Report of 1996-97
of the research-action project

COMMUNITIES - COMMUNITY SECTOR - INTERCULTURALITY

-Brief historical background of the project as a whole

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"It is true that Montreal has changed a great deal. I remember one day, being in
the subway and being at a loss, no longer recognizing the face of Montreal that I
had brought with me from Quebec."

A young woman of French-Quebeccois origin

"I have been living in Montreal now for 30 years and I have the same feeling that
Montreal has changed. I was no longer feeling at ease as I used to when I was
16."

Young Portuguese man

"Everyone was alike then: the same apartments, the same food, eaten at the same
time..."

A young man of French-Quebeccois origin
A. A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE

From 1993 to 1995, the Intercultural Institute of Montreal initiated a consultation process in the Park Extension, St-Louis du Parc and Mile End neighbourhoods of Montreal, with the intention of collecting the reactions of ethnocultural and multicultural organizations as well as mainstream community organizations in order to elaborate a project together concerning the betterment of social living within these neighbourhoods. But the idea was to do so within an intercultural analytical framework and on the basis of intercultural and interfamily relations.¹

The neighbourhoods perceived the idea to be a pertinent one and worth-pursuing. But due to the difficult conditions within these organizations, the latter could not see how they could turn this issue into a priority. Our analysis brought us to the conclusion that what was needed, was a reflection on the very notions of community and social movements, from an intercultural perspective, but also on the social and intercultural issues that these notions bring to the fore.

On May 26th, 1996, the IIM organized a round-table discussion which brought together families and community workers from the various cultural communities of these neighbourhoods, in order to discuss the following topic: «neighbourhood relations in a multicultural/multiracial context». As an outcome of that meeting, the IIM presented to MRCI (Ministère des relations avec les citoyens et de l’immigration) an educational project entitled: «Families and neighbourhood living for an intercultural rapprochement», in view of organizing meetings between the ethnocultural communities of Mile End, St-Louis-du-Parc and Parc Extension. The objective was to improve relations between them. The project was refused by MRCI and consequently the project was revised. Instead of an educational project, we transformed it into a research-action project entitled: Communities, community sector and interculturality. The project consists of two parts, each one having a double axis:

Part I: Intercultural Dynamics in Montreal Neighbourhoods,

Axis A: The establishment and construction of communities in a migratory context
Axis B: Families and communities in an intercultural neighbourhood

¹See D. Brochu and K. Das Rapport de la consultation dans les cartiers Parc Extension, St-Louis du Parc et Mile-End. Pour le développement d’un projet de régénération communautaire dans un contexte pluraliste.
(IIM, 1995, 93 pp.)

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Part II: Social movements and the challenge of pluralism.

Axis A: Cultural foundation of Quebec's social movements
Axis B: Relations between ethnocultural communities and Quebec's social movements

Moreover, this project was part of the IIM's regular activities. So the IIM immediately began within part I axis A of the project, a research-action on three Quebeccois communities: Greek, Portuguese and old-stock French. This constitutes the preliminary phase of this project. The following pages are the report of this preliminary phase (1996-97).
B. REPORT OF THE PRELIMINARY PHASE (1996-97)

1. OBJECTIVES

This preliminary phase attempts to gather basic information on: the establishment and construction of communities in a migratory context (part I axis A), by focusing on three Quebecois communities within the neighbourhoods of Mile End, St-Louis-du-Parc and Parc Extension, namely: Greek, Portuguese and old-stock French.

The idea was to gather information on how they perceived and experienced their coming into these neighbourhoods, how they reacted or proreacted with regard to the outcome of their being uprooted from their respective socio-cultural contexts of origin, and what were their different practices and places of reconstruction of their identities in a migratory context. The emphasis was laid on the communities and person from these communities, rather than on their community organizations that we shall call the community sector.

2. APPROACH TAKEN

a. These communities were chosen because of their high profile within these neighbourhoods. Moreover they are amongst the older ones.

b. The contact with each community was to be done through one of their community organizations and the community workers. For the Greek community we approached the Association of Greek Workers; for the Portuguese community it was the Centre for Social and Community Action of Montreal and for the old-stock French community we worked with La Maison d’Aurore (Aurora House).

c. For each community there was to be a meeting with its members (ideally of different generations) on site where they met and socialized regularly. At the end, an intercultural meeting was planned with some of the members from each community who had participated in the meetings held within their respective community.

d. The work began in the fall of 1996. But in mid-december it was necessary to change our strategy of approaching the communities. The approach had to be different with each community.

For the Portuguese community, the organization we had contacted had a lot of difficulty bringing members or persons to participate in the project. The difficulty was mostly one of
regrouping persons of different age (specifically those of the first generation) and having men participate. This organization is mainly a service center, while the community has other places for meeting and socializing.

A consultative meeting with two persons of that community has allowed the reorientation to take place. They first had to establish a link between these persons from the community and the IIM's community liaison person.

They suggested that the meeting with the Portuguese community take place at IIM, on a Sunday, by inviting the participants to bring and share some Portuguese food as well as the language spoken at that meeting could be mostly Portuguese.

For the old-stock French community difficulties rose at two levels: the organization was just beginning to work with a multiethnic clientele, specially in terms of helping children and youth with their homework. Thus it is obliged to begin an intercultural reflection, but the staff is not yet used to that reality and this may cause some difficulties. Secondly, the clientele which frequents this organization tend to be quite old, and it could be difficult to bring people of different generation to participate in such meetings.

The members of the Greek community were quite busy until December because they were preparing the 25th Anniversary of the Greek Association of Workers. So it was agreed that the meeting should take place at the Association's locale on a Sunday, since members of the Association would be there for the dance courses given to their children. In order to ensure an intergenerational presence, they tried to involve other persons and ensure that they contact other members of the community.

The alternative strategy to establish contacts with communities can be summarized as follows:

- Personalization of contacts and eventual preliminary meetings with participants prior to the group meeting.

- Identification of the places that sustained their identities, and of the informal meeting places of the community (associations, churches, other).

Other associations that were contacted for this project: Portuguese Association of Montreal, the Club of Portugal, the Voice of Portugal: YMCA of Parc - youth centre; Radio Centre-Ville - Helenic Team; Greek Orthodox community of Laval.
3. THE MEETINGS WITH THE COMMUNITIES

3.1. Meeting with the old-stock French community was held at "Maison d'Aurore", February 20th, 1997. Participants: 10.

Points of discussion proposed to the group:

- Arrival in Montreal, background and perceptions.
- Memories of neighbourhood life and of relations with others.
- The changes that took place.
- What perspectives for the future.

The French Quebecois group was composed of persons that were either born in Montreal, or came from a village or from the rural area. Some had had an experience of moving from one village to another, and expressed their difficulty to integrate within that village, thus experiencing being a stranger in their own country. Another person experienced the difficulty of being accepted as a "Quebecois" by the "Quebecois", because of her regional accent and her different habits.

Their memories of life in Montreal focused on neighbourhood life, where each neighbourhood was like a small town, where life was and still remains a very rural in character. The memories of the rural world and of the rural environment of Montreal are still very strong. Some seek and still love the rural aspect of some Montreal neighbourhoods, others came to Montreal seeking a more anonymous environment.

Family and family relations were very important, each person being identified with the family (as the son or daughter of such and such): "everybody resembled everybody else, all were alike, the same type of apartments, the same food, eaten at the same time..."

The families were big and self-reliant. There was no need to be in contact with the neighbours or with the neighbours' children. These were closed circles. The neighbourhood relationships were therefore between Quebecois, between like people. The "other" is the English or Native Indian, for those who come from outside of Montreal. But in Montreal, the neighbourhoods were a closed-in unit, each one staying in his own neighbourhood, an Englishman would not go into a French neighbourhood and vice-versa. It wasn't simply an issue of language, but ways of life, of culture. The Jewish Hassidic community seems to be another community that is difficult to understand and to accept. At school, all were old stock French.
Slowly, the "other" became the immigrant. Some of the neighbourhoods that were 100% French, have experienced the arrival of immigrants. This has given rise among people, to a feeling of being invaded. For some of the participants, the massive arrival of immigrants has made Montreal a modern and interesting City: for others, it gave rise to a certain mistrust and fear; "Once, as I was in the metro, I felt like a rare bird... We Quebecois are now rare specimens." Some of the French Quebecois have found themselves renting apartments from owners that were of another culture, hence with a different way of living the owner - tenant relationship; and the maintenance of the buildings.

There is a feeling both of mistrust and a pride to live in a cosmopolitan society such as Montreal. The question of integration to this society is felt to be important; "I would like the communities to integrate themselves and to learn the language: I know that it takes time to get closer to each other."

The issue of the French language survival brings certain frustration; the English language is more popular and important, and the French Quebecois themselves make no effort to speak French in order to help others learn it. While aware that the Catholic schools have refused immigrants, it is expected that immigrants will learn French because now the situation has changed. One has a feeling of being invaded and one also perceives that the immigrants are on the defensive, maybe because they fear being rejected.

Other changes have caused turmoil in neighbourhood life. The old-stock French Quebecois family is no longer as big as it used to be, TV has taken an enormous place in people's lives so that "people no longer talk with each other". The rhythm of life: people no longer have time for social relations; one no longer knocks at the neighbour's door as was once a custom. People now talk though the phone. Life and the people have become individualistic.

The group seemed to consider it important to weave links with persons, to respect each other, but at the same time is asking questions regarding cultural differences: how can we respect each other when we are so different?


Discussion points proposed to the group:

- Arrival in Montreal, background and perceptions.
- Memories of neighbourhood life and of relations with others.
- The changes that took place.
- What perspectives for the future.

The group, except for a young woman born in Montreal and for another person who arrived as an adult, was composed of persons that came to Montreal when they were very young. St-Louis neighbourhood was the first place where they lived and all of them still live there. Almost all of them came from a rural environment. The first generation did not have any choice as to the school they would frequent and the language that they were to speak, because the Portuguese, even if they were Catholics, were refused by the francophone school, and the parents were not much aware of these issues. Only one person went to a French school. The school has played an important role in the socialization and in the image building of Montreal: those who went to English school had an image of Montreal replete with immigrants and anglophones and with a minority of francophones.

There was little time for neighbourhood relations, because after school one had to help the family thus having very few memories of relationship with neighbours. The adults were weaving links with Portuguese because of the language. The children’s network expanded as they learned French, and sometimes the need to play with the neighbours forced us to learn French. But there are few memories of social relation with other communities.

The person born in Montreal speaks English with her parents and neighbourhood friends, learned Portuguese from the grand-parents and studies French at school. The three languages are spoken and the friends are not necessarily Portuguese, which generates a feeling of multiple belongingness. For some parents, the school is a critical place where the values that are transmitted enter into conflict with the values that they wish to transmit to their children.

The important times for togetherness, are, for the community, always the feasts where everyone participates, even people from other communities. But the participation and involvement of the young is very limited.

The changes that have taken place are perceived as being of a demographic nature and of life-style. Previously, there were more children, there was a village atmosphere, and during the summer, life was in the streets. There was no TV as is the case today. The Community would frequent Mont-Royal where the families went for picnic. The corner-store was a meeting-place for socializing. The outings were mostly familial, we did not then see youth gangs as we do now, and there were no cars. The car gives great freedom but draws one away from the neighbourhood. Only older men remain attached to the neighbourhood and frequent Portuguese associations, cafés and the church; the young people work and have a network outside the neighbourhood, a family-network in a broad sense, which includes friends that are not only of Portuguese origin. The schools are no
longer in the neighbourhood, so children are drown away from neighbourhood life.

Presently, the places where people socialize are mainly the school and workplace, much less in the neighbourhood which is more a place for occasionall meetings. Establishing intercultural contacts requires efforts more from adults than from the youth and the children do not seem to have this problem. Intercultural relations are neither perceived by the group as being a real problem nor as a fundamental issue. Urban development, drugs, the circulation of people from outside in the neighbourhood, bars, are seen as definite elements of insecurity.


Discussion points proposed to the group:

- Arrival in Montreal, background and perceptions.
- Memories of neighbourhood life and of relations with others.
- The changes that took place.
- What perspectives for the future.

The group was made-up of people that came from Greece, some at an adult age, others at a very young age. One was Spanish, but had lived many years in Greece with her Greek husband. Almost all of them come through St-Louis/Mile-End, and some still live there. Almost all came from a rural environment.

The immigration experience has been a very difficult and sometimes sad one, because of the difficulty of getting used to another country, difficulties at the job level, and because of estrangement from one’s country of origin. The Greek Community first established itself south of Sherbrook St. and to the east of St-Lawrence street, but for those who came after the second World War, Mile-End became their neighbourhood. Those who came after the war were not accepted nor helped by those who were already in Montreal. There were then no structures to welcome them and they had to fend for themselves, the best way they could. This is the reason why associations were created, for mutual help, and to this day, they are still working at the same needs as before, by helping all those who have linguistic problems. The first generation speaks neither English, nor French, while those who arrived young and the second generation have been obliged to go to English schools because of their Orthodox religion. Even if parents would have hoped it to be otherwise, there was no choice. One had to work hard both at school and at home. The discourse on integration is seen with a critical eye: one cannot transform someone in a few
years, it takes a few generations for certain changes to take place. Learning French is all the more difficult, because Greek is not a Latin language, and because the first immigrants came from a rural environment and had a lower level of schooling.

There are fewer Greeks in Mile-End today, but the associations are still active. This neighbourhood remains as a point of reference for the Greeks, because the feeling of belongingness, is not territorial, but more linked to the community. Mile-End is now losing its residents. Previously, there were more people, more life, more immigrants.

Hailing from Greek villages, the people were used to dealing with Greeks only, but in Montreal they found themselves in an urban setting characterized by great ethocultural diversity.

As a whole, the group underlines the poverty of human relations. This is not perceived as a problem of modernity because in Greece people live the same modernity, but more as an issue particular to this society: people are afraid to open up. The lack of stability and of roots (frequent change of residence) does not allow neighbourhood relations to develop. Besides, for the Greeks, family, community, solidarity are very important values, while the local society is very individualistic. Regarding neighbourhood relations, the group expressed its expectations, for example that there be more hospitality. That relations be more human, spontaneous, informal: "I would like my neighbours to be like my brothers." This is not to say that only one group is closed, but this is an issue which concerns all groups; each one is on the defensive. Furthermore, that friendly openness does not necessarily exist in one’s own community, but people are more at ease with each within the same community. These expectations are linked to life habits in Greece, where one finds such friendly relations. This Association works hard in establishing these solidarity links with workers from different milieu and from all origins.

The dream of returning to the country of origin is very strong and painfully present. The vision of the future is not very positive. One is very worried about the children, that they enjoy a better life, keep their Greek language and heritage. But the youth seem to be less worried, and indifferent to the social debates and to what is happening.
4. INTERCULTURAL MEETING AT THE INTERCULTURAL INSTITUTE OF MONTREAL,
   May 30th, 1997. Twelve participants in all from the three groups.

   Plan for discussion:

   1. Report of the meetings that took place within each community (French, Portuguese, Greek): comments and perceptions of the participants.

   2. Observations regarding the process: reactions, discussion and suggestions:
      a. - Difficulties in consulting the groups: lack of time, of availability, of interest?
         - Difficulty of forming intergenerational groups.
         - Low participation of men.

      b. - How did you perceive the process?
         - Were the objectives clear?
         - Was it something that concerned you?
         - Were you at ease to approach people from your community in view of being part of this project?

   3. Suggestions:

      - How to better relations between communities?
      - What kind of activity or action would bring the communities to work together?

   General considerations

At the level of group composition it must be said that we have not attained the objective of constituting intergenerational group for all three communities. Youth was absent, except for the Portuguese, where, on the contrary, it was the first generation that was absent. This is due in great part, to linguistic difficulties. But even if we had proposed to meet in the maternal language, not every one would have been at ease to meet in one's own community and much less in an intercultural meeting. The Greek group, however, was able to communicate by using three languages (Greek, French, English). The French Quebecois group also lacked a balanced man/woman composition.

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The process of making contact doesn’t seem to have been a problem. The approach and the request for constituting of these groups were clearly understood by all. There was no lack of interest, but lack of time was a major factor for everyone, regarding participation.

**Highlighted of the discussion**

a) A common factor: rural origin.

All three groups came from a rural setting: the French Quebecois either came to Montreal from the rural area, or remembered how rural was the neighbourhood life in Montreal. They still have the impression of Montreal as being a big village or of Montreal as being the rural world in the city. Almost all of the participating Greeks and Portuguese came from a rural area, from small villages, and were confronted with the city. They also remember neighbourhood life, specially during their childhood. However, for the adults, life in Montreal means much work and very little time for social and neighbourhood relations.

b) Need to regroup with people of same origin.

The change brought about by immigration is visible and is perceived to have been imposed itself upon the social environment which was mostly homogenous. First, there existed a territorial division between French and English: the French Quebecois would be together in the same neighbourhoods and there was no communication with the anglophone neighbourhood. Greek and Portuguese also had the tendency to gather in distinct neighbourhoods, because it was easier to establish where there already were resources and where lodging was less expensive. St-Louis became the neighbourhood inhabited by the Portuguese, while Mile-End was inhabited by the Greeks. The Greek participants underlined that in Greece also, they were used to homogenous neighbourhoods, and that in Montreal, they had to adapt to the presence of other cultures. One can summarize by saying that the three communities have the common tendency to regroup among likes and thus to give a culturally homogenous character to their own territories.

c) The relationship to the other.

For the old-stock French Quebecois, this relationship to the other is a deep and ambiguous question. There is at the same time a feeling of being invaded as well as an idea of the richness that this diversity can bring. It is interesting to note that this group identifies its first experiences of relationships with the “other” as being in the presence of the English community, and for those that
came from the regions, in the presence of Native peoples. It is only afterwards that the "other" becomes the immigrant, when the face of neighbourhoods changed. The Jewish Community seems to constitute another separate category, which is perceived to be a closed community, with "strange customs" and refractory to the customs of the country.

In general, the testimonies of the persons of Greek and Portuguese origins, the presence of other communities and other cultures is not a problem. One must note that the socialization process for those who came young to Montreal, took place in the school or in the neighbourhood. In both cases, diversity was a daily experience. Hence, for most people of Greek and Portuguese origins, cultural differences seem less worrisome and less problematic, probably because of their migratory experience and also because of the social change and cultural differences within the same family (often three generations means three languages).

d) The school and its impact on their perception of reality.

For both immigrant communities, the school seems to have been important in the construction of their perceptions of the Montreal reality. Those (that is the majority) who went to anglophone schools formed an idea of Montreal as a city of immigrants of all origins; those who went to a francophone school perceived Montreal as a French city.

e) Language.

The language issue is very important for all three groups: there was a strong need to speak about each other's frustrations, to discuss about each one's experience and the difficulties of learning another language experienced by the two immigrant groups. For the old-stock French Quebecois, learning and speaking French on the part of immigrants is considered as unavoidable, natural and vital. The meeting at la Maison d'Aurore, revealed the lack of effort on the part of the French to help immigrants to learn French. The attraction of English has been perceived to be very strong and the French group not completely taking its responsibilities in this matter. On the other hand, there is also lack of knowledge of the process which immigrants had to undergo with regard to the linguistic policies in Quebec. And even when this fact is known, one still underestimates the many difficulties inherent to learning a second language such as the difficulties pertaining to language of origin (Greek for example has a very different structure than the Latin languages), the level of education, the limit of time imposed on a person to learn a new language (specially when it comes to an elderly person) etc. Participants from Portuguese and Greek communities, also underlined with great emphasis, two other aspects, namely the problem of having lived through two school systems: the imposition first of an English schooling, and then of a French schooling, hence the
absence of choice and the obligation to learn one language rather than the other. This last aspect is perceived as having a result which is opposite to the one desired that is, instead of stimulating a person to learn a language, this provokes a feeling of repulsion towards what is lived as a duty, an obligation.

f) The effects of modernity.

In regard to social and neighbourhood relations in general, the three groups have underlined a growing individualism which renders people less sensitive to each other. The groups are perceived to be isolated due to a feeling of mistrust, fear and defensive attitude. All commented on the change of life caused by modernity: TV, cars, an accelerated rhythm of life, major changes in the family (broken families, fewer children), the way one relates to the family (before, activities were mostly family activities). All this creates a situation where the neighbourhood is no longer a reference point. It is also a question of age: the elderly people stay on the neighbourhood and find in it their reference point. For the Greek and Portuguese, this is all the more true since the community associations are an indispensable place for meeting and for social life. The other generations are away from the neighbourhood because of their work, their studies, a social life beyond the limits of these neighbourhoods.

g) Neighbourhood life and intercultural relations.

In regard to intercultural relations, each one of the three groups responded with different concerns. The French group is very concerned about change, diversity and the search for means to conciliate this diversity. The Greek group was strongly concerned about the quality of human relations between neighbours, at work and in general. For the Portuguese group, it is the question of security in the neighbourhood which seemed to be of foremost concern.

h) The future.

During the intercultural meeting, all participants have expressed the opinion that the deepening of relations between communities must be pursued. As for the means to do so, it remains to be seen, but some have offered ideas, such as the organization of a neighbourhood fiesta, the search for a better knowledge of the history of each community (its past, its difficulties), social activities of sharing, various sports events.