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RESEARCH

Empowerment through design? Housing cooperatives for women in Montreal

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Focusing on the architecture of three co-ops in Montreal established to support women in the 1978–88 period, this article examines the relationship between empowerment and design in the context of gender-conscious cooperative housing. Deindustrialisation from the 1960s was coupled with downtown renewal, which effectively meant many low-income, working-class neighbourhoods were wholesale cleared for new projects. The housing cooperative emerged as a viable model to protect access to housing. Against this backdrop, women in various government and non-profit positions helped each other and other women in precarious housing situations to establish housing co-ops for women. Feminist proponents of permanent and affordable women's housing argued that housing was central to women's emancipation, that is, to the designing of 'non-sexist' cities. The article treats the built environment of the co-ops as evidence to study if and how residents transformed their surroundings, and complements this with qualitative interviews with former and current residents to understand how the physical environment has, in turn, shaped their lives. While the co-op movement characterises itself as a type of solidarity network with open membership, the quality of architecture, or the deficiency thereof, in a social environment with already scarce resources can lead to tensions among member-residents. However, the historical housing co-ops, as well as ongoing initiatives to establish new women's co-ops, demonstrate the need and desire to pursue intersectional housing justice via the cooperative model, and the article's findings point to the need for increased attention to and investment in architectural design.

Key words intersectional housing justice • housing cooperatives • Montreal • low-income housing • gender-conscious housing

Key messages

- In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars of the built environment argued that affordable and supportive housing was central to women's emancipation, that is, to the designing of 'non-sexist' cities. To date, a systematic study of gender-conscious affordable housing projects is missing from the literature.

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- While in the US, it was the community development corporations through which early experiments in housing for women were realised, in Canada, it was the shared-ownership, member-resident cooperative model to which women turned to.
- Earlier, large-scale cases of housing co-ops in Montreal were outcomes of resident mobilisation against developers and state-led gentrification; however, the members of women's co-ops were typically recruited via women's networks, and building sites were selected following co-op formation. The latter co-ops were built with low budgets, eschewing a participatory design process, construction quality and communal spaces that could have fostered mutual aid networks.
- While the co-op movement characterises itself as a type of solidarity network with open membership, the quality of architecture, or the deficiency thereof, in a social environment with already scarce resources can lead to tensions among member-residents. Case studies show that the co-ops can also evolve into organisations with 'intersecting oppressions'.

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Introduction

Montreal's deindustrialisation from the 1960s was coupled with downtown renewal, which effectively meant that many low-income, working-class neighbourhoods were wholesale cleared for new projects. Faced with the threat of demolition and eviction, and fed up with spiralling rents and unmaintained apartments, tenants and other stakeholders organised to take control of their housing situation and mobilised to save their neighbourhoods. The housing cooperative emerged as a viable model. This was such a common story that in 1984, Radio-Canada aired, at prime time and on Sundays, 'La Pépinière' ('Nursery'), a one-hour, five-episode miniseries drama fictionalising the real-life stories of tenants who decided to take collective action, form cooperative housing and become a community. 'Security', 'tenure' and 'mutual aid' were the keywords used by the protagonists in fictionalised or documentary media representations about housing cooperatives in this period.

In the midst of a strong movement of housing co-ops that sought to offer alternatives to gentrification and to house disadvantaged societal groups, women in various government and non-profit positions, women who were part of women's organisations, and the women's movement helped each other and other women in precarious housing situations to establish housing co-ops for women. Feminist proponents of permanent and affordable women's housing argued that housing was central to women's emancipation, that is, to the designing of 'non-sexist' cities. They also developed specific ideas about how women's housing could architecturally cater to women's needs. It is against this background that housing co-ops for women emerged across Canada. This article focuses on the architecture of three co-ops in Montreal established to support women during the 1978–88 period.

There are two major types of co-ops according to ownership: building and continuing co-ops. The case studies belong to the latter group of continuing co-

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ops. In terms of governance, the co-op differs from other types of 'community housing', namely, the social housing owned and operated by one or more levels of the government or by non-profits (Gazzard, 2012). In the type of housing co-op discussed in this article, the residents have the double status of 'members' and 'tenants', and the project is socially owned (Cole, 2008). Core principles of co-op housing include: (1) voluntary and open membership; (2) democratic control; (3) members' economic participation; (4) autonomy and independence; (5) education, training and information; (5) cooperation among co-ops; and (6) concern for community (Cole, 2008: 258–9). These principles can have effects on the architecture of the co-op in the process of design, for example, if members participate in the design, they can shape the architecture. In turn, the architecture of the co-op can support their individual and collective needs and desires. Conversely, the architecture can undermine the principles of the co-op, for example, if the co-op's site is too far away from amenities, work and education such that the members may end up spending an inordinate amount of time on transportation, limiting their ability to participate in the upkeep or running of the co-op, or if the lack of communal spaces hinders the development of mutual aid networks among the residents. Design matters in housing as a general principle, but design particularly matters in co-op housing because of the co-op values and principles about cooperation, participation and community.

Research design

The co-ops that the article focuses on are still in operation and were listed in a pioneering 1991 report on women's housing in Canada by Dr Gerda Wekerle and Barbara Muirhead (1991). The authors did not visit many of the co-ops they list in their report. They made phone calls to arrive at information that is listed in a form, as seen in Figure 1. They used chain referrals or snowball sampling because there is, to this day, no official directory that identifies identity-based co-ops or women's co-ops as such.

These co-ops are small in scale and consist of 15, 18 and 24 units (and thus members), respectively (Figure 2). Since the memberships of the governing boards of the co-ops are public information, we started by contacting board members. The selection of historical cases over newer ones was made to understand how they fared over time, and the focus on Montreal is twofold: Montreal has the largest concentration of co-ops in any metropolitan centre in Canada; and the selection of cases within the same city provides a comparison base.

We were able to interview a total of eight residents: five of them current member-residents with occupancies ranging from 30 years to several years; one a former founding member who no longer lived in the co-op; and two residents who did not have member status. Two research assistants conducted and recorded by hand these semi-structured interviews. Due to the pandemic, interviewing more residents proved to be difficult. Even as restrictions for in-person meetings were sporadically lifted over 2020–21, there was significant hesitancy to meet with the research team; many of the residents and individuals that we wanted to interview are women in old age and thus vulnerable vis-a-vis COVID-19. Another aspect that made data collection even more difficult turned out to be the animosity and conflicts within the co-ops.

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Figure 1: Sample co-op entry in Gerda R Wekerle and Barbara Muirhead's 1991 report *Canadian women's housing projects*

Cooperative d'Habitation Tournesoleil

Address
4561 ave de 1'HQtel-de-Ville Montreal, Quebec H2T 2B2

Contact
Valerie Dupont

Date of Completion
March 3, 1979 - formation of coop organisation

Sponsor
Centre d'Information et de Reference pour les Femmes

Developer
Societe Municipale d'habitation de Montreal (SOMHAM)

Architect/Urban Design firm
SOMHAM

Resource Group
Conseil de Developpement en Logement Communautaire. A "Groupe de Ressources Technique

Funding
SCHL/CMHC 56.1 - for rental subsidies
SHQ (Societe d'habitation du Quebec) - $3000/unit for renovations

Building type
5 brick triplexes on same side of street Number of units
15 4-1/2 rooms (2 bedrooms) x 7; 5-1/2 (3 bedrooms) x 8

Unique design features
Landscaping of backyard designed for security and play space

Objectives/Resident criteria
Two-thirds of members must be women. Must be low income (less than $17,000/year income).

Subsidies and Procedure
CMHC criteria for subsidies.

Services and Activities
NIL except for social/leisure activities

Management
No board: encourages consensus decision-making
Committees: secretarial, treasury, maintenance, communication

What makes your project different?
Heterogenous membership; gives priority to socio-economically disadvantaged women

What would you like others to know about your project?
We are open and accept differences. We encourage diversity because each unique person can contribute to the co-op in a different way. We give priority to the economically weak.

Advice to other women developing housing
Remember that there are alternatives to being a tenant or a landlord i.e. co-ops. Living in a co-op is a lifestyle which can serve the specific needs of many people.

Source: Reproduced from Wekerle and Muirhead (1991).

In the process of researching these three cases, we identified several other newer co-ops and one in the works, which further allows me to compare and discuss the unique aspects of the selected cases. A ninth interview with a technical resource person who was actively involved in the formation and realisation of some of these

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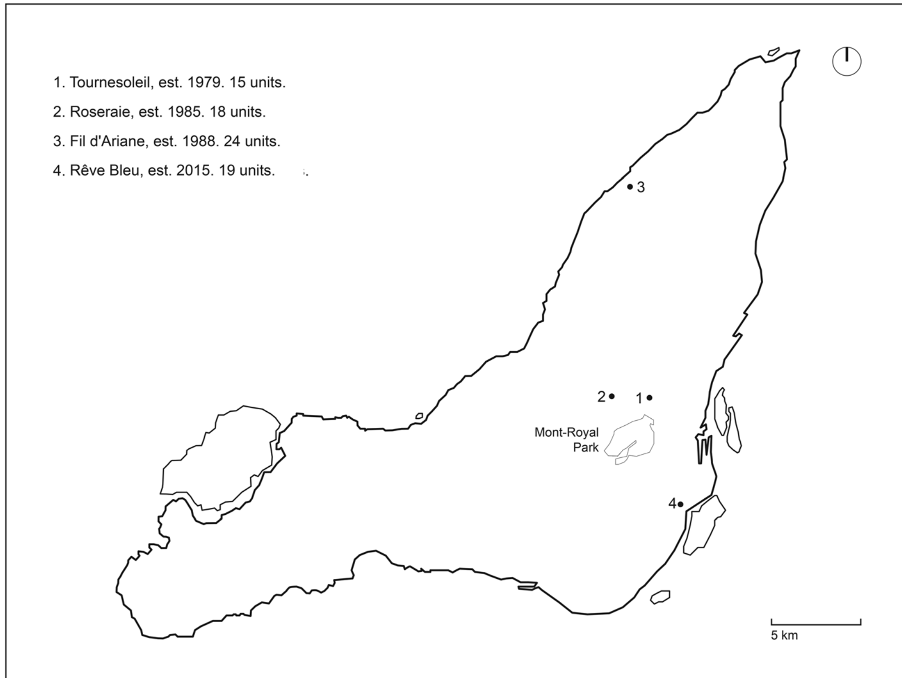
Figure 2: Locations of women's housing co-ops on the island of Montreal that are operational



newer co-ops for women provided insights into the changes in the co-op landscape for women. In addition to these interviews, I rely on published journalistic accounts, secondary literature on Montreal co-ops, architectural observations and spatial analysis. The latter is informed by the cultural landscapes approach, which does not privilege the relationship between makers (builders and architects) and objects (buildings), but instead focuses on the 'ordinary' built environment as material evidence to explore links between people, the built environment and identity (Upton, 1991). In summary, I reflect on the buildings in their urban context in light of interviews.

The main question of the research is to what extent housing projects for women empowered their member-residents and what role can be ascribed to architecture in this process. By 'empowerment' – a term originally stemming from social work – I refer to marginalised or disadvantaged groups that are lacking in resources but achieving self-control and developing power via the intervention of housing (Perkins, 2010). Empowerment is not a goal in itself, but rather a process towards improving communities' material conditions and people's lives. Empowerment can be discussed in this context in terms of architectural design, for example, if future users' feedback is incorporated into the original design (Sanoff, 2006; Zamenopoulos et al, 2019). Empowerment can also be discussed, as in much of co-op housing literature, in terms of taking on responsibilities in the management and maintenance of the housing once built and occupied (Skobba and Ziebarth, 2002). Co-op membership, as opposed to being merely tenants in a housing project owned by the government or by a private landlord, is considered to be

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empowering as members have a say and a vote over decisions affecting their lives. Finally, empowerment can be discussed in terms of having opportunities for investing in other aspects of one's life, leading to economic, social, psychological and health benefits. As I move through the case studies, I will refer to these different kinds of empowerment that residents reflected on and make connections to the architecture of the co-ops.

In the first section, I discuss the process by which women's co-ops came into being in relationship to the women's movement, and how they have been studied and advocated in feminist scholarship. In the second section, I examine how the selected case studies fit into the longer history of co-op housing in Quebec; then, I turn to the question of the interlocutors that shaped the constitution, membership and the architectural design of the co-ops at inception. In the third second section, I describe and analyse the three case studies and compare them architecturally, paying attention to how they have supported women residents, and where they have underperformed. By architecture, I mean not only the form of the buildings, but also the range of decisions made, from siting to interior layout, and from architectural detailing to landscaping. The findings reveal that, to an extent, the co-ops empowered the residents by providing them with improved material conditions so that they can concentrate on other realms of their lives, but the architecture has also been a source of conflict, diminishing residents' perception of control and the sharing of power.

Despite the enthusiasm for earlier cases, co-ops for women have not proliferated. They remain a grass-roots experiment in intersectional justice in the face of housing precarity. They exist and continue to be demanded; therefore, they present an important formal strategy to adopt and improve housing conditions for women. This study is further encouraged by, and speaks to, current concerns about women's situation in low-income housing in Quebec, as expressed by contemporary initiatives such as the 2018 report *Les coopératives d'habitation: présence des femmes, pouvoir des femmes* (Clerc et al, 2018). From within the architecture field, it seeks to make a contribution to current calls for socially engaged architecture by highlighting past experiments in housing to empower vulnerable groups – an area of action that has not received much attention among architects despite the current housing crisis and the ongoing precarity experienced by disadvantaged minority groups.

Women's movement and housing

Housing co-ops for women need to be examined not as insular instances, but as part of a longer history of women's organised efforts to improve cities in North America for women since the 19th century. Montreal had collective accommodation for women in the form of convents, brothels, nurses' residences and sheltering homes in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Adams, 1994; Martin, 1997). In the 1970s, second-wave feminism led to competing and complementary perspectives on women, how they experience and use the built environment, and how their experience can be improved. One strand advocated for integrating hitherto male-only spaces and institutions, while another argued for creating women-only spaces, such as women's libraries, women's housing and women's shelters (Spain, 2016). Feminist housing co-ops fall under the latter approach.

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Housing was not a central issue for the Women's Movement in Canada in the 1970s. Canadian feminists recognised the material bases of women's secondary status in society. Canadian academic Margaret Lowe Benston (1969) argued in her path-breaking essay 'The political economy of women's liberation' that the root of women's secondary status was economic. The transnational network Wages for Housework was hosted in Montreal in 1973 and 1975, but according to Toupin and Roth (2018: 181–4), francophone Quebecois activists did not take up concrete activism – they did not demand wages. Rather, they saw as more urgent women's health and sexuality, equality in education and employment, and preventing violence against women. For francophone Quebecois activists, added was the topic of the oppression of French Canada by anglophone Canada.

Housing may not have been a central issue for the women's movement, but professional women in design, women in government and non-profit positions, and women in social work, who were informed about women's structural issues, helped each other and other women in need of housing by making them aware of existing opportunities, as well as by supporting the projects directly, serving on their boards, establishing and serving on local community organisations coordinating co-ops and non-profits, and acting as design professionals. The outreach work was done through women's centres and neighbourhood education centres, which proliferated in the 1970s as a result of the societal transformation brought about in the 1960s with the Quiet Revolution.

In turn, housing research and policy neglected women's issues until the 1980s. In their 1984 book *Women and Housing*, Janet McClain and Cassie Doyle (1984: 62–9) argued that in order to address women's housing needs, researchers needed nuanced data, but such data were lacking. Canadian housing policy literature up to that point used homogeneous labels and categories without reference to gender (McClain and Doyle, 1984: 63). They note that the first document to identify women as a category was prepared in 1981 by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (McClain and Doyle, 1984: 66–7). The result of invisibility led to women not being eligible for public housing until 1988 except when categorised as a family (mothers), as elderly or as disabled (Wekerle and Novac, 1991: 6). Many women experienced, and continue to experience, layers of disadvantage because of their intersectional identities (Wekerle, 1987; Clerc et al, 2018). As Canada's first National Housing Strategy (Anonymous, 2017: 24) recognises:

> Across the country, women face unique barriers to housing because they are more likely to have low incomes, engage in part-time and precarious work, take on more caregiving responsibilities, and may be dependent on a partner for income. Intersections of identities such as race, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, and socio-economic status create unique experiences among women, including unique experiences of housing instability and homelessness.

It was Gerda R. Wekerle who first addressed the lacuna in research on contemporary women's housing projects in two reports, independently carried out with Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) funding: the first involving research with architect Joan Simon in 1985–6 (Wekerle, 1988) in eight Canadian cities; and the second co-researched with Barbara Muirhead (Wekerle and Muirhead, 1991),

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with a broader, Canada-wide scope. These two path-breaking reports listed both transitional and permanent housing, and within permanent housing, they included non-profits as well as co-ops, with co-ops forming the bulk of housing for women. In the first report, only ten projects were listed; in the later, Canada-wide report, 56 projects, amounting to over 1,500 units, were recorded. Immediately following the 1991 report, and citing them, Giséle Yasmeen (1991) conducted a focused study of two of the three Montreal co-ops for women; this study has also been invaluable to comparing the co-ops over time.

Influences and interactions

Housing policy in Canada parallels the better-known story of the US, in that government policies in the immediate post-war era supported large-scale housing producers in the private sector and suburbanisation, with single detached family homes as the dominant mode of middle-class housing. In this model, the house was a source of investment and generational accumulation for white people (Lipsitz, 2007). For those who did not fit this picture, racially, socially or economically, public housing programmes were developed in inner-city areas. These 'projects' were typically designed according to the tower-in-the-park model. Underfunded and mismanaged, these housing programmes ghettoised the urban poor in city centres and actively pushed racialised families to separate and become single-parent families to get a unit allocated (Bristol, 1991; Freidrichs et al, 2011). In 1973, the US federal housing programme stopped the direct provision of housing and instead started funding localised and scattered-site housing or cash assistance. By the end of the 1970s, there were three challenges posed to the market-driven suburban model by environmentalist groups, by civil rights groups and by women's groups.

Through the 1970s, feminist thinkers and women's groups drew attention to the fact that the suburban model did not respond to women's changing needs, as it was meant for the male-headed nuclear family. As a consequence of the end of Fordism, women had started re-entering the workforce in flexible forms of employment and needed housing that suited their everyday needs. Furthermore, non-traditional households – headed by women forced out of their homes by separation and divorce or by unwed mothers – had recognisably increased. Single mothers earned less than husband–wife families and male-headed single families since they were more typically employed in low-paid, lower-ranking occupations or were lower paid than men, as well as other women in employment. Single-mother-headed families were predominantly renters in multiple-family dwellings; they were locked out of the private home market and did not typically live in the suburbs. In a path-breaking article published in a special issue of *Signs*, Dolores Hayden (1980) asked, 'What would a non-sexist city be like?', and placed housing as a central design issue for the non-sexist city. Housing with support and communal functions was seen as key to building non-sexist cities. Feminist architects and planners had very specific ideas about how design could help women. They promoted a number of projects as precedents.

Recognising the needs of the changing demographics, the HUD had taken a special interest in women's housing (Skinner, 1978). In 1976, the Women's Policy and Program Division was approved as a special unit within the HUD to improve women's access to housing. This unit actively sought to connect with women

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in need of housing via women's organisations and guided them towards grant opportunities to develop housing for women in need. I have written previously on one such organisation, the Women's School of Planning and Architecture (WSPA) (1975–81), and noted that HUD representatives had attended to and encouraged participating women to enter the field of non-profit housing for low-income women (Türeli, 2018). There was no equivalent of the HUD's Women's Policy and Program Division in Canada, that is, a special division for women's housing needs under the CMHC.

A sociologist by training, York University faculty member Wekerle was already recognised for her work on mainstreaming women's issues in planning by the 1980s. She had been publishing *Women and Environments*, first as a newsletter, then as a magazine, since 1975, and she was on the executive committee of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, an association of 600 Canadian women's organisations. She had been one of the few attendees at the WSPA from Canada and had been invited to one of the HUD's workshops in Washington (author's interview with Wekerle in Toronto, 18 June 2019). She was one of the contributors to the path-breaking special issues of the US-based feminist publications *Heresies* (1981) and *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (1980). In earlier work on women and housing, Wekerle started publishing as part of the conversation in the US.

The origin of Wekerle's co-authored reports on women's housing may be the much-publicised case of Constance Hamilton Co-op. Constance Hamilton Co-op is a women's housing co-op in the city-developed, co-op-dense Frankel-Lambert neighbourhood in Toronto and was the first women's co-op in Toronto. Wekerle was invited to be involved in the architect selection when this project was already in the works; then, after the neighbourhood was built up, she was asked by the CMHC to do a post-occupancy study together with the architect of Constance Hamilton Co-op, Joan Simon of Simon Architects (Simon and Wekerle, 1986). It was with Simon several years later that Wekerle researched her first 1988 report on *Women's Housing Projects in Eight Canadian Cities* (Wekerle, 1988). That there was no Canadian government agency looking into women's issues in housing did not prevent women producing housing for women. Wekerle's contribution in this area has been through her persistent publications connecting these otherwise disconnected localised experiments and analysing their relative successes.

Although not a design professional by training, Wekerle was aware that the architectural end products did not match feminists' visions for communal facilities that would help transform the sexual division of domestic labour or the criteria of success for the architectural establishment. For example, Constance Hamilton Co-op was to include common areas such as a day-care centre, a tearoom, a co-op shop and a meeting room, but these were eliminated due to budget restrictions imposed by the CMHC. Aware of the impact of funding restrictions on architectural design, Wekerle noted in 1988:

> None of the projects described here will be written up in architectural journals as Aldo van Eyck's Mother's House in Amsterdam was (Hertzberger et al, 1992), for there are few design innovations. Small concessions such as Constance Hamilton's kitchens that blend into the living room or the same size bedrooms at the Beguinage are considered major victories. The Section 56.1 non-profit cooperative housing programme limits the kind of construction,

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> interior space, communal space, and amenities that can be provided through establishing Maximum Unit Price (MUPs) for each city. (Wekerle, 1988: 57)

Indeed, in the 30-plus years since she wrote these words, there has not been any coverage of the Montreal co-ops that this article focuses on, or, in fact, any Canadian co-ops for women, in mainstream architectural journals aimed at professionals.

Inspirations

It is worth dwelling on the projects that circulated at the time as key precedents among feminist architects and planners interested in the issue of women's housing. The most acclaimed one was arguably Aldo van Eyck's Mother's House (1973–78) – also known as Hubertus House for Single Mothers (Strauven, 1980; Anonymous, 1981; Doubilet, 1982; Buchanan, 1982). Most notably, it is discussed at length in Dolores Hayden's (1980) much-quoted and reprinted *Signs* article, 'What would a non-sexist city be like?', and in separate articles on 'single-parent housing' by Sherry Ahrentzen (1988; 1989) and Kathryn H. Anthony (1991), as well as in Wekerle's (1988) report. Yet, the Mother's House is not a co-op, but 'second-stage' housing to help single mothers.

In the Mother's House, the residents were expected to move out after a few months. The project was commissioned and run by a Church-related charitable foundation. The praise for the Mother's House comes from both the architectural programme that prioritised the well-being of residents, mothers and children, rather than economies, and how the programme was dealt with as an urban design problem. The project incorporates an existing historic building as temporary accommodation for single mothers and infants, and a new infill structure next to it that houses social service functions on five levels towards the street and children's apartments on two stories to the back of the lot. Between the historic and the new infill building, van Eyck carves out an internal alley and elevated roof-top terraces, and uses a material and colour palette to create a vibrant internal world (internal to the project yet exposed to the weather).

Another key reference discussed by feminists at the time was Nina West's homes for single parents in London. In particular, Sylvester Bone-designed Fiona House (built in 1972) was reproduced in various publications, including the August 1975 'Women in Design' special issue of *Architectural Design*. The residential block consists of four apartments on each floor, which are organised around a central common hall that serves as a play area for children. On the other narrow side of the triangular lot is the childcare facility that serves both the residents and the wider community. Nina West was a non-profit foundation, and the (second-stage) housing was for transitions. In addition to these singular Dutch (Amsterdam) and British (London) examples, which were not co-ops, feminist housing scholar-activists were inspired by Swedish and Danish examples of cohabitation, co-living and co-ops with programmatic support for everyday functions, including workspaces, day-care centres, shared kitchens and laundries, and diverse unit types to cater to different family forms (Woodward, 1989). The architecture of these much-touted housing projects for women was indeed rich, but the funding mechanisms of the Canadian experiments meant that the latter had to be stripped down to the bare minimum.

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Housing policy and organisations

To understand how these case-study co-ops for women in Montreal came to be, it is imperative to understand the history and structure of funding, as well as the network of intermediaries and allies. The CMHC at the federal level (since 1947), La Société d'Habitation du Québec (SHQ) at the provincial level (since 1967), Habitation Montréal at the city level and the Groupe de Ressources Techniques ('technical resource groups' [GRTs]) at the local borough level were the primary organisations that supported housing cooperatives.

The history of cooperative housing in Quebec is studied in several periods. The first-generation co-ops (1937–68) were intended for private property acquisition (Charbonneau and Deslauriers, 1985). Members of these 'building cooperatives' would contribute not only payments, but also sweat equity. They were organised by subsidiaries of the Catholic Church, which preferred detached, small-scale, single-family housing and individual homeownership solutions in order to protect morals, so that the residents would not fall under the influence of radical ideas. In denser urban areas such as Montreal, higher land prices and the impracticality of families to contribute sweat equity made such projects more difficult to realise.

Through the 1960s, the co-op sector moved from a model of private property to social property. In response to a report prepared by Fédération Coop-Habitat du Québec (the Quebec Federation of Cooperative Housing), the Coop-Habitat programme (1968–72) was established with a centralised structure to produce housing cooperatives where residents would own their buildings but be tenants in them (Collin, 1998). This organisation produced the second generation of cooperatives. After having built 1,400 affordable units in 13 housing projects, the Coop-Habitat was in financial deficit and thus dissolved in 1972. When this expert-led, large-scale, centralised operation failed, grass-roots approaches were valorised.

The third stage owes its existence to the first federal cooperative housing legislation in 1973 and the provincial housing policy supporting co-op housing following the election of the nationalist Parti Quebecois in the provincial elections of 1976. Parti Quebecois put in place a number of policies towards self-determination, away from the cultural orbit of Anglo-Canada, and more democratic political structures. The party encouraged co-ops in all realms. In housing, the party sought to decentralise planning, and the co-op model fit the bill. The 1977 provincial housing cooperative funding programme Logipop offered start-up funds for new co-ops, subsidies per unit and funded GRTs to facilitate the process of people in need of housing getting together to form a co-op. Between 1973 and 1986, an estimated 14,000 socially owned cooperative units were added to Quebec's housing stock; however, co-op formation would slow down in the following years. From the mid-1980s, the Canadian government started withdrawing its support, and by 1992, it cancelled its co-op housing programmes. The provincial government stepped in and introduced programmes to help with cooperatives.

The three case studies – Tournesoleil, La Roseraie and Le Fil d'Ariane – were all organised through local GRTs and funded through a combination of government-distributed loans for construction costs and rental subsidies. The GRTs are small-scale organisations with two to ten employees that coordinate various phases of the cooperative housing projects and act as intermediaries between tenants, public

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officials, building contractors, engineers and architects. They get a percentage of the project budget, and they are thus motivated to realise the co-op projects. The GRT idea seems to have been from the grass roots, in the sense that it was invented in the field and then incorporated into housing policy.

There are currently 25 GRTs in Quebec, and they have an umbrella organisation, the Association of Quebec Technical Resource Groups (AGRTQ). In the initial years along with social workers, the GRTs employed architects trained in the community design workshops at McGill University and Laval University. These groups of professionals had started out organising and mobilising residents in working-class neighbourhoods with poor housing stock to improve the quality of their built environments and to help residents fight urban renewal. In some cases, these architecture students were residents themselves in neighbourhoods such as Milton Park, right next to McGill University. The TV series 'La Pépinière' mentioned earlier featured four anglophone young men as characters, all of whom were architecture students at McGill. While a history of architects' involvement is yet to be written, the record points to architects as key actors as community organisers in the co-op movement in Montreal.

Tournesoleil, La Roseraie and Le Fil d'Ariane were very small-scale co-ops. In contrast, for example, Milton Park features around 600 units in 135 buildings. A second key difference from the likes of Milton Park or Coop Le Chatelet, which inspired the TV series 'La Pépinière', is that there was no citizen mobilisation to start with. The residents of these co-ops were recruited through ads in community spaces and media targeting women, spearheaded by GRT workers approaching women's spaces and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In Tournesoleil, the co-op was set up first and only later were the buildings identified and chosen for purchase by the co-op association; existing tenants were then invited to join – only five remained on. The rest of the residents were recruited through advertising in the newsletter of the Women's Centre (also known as Centre d'information et de Reference pour les Femmes [CIRF]) – an NGO founded in 1973 through a local initiative grant by action-oriented feminist women who had earlier formed the Feminist Communication Collective, publishing through the local newspaper *Logos* (Forrest and Roach Pierson, 1993–95). Interviewee 1 (a long-term member at the co-op) reports that she was working at Ateliers d'éducation Populaire – an organisation created in 1973 to improve the living conditions of the people living in the neighbourhood – when she saw the publicity for the co-op. In (Wekerle's and Muirhead (1991: 124) report, the Conseil de Developpement en Logement Communautaire is listed as the GRT and a local municipal entity, La Société municipale d'habitation de Montréal (SOMHAM), is recorded in lieu of the architect. For La Roseraie, the report lists another GRT, Atelier Habitation Montreal, as both manager and architect. Interviewee 2 (a founding member) remembers but cannot name a foreign (Austrian) architect as incompetent and responsible for the many subsequent travails of the co-op. She explains that the co-op was formed first, and then the site, an underutilised car park, was chosen and bought after prolonged negotiation with the municipality, which did not want low-income housing in its limits at that time. For Le Fil d'Ariane, Wekerle and Muirhead (1991: 118) list Groupe de Ressources Technique – Nord Est as the GRT and Lafontaine et Associes as the architect. Yasmeen (1991: 86) reports one employee at the local GRT who was active in feminist organisations that offered training to help women reintegrate into the

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workforce following changes in their lives; the co-op formation was also advertised to organisations working with communities in the east end of the city. Based on these three co-ops, women's co-ops tended to emerge from sessions and workshops focusing on issues of housing in organisations welcoming and working with women. They were not based on an association of existing tenant groups trying to protect their homes from urban renewal. Instead, they consisted of individuals who were already pushed out of their existing homes or did not already have adequate accommodation.

An architectural comparison of three Montreal co-ops for women

From the outside, nothing indicates that the three co-ops – Tournesoleil, La Roseraie, Le Fil d'Ariane – are designed with women in mind, with predominantly women residents (Figure 3). Yet, their designssupport women's daily tasks as mothers, workers and now in retirement. Architecturally speaking, these co-ops mostly follow the vernacular tradition of the Montreal plex, and my main argument vis-a-vis the success of these co-ops is that they fit into the urban fabric seamlessly, while improving on the existing housing patterns through (shared) use and management. The residents do not have the feeling of living in low-income public housing, which may translate into how they perceive themselves and how the broader neighbourhood perceives and treats them. The co-ops' relative success, in terms of resident fulfilment and cooperation, however, depends not only on the housing form (the building), but also on the notion of social property, as the buildings are owned by the member-residents and resources are offered by the urban settings, such as day-care centres and other services. Ultimately, individuals' satisfaction is determined by the diversity of life positions, backgrounds and life situations they are in.

Tournesoleil Housing Cooperative (built in 1979) consists of five adjoined triplexes in the Plateau neighbourhood of Montreal, a formerly working-class neighbourhood

Figure 3: Tournesoleil Housing Cooperative: street view showing architectural quality, urban context and proximity to a main shopping street

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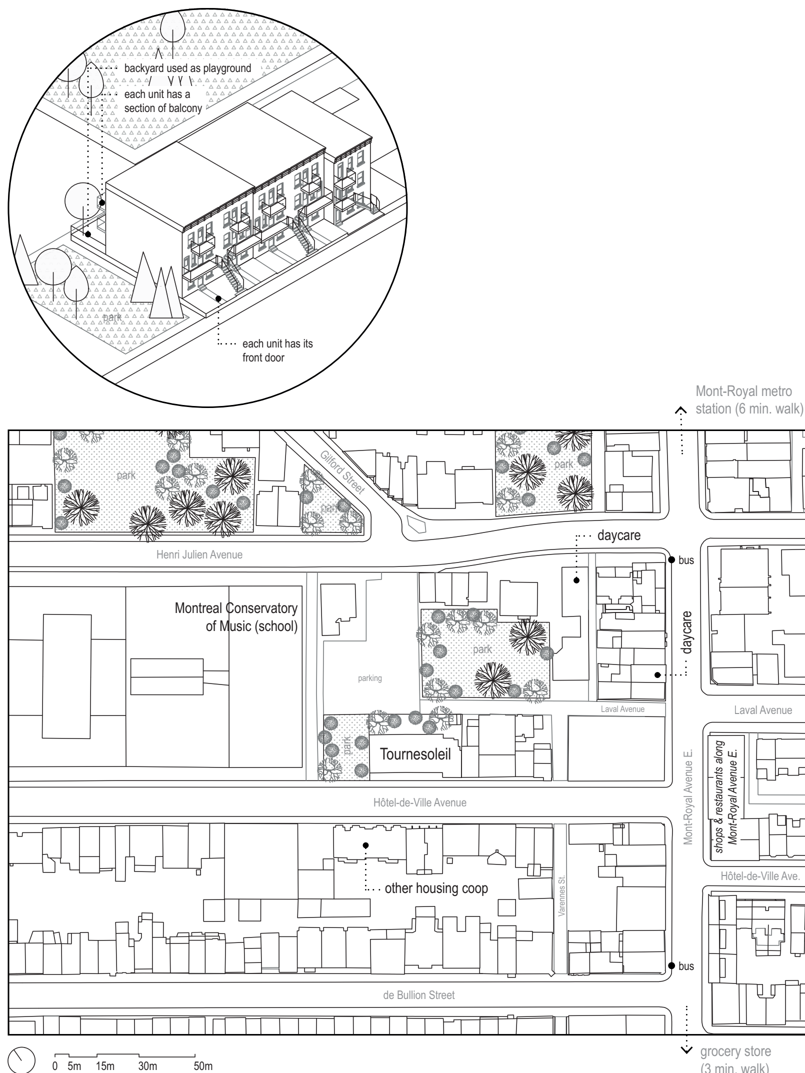
that was fast gentrifying at the time of the formation of the cooperative and currently one of the most desirable neighbourhoods in the city. It is an important contribution to the protection of the historic fabric of the city. The triplexes, dating from 1915, were converted to 15 units with one unit per floor. As a result of the renovation, the co-op contains seven two-bedroom units and eight three-bedroom units, designed primarily for low-income women and their families. Each unit is accessible from the street; in other words, the residents have a private and direct front door and a street number to their unit. The ground floor units are accessible from the street level, and an exterior staircase leads to a second-floor balcony, where one door leads to the second-floor unit, while another to the third-floor unit features an interior staircase going up (Figure 4). In addition to a unique street number and their own door to

Figure 4: Tournesoleil Housing Cooperative



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the street, members further appreciate the separate entrances because noise is kept at a minimum when circulation is not shared.

The renovation has remained true to the spirit of the plexes typical of the area, such that it is impossible to identify Tournesoleil as low-income housing. It looks like any other Plateau plex, with external stairs of black-painted iron contrasting against the brick facade. The neighbourhood-built environment further serves the co-op members well because of the availability of recreation, parks, shopping, transportation and other services all within a five-minute walking radius.

The units are not generous in spatial layout, and the residents are not able to change them according to their life situations. The units have narrow and deep plans, receiving daylight only from front and back facades, with rooms in the middle receiving no light (Figure 5). The front door opens to a corridor along the length of the unit, splitting the unit in half, along the width, providing access to the bedrooms and the bathroom, and terminating in the kitchen. Kitchen placement and the lack of a separation door between the kitchen and the corridor seems strategic, allowing residents (typically, women) to see right away who enters the unit and to be aware of what is going on within the unit. The design of each unit was thought to be flexible, with a double room at the front of the unit (approximately twice the size of the other rooms in the unit) that can easily be used for living space, a dining area, bedrooms or a home office. However, in practice, since the width is so narrow, residents have had to adapt furniture size and placement, such as pushing beds to the wall, as seen on the sample unit plan.

Common spaces for the residents are limited to the fenced-in backyard. Co-op members take care of it collectively and use it flexibly for leisure and play. The units have private exterior balconies at the back, off of the kitchen, from which the mothers can watch over their children playing in the backyard. In a landlord-owned plex, the occupant-owners would typically live in the first-floor unit and have exclusive use of the backyard, while tenants upstairs would not have been able to use it. In this co-op, the shared backyard doubles as a play space and serves social connectivity. Wekerle and Muirhead report the landscaped garden as only a 'unique design feature' in their survey. However, in her interview-based study soon after the survey, Yasmeen (1990: 26) accentuates further: 'The yard was a factor that led many of the members with children to choose Tournesoleil over other housing options. Members are also highly concerned with the safety of their children in the vicinity of the co-op.' The yard allows for the informal supervision of children, as they are passively watched, and for their protection from outside harms, that is, from strangers and traffic. Natural elements further benefit the emotional well-being of residents.

The co-op members have done continuous improvements to the building and in their units. The work on the co-op is mainly for maintenance and to meet code standards in order to ensure insurance and co-op status. However, there are no funds or grants to adjust the co-ops to the changing life situations of the residents, whose families shrink and enlarge, or who may develop mobility issues in old age.

The second case, La Roseraie (built in 1985), is situated in the affluent Francophone neighbourhood of Outremont on a residential street close to the main street with shops, restaurants and other types of services, as well as bus stops. Unlike Tournesoleil, it is a new-build project, but it also seamlessly fits into its urban setting. It is composed of three adjoined blocks of three-storey, brick-clad walk-ups. Each contains six units, making a total of 18 units, ten of which are two-bedroom units and eight are three-

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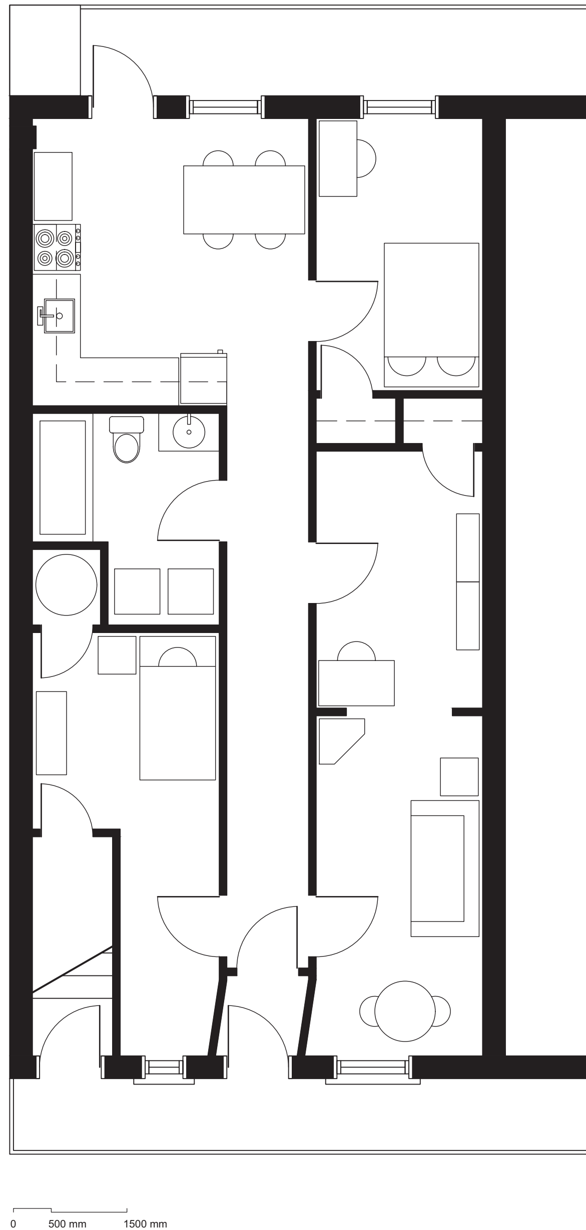
Figure 5: Typical second-floor unit layout in Tournesoleil Housing Cooperative



Note: The drawing is an approximation based on a sketch.

bedroom units, with one universally accessible (Figure 6, Figure 7). Designed with single parents and the elderly in mind, the co-op also offers a communal meeting room for its members. The facades and floor plans are symmetrically treated around an internal stair core. Balconies are slightly recessed, suggesting more privacy from being overlooked by pedestrians. The buildings are recessed from the street and, today, partly hidden by trees. The main building entrance is emphasised through an arched treatment, and the detailing around the windows nods to middle-class, market-

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Figure 6: La Roseraie Housing Cooperative: entry

rate apartment buildings in the vicinity. All these details are architectural devices to communicate with, and to fit into, the neighbourhood. In fact, La Roseraie was the first co-op in this neighbourhood, and it took two years for the cooperative to demonstrate the need in the neighbourhood to the mayor's office and for the scheme to be approved (*La Presse*, 27 November 1984). While the units do not have direct front doors, it is interesting to note that they still have individual street numbers, which may have been a preference on behalf of the residents. The apartment layouts and room sizes are viewed as satisfactory, but the quality of construction is low, with poor sound and heat isolation. Residents struggle with heat loss during long winters and excessive heating during the summer. All the interviewees report that

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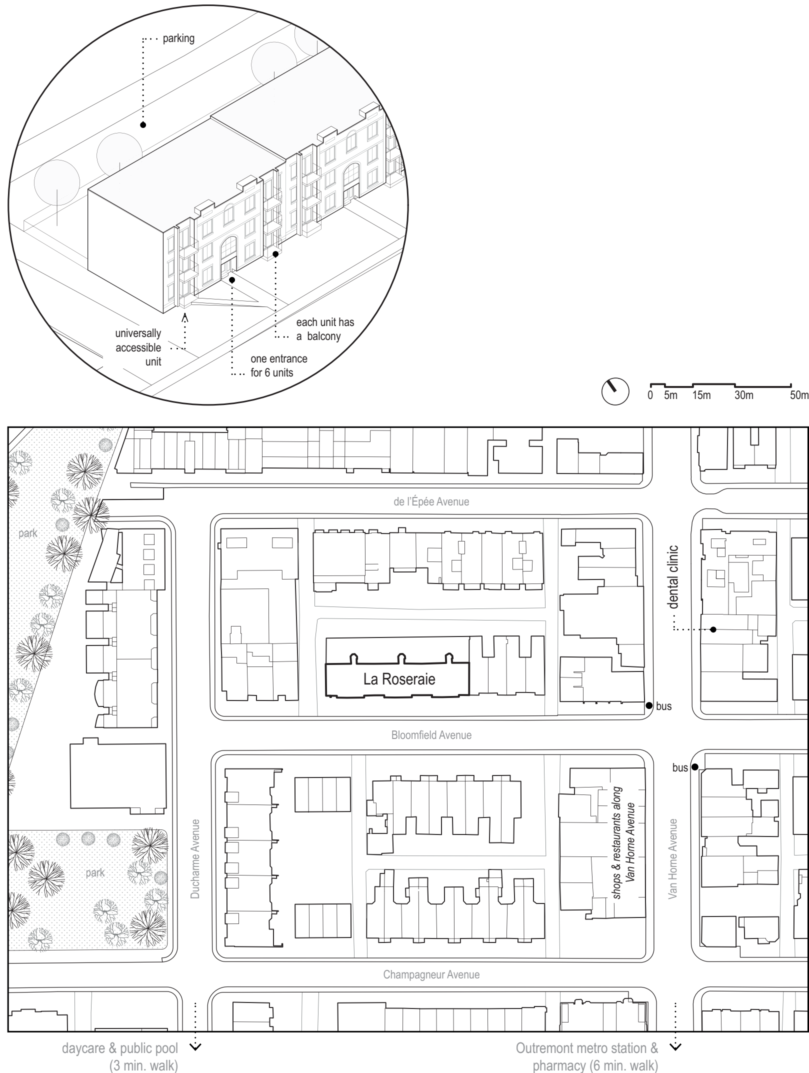
Figure 7: La Roseraie Housing Cooperative (1985)



along with heat loss, sound transmission and noise constitute significant sources of conflict among the residents.

In terms of the design process, Interviewee 2 reports that they were successful in their negotiations with the architect in getting an open plan: "This open-floor concept was new and exciting. We asked the architects to design it like that and they did." They further asked the architect for a common room, but the space ended up too small to fit everyone and they would usually meet outside in the backyard. Today, the backyard is communal and maintained by a gardener, but it is generally used by the people living on the first floor.

The first and second case-study co-ops were named after flowers ('sunflower' and 'rose garden'), but the third case-study co-op's naming is loaded most with a mission. Its name, 'Ariadne's thread', is a phrase that comes from Greek mythology,

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in which Ariadne helps Theseus to get out of the labyrinth with the help of a thread; the housing thus symbolises the thread that will uplift women from their labyrinth.

Le Fil d'Ariane, built in 1988, is also a new-build but on a site in a suburban borough to the north-eastern tip of the island of Montreal. It takes more than an hour from the city centre on public transport and several modes of transport to get there, and the nearest bus stop to the co-op is about 500 metres away. This is a car-dependent, low-income suburb, and this siting is reflective of the trade-offs that founding members had to make to keep costs down.[1] The co-op consists of four three-storey, brick-faced walk-ups, organised in two detached blocks, facing the same direction towards the street (Figure 8). Similar to La Roseraie, each walk-up has an internal stair and two units per floor. Thus, the project features 24 units and more apartment variation overall than the previously mentioned co-ops, with six two-bedroom, 12 three-bedroom and six four-bedroom units. The massing and architectural expression of Le Fil d'Ariane fits in with its immediate surroundings of low-income housing (*Habitation Loyer Modique*). However, its maintenance is visibly superior, and communal privacy is maintained with landscaping, as tall trees provide shade and well-trimmed tall hedges create a green wall on the periphery of the property. (Figure 9, Figure 10)

Since it was a new-build in a suburban subdivision, the project was ready for occupation in less than a year of breaking ground. Contrary to the previous two co-ops, its location made it less effective for its membership of single-parent residents, who had not been living in the area prior to relocation to this co-op and needed day-care centres and other services. However, the co-op did provide them with quality and spacious accommodation that they did not have access to before. In terms of design features, the consultation process with the architects, Lafontaine et Associés, reportedly lead to the avoidance of basement units and modified kitchen plans, with more storage space, more counter space and colour coordination (Yasmeen, 1991: 88). Each unit has a good-sized balcony. The communal backyard is again used for leisure and as a children's play area, as well as for car parking. There is also a community room for meetings and office work related to the management of the co-op on the basement level.

Advantages and challenges of the co-op environment

Living in a co-op has both advantages and challenges, which these three co-op cases also confirm. The main challenges have to do with the power relations that the architecture of the co-op animates and activates. Interviews point to discrimination due to intersectional identities and due to varying levels (or lack thereof) of participation in the running of the co-op.

Women choose to live in cooperatives because of the low cost of rent and below-market rates, and because they can access relatively-good quality and appropriately sized housing. According to Interviewee 1 from the first inner-city co-op of Tournesoleil, at the beginning, the co-op helped women who did not have rights at that point and who were defined only though their reproductive function. The women who moved to the co-op were able to work and raise children as single parents, benefiting from close cooperation, for example, exchanging babysitting services when needed. Today, only five of the 15 units are families with children; several members like herself have been living in the co-op for over 30 years. Over

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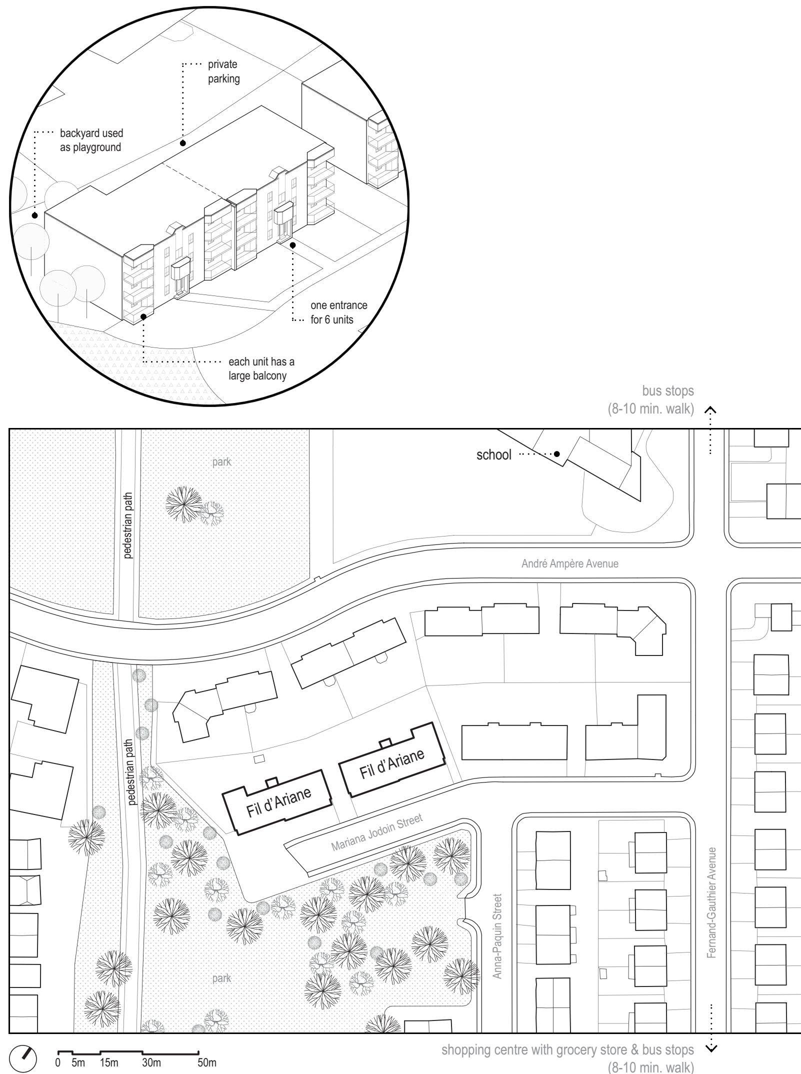
Figure 8: Le Fil d'Ariane Housing Cooperative (1988)



the years, as children grew, tenants tended to leave. Staying in the co-op even allowed some of them to save up enough to buy a home of their own. From the perspective of Interviewee 4 (a working mother of two in her 30s), who lives with her husband in the second inner-city co-op of La Roseraie: "Low rent allows for a much better quality of life; now, we can invest in our family. We can afford extracurricular activities for our children, and for ourselves, and better quality of food." The tenure provides a feeling of security without the fear of eviction by landlords, and this stability allows residents to plan and take control of other areas of their lives. Residents know their neighbours, and that adds to the feeling of safety and may even lead to mutual aid. Having control over the environment is a bonus for the residents, and responsibilities can become opportunities to improve oneself. The women-majority or women-only aspect provides further safety from the sexual harassment, verbal abuse or dismissal in

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Figure 9: Le Fil d'Ariane Housing Cooperative

co-op meetings that women in family co-ops report experiencing, and members can get opportunities to participate that they may not get in co-ops dominated by men.

Cooperatives are meant to encourage diversity, but what does that diversity look like? Yasmeen reports that race troubles sprang up among the residents as soon Le Fil d'Ariane was occupied in 1991, specifically between white French-Canadian and nine immigrant Haitian residents; the latter were concentrated in the block with the largest apartments, formed a cultural subgroup and experienced surveillance, policing and rejection by the dominant French-Canadian group. Instead of a 'mutual aid' network, mutual suspicion had developed, providing a practical demonstration of how immigration status, race and being women created overlapping levels of disadvantage for the latter group. Most of our interview requests, first by mail and later by door-to-door presentations, were dismissed or declined due to this ongoing animosity between the residents. The race-based conflicts translated into a dysfunctional co-op, where residents refuse to take part in its maintenance. The beautifully maintained front and backyards are the work of a hired gardener. In contrast to its external look, three apartments and the communal room currently remain evacuated due to a lack

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Figure 10: Le Fil d'Ariane Housing Cooperative

of maintenance and repair. Interviewee 7, who is vice president of the co-op of Le Fil d'Ariane, inserts race into his complaints. In an example of how much electricity is consumed, he explains: "When the inspector came to check, the apartment was as hot as in Haiti, and the woman was naked in her apartment"; "She had her oven on broil and all heaters were on full"; the walls were "brown because of excessive heating"; and the electrician "warned that the building is in danger of catching fire because of this abusive heating". This interviewee connects various problems, ranging from energy bills to infestation, to his Haitian neighbours, demonstrating that the race issues Yasmeen observed in 1991 are continuing 30 years later. From the same co-op and on the receiving end of racial scorn, Interviewee 8 expresses that "People do not respect each other" in the co-op.

The centrally located co-ops seem relatively more functional, but they are visibly less diverse. Living in one of the two centrally located co-ops, Interviewee 4 confesses that in the last membership selection, they had over 15 applicants, about two thirds of whom were people of colour. The latter were turned down because they were "too poor"; instead, a francophone man was recruited as a member because he had trade skills that would be useful for the maintenance of the co-op. The co-op ultimately maintains its middle-class, 'white' (francophone Quebecois) membership by discriminating against applicants of other racial and religious backgrounds. Different forms of discrimination based on gender identity, race (Indigenous, immigrant), age, linguistic proficiency, class, labour situation and ability may prevent women who do not conform to the majority from full and equal participation.

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The preceding example of the selection of a man with trade skills useful to the co-op also points to the issue of labour and the ability to participate, which can become a source of conflict. The co-ops were initially set up to help especially single women and to create safe spaces for them; however, over time, some started admitting men members because it became clear that women without partners and working and taking care of children had little to no time left to fulfil their work obligations to the co-op, and men were more readily available for such obligations. As Interviewee 2 expresses: "Maybe it's better to live in a large co-op or a regular social housing, it's impersonal, you pay the rent, and don't have to do the chores or fight with anyone. You know, the tasks are overwhelming." This insight based on lived experience reveals the oversight documented in co-op literature, which tends to correlate increased responsibility with greater empowerment. Disadvantaged groups may not have the privilege to lend time and labour, preventing their access to co-ops or leading to their marginalisation as a co-op member.

In principle, cooperatives offer democratic governance, as they have boards and committees. Yet, board members rarely rotate unless someone quits, making the generational handover of experience and knowledge difficult. Therefore, committees can become a source of stress, as not everyone ends up participating and working for the co-op in the same amount. Over time, a new intergenerational challenge emerges, as existing co-op members living in larger apartments but with changed life circumstances, for example, due to their children having grown up and moved out, do not want to give up their apartments to switch with newer residents with expanding families. As Interviewee 3 complains: "Older people in the co-op refuse to leave their seats in the committee; they won't give up the power they have in the co-op. Strong, powerful women are supposed to work together and support each other, but not here. Here, they are fighting for power in the co-op." The reason for her complaint is that she wants to grow her family, but she cannot access the larger apartments where older singles live, as they are not willing to switch.

At inception, key decisions rely on a few founding members, who then go on to recruit other member-residents who are not a party to the discussions; once the GRTs take over a project, little interaction is possible between the co-op members and the architects and builders. It is not clear from the literature how women in precarious housing situations or any disadvantaged group in need of housing come to form a housing cooperative and how they actualise a project. Current residents are also unable to provide such background to their co-ops, nor do they have access to records.

The co-op landscape today

A 2018 report commissioned by a coalition of housing stakeholders, including the Metropolitan Montreal Housing Cooperatives Federation (FECHIMM), shows that, presently, 12,000 households live in 460 member cooperatives (and an estimated additional 140 non-member ones); that is compared to 1,200 cooperatives overall in Quebec and 2,100 cooperatives in all of Canada (Clerc et al, 2018). Montreal has the largest concentration of cooperatives in the province and the country, and two thirds of co-op residents are women. The division of labour persists in the present, with women being paid less and also doing more of the unpaid, invisible domestic care work. Unlike Wekerle's report, the purpose of which was to show that 'women

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housing women' existed across Canada, this recent report examines the participation and role of women living in co-ops in Quebec for the first time. Findings reveal that, overall, women continue to experience difficulty in finding affordable housing compared to men. Women experience even more poverty in retirement age, as their retirement wages are lower than those of men. According to this report, once housed in a co-op, women continue to experience the issues, such as racism, ageism, ableism, sexual harassment and patriarchy, which prevented them from equal participation in their housing. It is not surprising, then, to find newer co-ops for women, but as I will explain, their members face new types of challenges.

A development agent with a GRT (Bâtir son Quartier) operating in South-West Montreal confirms that co-ops for women are still emerging from sessions and workshops focusing on issues of housing in organisations welcoming and working with women (interview, 26 February 2020). There are currently two permanent housing co-ops for women in this GRT's portfolio: one is for older single women in financial difficulty built in 2015 after a 14-year process, called Rêve Bleu; the other an ongoing project for older feminist lesbian women and their allies, with the name La Maison des RebElles ('The House of Rebels'). Rêve Bleu emerged from housing workshops with local low-income women at a local women's centre. The women realised that they had similar issues and the GRT further helped the women "develop their values, selection criteria" (interview, 26 February 2020).

This particular co-op started out as a small-scale autonomous project of 19 units, but financial issues forced them to exist with a non-profit senior residence of 107 units in a new construction. Today, the co-op exists on two floors of a ten-storey block as part of a larger planning proposal encompassing three blocks of affordable housing by the St. Lawrence River on a former municipal dump[2] (Figure 11). Due

Figure 11: Rêve Bleu (2015)

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to financial constraints, the project did not meet many of the member-residents' spatial priorities, such as having a separate entrance for their co-op, having a private dining room in their co-op for socialisation among themselves. Moreover, rents (co-property) costs turned out to be higher than expected. Architecturally, the massing is reminiscent of public housing projects (*Habitation Loyer Modique*), and the siting of the project is less than ideal.

The second co-op for women on the GRT's table, The House of Rebels, is a 20-unit project, and it is being paired with another co-op for women from the district organised by a local housing committee (Projet d'organisation populaire, d'information et de regroupement, POPIR) and transitional housing for women (by the organisation Logifem) in a large complex of buildings that will include market condos and commercial space. It does not seem viable anymore for new co-ops to nestle in the regular residential urban fabric as the three case studies did.

Discussion of findings

Housing co-ops have benefited their residents, their neighbourhoods and governments. Theoretically, they are autonomous self-help communities that exercise a form of democracy. In dense areas such as in Montreal's urban core, continuing cooperatives have helped renovate existing housing stock and contributed to historic preservation and inner-city regeneration. Deindustrialisation, suburbanisation and the subsequent return to city centres in the 1970s meant that inner-city housing stock was in poor condition, while, at the same time, it became difficult to find affordable housing. Through collective ownership, co-ops helped curb appreciation of property values. The experiment was a challenge to capitalism and – its main tenet in the settler-colonial country – private property ownership. At the same time as they served to reduce housing needs, co-ops have also reduced the cost of social policies for the Quebec government, for example, by replacing the need for the government to produce and manage more housing projects and other services.

Multi-unit housing cooperatives have been particularly attractive to women living alone and with children since women are typically disadvantaged in the housing market compared to men. In order to reflect on the significance of co-ops for women in Montreal, it is necessary to remember that in the province of Quebec, many women could not open a bank account, apply for a loan or take a mortgage of their own without the signature of a husband until 1964, or become jurors until 1971. Women controlling their housing was therefore a relatively limited situation in practice until the period covered by this study. Co-ops for women have more recently become attractive to women with other types of overlapping identities, from sexual identity to age and race, which have disadvantaged them further in the housing market. This is not to suggest that housing policy around cooperatives targeted to uplift women, but rather that women sought funding through existing programmes.

Women in need of housing were and are assisted by organisations at multiple levels, though, in particular, by professional women in organisational and institutional roles, whether in the GRT, the neighbourhood-level housing committee or the city's housing department. The role of women activists in grass-roots community organising for housing is an area of emerging interest among scholars of Montreal, and there is much more to uncover. The women who moved into and lived in these

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co-ops did not have or develop feminist consciousness per se. However, they were empowered by having access to affordable housing, adequate space and access to public services and schools. The affordability of the co-op allowed them to invest in their own lives and families.

The insights of the interviews and observations presented in the article underlie the significance of architecture. A common feature highlighted in the three main case studies was the communal green area. Even though residents did not necessarily participate in the care of these areas, they ascribed special value to them and collectively invested co-op resources into maintaining them. The green spaces visibly set the co-ops apart from social housing projects operated by public entities and are superior to those tenant-occupied apartment buildings of a similar price range in the private market. They demonstrate social capital on behalf of the residents. Furthermore, co-op residents associate the green areas with safety and security. In terms of the buildings, a fundamental challenge seems to be the budget and not a lack of imagination on behalf of architects. Funding mechanisms and financial constraints have meant that interactions between future users and architects in the design process were minimal; architectural programmes were stripped out of initial ambitions, especially for supportive programmes and communal areas, in order to meet the very low budgets imposed by government agencies. Financial constraints have led to substandard construction quality, including sound and heat insulation, which have created animosity and conflicts among the residents, some along racial lines. Financial constraints have also led to site selections that are less than ideal, as in the third example to the north of the island of Montreal. In Tournesoleil, the unit size is a difficulty that member-residents have had to put up with by acquiring small, non-standard furniture and pushing furniture to the wall. In La Roseraie, it was not the layout, but the quality of construction, that led to a significant source of difficulty for the co-op and residents. Le Fil d'Ariane's site is not advantageous for single mothers without a car and backup care; although some interaction with the architect led to an improvement in the internal layout, the low quality of the buildings has translated over the course of the past three decades to maintenance and repair needs that are beyond the means of the co-op. The quality of buildings, or lack thereof in an environment with already scarce resources, can lead to a tense social environment and even to discriminatory accusations among member-residents.

The co-op movement characterises itself as a type of solidarity network that has open membership. Yet, even as our limited set of interviews reveal, the co-ops are also organisations with 'intersecting oppressions' (Collins, 2000). According to the length of their tenure, their status as a member or merely a resident, and their social status or race, residents have different degrees of satisfaction and perceived control over their environment. From within the three main case studies, the fact that the two inner-city co-ops maintained their mainly white make-up, as opposed to the third one far away, shows how the co-ops can be closed, contrary to the openness among their guiding principles.

In today's housing market, many of the issues identified by the co-op movement in terms of the lack of affordable housing and in terms of women's intersectional vulnerabilities are only exacerbated. Inner-city areas for housing development are rare and expensive, pushing the GRTs to organise projects on former industrial, brownfield and relatively remote sites. Furthermore, as the projects take many years

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to be realised, it taxes disproportionately founding members, with some leaving the project before the building is finished and some leaving when the rents end up exceeding their means. The GRTs are funded from the overall budget and are thus motivated to get the projects done; however, the third-party negotiations with architects and builders that the GRT engage in on behalf of co-op members mean that their priorities may not be reflective of future residents. Overall, however, the historical housing co-ops, as well as ongoing initiatives to establish new women's co-ops, demonstrate the need and desire to pursue intersectional housing justice via the cooperative model.

Notes

[1] La Fil d'Ariane did not benefit from CMHC Non-Profit Housing Program, which was terminated in 1985. Its sole funding for mortgages and subsidies for low-income households came from SHQ.

[2] The architectural project is viewable on the website of the architects, Saia Barbarese Topouzanov (available at: https://sbt.qc.ca/en/projects/gaetan-laberge-housing-2/). A short report by the architect is also available at: http://sbt.qc.ca/en/projects/gaetan-laberge-housing-2/?print=print

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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