

The Struggle to belong: *Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings*
Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

**Negotiating social mix in Toronto's first public housing redevelopment:
Community development, cohesion, and criminalization in Don Mount
Court/Rivertowne**

Martine August*

Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011
Session: 10.1 Negotiating Social Mix in Global Cities

*Trudeau Foundation Scholar, PhD Candidate
Department of Geography & Program in Planning
University of Toronto
Sidney Smith Hall, 100 St. George St., Office 5047
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3G3
martine.august@utoronto.ca

Abstract

Modelled after the HOPE VI program, Canada's first socially-mixed public housing redevelopment in Toronto's Don Mount Court/Rivertowne community is almost complete. The project involved the demolition and on-site replacement of 252 subsidized units, the addition of 187 new condo townhouses, and a neo-traditional re-design featuring new streets and a new park. This paper explores how tenants returning to the subsidized housing, new condo residents, and neighbours in the nearby gentrifying community that surrounds the project have experienced and negotiated the area's new "social mix." While mixed-income redevelopment is premised on the assumption that wealthy neighbours will use their superior political influence and social capital to benefit the poor and improve neighbourhood services, this paper finds that the most politically-active non-tenants mobilized their efforts to the detriment of tenant safety and quality of life. Based on participant observation, this paper covers four stories that unfolded in Don Mount Court/Rivertowne during the hot summer of 2010, when mixed-income residents were brought together to build community and promote inclusion. The first story details the power dynamics that emerged in mixed-income meetings. Meetings were dominated by non-tenants (largely white males) who used subtle techniques (e.g. agenda setting) and non-subtle techniques (e.g. shouting, interrupting) to prioritize their concerns over those of tenants, all of whom were all women of colour. The second story details the main outcome of non-tenant involvement, which was to enhance surveillance and control over tenants; criminalize tenant youth; and increase security and policing in the area. These efforts created deep divides and led to ramped up policing, racial profiling, and harassment; and culminated in the assault of two tenant youth. The third

conflict that arose centered on differing expectations for the “proper” use of space in the community. Homeowners sought to discursively construct space in a contested alley as “for cars” and to demonize any outdoor tenant socializing as “inappropriate.” The fourth story looks at the non-tenant insistence on controlling branding and appearance of the community, centering on debates over a tenant-created logo for the community. The paper concludes that the outcomes of mixed-income interaction did not benefit low-income tenants. However, the efforts of a dedicated community development worker, hired to “build community” in the area, did lead to many improvements in tenant quality of life, and directly responded to problems identified in the community. As such, it is recommended that rather than mixed-income redevelopment, low-income public housing tenants would be better served by dedicated, resourced community development efforts.