Leonard Machler, PhD Candidate, MA – Research Statement

Urban planners have long advocated strategies that enable a broad spectrum of the population to live in their preferred communities. In particular, planning researchers emphasize the importance of enabling households with preferences for Smart Growth communities to match. Living in Smart Growth communities – characterized by higher densities, more mixed land uses, and better access to transport alternatives to the car - has been empirically linked with improved health, environmental and economic outcomes. One widely cited neighbourhood matching strategy is to increase the level of housing mix - or the diversity and distribution of different housing typologies within a neighbourhood - to permit households of lesser financial means to trade living space for an opportunity to live in their desired communities. However, no empirical study has investigated whether increased neighbourhood housing mix is associated with higher levels of neighbourhood matching in the population.

The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate the effectiveness of housing mix as a planning strategy. Using data obtained from a residential preference survey of 1,186 Vancouver area households, this project investigates the association between neighbourhood housing mix and the ability for households to match into their preferred neighbourhood type. The project also tests the association between neighbourhood match and neighbourhood satisfaction as well as the association between neighbourhood match and two measures of health: self-reported health status and body mass index (BMI). Neighbourhood match is defined two ways: based on a survey respondent's subjective interpretation of their actual neighbourhood design compared to their preferences (i.e. "subjective match), and a comparison of the respondent's survey-indicated preference versus an objective assessment of their community based on measurable features of the built environment (i.e. "objective match"). Findings reveal that housing mix only significantly predicts objective match, and significant associations are limited to owner-occupiers and respondents under the age of 60. Objective match is not a significant predictor of neighbourhood satisfaction or health. This dissertation concludes that housing mix is not an effective planning strategy for enabling households with Smart Growth preferences to live in their desired community.