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Producing diversity in a new urbanism community: theory meets practice

Abstract

Since the mid-1990s Markham, Ontario, has embedded new urbanism and smart growth principles in its plans. The policies presume that requiring a mix of prices, housing types, uses, and densities will produce social diversity. This paper examines diversity in practice through analysing planning policies, interview data, advertisements for new projects, and demographic and building data on new development areas. While planners describe Markham as extremely diverse, economic and social processes are creating new forms of homogeneity in the town. Because planning policies are only one input into the production of diversity (or homogeneity) in the suburbs, new urbanism and smart growth policies may prove insufficient to interrupt the dynamics that generate uniformity in suburban development.

Theorizing diversity

In the last two decades, diversity has become an important theoretical construct and practical objective. As Fainstein (2005) notes, diversity can have many meanings and may be used differently by urban designers, planners, and sociologists. Designers and planners often define diversity in terms of mixed building and housing types, mixed uses, and mixed densities (Talen, 2005, 2008). Talen (2006, p. 236) describes place diversity as “a normative goal in city planning,” often promoted as a strategy to achieve social diversity. For planners, social diversity means a desirable mix of people with differing demographic, economic and ethnic characteristics that together create a balanced community (Cole and Goodchild, 2000; Eberle et al, 2007).

Equity and social justice advocates push the concept of diversity further, arguing for a pluralism that respects and actively engages difference (Fainstein, 2005; Young, 1990; Sandercock, 2003a, 2003b). To address some of the challenges created in trying to accommodate difference, many governments have adopted policy to better engage those traditionally excluded. Booth (2006, p. 47) notes that in England the planning system seeks to “mainstream equality and manage diversity”; planners are trying to integrate these ideas into the policy process (and organizational structure) at all stages. This approach to diversity accepts that planning is not neutral in its distributive effects and enjoins planners to challenge discriminatory attitudes and practices. In Canada, the City of Vancouver has probably made the greatest progress in trying to engage disparate communities in planning as a strategy for accommodating diversity (McAfee, 2008).

In this paper we examine efforts to promote diversity through explicit adoption of new urbanism, sustainable development, and smart growth principles in a Canadian municipality. The Town of Markham, Ontario, has applied new urbanism and sustainable development principles since the 1990s. Over the same period, smart growth theory became important at the provincial level, ultimately resulting in the *Places to Grow* legislation and plan (Ontario, 2006). All of these approaches include a commitment to diversity both as a development strategy and as a desired social outcome. We will explore the diversity objectives in Markham's policies and the extent to which they are being achieved in development practice.

Previous studies have assessed Markham's success in meeting its ambitious agenda. Gordon and Vipond (2005) showed that new urbanism communities in Markham had higher densities than older neighbourhoods, but Skaburskis (2006) countered that the density gains were modest and unlikely to be sustained due to declining household sizes and inherent consumer preferences. Gordon and Tamminga (2002) argued that new urbanism developments in Markham protected many areas designated by earlier environmental policies. Markovich and Hendler (2006) studied the concerns of women living in Cornell, a new urbanist development in Markham, and suggested convergence between new urbanism and some feminist principles: their survey respondents were mostly affluent white women satisfied with the level of diversity in the neighbourhood. These studies have begun to reveal the successes and challenges of achieving new urbanism and smart growth objectives.

Markham lies on the northern fringe of Toronto, Canada's largest and most socially diverse metropolitan region (Statistics Canada, 2008). In the 2006 census, over half of Toronto's residents identified themselves as visible minorities. Given its placement in a region that receives the greatest proportion of new immigrants to Canada, Markham has the potential to achieve considerable ethnic diversity. We wondered how diversity is expressed and produced in Markham. Has the built form become more diverse as a product of new urbanism and smart growth principles? How is the population of Markham changing, and what role do new urbanism and smart growth policies play in contributing to diversity? Our research employs several methods to investigate the ways in which diversity is socially produced in Markham¹. We utilize four kinds of data analysis to explore Markham's success in achieving diversity. First we examine policy and planning documents; then we report on interviews with respondents in Markham; next we consider advertising strategies employed by builders and developers selling homes in Markham; finally we present recent census data. The varying sources reveal the points of accomplishment and the significant challenges that remain for planners committed to promoting the diversity objectives of new urbanism and smart growth.

Although planners and political leaders are strongly committed to diversity and seek to implement it through planning and zoning strategies that encourage a mix of uses, house types, and densities, home builders reinforce stereotypes of homogeneity in their advertising (Perrott, 2007). The factors producing ethnic diversity in Markham are only partly related to the diversity objectives of the plan. Moreover, as old forms of segregation disappear, new forms of homogeneity are appearing in Markham. Some

diversity objectives, like providing housing opportunities to lower income households, have proven elusive. The research offers insight into the mechanisms by which cultural practices and processes beyond the control of local planners mute the visionary objectives of community design paradigms.

Diversity as an agenda

From the national to the municipal level, Canadian governments have targeted diversity as a positive social outcome that contributes to economic vitality and social justice. In 2005, Canada's Minister of State for Multiculturalism reaffirmed the government's commitment to "multiculturalism ...as a way of supporting integration which directly and indirectly assists in framing citizenship"; he noted that the government recognized "Canada's diversity as a source of strength and innovation" (Chan, 2005, p. 3). The Minister argued that "Multiculturalism is at the heart of Canada's fundamental values and Canadian identity" (Chan, 2005, p.5). Large Canadian cities are incredibly socially diverse, with immigrants attracted from around the world (Ley and Germain, 2008).

Not only is diversity integrally linked with Canadian political values, in the last two decades it has become a key issue for municipal planning practice. By the 1960s, the application of zoning policies and other government regulations had generated a high level of conformity and homogeneity in Canadian suburbs (Harris, 2004). Inspired by the philosophy of Jane Jacobs (1961, 1984), many planners concluded that mixed use could promote diversity and restore urban vitality. Cities adapted land use planning policies and regulations to permit new mixed use zones. With rising interest in the theories of sustainable development and new urbanism in the late 1980s, Canadian planning gradually made the transition from simply permitting mix to actively encouraging it (Grant, 2003, 2006).

Canadian suburbs house people with a range of incomes and ethnicities. Walks and Bourne (2006) find some clustering by income in inner suburbs. As Ley and Germain (2008) note, a significant proportion of new immigrants reside in the suburbs of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Qadeer (2008) points to suburbs like Markham as showing rapid change in ethnic characteristics since the mid 1980s. Where the central city was once the landing point for immigrants to establish ethnic neighbourhoods, new residents now sort themselves into what Li (1998) calls "ethnoburbs": suburban clusters of businesses and residences catering to particular ethnic communities. Kumar and Leung (2005) and Teixeira (2007) have documented self-selected enclaves in several parts of the Toronto suburbs; Hackworth and Rekers (2005) suggest that ethnic retail strips in the city contribute to gentrification. In the context of a multicultural society, encouraging diversity has become an important principle of Canadian planning practice, yet the challenges of accommodating difference remain significant.

Diversity is a key value of the theories that have substantially influenced Canadian planning practice since the late 1980s. Sustainable development theory made its way into planning policy in the early 1990s following the publication of the Brundtland Report

(WCED, 1987). With a strong environmental movement growing in the early 1990s and a government-financed “Green Plan” initiative, planning looked to ideas of mixing uses as a sustainable strategy to reduce energy demand and improve community health. Municipal plans across the country adopted sustainability principles (Grant, 1994) and introduced innovations like mixed use zoning.

By the mid-1990s plans in Markham were explicitly endorsing new urbanism theory (Grant, 2006). As a community design movement, new urbanism strongly advocates place diversity (Talen, 2008). Designers argue that mixing housing types, building types, and land uses at a fine grain will provide opportunities for a range of household types, sizes, and incomes to find homes thereby creating an authentic community (CNU, 1997; Duany et al, 2000). The Ontario government supported new urbanism principles in the 1990s (Ontario, 1995, 1997) before shifting towards smart growth theory. Smart growth integrated some of the values of sustainable development and some of the principles of new urbanism with the premises of economic growth. The resulting policy and legislative framework set an agenda for managing and shaping growth within the “Greater Golden Horseshoe” around Toronto, and intensifying development within already urbanized mixed use nodes and corridors (Filion, 2007; Ontario, 2006).

In the last few years, political leaders have come to see diversity as a powerful tool for economic development. Following the teachings of Richard Florida (2002, 2005) governments recognized that talented workers and investors find places with a diverse mix of people and activities attractive. This reorientation in development philosophy strengthened the mandate of local planners to try to encourage some kinds of diversity, but also raised concerns about gentrification and displacement (Meligrana and Skaburskis, 2005; Rose, 2004; Slater, 2004). Despite producing empirical evidence that social diversity may reduce social solidarity, theorists like Putnam (2007) retain faith in the efficacy of diversity. A backlash against immigration occasionally erupts (eg, Moore, 2008), but thus far has been powerless to displace the dominant discourse that diversity is socially and economically desirable. In the contemporary context the faith that mixing people offers salutary effects appears well entrenched and guides initiatives such as the redesign of public housing projects (Regent Park Collaborative Team, 2002).

For municipal planners diversity has become both a means and an end. “Human settlements, planners say, should be socially and economically diverse – mixed in income, mixed in use, and actively supportive of places that commingle people of different races, ethnicities, genders, ages, occupations, and households” (Talen, 2006, p. 233). The common strategy planners use to plan for diversity is to mix housing type and tenure at the smallest scale possible to create opportunities for a range of people to live in close proximity. New urbanism and smart growth philosophies both advocate such social mix through physical mix. In the context of practice we must ask several questions: to what extent is this physical diversity actually achieved in build-out; to what extent does a range of people actually inhabit the community; to what extent does the diversity in physical form contribute to the diversity in population characteristics? These questions direct our inquiry.

Diversity in policy

The growth plan for the Toronto region, *Places to Grow* (Ontario, 2006), expects local governments to consider diversity through mix.

This Plan is about building *complete communities*, whether urban or rural. These are communities that are well-designed, offer transportation choices, accommodate people at all stages of life and have the right mix of housing, a good range of jobs, and easy access to stores and services to meet daily needs. (Ontario, 2006, p. 13)

Complete communities meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, and community infrastructure including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents. (Ontario, 2006, p. 41)

The Town of Markham must consider provincial policies in its planning. It also takes direction from the York Region Official Plan (2007, p. 37):

healthy communities evolve in a way that preserves the natural environment and heritage, encourages community spirit and participation in decision-making, provides easy access to a range of services and leisure opportunities, provides a range of housing choices, ensures accessible public transit and encourages social diversity and respect for a variety of lifestyles. ...Migrations of large numbers of people, with their own histories and backgrounds create a rich, changing cultural landscape.

Markham first adopted new urbanism principles in the mid-1990s. Authorities brought in Andrés Duany and his company to help with the plan for the Cornell development, and to offer advice to planners on design guidelines. The political and planning commitment to new urbanism and smart growth comes through strongly in Markham's current policies:

2.13 Housing a) Goals i) To encourage the provision of a sufficient supply and a range of housing, adequate and appropriate to the existing and anticipated housing needs in Markham including housing which is accessible and affordable to low and moderate income households, seniors, and the physically and mentally challenged. (Markham, 2005, p. 2.53)

3.14.3 b) viii) Residential development within a Planning District will be designed to encourage a broad range of housing, by type and tenure, suitable for different age levels, lifestyles and family structures (Markham, 2005, p. 3.80).

The plan explicitly links physical variation with social diversity. Contemporary new urbanism and smart growth philosophy usually avoids uniform concentrations of housing types, preferring a mix of unit types and densities. These sentiments clearly inform Markham policy, leading to specific targets for some neighbourhoods and general policies to prevent "concentrations".

3.3.2. Housing Categories a) i) Low Density Housing ... The dwelling unit types comprising the Low Density Housing category shall be so distributed as to

achieve an appropriate housing mix... Street townhouses, linkhouses or similar types of permitted single attached dwellings shall, as far possible, be dispersed throughout the areas designated for Low Density Housing.” (Markham, 2005, p. 3.7).

3.3.3. i) Major concentrations of medium and high density housing projects shall be avoided, and where feasible, provision of mixed density developments shall be encouraged to reduce the potential for such concentrations to occur. (Markham, 2005, p. 3.9)

The plan reveals the hope that mixing will have economically and socially productive results for Markham by increasing choice for residents and investors. In the industrial policies, the plan notes:

The opportunity to incorporate the additional uses is established recognizing the positive and supportive interrelationship and vibrancy that may occur through the mixing of complementary and compatible uses. (Markham, 2005, p. 3.33)

Cornell, the best known new urbanism community in Markham, has its own Secondary Plan which exposes its philosophical leanings. Section 7.1b says, “Cornell Centre is based on principles of sustainable development and builds on the principles of New Urbanism” (Markham, 2007a, p. 83). The Cornell plan echoes the language of provincial policy in calling for “complete communities” through mix (Markham, 2007a, p. 34). In articulating its goal for mix within neighbourhoods, the plan closely parallels the language of the Charter of the New Urbanism (1997) in suggesting

a broad range of housing types and price levels can bring people of diverse ages, race, and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community. (Markham, 2007a, p. 38)

Throughout the planning documents in Markham words like complementary, compatible, and integrated appear frequently in association with discussions of mix. Plans talk about seeking balance, range, and variety; they postulate physical mixing of housing types, building types, land uses, and densities as the strategies to generate a complete or authentic community. Implicitly linked to these physical inputs are desired results of economic vibrancy, consumer choice, and social diversity. Policy documents never explain the mechanisms whereby diversity in built form might produce social diversity.

Diversity in discourse

To explore the way in which those who produce urban form in Markham describe and explain trends we interviewed planners, elected officials, and representatives of the development industry. All of the respondents agreed that Markham is an ethnically diverse community, and that it has become a fairly privileged suburb. One planner told us, “Markham is a community where people move to when they are successful”; another noted, “Poor people do not come looking for housing in Markham, because there isn’t any.”

The planners we interviewed saw diversity as an important goal for Markham. Several spoke of the need to build complete or open communities with room for all kinds of people. One told us, “We want to promote the idea that all forms of housing are good housing and everybody has different requirements based on who they are and where they are in their life. And by integrating the housing types I think it makes for a better community overall – visually and socially.” Others explicitly praised the mixing and openness promoted through new urbanism.

Planners noted that Markham is getting some socio-economic diversity through multifamily households within its communities of recent immigrants, but described challenges in convincing developers to mix units at block scale and to build affordable apartment units. Several planners reported difficulties in trying to achieve the desired mix of commercial and residential uses. Markham has been more successful, especially in Cornell, in developing a mix of housing types and densities within neighbourhoods.

Some planners voiced concerns that instead of getting social integration they were beginning to see the development of ethnic enclaves: East and Southeast Asians in Unionville; South Asians in South Markham. Marketing was the specified culprit, as one planner explained:

“Our newer communities, with the exception of a couple, tend to have been populated on a racial basis, which I think maybe was a result of marketing strategy, to some extent, and real estate promotion. ... We seem to have clusters of ethnic groups within the community. And some communities are more mixed both in terms of age status, and if you want financial status, ethnicity and race. But I think that there is still a lot of clustering of groups of people. Again, probably a real estate strategy involved there.”

The municipal councillors we interviewed generally supported the idea of integration of uses, mixed use in the town centre, and housing options for residents. They saw multicultural variety as beneficial for residents and the ambience of the town. One said, “You can travel the world just by crossing the street here. There’s food of every type, there’s cultures of every type. There’s entertainment of every type. And I think it’s great to be exposed to that.”

One councillor noted divergent expectations regarding housing coming from new immigrants and linked that to increasing ethnic segregation.

“On one side you are getting bigger homes. For example, the courtyard that I live on has five houses. When I moved here 14 years ago it was all WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant]. Now all four of my other neighbours are Asian, which is fine. But, what did they do? They all tore down their houses and built monsters: beautiful big houses. So if you ask me if the housing has changed... They have the money to do that. On the other side of the coin, you have different cultures moving into the smaller stuff, too. It is almost the socio-economic thing. You are getting almost as many condos and semi-detached being built as you are single detached. For example, if you take this condo project that I told you about, the townhouse condo, that is 90% Asian, is it because they like it? Obviously they do.

Do you see any difference in the built form? No, I don't. They are nice townhouses, but why is it 95% Asian? Maybe because it is right close to the highway, and they like that? Maybe because it is new, and they like that? There is a nice park in the front. Maybe they like the fact that it is a condo. Does that mean that someone who is a WASP person would move in there?...No. I am being quite frank here.

Like the planners, the councillors postulated a direct link between form and social diversity, but argued that the Town needed time to achieve the social objectives. One put it this way:

“The housing, the stock is not all the same. Yes, there are repeats of houses, but it's not like going down the street where it looks like a monopoly board. There are differences with townhouses, with single-units, with semis, with coach houses at the back. Some call them granny flats, some call them mother-in-law flats, no matter what you call them -- so it's an entire mix of people it's an entire thing all put together. It isn't working yet because it isn't all built, so there are growing pains.”

The political leaders identified the influence of market mechanisms in translating the goals of the plan into practice. As one councillor noted,

“Developers have their shortcomings, but when it comes to providing what people are asking for, they are not in business if they don't. When it comes to singles, and semis, and townhouses, there is a good mix. You can see them all. I have no doubt that the mixture is what people are asking for. If everyone wanted to live in a townhouse that is all they will bring in.”

The councillor respondents spoke to the challenge of achieving socio-economic diversity when the market is hot, but one also revealed aspirations for upward mobility and consequent resistance to mixing different classes. His comments directly linked mixing with the pressures of urbanization and intensification.

“There are options there. People will tell you there is not as many as there should be, but you have to ask yourself what you want your community to be. I didn't move to Markham from downtown Toronto because I wanted to move into a community where there was a great mix of housing. Because I thought I was moving up in the world at the time...But it is becoming a city.”

Respondents from the development industry understood the principles behind the mixing the plan required. While some expressed scepticism about whether mixing commercial and residential uses worked, most geared their projects to achieve the Town's targets for housing mix. A builder explained,

“We have a good component of single family lots. There is some semi-detached that we have built. There is definitely more townhouses. We have completed two different types of townhouses: ones that face onto the street, and ones that face onto the open spaces. There will be more going in, in the later phases. There is a good blend.”

Trying to make commercial uses viable under current policies and design guidelines clearly frustrated a property agent we interviewed. Those in the development industry see Markham as a high end market; they also cater specifically to a particular kind of ethnic diversity, as the property agent noted:

“I think you’re getting more immigration now from India, Pakistan, and those countries, than you are from China now. We have to study those demographics, because if I’m building a plaza and it’s mostly East Indian in the residential homes, that’s how I’ve got to structure everything.”

Several respondents suggested that new Asian immigrants have different expectations in looking for housing and retail space. Developers are responding by further segmenting the market not only on price point but also by special housing requirements, retail services, and amenities. Consequently, instead of seeking to produce the complete and integrated community desired by government and planners in Markham, those who make investment decisions cater to the particular needs of a select group of potential residents.

Diversity in marketing

In 2007 Markham (2007b) conducted an on-line survey to solicit input into the Town’s strategic plan. A prominent image in the campaign showed three people: representatives of different ages, genders, and the dominant ethnic groups in Markham (See Figure 1). The online imagery suggests that the Town is trying to encourage, embrace, and engage diversity.

[Figure 1. The Town of Markham’s website features an image of diversity (Source: Markham, 2007b)



To understand the way in which developers, builders, and realtors describe the properties they are selling in Markham, we examined advertising for residential developments being marketed in Markham in the summer and fall of 2007. We obtained extensive marketing bundles (including, brochures, print ads, websites, posters, and model suite imagery) for

35 developments and subjected them to semiotic, content, and discourse analysis (Perrott, 2007).

Even though most developments included images with visible minority models² in their marketing material, images with white models proved more numerous, larger and more prominently placed overall (Table 1). Over 80% of the images including people in the materials featured only white models (Figure 2a); 16.6% of images included visible minority models, 11% showed only visible minority models (Figure 2b), and 5.4% used multiple ethnicities in one image. Figure 2c illustrates the use of visible minority models as secondary subjects through marginal positioning and shadowing.

Table 1. Presence of visible minority models in advertising materials for new developments in Markham in 2007.

Development Type	# of Developments	Total number of images including people	% of images including visible minority models	% of images including white models only	% of images including visible minority models only	% of images including models representing a mix of ethnicities
Subdivision	31	578	16.3%	81.8%	10.9%	5.0%
High Rise Condominium	2	29	31.0%	69.0%	13.8%	20.7%
Townhouse Condominium	1	7	57.1%	42.9%	57.1%	0.0%
Gated Community	1	31	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	35	645	16.6%	81.7%	11.0%	5.4%

Figure 2a, 2b, 2c Three sample images from advertisements



Figure 2a. Most advertising images featured white models. [Source: RoyalPark]

Figure 2b. Images using only visible minority models were less common. [Source: National Homes]

Figure 2c. In images with white models, the visible minority models usually take secondary positions. [Source: Ballantry]

Representations of ethnic diversity in the materials differed by development type. The gated community used images only of white models in its marketing materials. Of the images in marketing material for freehold subdivisions, 81.8% had white models only. The images used to sell townhouse and high-rise condominiums had the highest proportion of images including visible minority models and images showing models with

different ethnicities interacting. Builders' websites featured the largest percentage of images including visible minority models, followed by print ads. Sales centre signs had the least amount of visible minority representation.

Some builders used models of particular ethnicities to appeal to certain target markets. The visible minority groups most frequently represented in the images were East and Southeast Asian, followed by Black and South Asian. Marketing materials for two developments incorporated images of multi-generational Southeast Asian families shopping for a house together (Figure 3). Some builders appropriated culturally salient symbols, such as *feng shui*, to appeal to potential clients.

Figure 3. Some developments target ethnic communities with multi-generational households. [Source: Monarch]



Generally the ads downplayed ethnic differences: for instance, all visible minority models wore western clothing. Advertising for residential developments in Markham generally reproduced norms of North American culture and reinforced conventional social discourses on gender identity, sexuality, and romance using models that fit cultural stereotypes of youth and beauty. The ads showed some diversity in gender roles, but commonly represented the nuclear family as normative. Few teenagers appeared in the marketing materials. None of the advertising stressed affordability: the text of the ads frequently referred to privilege, exclusivity, and entitlement. In Markham, developers were selling luxury and quality linked to a particular class position. The marketing media imagery and symbols communicated the price point and cost of the housing, as well as the status of the people intended to live there. (Perrott, 2007)

While the Town of Markham tries to promote inclusivity through its own imagery, builders' marketing media construct an image of the prospective Markham homebuyer as Western, white, middle-upper class, youthful, beautiful, and part of a nuclear family.

Diversity outcomes

To what extent do census results indicate that Markham is achieving greater socio-economic, household, and ethnic diversity as a product of employing new urbanism principles? Markham is a relatively affluent suburb within the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). The median income for all census families in Markham in 2005 was \$74,889 while that of the Toronto CMA as a whole was \$69,321 (Statistics Canada, 2008a). Over 40% of families in Markham make more than \$100,000. Some 39% of families in the post 1991³, or new, neighbourhoods have an income over \$100,000, while almost 42% of the families in older suburban areas earn that level. The new neighbourhoods have higher proportions of households in the income categories between \$50,000 and \$100,000 than do the older areas of Markham (Statistics Canada, 2008b). This may suggest that the new suburbs provide greater affordability; it may, however, signal that fewer high end homes are available in the newer neighbourhoods.

The 2006 census indicated that the average value of homes in Markham, \$440,775, was high for the Greater Toronto Area (Statistics Canada, 2007a). The average assessed value for the Toronto CMA was \$403,112; for the City of Toronto \$413,574; for Brampton \$333,591; Stouffville \$495,718; and Barrie CMA \$266,167. Markham has a small supply of affordable housing, and a lower proportion of low income households (16.1%) than does the City of Toronto (24.5%) (Statistics Canada, 2008e). The high cost of land in the Toronto area produces a context within which only relatively comfortable middle class consumers can buy homes; this makes it challenging for municipalities to address the need for low cost housing.

Like many Toronto suburbs, Markham had a high proportion (84.7%) of married couple families in 2006; by contrast, the Toronto CMA as a whole had 74.3% and the City of Toronto had 70.4% married couple families. Lone parent families make up 11.8% of census families, which is low compared to the Toronto CMA with 16.9% (Statistics Canada, 2007a). Markham remains primarily a destination for families with children. Multiple family households as a percentage of total private households are higher in Markham, at 7.8%, than in the Toronto CMA as a whole, at 4.2% (Statistics Canada, 2007b).

The latest census data indicate that the pattern of housing types⁴ is changing in Markham in areas built since 1991, but not uniformly in the direction of greater diversity. Detached units remain the largest portion of the recent housing market. Because lot sizes are generally decreasing, unit densities are increasing slightly, consistent with Skaburskis's findings (2006). The proportion of detached housing increased from 67% of units in census tract neighbourhoods built before 1991 to 70% in those built after 1991. The proportion of row houses held constant at 11%. The proportion of duplex apartments increased slightly after 1991, but the total proportion of apartment units declined (Statistics Canada, 2007c). We might expect, however, that with the recent condominium apartment boom in Markham the proportion of apartment units will rise again.

New patterns of housing mix appeared in neighbourhoods built after 1991. In the post 1991 neighbourhoods almost half of the census tracts feature a split of at least 10% of units in each of three housing types: row houses, semi-detached, and single detached. None of the earlier tracts show this pattern of mixing housing types. A third of new census tracts reveal clusters of detached units and duplex apartment units, with few units in other housing types; this pattern is rare in the older neighbourhoods. The typical census tract type in neighbourhoods built before 1991 reveals land use segregation, and features either a preponderance of detached units or a significant proportion (35% or more) of units in apartment structures of 5 storeys or higher. By the same token, however, the proportion of census tracts with a mix of at least five housing types is twice as high (45%) in the earlier neighbourhoods than in the more recent areas (20%) (Statistics Canada, 2007c). Thus, while the newer areas appear more mixed in some ways, on other measures they prove less diverse than census tract areas with a majority of units built before 1991.

The 2006 census reveals that the suburban municipalities surrounding Toronto are ethnically diverse with people clustering in new ways⁵. The majority of residents identifying as a visible minority within the Toronto census metropolitan area reside in five municipalities. Markham has the highest proportion of visible minorities in Canada, with 65.4% of the town's population of 260,760 self-identifying as a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2008c). Brampton has 57%; Mississauga 49%, City of Toronto 46.9%, and Richmond Hill 45.7%. Visible minorities clearly cluster in the City of Toronto and the immediate ring of suburbs around it. Their numbers decline dramatically in more distant commuting zones within the Greater Toronto Area as Figure 4 illustrates.

In a relatively short period of time, Markham transitioned from being predominantly white to predominantly visible minority⁶. The decade between 1986 and 1996 saw the population of Markham increase by 51.4%. When new urbanism development began in Markham in the mid-1990s, the population was 54% white. Between census years 1986 and 1991 the Chinese population in Markham more than tripled, then doubled again by 1996 (Statistics Canada, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008d). Markham became something of a magnet for Chinese migrants to Canada.

Within Markham more than half of the visible minority population is of Chinese origin, one-quarter of South Asian origin, and 6% other Asians (Table 2). Markham appears en route to becoming an *ethnoburb* (Li, 1998). A review of the organizations, programs, and services available in Markham reveals the growing influence of the Asian community and the preponderance of businesses that cater to it (FCCM, 2008). Census data support respondents' perceptions that Markham services and amenities increasingly cater to Chinese and South Asian communities. With more than half of the population of the Town declaring Asian heritage, development advertising that seeks to produce a white consumer seems especially incongruous. Planners' perceptions that Markham is "extremely diverse" acknowledge the large proportion of visible minorities without addressing the population transition that is occurring, or the question of when social mix becomes ethnic clustering.

Figure 4. Percentage of population identifying as a visible minority in Municipalities in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area [Data source: Statistics Canada, 2008c]

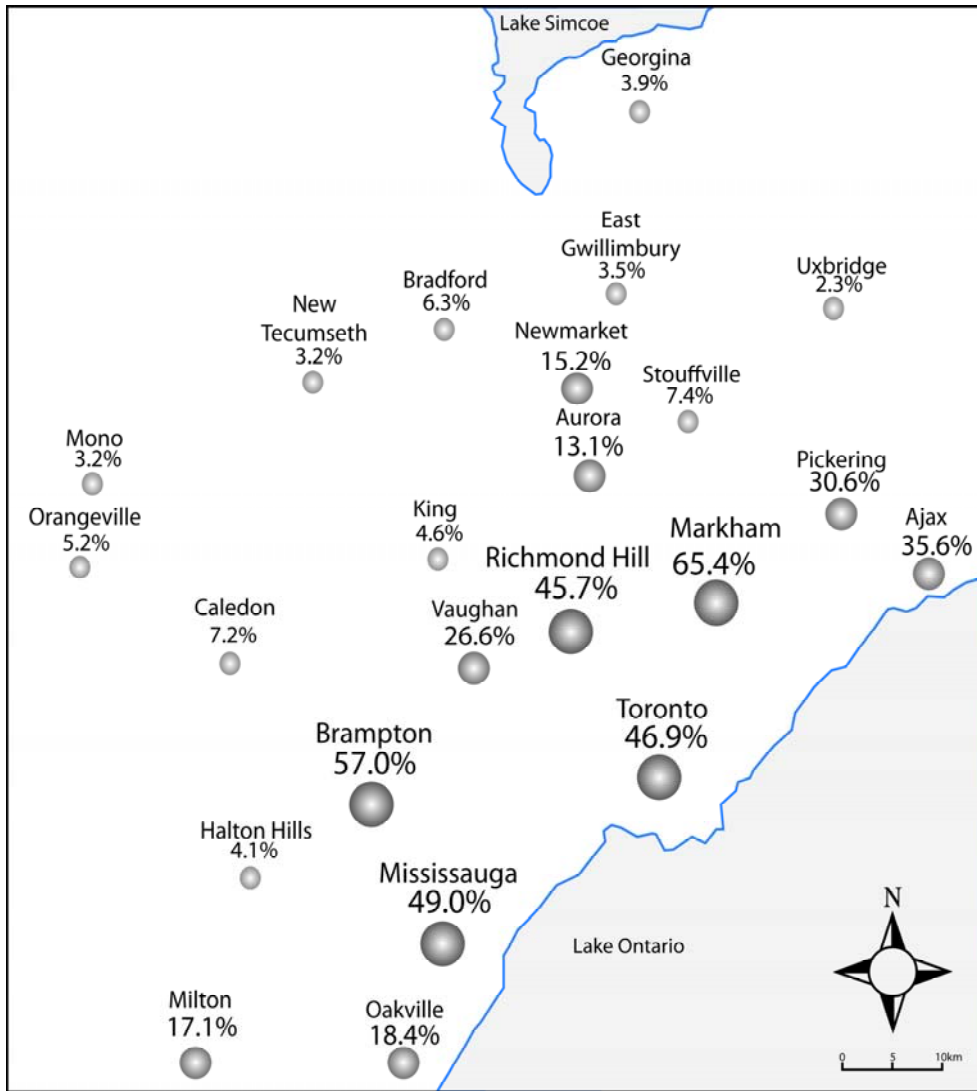


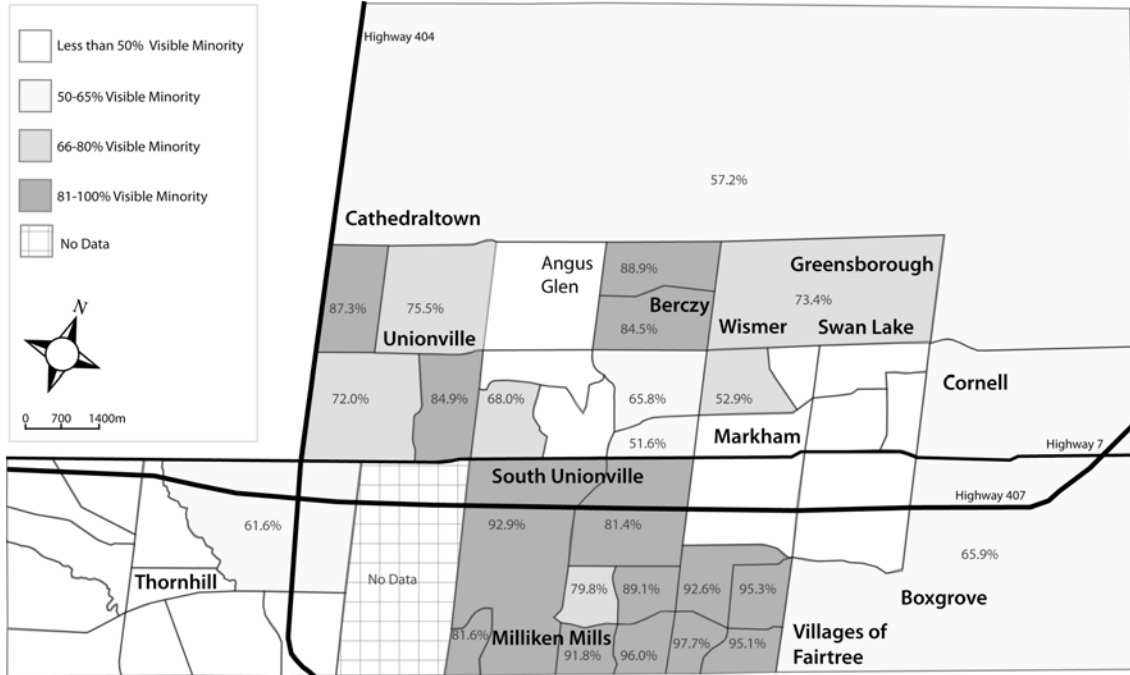
Table 2. Visible minority characteristics in Markham from total visible minority population (n=170,535) (Statistics Canada, 2008d).

Minority Identified (Ethnicity)	% of visible minority population	% of total population
Chinese	52.36%	34.24%
South Asian	26.38%	17.25%
Black	4.69%	3.07%
Filipino	4.32%	2.83%
Latin American	0.81 %	0.53%
Southeast Asian	1.15%	0.76%
Arab	1.48%	0.97%
West Asian	2.91%	1.91%
Korean	1.89%	1.24%
Japanese	0.49%	0.33%
Visible minority no identified ethnicity	1.11%	0.73%
Multiple visible minority	2.36%	1.54%

Clusters of certain ethnic groups within particular neighbourhoods in Markham are evident from the census data. The 2006 census results indicate that about half of Markham residents who identify themselves as visible minorities live in areas constructed prior to 1991, and half in areas built since 1991. Those identifying their heritage as Chinese are similarly evenly split between older and newer developments. The proportion of visible minorities is higher (76.5%) in the post-1991 developments than in the older neighbourhoods (57.3%). Milliken Mills in south Markham has the highest proportion of visible minority residents, with several census tracts containing over 90% visible minority (Figure 5). Western Milliken Mills exhibits a clustering of East and Southeast Asian residents, with South Asians in the east. The South Asian population makes up over 40% of the census tract population in Boxgrove and Cornell. Greensborough and Wismer have 73.4% of residents identifying as visible minority, with East and Southeast Asians as the largest groups. The East and Southeast Asian population, principally of Chinese origin, also clusters in Berczy, Unionville, and Leitchcroft. Although the very high end developments like Angus Glen and Swan Lake remain predominantly white, relatively affluent immigrants from Asia have become the typical new Markham homebuyer and resident over the last decade. By contrast, the older neighbourhoods of Markham and Thornhill reveal concentrations of white residents: in several census tracts upwards of 80% are non-visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2008d).

Depending on how we define diversity, then, Markham's new urbanism communities may be more or less diverse than other places. Markham has a high proportion of visible minorities, but the evidence indicates that it is trending towards new patterns of ethnic homogeneity. Census data indicate that Markham experienced a slight decline in its white population while its visible minority population more than doubled over 10 years. The newer parts of Markham have a higher proportion of visible minorities than do older parts of the Town: the scales are tipping towards ethnic enclaves in the new urbanism developments.

Figure 5. Census Tracts with more than 50% of residents identifying as visible minority (Data source: Statistics Canada, 2008d)



Like many other suburbs, Markham attracts families with comfortable incomes; it presents few opportunities for poorer households, single parent households, or single people. Its post-1991 housing mix continues to favour detached housing as the dominant form. Although some newer census tracts are approaching the planning target mix of detached and row housing, the general frequency of mixing of housing types proved higher in older neighbourhoods. By and large, we have to conclude that to date Markham’s new neighbourhoods have not achieved either the physical mix that planners envision or the social mix they seek to enable. Despite the failure to reach the projected mix or desired “balance”, however, Markham’s cultural diversity appears to be producing considerable economic vitality.

Producing diversity

In light of a social, political, and theoretical discourse that promotes diversity, community planners in places like Markham develop policies, plans, and regulations to create mix. Their desired outputs include social diversity and economic prosperity. Their means of trying to achieve their ambitions include policies on mixing housing types, building types, densities, and uses. Can the inputs that planners control actually produce the level and kind of diversity that planners imagine? What factors come together to influence the production of diversity (or homogeneity)?

As several respondents suggested, Markham has achieved diversity in some ways, but not others. While planning policy seeks to produce social diversity through physical mix, our analysis suggests that other cultural and economic factors may be more responsible for the kinds of diversity that Markham is seeing. Moreover, the findings imply that new urbanism interventions contribute to producing new forms of homogeneity as particular ethnic communities choose to locate in new developments. Markham is rapidly developing a concentration of affluent Asian immigrants in its new urbanism communities.

Our analysis of the advertising aimed at those who are exercising consumer choice in Markham reveals some of the ways that developer advertising operates as a mediating factor to influence diversity outcomes. The developments using the highest proportion of white models feature generally higher house prices. Ignoring the increasing diversity in Markham, many ads try to (re)produce homogeneity; they represent an effort to encourage clustering around income levels, ethnicity, safety concerns, or age. Six new developments in Markham used white models in all their marketing materials even though census tract analysis indicated that the developments have a majority visible minority population. Marketing offers the targeted potential resident an image of the good life in a place that meets their needs and values, but that image does not acknowledge or encourage social diversity.

Other cultural factors beyond the control of local planners operate to attract particular ethnic communities to Markham. As Li (1998, p. 482) wrote of Los Angeles, *ethnoburbs* have “peculiar population dynamics” that can change with immigration patterns and changing economic conditions. The Asian influx in Markham is a manifestation of globalization and shifts in immigration policy. It may reflect the transfer of people with particular kinds of technological skills to sites of employment. With large concentrations of immigrants sharing languages, retail services, and amenities, places like Markham help the unassimilated to find community and opportunity. Agglomeration begets further concentration.

Markham’s history shows that ethnic diversity represented in one census may rapidly give way to growing homogeneity in subsequent periods. The physical changes adopted through the influence of new urbanism may be assisting this transition, as a planner noted. “Over the past twenty and thirty years in Markham, we have had huge influx of South Asian residents, mainly from China and India, who I think have a different

aesthetic. I think that their interest is in large dwellings, but they are not interested in large lots. That has worked hand-in-hand with the new urbanism movement.”

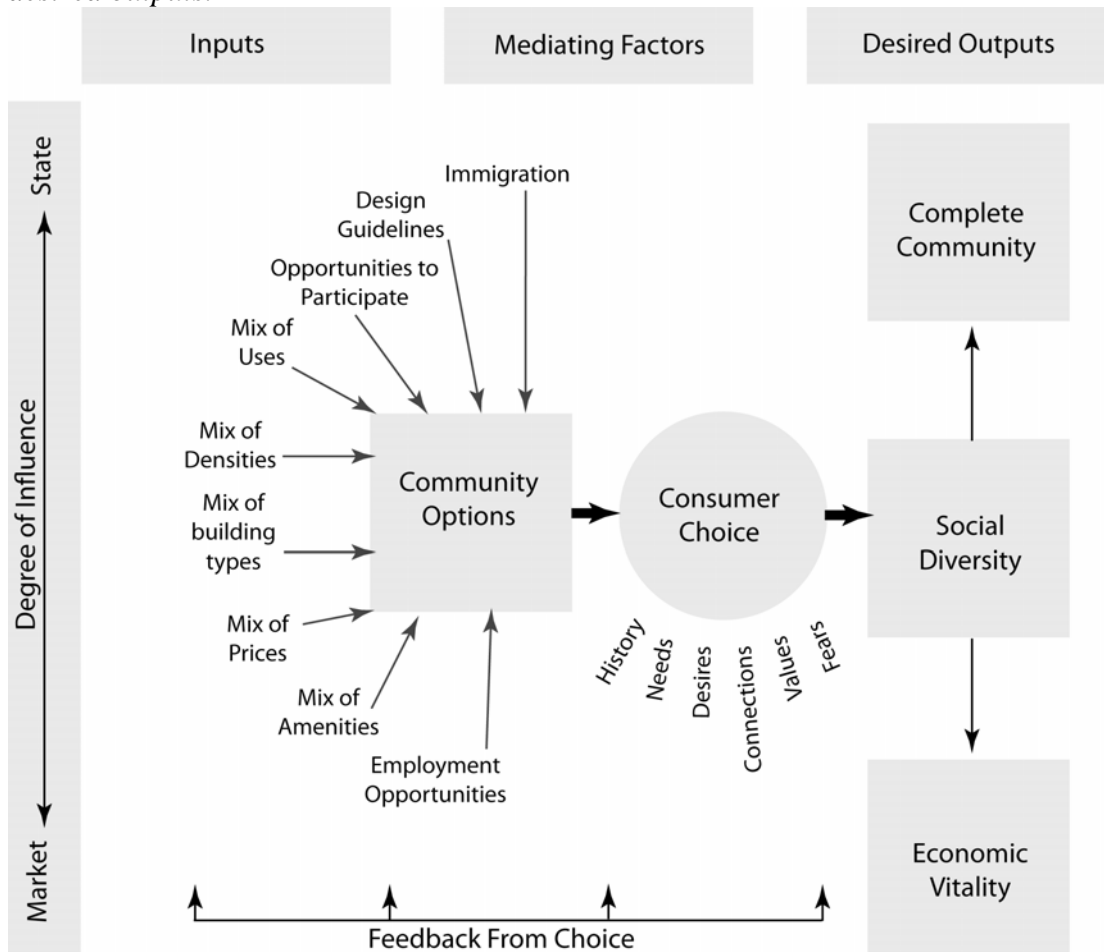
It may be coincidental that Asians are concentrating in Markham, or it may be an inadvertent product of a planning idea being adopted in the right place at the right time to offer people the choice they seek. While new urbanism and smart growth policies deserve some of the credit for producing a suburban community with a robust ethnic identity, their ability to maintain diversity in the face of cultural pressures that drive further homogeneity remains unproven. Further research into the choices that residents make in coming to Markham would help to illuminate the dynamics at work.

Given the findings of our analysis of Markham’s efforts to promote diversity, we proffer a model of the production of diversity (Figure 6). The model describes the production of diversity as involving *input factors*, *mediating factors*, and *outputs*. Some factors are influenced primarily by the state (national, province or local government), while other factors are influenced principally by the market (composed of development interests, intermediary groups, and citizens/consumers). The input factors the state contributes to the model include policies on the mix of uses, building types, densities, and design. Opportunities to participate in community decision processes may generate options for engagement. Federal and provincial policies on immigration can make particular places attractive. Market controlled input factors may include employment opportunities, the mix of amenities, and the mix of house prices. Together such input factors create a suite of community options that citizens/consumers evaluate and select.

Consumer choices reflect consideration of an array of mediating factors that may include the consumer’s personal history, needs, desires, values, fears, social connections, employment connections, as well as their interpretation of local history and community character. In a feedback process, consumer choices influence the inputs made by the market and the state, leading to the development of new policies and options. As thousands of individuals make decisions about where they will live, they either contribute to or undermine social diversity. If a consistent type of consumer chooses a community, then homogeneity along some variables will result. When a particular combination of people chooses a place, then they may produce economic vitality and vibrancy. When the “right” variety of people selects a place, then a notional “complete community” may develop. As Markham illustrates, given the plurality of factors influencing the process, the production of diversity cannot be guaranteed with any particular constellation of inputs.

Markham exemplifies the challenges of planning for diversity. The data expose some ambiguities in how diversity is conceptualized in theory and policy as well as how it is sold through marketing. At what scale is a place considered diverse? New urbanism theory, and the Markham planners and councillors interviewed, prefer a more fine-grained mix of both physical form and social integration than is currently happening in Markham. Local authorities hold steadfastly to their principles despite changing population dynamics and a development industry committed to marketing a traditional kind of homogeneity.

Figure 6. A model of the factors producing diversity: policies on physical mix are among the inputs, consumer needs are mediating factors, and economic vitality is one of the desired outputs.



New urbanism and smart growth literature has been quick to point the finger at single use zoning for creating homogeneous suburbs in the past. As current practice reveals, however, the forces that produce social homogeneity may prove resistant to the interventions of community planning policy and regulations. Creating and sustaining a society that is socially just, open, integrated, and enabling requires more than a planning agenda.

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Notes:

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² We relied on our own interpretation of ethnicity in conducting the analysis of imagery.

³ We used the census defined categories of housing built prior to 1991, and housing built in 1991 and up to 2006 as a way of differentiating areas likely to have new urbanism influences from those built by conventional means. We recognize that some of the housing built since 1991 actually follows conventional

building practices; this presents a limitation to our method, as does any under or over counting in the census data.

⁴ Census categories of housing types are single detached, semi-detached, row house, apartment duplex, apartment 5+ storeys, apartment less than 5 storeys.

⁵ The census asks respondents to self-identify their ethnicity and visible minority status. This may under- or over-count some categories.

⁶ Some changes in definition of terms over different census periods create some limitations to these comparisons, but the general trends seem clear.