

Conflict around the Brownfield Reconversion of the Canadian Forces Base Rockcliffe in Ottawa: A Clash of Ambitions and Visions in Canadian Urban Sustainability

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Abstract : Over the past decade, a number of remarkable projects in urban brownfield reconversion emerged across Canada, including the reconversion of former military bases owned by the Canada Lands Company (CLC) into sustainable communities. However, unlike other developments, the regeneration project of the former Canadian Forces Base Rockcliffe in Ottawa - which was announced as one of the most ambitious Smart growth projects in Canada - faced serious obstacles in terms of social acceptance by the local community, particularly urban minorities composed of Francophones, Indigenous and vulnerable groups who live near or on the Base. This turn of events led to the project being postponed and even reconsidered. Through an analysis of its press coverage, this research aims to understand the causes of this urban conflict which lasted for nearly ten years. The findings reveal that the conflict is not limited to the "standard" issues common to most conflicts related to urban mega-projects in the world - e.g., proximity issues (threats to the quality of the surrounding neighbourhoods; noise, traffic, pollution, New-build gentrification) often associated with NIMBY phenomena. In this case, the local actors questioned the purpose of the project (for whom and for what types of uses is it conceived?), its local implementation (to what extent are the local history and existing environment taken into account?), and the degree of implication of the local population in the decision-making process (with whom is the project built?). Moreover, the interests of the local actors have "jumped scales" and transcend the micro-territorial level of their daily life to take on a national and even international dimension. They defined an alternative view of how this project, considered strategic by its location in the nation's capital, should be a reference as well as an international showcase of Canadian ambition and achievement in terms of urban sustainability. This vision promoted, actually, a territorial and national identity approach - in which some cultural values are highly significant (respect of social justice, inclusivity, ethnical diversity, cultural heritage, etc.) - as a counterweight to planners' vision which is criticized as a normative/ universalist logic that ignore the territorial peculiarities.

Keywords : smart growth, brownfield reconversion, sustainable neighborhoods, Canada Lands Company, Canadian Forces Base Rockcliffe, urban conflicts

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