

## The Evolution of Canadian Discourse on Urban Neighbourhoods since 1900

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Advisory Group	David Hulchanski, Jill Grant, David Ley, Damaris Rose, Alexander von Hoffman (Harvard)
Community Partner/s	This is a background study relevant to all research projects the NCRP will commission. This history will fill a gap in the Canadian neighbourhoods literature and will provide a chapter in a future NCRP book. NCRP PI David Hulchanski requested this proposal from Richard Harris.

### 1. Rationale & Potential Policy Relevance

Just as the character and significance of urban neighborhoods in Canada has been changing, so too has the manner in which those neighborhoods have been understood by urban experts, planners, the media, and indeed by their residents. Such understandings are embodied in what may be termed the discourse of urban neighborhoods. This discourse has two aspects. The first involves the manner in which Canadians have spoken about those neighborhoods: the definitions they have used, and their understanding of how area of residence matters, and about the probability of long-term neighborhood 'decline'. The second involves the changing ways in which residents, governments, and planners have acted in relation to neighborhoods, whether to stabilise or to change their social and physical characteristics. The nature, chronology, and geographical scope of the changing neighborhood discourse in Canada (or indeed anywhere) have never been surveyed and are the concern of this proposed research.

North American conversations about neighborhoods have been dominated by the U.S. experience, and notably the neighborhood dynamics associated with racial segregation and the active intervention of the FHA in housing markets after 1934 (Temkin and Rohe, 1996). Given the influence of American thinking on urban residents, scholars, planners, and policy-makers in Canada, it is important to identify the distinguishing features of the Canadian discourse. In Quebec, presumably, American influence has been attenuated by translation, and counterbalanced, especially, by French intellectual and planning traditions. The comparison of Quebec/Montreal with English-Canadian cities poses a distinctive opportunity and challenge (below) (c.f. Topalov et al, 2010).

The neighborhood idea has typically incorporated the notion that residential areas have, and according to some observers should have, distinctive social identities, ones which may be shaped by or embodied in their physical layout. Among social reformers, planners, and policy-makers, interest in neighborhoods has peaked at times, such as the present, when social inequality and cohesion are issues (Forrest, 2004; von Hoffman, 1994; Walks, 2010). It has usually focussed on low-income districts (e.g. Mann, 1961), but arguably neighborhood matters just as much for the middle classes and social elites (e.g. Ley, 1993).

In Canada, the United States and Europe, the idea of shaping the city neighborhood appears to have emerged in the late nineteenth century, often in relation to areas of immigrant settlement, and was adapted to frame the design of suburban subdivisions from at least the 1940s. At first social agencies, then municipal planners, and by the 1970s the federal government, acted to strengthen and shape neighborhoods (Hodge and Gordon, 2008; Silver, 2000). Over time, assumptions about the character and significance of neighborhoods have changed. Some scholars have implied or argued that, because of increasing daily mobility and telecommunications, neighborhoods matter less than in the past (e.g. Slater, 2013; Wellman, 1971). Others contend that the increasing importance of social capital for education and employment opportunities, and the growth of home ownership which has sensitised residents to localised effects on property values, neighborhoods matter as much as ever (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Sampson, 2012). Lately, 'the neighborhood effect' has attracted new interest from policy-makers and researchers. Its

character remains unclear, however, because causal mechanisms are ill-understood (e.g. Ellen and Turner, 1997; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Sampson, 2012). Better knowledge of the character and long-term evolution of neighborhood discourse can usefully inform current discussions and policy.

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## **2. Research Questions**

With respect to urban neighborhoods in Canada since 1900:

1. How has the popular understanding of neighborhoods in Canada changed?
2. How has the academic understanding of urban neighborhoods changed?
3. Which private and public agencies have shown an explicit interest in neighborhoods, and how have these agencies understood them?
4. How have those agencies acted to enhance neighborhoods, to promote stability, or change?
5. In general, how has the Canadian discourse differed from that in the United States?
6. In light of the answers to the above questions, what periods can be identified in the evolution of the neighborhood discourse in Canada?

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## **3. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions**

This proposed research will fill a gap in the literature on Canadian neighbourhoods and, as such, is a background study relevant to all research projects the NCRP will commission. One deliverable is a book chapter for one of the NCRP planned edited books.

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## **4. Research Design & Methods**

Given time constraints, it will not possible to do full justice to this topic. Accordingly, the proposed research should be regarded as a 'first cut'. Even so, and because nothing like it has previously been attempted, it is believed that it promises not only to provide a useful context for the NCRP, but should also attract wider interest.

Popular understandings of neighborhoods are shaped by, and reflected in, local media, notably newspapers. The understandings of planners, municipalities, and the federal government are expressed in reports, and sometimes legislation. Either or both have sometimes been examined by graduate students in unpublished theses. Accordingly, where possible, online keyword searches of newspaper archives, coupled with surveys of unpublished reports will be undertaken by students. To the extent possible, it is desirable to undertake such research in at least three locations, including Montreal.

Montreal poses a particular opportunity and also a challenge. The (rare) opportunity is to compare, for the same place, the discourse of neighborhoods in two languages. The challenge is that (i) this involves more work and (ii) online newspaper archives do not reach back before the 1980s. Accordingly, for Montreal, attention will focus on published works and planning documents, while a special effort will be made to identify unpublished reports and graduate theses in a variety of fields (Sociology, History), in both languages, at the major local universities and research institutions.

A survey of published research in English will be undertaken by the principal researcher.

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## **5. Role of Community Partners**

Members of the NCRP in different parts of the country will be contacted and asked for advice about any local resources and experts who might be helpful in this historical research.

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## **6. Role of Students / Research Assistants and Contributions to Training**

- One or more students will undertake keyword searches of newspapers and other historical databases. Depending on access arrangements, it may be possible for one student to undertake most of this work in Hamilton under the supervision of the applicant.

- Students in several locations may undertake local surveys of unpublished and fugitive material, including municipal reports and graduate theses. Depending on access arrangements, they might also undertake keyword searches of a local newspaper. This will likely be arranged with our CMA team leaders and with academics in locales where the NCRP does not have a team.

## 7. Schedule

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- Research October. 2013 to April 2014.
- Writing paper(s) May/June 2014.

## 8. Outcomes / Deliverables

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The main deliverable will be a book chapter for one of the NCRP's planned edited books on neighbourhood change in Canada (Oxford University Press Canada is one of our dissemination partners). A summary version may be produced for more immediate and widespread dissemination. The research may lead to a proposal for a larger project (not necessarily funded by the NCRP).

## 9. Budget Explanation

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- MA student research assistant at McMaster, part-time over the 7 months Sept to March, 300 hours at \$25/hour = \$7,500
- MA student research assistance in other cities, 150 hours at \$25/hour = \$3,750

## 10. References cited

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## SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
<b>Personnel costs</b>				
<b>Student salaries and benefits/Stipends</b>				
Undergraduate *				
Masters *	\$11,250			
Doctorate *				
<b>Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends</b>				
Postdoctoral				
Other				
<b>Travel and subsistence costs</b>				
<b>Applicant/Team member(s)</b>				
Canadian travel				
Foreign travel				
<b>Students</b>				
Canadian travel				
Foreign travel				
<b>Other expenses</b>				
<b>Non-disposable equipment</b> (specify)				
<b>Professional / technical services</b> (specify: includes partner staff time contributed to or paid for by project, translation, editing, etc.)				
<b>Other expenses</b> (specify: includes honoraria, data purchase, field costs, printing, supplies, etc.)				
Misc supplies, communication expenses, photocopies	\$1,000			
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,250</b>			<b>\$12,250</b>