occupiers living in the condominiums recently constructed along the Lachine Canal. Such changes have been accompanied by a 25.5% increase in average household income between 1996 and 2006 compared to a 16.4% increase on the Island of Montréal overall. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of the population with a university degree, and in 2006 the neighbourhood is just below the average on the Island of Montréal (23.2% for Saint-Henri compared to 25.8% for the Island of Montréal). However, as mentioned above, not all parts of the neighbourhood are gentrifying. Another important demographic trend that is observable in Saint-Henri is an increase in the proportion of the population who speak a non-official language as a mother tongue.
Population and housing tenure evolution in Saint-Henri (1996 -2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>13563</td>
<td>14802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Owner-occupation</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Renter</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
<td>81.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household income</td>
<td>$31338</td>
<td>$39340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With university degrees</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-official languages</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 and 2006

Who participated in the study?

In Saint-Henri interviews were conducted with long-term renters to explore whether they had experienced displacement (direct or indirect forms) and if so, what meaning displacement had in their lives? For the indirect displacement component, I conducted interviews with a total of 34 total residents. In terms of basic demographic characteristics of these interviewees, the majority were between 31 and 50 years old and females were over-represented due to the fact that females were in general more willing to participate. Over 2/3 of the residents I spoke with spoke French as a mother tongue, while a quarter were Anglophones, and 3% spoke a non-official language. This is roughly characteristic of the linguistic balance in the neighbourhood, although those speaking non-official languages are under-represented, as they were 17.5% of the neighbourhood population in 2006 and only 3% of the sample. This might be due to the emphasis in recruitment on long-term residents, as many non-official language speakers were newer entrants to the neighbourhood. The vast majority of interviewees were Caucasian. As to housing tenure, just under half the sample were private sector renters, while the remainder were in various types of public housing (HLM, coop and OBNL). Interviewees came from a range of income levels though the majority were low and modest-income and had diverse educational backgrounds. In terms of length of residence, 29% had been in Saint-Henri for 5-9 years, 50% for 10 years or more and 21% had lived their entire lifetimes in the neighbourhood.

For the direct displacement component I conducted five key informant interviews with residents whose housing was slated for expropriation for the redevelopment of the Turcot Interchange. Of the five key informants, four were private sector renters and one was a homeowner who had been living in the same house for 45 years. I interviewed four women and one man, from a variety of income groups. The age of interviewees ranged from 36 to 72 years old. Their length of residence in the neighbourhoods was between 5 and 66 years.

Findings: Four different types of indirect displacement in Saint-Henri

The following section will summarize the evidence of the four different types of indirect displacement outlined above.

Social networks and social displacement

To examine potential social displacement (i.e. whether existing residents had friends or family that had been pushed out of the neighbourhood by wider neighbourhood changes) I began by exploring residents’ social networks to see if they had friends and family living locally. All income groups tended to have weak ties/acquaintances within the neighbourhood. In terms of strong ties, among low-income residents some reported having almost all their strong ties living in the neighbourhood. The following quotation is from a lifelong resident and illustrates that the neighbourhood is an extremely important anchor of her social network.

“For me, Amy, Saint-Henri is Saint-Henri. I have it tattooed on my heart for real, and the people I spend time with, the majority remain in Saint-Henri. I’ll tell you that we are a family of seven (…) there are two who have moved. My sister married a soldier so she had to remain close to the military base. And my other sister moved to Ville Saint-Pierre because you can have the same thing as here for $300 less rent.” [translation] 45 year old woman, lifelong resident, low-income, living in public housing.

There were a number of factors that contributed to social displacement in Saint-Henri. One factor that ultimately led to a fracturing of social networks for some residents was the widespread fires within the neighbourhood and the subsequent displacement of friends who were then unable to find replacement housing nearby, due to the lack of affordable housing. Second, the shift in neighbourhood atmosphere identified through loss of many acquaintances and the subsequent loss of familial atmosphere within Saint-Henri is also a form of social displacement, experienced through the watering down of networks of locally-based weak ties (acquaintances). This may be related to length of residence, as the likelihood of significant turnover of neighbours over time (then accelerated by the gentrification process) seems more likely to be perceived and
Residents’ Experiences of Displacement

Experienced in a negative fashion by those who have been living in the neighbourhood for a significant length of time. Third, high turnover in rental housing (due to lack of maintenance by the landlord) seemed to be a factor working against ‘locally based community’ and networks of weak ties as it was reported that it required significant energy to recreate ties with neighbours on an annual basis in the face of high turnover. Another factor contributing to a fracturing of social networks was repossession-induced displacement, whereby friends or neighbours were pushed out of their housing and were unable to find replacement housing close by. Evidence suggests that in the case of repossession, even if one has the ability and/or good fortune to be able to remain within the neighbourhood after the fact, it does not mean that such events will not have a dire impact on one’s social network or social re-integration into the neighbourhood more generally.

**Cultural displacement in Saint-Henri’s local retail services**

There were a variety of points of view on changes in neighbourhood commercial services. There was evidence of a mismatch between available retail services and the needs of some long-term residents, especially in terms of certain basic items such as children’s clothing, forcing residents to leave the neighbourhood to shop for these basic items. This idea of a shifting ‘sense of place’ resulting from wider neighbourhood changes was evident in some aspects of retailing in Saint-Henri. A key site of contestation was the new IGA supermarket opened in 2006 which was a noted point of conflicting views among residents. Some long-term residents felt uncomfortable in the new store due to the loss of a more familial small-scale neighbourhood grocer and its replacement with a much larger, more expensive store, which in turn led to a shifting ‘sense of place’ at the neighbourhood grocer that they could no longer identify with.

“It is very, very, very expensive there, it is certain that for him [the grocer] … We are the last of his worries. Yet it is a man that, well it has been years that he is in the neighbourhood. (...) Here we had a small IGA, and when I say small, it is not just the size of the place, but I mean to say that a little IGA for me, I mean that we felt at home when we went there back in the day. But not today. Today it has moved and been renovated, there’s … they built a luxury IGA, we call it luxury, it is not even affordable. You no longer feel … It’s no longer our neighbourhood IGA there. It’s really no longer the same.” [translation] 51 year old woman, long-term resident, low income, living in coop housing.

Others however, felt that the new IGA was a real improvement in the neighbourhood, though those expressing this view were more recent arrivals and were not low-income, so likely not priced out of the new store. Interestingly, a key tension was raised by one lifelong resident, who felt caught between rock and a hard place: she felt conflicted about supporting the new store (due to its steep prices), but continued to shop there to help sustain the store and protect the jobs of many long-term residents she knew who were worked there. In light of deindustrialization and the rise of precarious employment, this interviewee saw the strategic value in keeping low-income residents employed within the neighbourhood, even at the expense of larger grocery bills for her family. The Atwater market was also a point of conflicting views. While some residents felt culturally excluded by the lack of availability of traditional Québécois ingredients and the high prices of produce there, another longstanding resident suggested that in fact this had never been a market destined to the local population. On the whole, these results suggest that at least for lifelong residents, cultural displacement had occurred within neighbourhood retail establishments.
Cultural displacement in neighbourhood public spaces

A key issue that came up in terms of levels of comfort in neighbourhood public parks was the presence of dogs. While a dog run had recently been provided to accommodate the increased number of dogs in the neighbourhood, not all dog-owners felt it was safe for their dogs there due to the presence of so-called ‘aggressive’ breeds. Due to this lack of comfort, some dog owners would walk their dogs off-leash in other neighbourhood parks, which in turn created tensions, especially with parents with young children, or with neighbourhood children who did not want to play in areas frequented by dogs:

“They rebuilt Louis Cyr Park (...) but what happened is that they have created a park of grass, before it was games, now they have just put down grass, but then it is like a dog park. It's not supposed to have dogs, but the kids call it the dog park and they will not go there because there is poop on the ground, so they cannot walk there and cannot go play there. So we don’t go there anymore. But when I was little, we went to this park. We would play there. But since 5-10 years, we can’t go because there are dogs (...) They leave them off leashes as well, and do not pick up the poop and leave the dogs roaming free. It’s dangerous for children. So we go to the parks further away.” [translation] 24 year old female, lifelong resident, high income, living in coop housing.

Interestingly, however, some lifelong and long-term residents felt that the dog run afforded an opportunity for mixing of diverse breeds of dogs, as well as a minimum of social contact with the more affluent newcomers, many of whom owned dogs.

The redevelopment of the Lachine Canal (designated a recreational corridor in 1997) and the changing atmosphere along its banks (due to the onset of extensive new-build gentrification) was experienced differently among lifelong residents. While some greatly appreciated the improvement in infrastructure along the Canal, for others it had simply become too busy, changing the feeling of the place itself and diluting long-term residents’ sense of belonging there. Improvements in other neighbourhood parks were widely noted, although some long-term and lifelong residents were cynical about them and felt insulted that such improvements were made only after higher income people moved into the neighbourhood.

Cultural displacement and shifting definitions of places

Some interviewees expressed feelings of division and social separation between themselves and the incoming condo dwellers and felt that some incoming residents were trying to redefine the condominium developments along Lachine Canal as distinct from the Saint-Henri neighbourhood:

“They are snobs, I’m sorry ... (...) Amy, we were doing a survey on the edge of the canal. People living on the edge of the canal, if you ask them ... “Hello ma'am, you live in St-Henri?” “No, I’m sorry.” “Ah, you are in another neighbourhood?” “Well, I live here on the edge of the canal.” “Well, madam, the canal is in Saint-Henri.” “No, no, no ma’am. I live in...” “Well, tell me the name of your neighbourhood first?” “Well, I live in Montréal!” “I’m sorry to tell you but you live in Saint-Henri.” That’s what I said to her and then I left. Worse, it was not just a lady, but two ladies who were not together. They do not live in Saint-Henri. They live on the edge of the canal. I’m sorry, but this is where you live.” [translation] 45 year old women, lifelong resident, low income, living in public housing.

Here we see an example of conflicting and competing definitions and experiences of place between those held by long-term residents and incoming condominiums dwellers. More concretely, some long-term residents experienced friction with incoming condo dwellers who exhibited condescension and snobbery towards them.
Political displacement

In order to examine whether political displacement was underway I explored whether there had been shifts in power between existing neighbourhood organizations or whether new organizations had been created by incoming gentrifiers which were competing for power with long-established organizations. As following passage illustrates, one thing that was noted was that there was a distinct lack of participation from incoming residents in neighbourhood struggles.

“Well, I think when I go there, what I see a lot of is people like me, who it’s been years that they are here. I don’t see too many new residents, the rich and all that ... mobilizing for something ...” [translation] 32 year old woman, lifelong resident, low income, living in public housing.

A more recent resident recounted a story of a colleague who visited a condo project masquerading as a potential buyer, only to discover that one of the main selling pitches by the realtor was that you have the advantage of the canal, but your building faces away from the neighbourhood so you do not need to be involved in it.

“... I’ll give you an example, one of my colleagues (...) he went to one of many new condo projects on the canal (...) and the lady told him: “What is fun here is that you have the advantage of the canal, but you are backed onto the neighbourhood, so you do not need to be involved”, so at the end of the day that is a selling point, “Come here, it’s cool, you do not need to invest.” (...) For me it is the major problem that is happening in the neighbourhood. It is that people opt for comfort and after that are pretty much fairly indifferent to what is happening outside.” [translation] 28 year old male, recent resident, modest income, living in private rental housing.

These findings are consistent with Belanger’s (2010) research in the same neighbourhood, which revealed that some longstanding residents reproached incoming gentrifiers for their lack of involvement in the social and cultural life of the neighbourhood. There was not however concrete evidence of political displacement underway in Saint-Henri. Perhaps it is a matter of timing as incoming condo dwellers in Saint-Henri were not yet actively mobilized in the neighbourhood at the time of fieldwork—a situation that could change as their numbers increase and if the rate of turnover is not too high.

Exclusionary displacement

In Saint-Henri there was evidence of exclusionary displacement, which occurs when areas that were once accessible to low and modest income households become inaccessible, as competition from more affluent groups push prices beyond their ability to pay. However, it seemed to depend on one’s socio-economic position and was more likely to be experienced by low-income long-term residents:

“Yes, sure, because it’s like in our neighbourhood, we are no longer at home. We cannot come and go as we want. Worse is like all of a sudden you, well once you leave, the minute you leave it’s already there, when you’re in private rental housing it is not easy, but if you leave the neighbourhood, it is even harder to return. So it is like you are no longer at home, no longer able to come and go as you want. It’s finished. You no longer have that feeling of belonging, of being at home. Finished.” [translation] 51 year old woman, long-term resident, low income, living in coop housing.

This perspective was not unique among long-term renters, particularly those in public housing within the neighbourhood. They had already been priced out of the private rental housing market, and while their tenure was somewhat secure within the neighbourhood, for their friends and family, putting one’s name on the public housing lists and hoping for the best was the only way to move back to the neighbourhood. However, this was not the perspective of all low-income long-term residents interviewed. One lifelong resident recounted how many of her friends and family had chosen to move to the suburbs due to the combination of a number of factors including the lack of affordable housing, Saint-Henri’s reputation as a poor neighbourhood and the greater accessibility of green space in suburban areas.

Not all private renters felt the neighbourhood was too expensive, however. The following quotation is from a more recent resident who is middle-income, who had succeeded in finding both his sister and aging father apartments within a block of where he lived, to simplify caring for their father in old age.

“No. It is still within reach. Especially compared to other neighbourhoods, I mean if you compare to the Plateau, I mean, come on, it’s the same types of apartments. (...) I had the same type of apartment that I do now and it was like three times what I pay.” 35 year old male, recent resident, middle-income, living in private rental housing.
This resident clearly felt the neighbourhood still offered affordable rentals. His concern was that as housing prices escalated in the neighbourhood, he would be priced out of becoming a homeowner. These findings indicate exclusionary displacement is underway. As competition for rental housing increases in Saint-Henri as it gentrifies, it favours more affluent renter households who are able to pay higher rents.

**Findings: Living with the Threat of Direct Displacement in Saint-Henri**

In Saint-Henri, the experience of direct displacement can lead to a number of detrimental effects for affected households, including diminishing housing conditions, increasing housing costs and increasing overcrowding or doubling up. By far the most taxing effects are those that are psychosocial in nature. Living with the threat of displacement provoked a different set of emotional reactions for each key informant, which were informed by different personal circumstances. Fearlessness and the potential for grief in the event of displacement were characteristic of a longstanding elderly renter, with a highly embedded social network. More immediately debilitating reactions such as post-traumatic shock, difficulty coping, stress and anxiety were manifested by a lifelong elderly homeowner living with chronic pain for whom the importance of home as a haven and safe space, combined with the potential loss of a deep sense of belonging in Village des Tanneries (a sub-neighbourhood in Saint-Henri) due to her lifelong residence there were important factors at play. This resident talked about her experience of the threat of expropriation in terms of her demolition:

"I was completely demolished ... I was shaking like a leaf ... well I have bad health problems so it was by chance I found myself at the same time in the clinic for chronic pain and (...) I was no longer able to able to talk about my pain because was so taken with the Turcot (...) And she [the psychologist] told me: ‘You are in post-traumatic shock.’ And the first week I was not able to able to stay home all alone ... I I I I ... was crying, weeping and I am not really a crier, but I was completely demolished. It changed my behaviour. In the first week I lost six pounds. For a woman who is not healthy, that does not help. Anyway, finally it’s all put back in place, but I went through hell. I really went through hell." [translation] 65 year old women, lifelong resident, middle income, living in co-ownership housing on rue Cazelais.

For a long-term renter with previous experiences of direct displacement within the neighbourhood, debilitating stress, anxiety, lack of control and powerlessness were characteristic of the experience of the threat of expropriation. Here past tenure insecurity and previous experiences of displacement, combined with the potential loss of sense of belonging she felt both in her home and in the wider local neighbourhood, informed such emotional upheaval. Fear of loss of one’s livelihood was representative of another long-term renter who used his loft as a live/work space. Last, feelings of injustice, powerlessness, anger and frustration were characteristic of another recent renter due to the potential loss of a dwelling that suited her needs both functionally and psychologically.

**Conclusion**

The main contribution of this research is the development of an indirect displacement typology that sub-divides it into four constituent types: social, cultural, political and exclusionary displacement. Using this framework in fieldwork and analysis of the interviews helped to identify subtle differences in terms of residents' experiences depending on length of residence, where they lived in the neighbourhood and their type of rental housing tenure. Overall, we can conclude that there was some evidence of social, cultural and exclusionary displacement observed in Saint-Henri, particularly among low-income incumbent residents. There was no evidence of political displacement underway in the neighbourhood however, though this needs to be re-examined at a later date. This study also revealed that living with the threat of direct displacement is a source of major psychological upheaval for those affected.

This study also helps us identify a number of avenues for future displacement research. In light of the evidence of indirect displacement among long-term residents in Saint-Henri, future research could work to develop specific planning recommendations in order to limit its negative effects. Second, there is a need to further explore the experiences of displacement for long-term residents in other Montréal neighbourhoods undergoing significant new-build developments. Research is also needed in other Canadian cities experiencing gentrification, exploring the diverse contexts and experiences of displacement (in both direct and indirect forms), using qualitative methods in order to gain deeper understandings of displacement the perspectives of residents experiencing it.