DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL MODALITIES FOR COMMUNITY COOPERATION

REPORT ON FOCUS-GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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Montreal, January 2000

This translation was made possible with the Ford Foundation grant
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Report Presentation

This document is a descriptive report of the views and opinions expressed by the participants in the focus-group process. This is an initial-level interpretation and does not constitute an in-depth analysis of the information gathered during this research-action project.

We wish to express our appreciation to all those who participated in this research-action.

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I

RESEARCH CONTEXT
Background: questioning and history

In our community-research activities, it is our practice at the IIM to allow research projects to develop spontaneously. Our role is to observe, to be present at the community level and to gradually formulate questions. We do not begin with entirely predefined projects: we develop them around the contacts that are made, the dialogues that take place and the reflections that emerge over the course of a process. It was in this way that this research-action project progressively took shape. The project was based on a desire to deepen our understanding of the discourse within communities on the question of pluralism. In this regard, within our research-action entitled “Participation: Community Development and Intercultural Cooperation,” we have created a module called “The Sociocommunity Movement and Cultural Pluralism.”

In 1994, in an initial phase of activity, we began conducting a consultation process centered around the theme of “Community regeneration in a pluralist context” in the adjoining districts of Mile End, Park Extension, St-Louis and Plateau Mont-Royal. This consultation process concerned three types of community organizations: old-stock Quebec francophone organizations, ethnocultural organizations and multicultural associations.1 Within these communities we investigated how people experience pluralism and how the different organizations’ leaders and social workers determine what action should be taken to improve the social ecology. Thirty out of approximately 60 organizations contacted actively participated. We also researched the question of what constituted the high-priority issues within the communities: matters involving young people, a sense of isolation among elderly people, and neighbourhood safety were the themes most frequently mentioned (Report on the Consultation Process in Park Extension, St-Louis-du-Parc and Mile End, 1995).

In a second phase of activity, we began a series of exchange-and-dialogue activities with certain groups regarding the issue of neighbourhoods. The goal of this project, entitled “Families and neighbourhood: towards an intercultural rapprochement,” was to organize meetings with and between three communities: the Quebec Greek community, the Quebec Portuguese community and the old-stock francophone community. These intercultural meetings were intended to bring into realization a dynamic of consultation and cooperation within the St-Louis and Mile End districts. Based on an intergenerational approach, the process sought to instill a sense of responsibility in families with regard to their multicultural and multiracial neighbourhood. Our intention was to gather data on the daily neighbourhood experience in terms of contacts between families in communities comprised of people of various origins. At the same time, we attempted to promote and instigate a dialogue between these families on the question of neighbourhood (Report on “Communities, the Community Sector and Intercultural Relations”, 1997).

In a third phase of activity, between January 1997 and March 1998, we conducted a preliminary survey among 13 women’s organizations belonging to two different coalitions: the Regroupement des centres des femmes du Québec (association of Quebec women’s centers), Montreal region, and the Développement Québécois de la sécurité des femmes

1While recognizing the relative nature of the kind of distinctions made with respect to this research-action, we categorized the participating groups as follows: “old-stock Québécois organizations and groups” refers to organizations and groups that have traditionally been headed by old-stock Québécois and are organized around the homogeneous Quebec society. Among the ethnocultural organizations, we distinguished between those dedicated to defending the rights of the immigrant population (multicultural organizations) and those whose mission it is to provide services to specific communities (ethnocultural organizations).
(Quebec association for women's security). Interviews were conducted during this survey to explore the experiences of collaboration and cooperation between French-origin (old-stock) Québécois organizations and organizations from other communities. With regard to our interviewing work, we also participated in the solidarity committee with immigrant members of Solidarité Populaire Québec (Quebec people's solidarity movement) and members of the east-west committee of the Action Solidarité Grand Plateau neighbourhood coalition, and the Centre for Economic and Community Development (CECD) Centre-Sud/Plateau Mont-Royal.

In the course of our work it became quite clear that certain difficulties existed in terms of the participation of ethnocultural communities within coalitions or in associations composed largely of old-stock Québécois: each group had a more or less accurate view of the other group’s participation. Thus, on one side, the communities perceived that the associations did not extend a warm welcome and were not interested in immigrants; on the other side, the associations found the communities to be rather closed in on themselves (report entitled “Le mouvement socio-communautaire et le pluralisme culturel au Québec” [the Sociocommunity Movement and Cultural Pluralism in Quebec], 1998)².

It was thus through the data obtained during the survey that we were able to identify divisions and constraints with respect to relations between the so-called “old-stock” Québécois community organizations and ethnocultural organizations, as well as with respect to the biased perceptions that the groups had of one another. At the same time this difficulty highlighted the need for mutual reflection regarding the possibility of creating favourable conditions to ensure equal participation among all partners in the cooperation process.

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²The reports cited in this report are available at the IIM.
II

PROBLEMATIC OF THE PROJECT

Objectives and methodology

The questions discussed in this report are based on the study process that has been in progress for the past several years regarding pluralism within the sociocommunity movement. This research-action on *the development of intercultural modalities for community cooperation* is the result of experiences in the field that point to the need to initiate a fruitful dialogue that stimulates development of intercultural modalities required for cooperation in the community environment. It is thus a continuation of the research process concerning the reflections on and experience of pluralism within the sociocommunity movement, in terms of the concrete experiences of both ethnocultural and old-stock Quebec francophone community organizations.

As already mentioned, this research-action is also situated within the framework of a module entitled “Sociocommunity Movement and Cultural Pluralism,” a module that primarily takes into consideration the questions raised by community groups and federations with respect to how ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity impacts them. The general objectives of this program are as follows: to develop intercultural relations within the sociocommunity movement; encourage persons and communities of diverse origins to participate in the sociocommunity movement; create and articulate alternative knowledge and know-how through a process of understanding and learning between communities of diverse origins for the purpose of seeking alternative responses to the great social issues together.

This theme is of particular concern to IIM given that, over the last 35 years, we have been rooted within the community and witness to and an actor in changes in Quebec with regard to pluralism. During the 1980s, the institutions began to become actively involved in the growing cultural diversity of Quebec society. Well before this institutional involvement, IIM had begun work in an informal way⁴, and other organizations were already offering welcoming services to immigrants (*Interculture*, no. 123, 1994). In the 1970s, much action took place in the community and informal sector and very little at the institutional level. In 1981, the cultural communities portfolio, which until that time had been the responsibility of the ministry of cultural development, was transferred to the ministry of immigration. That year the government presented an action plan, entitled *Autant de façons d’être Québécois* (Many ways of being a Quebecker), aimed at facilitating the integration of cultural communities into Quebec society. Unfortunately, this action plan made no mention of the work at the informal level that had already been accomplished. In 1983, the Superior Council on Education also presented a report, entitled *L’éducation interculturelle* (intercultural education), to the Ministry of Education. Lastly, it was in the early 1990s that the Quebec government, through the Ministry of Cultural Communities and Immigration (now the Ministry of Relations with Citizens and Immigration), published its first systematic and consistent policy statement with regard to immigration and cultural integration entitled *Un Québec à bâtir ensemble*⁴ (building Quebec together).

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³ On June 11, 1977, a symposium was held at the Monchanin Centre, the former name of the IIM, on the question “Who is a Quebecker?” [For more information, see the *revue Monchanin*, nos. 58, 59, 60, 1978.] As Jacques Langlais wrote in the *revue Monchanin*, no. 58, p. 4, 1978: “Realizing the importance of the current issues in cultural, political and economic terms, the Monchanin Centre wanted to bring together friends from different cultural horizons to reflect upon the question that everyone is asking with increasing frequency, ‘Who is a true Quebecker?’ They formed a special committee, the ‘Comité pour un Québec interculturel’ (committee for an intercultural Quebec), whose mission is to pursue this question.”

⁴ This statement proposed the following: “[...] a society in which French is the common language in public life; a democratic society in which everyone is expected and encouraged to participate and contribute; a
Since that time, institutions have begun appropriating the areas of action and the know-how of the informal, community environment in the form of an official discourse. Obviously, this discourse, which remains the predominant one, has been incapable of revealing all the richness of the social reality experienced at the community and grassroots levels. Consequently, it is imperative, in our view, that we equip ourselves in order to reconstruct a discourse on pluralism within a perspective that draws primarily upon the sociocommunity experience (Kalpana Das, "Le défi interculturel dans le secteur non institutionnel et informel" (the Intercultural Challenge in the Non-Institutional, Informal Sector), *Interculture*, no. 123, pp. 13-21, 1994).

**Methodology**

In conducting our project we chose to use the focus group-discussion format. This format is a research method that does not aim for consensus among the participants but, rather, allows for all opinions to be expressed, without any pressure applied to reduce differences in these opinions. It is "a social-research qualitative method that facilitates the recording of the (group-discussion) participants' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, different experiences and know-how, as well as their zones of resistance" [translation], (Simard, *La méthode du "Focus-Group"* [The Focus-Group Method]. Modia Éditeurs, Laval, 1989).

Fernand Gauthier, our consultant in this research, said with regard to the methodology used, "The focus group is a qualitative-type social research tool that makes it possible to identify why the participants react as they do with regard to the questions and situations discussed. Towards this end, the use of a group moderator facilitates a structured, focused discussion in an environment in which the participants, listening to one another, feel free to express their points of view, manifest their attitudes and communicate their perceptions on a subject concerning which they have experience." Concerning the intercultural-method viewpoint, Kalpana Das explained, "The purpose and the form of the focus group can vary according to the context and goal of the process. In the present project, in terms of context, the group is composed of persons of diverse cultural, ethnic and racial origins. The goal is to conduct structured reflection in a dialogical and intercultural dynamic that becomes a source of new knowledge."

She continued, "It is important to point out that we utilized the focus-group tool and method within the framework of research-action the goal of which is to create, through the activity itself, a dynamic of intercultural dialogue among the participants. This dialogue offers the possibility of a new type of knowledge with respect to each of the questions and the source of the questions on which the research is based. Thus, the foundation of this research is the intercultural method, which validates the specific participation of persons from different cultural communities and promotes heightened awareness of the fact that, in society, there exist different ways of doing things and of thinking. This method seeks to reveal, in social realities and among the participants, those attitudes and beliefs that are culturally determined. The participants present social particularities: they come from so-called majority host groups or minority immigrant groups and with regard to these groups, it is important to specify the impact of their use of their identity strategies and the importance of how they portray one another." In this way, we have incorporated three research methods in carrying out our study: the intercultural method, used throughout the process, the principles of research-action, and the instrumentation of the focus group (*Interculture*, no. 135, 1998).

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"pluralist society open to multiple contributions within the limits dictated by respect for fundamental democratic values [...]."
The intercultural moderating\(^5\) of the meetings played an important role in the reformulating of questions: this reformulation allowed for incorporating certain cultural notions into the questions while making adjustments in order to respect the sensitivity of culturally different participants. This intercultural moderating thus made it possible to initiate a process of cultural decentering that encouraged the participants to listen to one another.

This focus-group approach was used, first, to clearly delineate the intercultural issues involved in cooperation at the community level and, second, to understand and surmount the difficulties involved in the cooperation process when the element of cultural diversity exists. The focus-group approach not only makes it possible to obtain a response to a given question, it also stimulates dialogue on the question itself, while at the same time creating a space for learning and for questioning ideas.

The focus-group discussion meetings clearly enable the participants to engage in dialogue and an open sharing of experiences in order to better know each other and become aware of one another’s experiences. In addition, group participation in this particular research-action in itself constituted a concrete cooperative experience.

In selecting the participants, we first chose those persons who, through interviews, had taken part in the previous stages of the research-action, i.e. individuals from women’s groups and women’s movement organizations. We also invited representatives of other organizations, making sure there was a proportionate representation of the so-called pure laine community and the ethnocultural community. Not everyone invited at the beginning of the process participated in each of the discussions. In all, 12 out of the 15 who were invited took part in one discussion or another.

Three small groups were formed in order to facilitate dynamic and personalized participation by all the participants in the discussion. Two discussion meetings per group were then held and at the end of the process the three groups got together. At this plenary meeting the knowledge gained at the previous meetings was pooled and there was a sharing of the different dialogue experiences. Then participants sought to identify directions to take toward achieving intercultural cooperation.

The following people participated:

**GROUP A\(^6\)**
- Gisèle Caron (G. C.), *Conseil communautaire de la Côte-des-Neiges* (Côte-des-Neiges Community Council)
- Michèle Charland (M. C.), *Développement Québécois de la sécurité des femmes* (Quebec Association for Women’s Security)
- Elizabeth Cobert (E. C.), *Regroupement des centres des femmes du Québec - Table de Montréal* (Quebec Association of Women’s Centres – Montreal Coalition)
- Stéphan Reichhold (S. R.), *Table de concertation des organismes de Montréal au service des réfugiés* (coalition of Montreal organizations serving refugees)

**GROUP B**
- Assunta Sauro (A. S.), *Montreal Italian Women’s Centre*
- Sadeqa Siddiqui (S. S.), *South Asian Women’s Community Centre*

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\(^5\)In addition to the efforts of the moderator, Kalpana Das made pedagogical contributions, while Fabiola Pardo served as an observer and wrote the summaries of the meetings and this report. Participants were shown the preliminary summaries of the meetings and asked for their reactions, which are presented in this report.

\(^6\) In the summary of discussions, participants' initials are used.
- Daniel François (D. F.), *Maison Haïti* (Haiti House)

**GROUP C**
- Elisabeth Garant (E. G.), *Centre justice et foi* (Centre for Justice and Faith)
- Marise Guindon (M. G.), *Centre for Economic and Community Development (CECD): Centre-Sud/Plateau Mont-Royal*
- Rosemarie Mayetela (R. M.), *ACCESSS, Alliance des communautés culturelles pour l'égalité dans les services sociaux et de santé* (Cultural Communities Alliance for Equality in Social and Health Care Services)
- Marie-Claude Barey (M-C. B.), *Centre communautaire de loisirs de la Côte-des-Neiges* (Côte-des-Neiges Community Recreation Centre)
- Jean-Yves Joannette (J-Y. J.), *Table régionale des organismes volontaires en éducation populaire de Montréal - TROVEP* (regional coalition of volunteer organizations for public education in Montreal)

**Discussion objectives and questions**

It is important to note that the participants were invited to take part in the discussions both as individuals and as community actors.

**Objective #1:** To share experiences and perceptions of intercultural relations in the community environment.

**Questions:**
1. What is your organization’s approach with regard to the issues involved in cultural diversity?
2. What is your perception in regard to “intercultural relations”? What significance do you attribute to such relations in your work or actions?

**Objective #2:** To identify the elements which constitute obstacles to cooperation in the context of cultural diversity.

**Questions:**
1. What does “cooperation” signify to you?
2. Can you identify the most serious difficulties you have encountered in cooperating with persons/organizations from different communities?
3. In your view, what are the underlying factors with respect to these difficulties?

**Objective #3:** To identify approaches for developing intercultural modalities for cooperative efforts.

**Questions:**
1. What steps have you taken to surmount these difficulties and what have been the results?
2. Do you feel it is necessary to establish new conditions in order to promote fruitful cooperation between diverse communities? If so, what are these conditions?
3. What is your opinion of the document entitled “Constats” (findings)?
4. Do you see the following activities as prerequisites to initiating a concerted action?
   - Dialogue sessions concerning the needs, expectations and community-work approaches of potential partners from the different communities

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7 This document is included in the appendix. These findings are the results of a preliminary study conducted among 13 Quebec women’s organizations in the Montreal region and the Quebec association to promote women’s security. The findings concern the most significant determining factors with regard to difficulties that arise in cooperative efforts between French-origin Québécois organizations and the other communities. They are not grouped in any particular fashion: some concern obstacles and others have to do with responses.
- Sessions designed to raise awareness of Quebec sociocommunity movements and the major issues that these movements are presently dealing with
- Sessions to raise awareness of the intercultural approach used in community work and the know-how of the different communities
III
DESCRIPTIVE PORTRAIT OF THE DATA

Given that the discussions of the three focus groups centered around the three principal blocks of questions, we will follow the order in which these questions were asked in presenting the content of the debate that took place in each of the groups. Next, we will present a portrait of the different points of view held by the participants in the three discussion groups, with emphasis on the ideas most directly related to the goal of the process. This part of the analysis will serve to identify the patterns or central ideas derived from the responses to the questions or articulated in the course of the discussions8.

3.1 Cultural diversity and intercultural relations

In the first series of questions, participants were asked to share their experiences and perceptions with regard to the issues of "cultural diversity" and "intercultural relations."

GROUP A

Given the difficulty in taking a firm position on these questions, the participants agreed, from the beginning, on the need to devote time to reflection and analysis in order to provide an appropriate response to the question of "cultural diversity" and "intercultural relations."

In the opinion of G. C., of the Côte-des-Neiges Community Council, most of the time groups are caught up in taking immediate action, which leaves little opportunity to reflect on priorities: "Reflection and analysis are luxuries that community groups cannot allow themselves within a demanding daily context where clients take up all the room." There is also, in her view, a lack of training with regard to intercultural matters. For S. R., of the coalition of Montreal organizations serving refugees, the time has come for serious reflection that would benefit the community network over the long term. He believes that the questions of "cultural diversity" and "intercultural relations" have not been subjected to the kind of in-depth analysis that the current sociopolitical situation demands: "It is important to take the time to reflect and to share points of view – to make the additional efforts necessary to do so."

However, for M. C., of the Quebec association for promoting women’s security, the problem is not a lack of time but rather how people choose to use their time. “In our organization we have chosen to establish real relations with the cultural communities. This represents almost a personal commitment.” In addition, she thinks the problem is not too little reflection but instead the choice of themes for reflection. “I’m tired of hearing organizations say that they lack resources, they lack money, they lack recognition...It’s necessary to consider where the money is.” As a member of a community organization, she considers it essential to move away from the state’s way of doing things. For her, deciding to devote time to reflection involves deciding to challenge the state’s demands.

E. C., of the Quebec association of women’s centres, also emphasized the seriousness of the problem concerning the lack of time to devote to reflection on the question of intercultural relations. She did acknowledge that “there is not a total absence of training with regard to interculturalism...Some forms of training are perhaps not very well known or recognized.”

8In responding, the participants were not obliged to speak for their organization.
S.R. said his organization does not follow a systematic approach with respect to "cultural diversity" and "interculturalism." For the past 10 years, the coalition of Montreal organizations serving refugees has oriented its actions with the goal of obtaining recognition as a community organization and being recognized by government institutions, in particular, the Ministry of Relations with Citizens and Immigration, as well as many other sectorial ministries. Its work consists primarily of demonstrating how, as an organization headed by immigrants, it differs from organizations headed primarily by white Catholic francophone Quebeckers, etc. The group's method of addressing intercultural themes is based on its own practices and the needs of its clients. S.R. commented, "For years the fundamental problem for our sector has been that, as a community organization, we have always been publicly funded. We have always been ghettoized within the Quebec ministry of immigration." Thus, it is important to strengthen ties between the different organizations and to promote the community approach by involving alternative services. For, through these ties, it would be possible to create and maintain a community network in which newly arrived people, like Quebeckers themselves, could develop projects concerning the collectivity.

G.C. linked the general lack of knowledge regarding intercultural relations to the drop in funding to community groups since 1992 with the move towards increased ambulatory care. This decreased funding has led to a redefinition of their mandates and are henceforth centres dedicated to offering specialized services: "Each organization acts according to its mandate and it stops there." Her experience in Project "École-milieu" (a project involving intercultural rapprochement in the Côte-des-Neiges district) has taught her that strength remains concentrated within religious organizations. Since the 1960s, religious groups that have remained active in this sector have become very strong. Having made the transition from the institutional sector to the community sector, they have become the keepers of an institutionalized organizational culture. Meanwhile, "the other organizations have developed expertise that is not recognized: informal strategies, underground activity..." Furthermore, G.C. sees school management as now primarily consisting of managers rather than educators. "They aren't concerned with the human element and the question of intercultural rapprochement is ignored."

It should be noted that the internal practices of the women's centres were an important subject of discussion during the two meetings of the first group. Based on her experience, E.C. sees all kinds of reasons why women from other cultures do not often take part in the centres' activities. "For years we have worked at opening our doors and still women from other cultures do not come. It is hard to undo prejudices." In M.C.'s opinion, "It's important to speak plainly - to state that within the community there is an enormous amount of discrimination and prejudice. It's the same with intercultural relations - there is a great deal of prejudice... But it is difficult to say what it is that is really blocking intercultural rapprochement." S.R. referred to the debate over the past years regarding the place of women from diverse cultures within the Quebec feminist movement. His perception is that, in spite of everything, little by little, openings are being created.

For the purpose of further exploring the issue of intercultural relations, Kalpana Das (K.D.) asked: "How do you address the intercultural question? What does interculturalism signify to you? How do you define it within your field of activity? It is important to know how you perceive intercultural relations, cultural pluralism, cultural diversity."

In G.C.'s view, the approach is developed more at the individual level than at the level of the organization itself. She does not consider herself to possess specific expertise beyond the experience she has gained in working in the field and coping, on a daily basis, with clients' demands. S.R. also hesitated to address this question from a theoretical standpoint: "From a practical viewpoint and based on our experience, intercultural relations develop in the course of dealing with concrete problems." Attempting to give a more concrete definition, he
added, “Interculturalism consists of a meeting, the experience of two or more cultures coming together. This experience is on various levels and assumes all sorts of different forms—sometimes positive, sometimes very negative.”

According to M.C., “The intercultural problematic has to do with reality...We are an intercultural organization essentially because we work a great deal with communities.” “Interculturalism” is a term that means “as an organization, accept being an incomplete organization, and the completing part is the part that works with the cultural communities. And not ‘us with’ but rather ‘us together’. This extends to the sharing of funds. For me, interculturalism constitutes an exchange of influences between us.”

For E.C., it is through work that alliances are formed: “It is the particular district’s make-up that determines the work to be done by a particular women’s centre. Each centre takes on the colour of the area it serves...I can’t give a general portrait – it all depends on where the centre is located.”

At the local level an enormous amount of intercultural work or intercultural experimentation is done, S.R. pointed out, but groups know little about this work. The activities in question do not extend to that point. In his opinion, it is a problem of structure: “Actions that do not fit into the structure remain marginal in nature.”

K.D. presented interculturalism in the following way: “Interculturalism signifies coming to terms with the reality of the differences around us. These differences may have to do with civilization, culture, ethnicity, race or religion.”

As E.C. saw it, another way of identifying differences is in terms of language: “The majority of workers are francophones. The centres are not equipped to provide all services in two languages. This fact excludes an enormous number of women. Speaking various languages would remove one of the obstacles.” She added, “even though there is a policy of openness, if the workers are not concerned about this issue, this openness will not carry over into the way the women’s centres operate...In the present context, a lack of knowledge and prejudices prevail and we have difficulty opening up new avenues.”

S.R. viewed the question somewhat differently. “We are a multiethnic organization and there exist multiple relations to begin with, so within our organization I don’t see any difficulty.” He did wonder, however, whether the current structure truly addresses the pluricultural problematic: “There is likely a problem with the structure. It is not presently adapted to address that. But it has certain advantages, as well as certain inconveniences. It represents power relationships, influences, that are interesting all the same.” In his opinion, it is very hard to be innovative because the structure is built on a different historical, social and political framework that cannot be dismantled in a single day. However, he does consider, based on his 10 years of experience, that the situation has, in that time, evolved a great deal at the grassroots level, at the level of local groups.

GROUP B

A.S., from the Montreal Italian women’s centre, sees a difference between the opinion given by a person as a member of an organization, the opinion given as an individual, and the opinion given as a member of a cultural community. The approach adopted by the different organizations always depends on the people who work within them and those who direct their actions. Her organization is conducting more and more intercultural activities. And she is personally in favour of establishing contact with other groups.
S. S.\(^9\), of the South Asian women’s community centre, views the issue differently, given that she works with women who are new arrivals and who are very withdrawn: she identifies the difficulty of opening up to the Other as cultural in nature. According to her, women in the South Asian community who have chosen to remain at home have made a choice dictated by their culture. Her group organizes activities designed to show women of her community how women from other cultures live. But it is a very slow process. She also pointed out a contradiction that new arrivals face (and which she herself faced): on the one hand, her community has its own culture and values that it does not want to lose and, on the other hand, the host society sees the cultural communities as closed. It is for this reason that the centre’s priority is to help women open up to Quebec society, to learn about it and study French. In this regard, the dominant thinking in her community is, “If I don’t know the people here, that is not going to affect me.”

This fear of losing one’s own culture is not exclusive to new arrivals, as A.S. confirmed. Her community has been established here for many years and many of its members continue to be fearful of other cultures. Immigrants seek security and it is within their own community that they believe they will find this security. In her opinion, it is necessary to ask not only why immigrants do not integrate into Quebec society but also how the host society acts towards them and what it does to break up ghettos. “Before, groups were fewer in number, but now each creates its own cultural group... I am not saying that we do not want to preserve our culture, but I ask myself the question: ‘How are we all going to work together when there are so many different groups and each one wants to remain within its own community, including old-stock Québécois?’”

The challenge presented by the Other, whom the immigrant is confronted with, is not always an easy one to meet. As S.S. commented, working with other cultures involves questioning oneself. This is very difficult within the communities, owing, among other factors, to members’ religious principles: “We have five different countries involved in South Asia. Each community has their religion and they don’t open their minds to others...” Thus, stepping outside one’s own culture constitutes disobedience to a certain extent. At the South Asian women’s centre, S.S. works with women, talks with them, provides them with information to help them escape their isolation. But, in her opinion, the women she deals with remain extremely oppressed within their own culture. Their religion leads them backwards and, what is more, does not allow them to express their own ideas.

According to K.D., the participants at the meeting seemed to understand that interculturalism involves the integration problematic. She noted that ethnocultural organizations are primarily concerned with offering basic services to their community to ensure their day-to-day survival and thus they adopt the parameters laid out by the institutions. For A.S., interculturalism is a subject that has been presented as an important issue by the host society. This is why her organization has begun opening up in terms of intercultural relations. This process was not previously a priority, given the organization’s work overload. But she emphasized that the Italian women’s centre’s number one priority remains offering services to new arrivals.

Daily life for immigrants, K.D. pointed out, consists of a permanent struggle to make intercultural adjustments. Every day immigrants are confronted with the presence of the Other; they are constantly negotiating with the Other. It is their beliefs and values that are continually challenged. It is in this regard that K.D. posed the question: “Your challenge, as an ethnocultural organization, should it not be to address this culture shock that people experience and, in spite of this culture shock, work towards helping them maintain their own

\(^9\) S. S. was the only participant who spoke in English during the meeting.
identity and situate themselves within the new context? Would it not be possible to obtain funding to support such efforts?"

According to A.S., the Italian community has been able to preserve its fundamental values: it has not yet been integrated or assimilated. In this respect she wondered, "Up to what point must we accept intervention on the part of the host society in order for us to function well within this society?" She said that although the ethnocultural communities experience the same problems, the approach used in facing these problems is different and, furthermore, in these communities changes come about more slowly. In S.S.’s view, the immigrant question also concerns the host society and the two communities must inform one another about the subject. Interculturalism, therefore, involves an examination of both communities. Immigrants also form part of society.

On the theme of relations between the various immigrant communities, A.S. and S.S. agreed that there is little contact between them. According to A.S., contact is primarily limited to infrequent activities performed with other organizations. S.S. stressed the need for members of different communities to get to know one another. In her opinion, total assimilation or integration is impossible, but one should be curious about other realities. And children should be permitted to appropriate the new reality, so that they will be able to appreciate how enriching it is to enter into closer contact with people from other cultures. In her work with women from South Asia, S.S. attempts to develop a certain feminist awareness by devising activities in which the women can become active through meeting women from other groups. A.S. wondered whether, in their daily lives, women view intercultural relations as necessary. She is not completely convinced: for these women a sense of belonging to the community appears to be more important.

The issues raised by the problematics of integration and assimilation were the focus of the discussion. All the participants rejected assimilation as an institutional strategy wherein one culture imposes itself upon another. For A.S., assimilation signifies that “you no longer have any roots, you’ve lost your culture and you’ve lost your language.” On the other hand, integration was interpreted as the meeting of the two cultures. For D.F. of Haiti House 10, integration is closely related to the notion of “adaptation.” He gave the example of older communities, such as the Italian community. “An important notion has been neglected, one that is like a continuum for arriving at integration: the notion of adaptation.” For her part, S.S. continued to wonder, “Then, what is integration? If they are not assimilating, then what is assimilation? I sometimes say integrated, not assimilated. It means that still we have to differentiate between the two terms.” She stressed that total assimilation is dangerous and said that she favours integration that is understood to constitute a true exchange.

GROUP C

According to M-C.B., of the Côte-des-Neiges recreational community centre, the intercultural question is one of the major goals of her organization, which views itself as a site of integration. Her colleagues take into consideration cultural diversity, given that they work within an immigrant district, even though the centre’s services are offered to the general population. “We try to avoid using ‘us’ and ‘you.’ Everyone therefore works together towards social integration.”

M. G. sees the CECD as using a different kind of approach. In the course of their work, members engage in a consultation process with various neighbourhoods (Centre-Sud, Mile End, Saint-Louis and Le Plateau). She said her organization does not adopt a formal,

10 D. F. was not present at the first meeting and therefore could not take part in the discussion that centred around the first theme.
predetermined approach concerning cultural diversity. Its approach is based on action. “We act within the context of neighbourhood life to reflect the reality of diversity...We work with organizations...We are there to create spaces of exchange in a neighbourhood perspective.” She also pointed out that this approach generally corresponds to the experience acquired by the organizations and by the person handling a particular case: this is why it is difficult for the community organizations to find a common, constant position.

E. G. described her organization, the Centre for Justice and Faith, as a “centre for social analysis. We are a service centre for the community organizations rather than a community centre.” From its inception 15 years ago, the centre has always addressed the issue of cultural diversity and immigration but has made various adjustments over time. Its members have worked particularly closely with francophones to sensitize them to the reality of change within Quebec society. Currently, the staff members are developing reflection mechanisms such as Vivre ensemble (living together) evenings. “We have gone from sensitization work involving the old-stock francophone community to collective research on the change taking place in Quebec society...Part of the process consists of a newsletter that enables persons who are concerned with the issue to read about the thinking going on at the centre on this subject...We have roundtables on various topics with people from different communities...For two years we have had the Vivre ensemble evenings, which serve as a dialogue space in which participants of diverse origins share their expertise...” All the centre’s activities are based on the four components of society: francophones, anglophones, native persons, and immigrants.

J-Y. J. did not really take part in the discussion of this question since, in his view, his work at TROVEP (Montreal Regional Association of Public-Education Volunteer Organizations) is not directly related to the intercultural question. “We do not have a particular approach with respect to relations with the cultural communities. We work to obtain recognition of community centres and for the defense of rights.”

R. M. described ACCESSS (Cultural Communities Alliance for Equality in Social and Health Care Services) as an organization dedicated to defending the rights of ethnocultural communities with regard to health and social services. This organization meets with the “decision-makers” and officials from the different communities. According to R.M., “The existence of ethnocultural communities is not obvious to the host society.” She criticized the communities for being insufficiently knowledgeable about one another and deplores the fact that, when she receives information (from TROVEP, for example), she does not feel included in the group’s discourse as a member of the ethnocultural community.

The participants next talked about the approach they use in dealing with questions concerning “intercultural relations.” M.G., who spoke first, said, “There is a difference between having an approach and seeing how this approach translates into action.” In her view, intercultural relations involve an on-going negotiation process – a process conducted between the different traditions – and negotiation is imbedded in action. “There are objectives that can be shared, but there are modes of action and functioning that are different: these differences constitute a source of richness but also create tensions. So, how do we negotiate all this?”

M.G. explained that the CECD addresses needs that are identified by the community itself and, in this sense, its actions are not based on a particular intercultural rationale. Intercultural concerns are integrated into its practical initiatives and it is with respect to the definition of issues and strategies that tensions exist.

E. G. said that, initially, the members of her organization did not specifically use the term “intercultural relations.” Based on their analyses of issues within Quebec society, beginning in 1980 they have used, instead, the expression “common public culture.” In the
course of their reflections, they have studied the challenges posed by the hosting and integration of refugees and immigrants, which they characterize as a progressive process: “a process that is respectful of a people’s history and of the host society and in which there is full awareness of the fact that this history will go on being written in an increasingly diverse context.” She said it is important to acknowledge that we live in a pluralist society and we must find ways to function in such a society. “The notion of ‘living together’ is very important to us. Our work involves Quebec society and the issues concerning cultural diversity. We promote the active participation of the different communities in this common space and the creation of a common public culture.”

M.-C.B. defined intercultural relations as “relations between peoples with different culturalheritages.” She drew attention to the fact that, in general, people address the question of intercultural relations after first having contemplated the question of integration, i.e. by reducing the question to the mechanisms of integration, such as language. In this regard, E.G. maintains, language conditions participation and is thus a significant issue that each person deals with in his or her own way.

According to R.M., integration is a question that has yet to be resolved. It involves the host society’s attempt to first understand the expectations of each group: “The decision-makers expect people to integrate, but if we are talking about living together, this means exchanges, people being aware of each other’s expectations and negotiating on that basis before arriving at a point where everyone’s self-worth is recognized and enhanced...Saying you want to integrate does not mean saying that one wants to do away with one’s identity.”

K. D. asked E.G. for an explanation concerning the links between, on the one hand, the notions of “common public culture” and “living together” and, on the other hand, the four components of society (francophones, anglophones, native persons and immigrants).

E. G. responded that her group had not yet really managed to answer that question: “We do not have a practice based on a method of proportional representativeness with regard to the numerical size of each of the components in Quebec society. At the Vivre ensemble evenings, “we have chosen to include the four components of society and in the process are confronted with our limits. We are positioned within a perspective of historical and societal continuity...The negotiation process occurs within a historical continuity in which other practices are continually introduced.”

Responding to a comment by J-Y.J. about how difficult it was to follow the discussion owing to the complex language used and the wide range of words employed in speaking of cultural diversity, K.D. stressed the importance of understanding the meaning of the words one uses and she asked the participants their opinion on the following question: “In their field work, do members of the community movement use as their frame of reference the same frame of reference used by the state and public institutions in this field – the frame of reference within which academics often work – with concepts and sociological categories that they apply at the community level? Or do they develop their own frame of reference with their own language?”

According to M-C. B., vocabulary plays a major role in exchanges: “The subject of cultural diversity has become an important public issue... People are afraid of being misunderstood and afraid that the words they use in referring to cultural diversity will convey prejudices.” In addition, within organizations, there are differences in terms of interpretation: there is a mixing of ideas.

K. D. reminded the participants that the specific goal of the focus groups was to come to understand that the knowledge possessed by the community should not replicate the
knowledge of the university sector. Rather, through its work, the community develops another type of know-how that is specific to it. The work of this discussion group illustrates this process.

3.2 Concerted-action

The second series of questions dealt with the theme of concerted-action, specifically, the major difficulties that the participants have experienced in cooperating with persons or organizations within various communities, as well as the factors underlying these difficulties.

GROUP A

The participants showed themselves to be even more sensitized to the issue of cooperation and were more vulnerable in responding to questions on this subject.

For S.R., cooperation means sitting down together, talking and, in particular, "agreeing on common objectives and breaking through the boundaries of one’s particular environment, be it the community or the institutional sector.” Everyone understands what is meant by cooperation; what is required is an examination of the conditions in which the process occurs. S.R. emphasized that people within the ethnocultural community want contacts but do not make them: "There are ministries that want to work with the cultural communities and that say, ‘We invite them but they don’t come.’ This has also been heard from community groups and neighbourhood coalitions.” No one has asked, however, why the cultural community groups do not come to meetings. In S.R. ‘s opinion, no real reflection has yet been conducted regarding the participation of cultural communities and power-sharing between government agencies and the community.

In G.C. ’s opinion, cooperation involves analysis and long-term vision. It also represents a way of devising strategies in order to make progress in different areas, as well as the possibility of creating alliances that allow for the development of pressure tactics at the political level: “The power of cooperation lies in its political impact.”

As the state offloads, the community centres, in their capacity as service organizations, become state subcontractors and find themselves, to a certain extent, marginalized in their operations. According to G.C., “the move towards more ambulatory care has produced the spontaneous generation of organizations that have established themselves as managers of state services. They are caught up in daily matters, with services, and this fact substantially influences the cooperation process.” Thus, increasingly, organizations are becoming state subcontractors. Cooperation is thereby threatened by a lack of adequate financing, which enormously devalidates community work.

In such a context, many organizations have been given a service mandate. In G.C. ’s opinion, this phenomenon has serious consequences: “If, at a certain point, organizations do not step back to explore and reflect upon their practices, if everything remains at the level of providing services, this can become a panacea for the organizations because, more and more, funding is based on the services offered.” In her opinion, another way of seeing things is that many organizations, with their interesting level of analysis, can be criticized by clients or by their members for always being in the midst of the cooperation process and for adhering to one way of doing things that does not yield short-term benefits.
According to S.R., his organization's operating strategy is that of constituting a physical presence: gaining recognition and strengthening communication ties at the formal-network and neighbourhood levels.

"It is clear that the coalition mechanism does not bring together many people..." said M.C. "It is clear that there is no coalition concerning women's security." What is important, in her view, is "encouraging people to want to improve their level of security together, because only actions that result from strong ties are actions that can be sustained over many years." For this reason, her group has decided not to participate in any cooperation process whatsoever because the result is dissension. "What we do in my group is not necessarily within this structure. We are more comfortable within an alternative structure."

According to E.C., because the majority of women's centres work with old-stock Québécois, the problem at the regional level is that the women who deal with the question of multiculturalism do not take up much space within the coalition. There also exists, she said, "a certain resistance within the coalition to having specificity in order to avoid the double discrimination that we are subject to experiencing. It is as if people do not want to see women who come from another culture, women who are lesbians, etc. We are all women! But no one questions the fact that there is no talk about the presence of women from other cultures in our centre."

Responding to the question concerning the factors behind the difficulties that arise in the cooperation process, G.C. emphasized the state’s diminished involvement and the precarious conditions that characterize community work owing to budget cutbacks. "We ask for recognition of basic things...Things are very tight. We are always reacting and have no time for analysis." In her opinion, this is why the question of interculturalism is not accorded the attention it deserves and, thus, cooperation is necessary for self-protection.

S.R. agreed that the socioeconomic context plays a significant role in terms of the conditions in which the cooperation process takes place. However, he called for a certain level of community power and stressed the importance of self-criticism. In his view it is necessary to reflect upon the means of exercising this power and the influence required to bring about positive changes.

**GROUP B**

A. S. perceives cooperation as a means of escaping isolation. She believes it is very important to cooperate with other women’s groups. S.S. emphasized the importance of and need to develop communication between women from different cultures. Cooperation "is just something to bring the community together and have an open discussion. We enrich our experience and our knowledge." There must be cooperation but she does not know how this is to be achieved. She suggested that this cooperation should, above all, serve the interests of women who have little contact with the surrounding community: "One idea is that 'concertation' should involve women: those who are not in touch with the community, with the mainstream, with the groups." This is, for her, the meaning of intercultural cooperation.

A. S. stressed that she speaks as a representative of an organization, while S.S. speaks more for herself as an individual. A.S. has made this choice because, in her opinion, women as individuals have different priorities. For her part, S.S. said she speaks as a member of her community because an organization constitutes an institution. She speaks about the women with whom she works because they form her work group and determine the nature of the work done at her centre. S.S. sees cooperation as offering the possibility for women in her community to come into contact with other approaches and other values. Thus, the
cooperation process offers another way of learning how to use the services and resources that exist within the host society.

A.S. said that the women in her community are always kept informed of what goes on in the different meetings but they are preoccupied by immediate concerns, such as health, their children and their spouse. She therefore is not inclined to believe that these women are interested in participating more directly in the cooperation process. S.S. has also noted that the different communities and the community centres tend to work in isolation and there is a need to end this isolation. To place matters in a clearer perspective, K.D. added, “The Québécois also work in isolation.”

The participants were questioned about their experience working with other groups. A.S. and S.S. agreed that it is one thing to work strictly with ethnic groups; these groups together coming face-to-face with francophone Québécois groups is another matter. According to A.S., with certain groups everything goes well, while with others, nothing goes well at all: “Perhaps it has to do with conditions or the individuals involved. In cooperating with other ethnic groups, we feel more at ease, better understood... When we are two or three people from ethnic groups, we take up the cause together. This division occurs automatically...” In S.S.’s opinion, the concepts that people bring to the group, such as “cultural community” and “women’s group,” also have an impact.

According to S.S., it is hard for members of ethnocultural groups to share their perceptions: “...it is a cultural difficulty... For example, in our community you cannot save women without saving the family.” This is one of the factors involved when, facing Quebec francophone groups, members of ethnocultural groups tend to band together. In this regard, K.D. wondered whether people of different origins construct a “we” when facing groups from the host society. S.S. feels that they speak the same language, the language of immigration. “Individually we talk, we meet. When we [people from cultural communities] are in a group, we are on one side, we feel like we have something in common, that we could talk about our difficulties or whatever. With the other group [the host society]...individually, you don’t see the problems, but when we are in a group then you feel the differences. So, we take ourselves separately because, I think, we use the same kind of language [not their mother tongue], we feel close, we feel comfortable.” Or, as A.S. added, they immediately identify themselves as immigrants: “We are not old-stock...This is the immigration experience: it doesn’t matter whether you arrived yesterday or 50 years ago, you always feel you’re an immigrant.”

This situation has created differences that, in terms of working in a group, have taken on great importance. According to A.S., an example is that “sometimes even the language prevents us from expressing ourselves: there are Québécois expressions that we don’t understand and we don’t quite follow everything that is being said.” In this regard, she emphasized the importance of all the little details that provide cultural groups with other means of exchange and she commented that perhaps these groups require longer to reflect on certain subjects. For S.S., it is as if the members of the host society assume that others are on the same level, that these people should immediately understand their language, their ideology, their way of tackling problems and their concepts.

In conclusion, S.S. and A.S. agreed that relations with groups within the host society are generally good when established on an individual basis but are not when it comes to working in a group. Members of cultural groups feel more at ease when their differences also are accepted and when people accept that each community has its own ways of solving its problems.
D.F.'s vision of cooperation differs substantially from the visions expressed by S.S. and A.S. For him, his organization's decision to participate in coalitions and within organizations belonging to the host society was made primarily with the goal of defending the interests of his community and immigrant communities in general. He said that "establishing alliances is very important: the survival of the services we provide depends on it." In short, according to him, cooperation is necessary, and alliances must be forged with the other communities and the host society in order to better defend the community's rights. This conviction notwithstanding, he made the following very important observation: "We can get together, we can create alliances and cooperate with regard to specific problems of the moment, but when it comes to major questions such as integration, there is no cooperation." For this reason, in his view, in order to resolve fundamental questions, government must be prodded into action through debates begun within the community movement.

GROUP C

In keeping with her previous comments, M.G. stated that members of her group not only seek solutions to problems, they also attempt to together define the realities concerning which they wish to take action and to determine the nature of this action. Thus, her organization perceives cooperation as a means of mobilizing and supporting the community: "First we have to identify within the neighbourhoods the realities with regard to which we want to take collective action, propose them within the community, choose the interested organizations and persons, and from there define the issues."

M-C.B. said that in Côte-des-Neiges, cooperation is experienced as a complex reality. It is perceived above all as a challenge. In this regard, there exists an inequality between the available means of action and the recognition that organizations receive in the district. "It's true that cooperation is needed, but for that people need to feel at least minimally equal." Before cooperation becomes an imposition, it is necessary and a means of action for use by organizations, as well as a way for people to meet and enter into a relationship. At the same time, by cooperating, participants can agree on objectives and ways to achieve them. The problem is that there is a lack of continuity in the cooperation process evidenced primarily in the inequality that exists between the organizations that are able to maintain continuity and those lacking the means to do so.

According to J-Y.J., "The word 'cooperation' has become a catch-all term, a word into which we put all sorts of even contradictory things." There are people who tend to make use of the concept of cooperation not to be useful to others but rather to make money. "Cooperation leading to solidarity is in the process of disappearing and the control that citizens have had over their organizations is turning against them." It is in this sense that 'cooperation' is one of the words that is losing all its meaning. Given this situation, the community is provided with a field of action that can be either liberating or dangerous.

Within coalitions, E.G. has experienced power relationships and defensive attitudes. In her opinion, among the obstacles to cooperation, the primary ones are frequent changes in personnel, which make it impossible to have continuity of action, and the absence of an open space for reflection. "Our work continues to consist of reacting to emergencies and we're not really sure what direction we're going in." According to her, for cooperation to be truly effective, it is necessary to find an appropriate space in which to present the different experiences and skills found within the community.

Referring to her experience, R.M. commented, "We have been involved in the cooperation process but it is not always the type of cooperation we desire, because when we enter into the process, the problematic has already been analyzed and the method of action has already been decided upon. Therefore, only adjustments are made for the ethnocultural
communities.” For this reason she asks that decision-makers take into consideration the ethnocultural dimension in developing policies and programs. For the time being, “since there is not much dialogue between us and the decision-makers, we are positioned more at the level of attempting to have a cooperative process than at the grassroots level.”

M.G. stated that cooperation should not be seen as an end in itself. This is in fact what has given rise to an ever increasing number of coalitions. “It is a tool but it is also a space that enables us to exchange information – a support space and a space that ensures that our issues and concerns are heard.” Speaking of obstacles to cooperation, she spoke also of power relationships within coalitions. In her view, these relationships can be seen in the strategies that are imposed and the pace that is dictated: there are people who wish to proceed faster than others and who argue that what counts is the result and that there are insufficient human resources. She emphasized that difficulties exist at the intercultural level in the sense that different approaches create tension: “Even though not listening to the other person causes problems, it does not constitute an absolute obstacle but, rather, a difficulty. It is necessary to take the risk involved in having differences. An approach that is more open to diversity involves risks but is, at the same time, enriching.”

J-Y.J. pointed out two problems. There is the difficulty in receiving others, in understanding that others do not operate at the same level of analysis. There is also the possibility that the other communities do not know enough about the history of the Quebec grassroots community movement and the history of the French-Canadian people. R.M. agreed with regard to the question of a lack of knowledge. However, in her opinion, it is important to acknowledge that this lack of knowledge is mutual. To end this frustrating situation, people need to sit down together and talk.

E.G. commented that two issues make cooperation with ethnocultural organizations difficult. There is first the problem of integrating the question of cultural diversity or pluralism when it is not on the agenda of coalitions. There is also the problem of “what action should be taken so that members of the communities will also be interested in actively cooperating on issues that do not always involve pluralism but that concern daily life in society, generally speaking.”

In response, R.M. said, “Ethnocultural communities are not consulted regarding very specific questions. Yet this is key in terms of the whole issue of integration.” She emphasized that there is a lack of awareness of the know-how that the communities can share with others and also that, at the community level, these potentialities are even negated. Yet, “there are strategies specific to the cultural communities that can be of great benefit to the host society.” K.D. added that interculturalism involves considering how to embrace different forms of knowledge that can contribute to enriching society as a whole. “Recognition of other forms of know-how is extremely important if we wish to work together.” E.G. agreed but pointed out that such recognition must be reciprocal: “Those who possess other forms of know-how must also take into consideration the history and know-how of Quebec society.”

In conclusion, M-C.B. raised two questions. First, how can we take into consideration the great diversity that currently exists within society? “During the first several years, in a group of 20 people, four or five different countries were represented. Today, in a group of 40 people, 15 or 20 different cultures are represented.” Second, how are we to respond in view of the lack of representation of the diverse communities which the dialogue on intercultural relations most concerns? And how are we to take into account the fact that interculturalism is not seen by organizations in general – or even by ethnocultural organizations – as an important issue compared with issues such as jobs and access to social services? M-C.B. pointed out that, in general, cultural community organizations are more concerned with access to social services and jobs than with the question of interculturalism and rapprochement. In
her view, paradoxically, “in Côte-des-Neiges, the organizations most interested in reflecting upon intercultural relations are not, by and large, cultural community organizations.”

3.3. Intercultural cooperation

The third series of questions led the participants to reflect upon the measures to be adopted in order to surmount the difficulties involved in intercultural cooperation and upon the development of new conditions for fruitful cooperation between communities of diverse origins. The participants were also invited to work on the conclusions of a preliminary study on the same subject, “Constats (findings), June ‘98”, and on proposals with regard to initiating concerted action.

GROUP A

On the subject of the document entitled "Constats", based on a previous preliminary study

What follows is the group’s reaction to the document entitled "Constats". In M.C.’s view, the document demonstrates the need to innovate and identify alternative operational methods while ensuring continuity in the cooperation process. “Activities that are unlike what is involved in a coalition – although this process is a necessary one – are also beneficial. Organizations must develop a capacity for innovation.”

With regard to the “Principles of Cooperation Organizations” discussed in the document, E.C. finds that these principles, which give direction to the organizations’ efforts, are not as inflexible as they might appear. She thinks, rather, that it is when they are put into practice that little change is effected: “We are not prepared to change our practices to reach persons elsewhere.” M.C.’s reaction was, “But when there is a principle and there is a practice that cannot be changed, what is the underlying principle?” E.C. replied, “I am talking about what goes on and about the reality of the groups with which we work. It must be recognized that practices are not easy to change.” And she wondered, “Are people ready to question their principles and change them?” In this regard, M.C. considers that one of the principles that should be integrated into the work of organizations is acceptance of the fact that working with people who are different means agreeing to work differently. For M.C., therein lies the contradiction: though people desire integration with the other communities, they do not want to work differently. In E.C.’s opinion, it is necessary to educate personnel, given that each centre is autonomous in terms of selecting staff.

S. R. spoke of his rather positive experience of meetings with official representatives from different organizations in which there are many exchanges between Québécois community organizations and social actors who are themselves immigrants and who belong to different communities. “At these meetings we succeed in establishing ties and we regularly debate various subjects.”

In light of the arguments presented by the participants, K.D. considers that intercultural issues should be situated at two levels: at one level, working with people who are culturally or otherwise different, and on a second level, making use of the knowledge that people and organizations from the different communities can contribute. She gave as an example violence against women: “It constitutes a phenomenon that is not experienced in the same way culturally speaking and not everyone seeks the same solution. Cultures are the receptacle of knowledge and practices...Thus, if we wish to cooperate with one another, should we not take these issues into consideration?”
Intercultural modalities for cooperation

Among the measures to be adopted to surmount the difficulties that arise, M.C. emphasized the importance of learning to situate one’s actions independent of financial considerations. This means distancing oneself from the pressures exerted by the state through its policies and programs. For example: “The state insists on one-year projects, yet it is impossible to do the work within this time limit.” This is why modification of the structure has been, perhaps, the most important measure taken. “First, a distinction was made with respect to what we had learned as an operational organization comprising part of a more organized structure. Already we had stood out as a result of our own particular way of dealing with the issue of violence. This way of operating was not favourably received initially.”

The members of her group are engaged in a continual process of self-examination with regard to their practices, in order to attempt to understand why women from other cultures do not participate in their activities. Towards this end, they have decided to be mobile, to go elsewhere, to completely step away from the organization and do work in the field. They have developed the following concept: “The group must become competent in terms of its progression and its activities.” “Our principal practice has been to continually adapt the discourse. We don’t have paper. The writing we use consists of letters in a visual format intended to create a more interpersonal bond. Language problems also arise and we will speak in English if necessary. The biggest job is adapting in accordance with the particular reality. For example, in the case of the Italian women’s centre or the South Asian women’s centre, it took us time to really understand their situation. They see us as very different. Quebec women, with their notions of sexual freedom, the family, etc., are a threat to their values. As feminists, we must stop having a fundamentalist mentality and believing that everyone thinks alike.”

E. C. said that M.C.’s case is different because she works primarily with people at the grassroots level and not at the level of cooperation among Montreal groups. E.C. is positioned more within a structure which is impossible to change totally. Thus, “working in an alternative fashion within the structure is a pipe dream. The structure will always remain as it is. We can accomplish things within the centres but outside, it’s more difficult.”

To move the discussion forward and restate the question, K.D. added that there are two different dynamics. Vertically, it is very difficult to move up through the various established levels. Horizontally, there is the advantage of being able to create and innovate from the present moment. Thus, she asked, “What are the new modalities or conditions that might favour a different relationship with respect to cooperation?” In M.C.’s opinion, it is important to understand that this relationship is more a one-on-one relationship. Therefore, deriving meaning from a meeting as an individual is fundamental.

E. C. commented on the fact that the centres have existed for some time. Thus, mentalities are changing and the older workers are now less involved in the centres’ activities. These individuals are now more concerned with funding and management than with actually working with clients. She pointed out that they find themselves pressured to make decisions without knowing what the results of these decisions are. “We continue to work according to our principles, our ideology and beliefs... Despite the fact that we do our work and no longer see what good might be coming from it, we continue our efforts.” M.C. said that the mandate of her group is to “work towards social transformations and very quickly see the results in our current practices.” To succeed in this regard, it is necessary, in her opinion, to establish a different kind of relationship with the state.

To launch the discussion on concerted action, the following questions were proposed: “Do you think it is necessary, in terms of intercultural cooperation, to have dialogue sessions
regarding the needs, expectations and community-work approaches with potential partners from the different communities? Is there a need for sensitization sessions on Quebec's socio-community movements and the major issues with which Quebec is currently confronted? Is there a need for sensitization sessions concerning the intercultural approach in community work and different communities' know-how?"

As S.R. sees it, these sensitization sessions will take place during a second phase. “Before we reach that point, something must happen. We must experience something, have the will to work together. A very specific need must emerge. And in a second phase, we will indeed be able to take the time to look at that. I don’t presently see workers as being motivated. They must first be confronted with this question.” E.C., on the other hand, believes that, given the current reality, the problem is urgent and the questions involved must be answered immediately, particularly the question of interculturalism’s place in the cooperation process.

In M.C.’s opinion, “It’s all well and good to ask why things aren’t working, but it should be noted that it is because of the actions of the very people who engage in such questioning that things aren’t working.” According to her, organizations that succeed in going beyond certain boundaries are generally marginalized. “Once your organization begins to accomplish things or function well, the first reaction is to marginalize and reject you. There is no frank dialogue between organizations. How can we be sure that all the issues will be examined so that there is an open dialogue?”

In K.D.’s view, a climate of dialogue is necessary and conditions must be created prior to this dialogue. “Dialoguing also means confronting the Other...Thus, we must ask ourselves whether we are capable of dealing with the destabilization that the Other will cause us to experience.” Interculturalism therefore essentially involves the question of how to deal with this destabilization, with the discomfort we experience and feel: “Are we able to deal with that as an organization, as a movement?”
GROUP B

On the subject of the document entitled "Constats", based on a previous preliminary study

A.S. considers that, overall, the document entitled "Constats" is reflective of reality. D.F. emphasized the importance of identifying common interests when forming alliances, given that there is room for democracy in groups, even if, in certain cases, the existing principles and structure oblige participants to adapt. "To make things happen, alliances with groups within the movement are required." In his opinion, respect for democracy is one of the conditions needed for cooperation.

K.D. made a few comments with regard to democracy: "While there is a place for democracy, it is important to keep in mind that democracy can, to a certain extent, transform itself into tyranny in the sense that any majority whatsoever can impose its will." It has been her experience that the voice of the ethnocultural communities within community movements is, in general, substantially minimalized owing to the manner in which the democratic process is presently understood. In this perspective, "democracy as it is practiced does not appear to work."

For D.F., this problematic with regard to democracy is related to the gap that exists between the reality that members of ethnocultural communities experience and government policy statements. "Beautifully written policy statements are made on the subject of cultural diversity and interculturalism, but in reality government does not make enough of an effort to translate these pronouncements into concrete action."

S.S. criticized government programs: "For example, this is what the new government has asked us to do in terms of services. The government told us that our job is to tell people how to arrange their closets. They told us to give them instructions on where to put their sweaters, pants and shoes. After one month, we were to go to these people's houses to see if they were doing it right." She opposes the government's imposing its will with regard to the various communities' practices and values: "If they see partnership as a mechanism of assimilation, the communities will not accept this. This is not going to work." She added, "You cannot have democracy by forcing somebody to do something because they come to your country. If they told you to leave your culture in your closet before immigrating, then at least people could make an open decision about this." In S.S.'s opinion, cooperation has been talked about for a very long time, but no one discusses what this concept really means. In her view, this concept has not to do with relations between two organizations but, rather, with relations between societies, groups and communities.

K.D. agreed with S.S. that Cooperation is not about adopting a particular method for resolving different problems and everyone being obliged to conform to this method. She proposed three questions for discussion: "First of all, how to recognize that every community has different practices based on their different cultural visions of their life experience, of the issues – dealing with women, dealing with children. So, based on that, they develop their practices. How to link these practices, how to respect these practices, and how to support each other in these practices." In her opinion, all this must be considered when thinking about cooperation. One way of viewing cooperation is in terms of verticality. For example, "Mainstream interculturalism is often represented in the following manner: Quebec society versus everybody else. Whereas interculturalism means interaction between everybody, between people of diverse origins." Another demonstration of verticality is "government tells us what to do and then we go and do that." K.D. again asked, "In terms of practices, how could we come together to support each other and, in the process, learn from each other within a dynamic of horizontal 'concertation'?"
D.F. stressed the need to come together to work towards gaining recognition of cultural strategies with the goal of solving problems. In his opinion, we are in a fight with the government and efforts must be made to gain respect for the different practices of each group. As he sees it, government has begun to accept varying points of view. For example, “So that we can carry out the ALPHA program here, they have allowed us to draw on our experience in Haiti. They have shown respect for how we conduct ALPHA.”

Continuing in this vein, K.D. indicated that recognition of different practices is indeed fundamental, but when this need for recognition is analyzed with regard to available funding support, the result is completely the opposite: “They do not want these practices to continue. All the support comes so that these social practices are abandoned and the host society’s practices are adopted by the groups.” In his view, there is thus great tension between local practices (required by the state) and the practices that various immigrant and ethnocultural communities continue to follow in their adopted country. K.D. asked, “Can we consider the possibility of working to create a horizontal alliance based on recognition of the practices of the different communities? Can we take these strategies and approach the existing groups in a broader sense?” D. F. agreed because, in his opinion, if this work is not done, it will be easier to force things on people if they are members of an isolated group than if they are part of a movement.

As A.S. noted, “When you are the only ethnocultural group within a coalition, you are assimilated by the others because it is the general problematic that predominates. And even if the problematic is the same, our approach is different and we must fight to be heard. This is what causes the problem.” She also sees a difference in the fact that the host society is more open to rapid change, whereas within the ethnocultural communities, change generally occurs slowly. In addition, these communities are more traditional in nature compared with the host society, which sees itself as more advanced. K.D. cautioned that this “openness-and-tradition” interpretation framework already constitutes, in intercultural terms, an anti-model. Instead of different practices being recognized, a norm is established by which everyone should be judged. “We must deconstruct this kind of issue-framing,” she said.

S. S. expanded upon her approach to cooperation: “The kind of ‘concertation’ I am thinking about is when you learn from each other. It is like putting your problems on the table and asking everybody to discuss them and learn from each other. When you leave the process, even if you don’t agree...When I go back, I will think that I can change myself; the society is changing. We don’t know what is ‘correct’ and what is not...”

Intercultural modalities for cooperation

The participants were asked about the measures they have adopted to overcome difficulties in the cooperation process and about the results achieved. S.S. commented, “If you ask me what we are doing to deal with: the intercultural aspect or integration of people, I think that we have tried many things but not exactly towards that. The first thing, like everyone, is giving the language course. We feel that learning English or French is very important.” With regard specifically to women, she added, “In India, in the home, women from Pakistan and Bangladesh don’t practice their English. We don’t talk. Here, we understand but we don’t talk. What we do is give them the power of speaking.”

It should be noted that S.S.’s response is tied to her particular perception of cooperation. She speaks as a member of a community and not as a representative of any organization. For this reason she added, “As a community organization we do a specific kind of work: I don’t think cooperation between groups is easy. What we are doing is working at
the grassroots level. We are talking to people, we are teaching. We are bringing them out. We cannot just go and say, 'This is our approach.' But there is no proper cooperation among the groups."

According to A.S., organizations such as hers have a monoethnic mission based on the offering of services. This mission, she said, "is not to cooperate with the other organizations or make ourselves known." She added, "Interculturalism per se is not a concern for users of our services." But she noted that Montreal has become a multiethnic city and thus there is a need for change, a need for new developments, a need to meet and to talk more.

For D.F., it is clear that "continuation of the services offered is linked to the alliances formed with the movements concerned. We must invest in coalitions and form alliances to better defend the interests of our clients." S.S. questioned D.F.'s opinion in the sense that using the cooperation process to make demands does not fit in with her concept of intercultural cooperation. She agrees that people can go to the different coalition meetings, present problematics and make requests, yet asks: "Is this the type of cooperation that we want?....With the cultural community or the host society? I don't know. We are the organizations who know how to approach other organizations when we have problems. There are many small groups where we can go and we approach these organizations... This is something we are doing, but particularly sitting down and discussing the biggest problems of integration of the cultural community within the society. Nobody has done it." D.F. believes that, little by little, we can reach the point where we begin to debate the fundamental question: the question of integration.

Cooperation is seen in both horizontal and vertical terms, with emphasis on horizontal cooperation in terms of its possibilities and the difficulties it entails. In this respect, D.F. said that "...more and more, within coalitions there are government representatives." According to him, these representatives contribute things and their presence allows for more direct access to public funds. This contact also helps in getting answers faster. A.S. is less optimistic in this respect, pointing out that "...with regard to the different problematics, we are not truly represented...There is no direct representation with the government as such."

S.S. again commented on how she views things differently: "I don't go to the government...Government is looking down and expecting us to do all the multicultural work, to do the integration, 'jumelage' (partnership), etc. Thus, for her, talking about intercultural cooperation does not mean (contrary to the way government sees it) talking about how to integrate people into the host society as quickly as possible. In her words, "Intercultural cooperation means intercultural groups, ethnic groups where we discuss, we talk, we do things, the host society and the cultural community together, to understand each other. Intercultural cooperation is knowing about community, about a community's difficulties, knowing about a different culture."

Next, the participants gave their opinion on sensitization sessions held prior to the intercultural cooperation process. S.S. suggested, first of all, not using the word 'sensitization' but rather talking about a "friendly exchange of ideas...discussion..." D.F. favoured continuing to sensitize the immigrant or ethnocultural communities with respect to the movements that exist here: "If we are to participate in these movements, we must be sensitized." Such sensitization can contribute to forming another vision of interculturalism. According to A.S., "Sensitization is conducted every day among the different groups, through the different coalitions. Montreal is now a multicultural city and, consequently, we must accept different practices." She added, "I would like it if people did not judge the different practices too much. We are not all obliged to follow modern trends. Ethnocentrism consists of believing that one model is superior to another." In conclusion, K.D. said, "In order to accept the Other, we must succeed in dismantling our own prejudices so as not to make judgments."
GROUP C

On the subject of the document entitled Constats, based on a previous preliminary study

The participants in this group questioned some of the content of Constats. To begin, E.G. addressed the question of the structure of a cooperative group, which states that shared experiences (such as the experience of immigration) constitute a unifying factor. She finds this statement excessive. In her opinion, other factors may also be influential and sometimes immigration is not even a unifying factor. With regard to the same paragraph in Constats, M-C.B. reacted to the sentence to the effect that a homogeneous cultural composition may be preferred by the participants in a coalition. In her work there is no homogeneity and she pointed out that "where it becomes more difficult is in the matter of language, which plays a role in the majority-minority dynamic."

On the topic of work approaches, R.M. emphasized that if the ethnocultural communities do not participate in collective actions of a political nature, it is because they have a different kind of relationship with the state. "The difference lies in the means and strategies used when it comes to taking political action."

With respect to political participation, K.D. commented on the need to differentiate between organizations dedicated to the defense of rights, such as ACCESSS and those which are sociocultural and service organizations.

Concerning the fundamental principles and orientation of a coalition, E.G. suggested the addition of another scenario wherein it would be possible to clarify the basic principles while retaining the non-negotiable elements. According to her, this scenario would lead people to be more open to self-questioning.

R. M. also said that, in practice, "it is the funders who determine what constitutes a community need and what does not." In addition, referring to the reciprocal lack of knowledge noted in Constats, she commented that "everyone should be educated with regard to understanding cultural differences." In her view, it is necessary to go beyond the idea that interculturalism is strictly a concern of the cultural communities.

Intercultural modalities for cooperation

On the subject of the measures to be adopted to surmount the difficulties involved in the cooperation process, M-C.B. said that she continues to seek the appropriate means. She added that, despite the great diversity seen in the social make-up of Montreal, one of the issues that continue to draw attention at the intercultural level is the linguistic polarization between anglophones and francophones and the lack of will on both sides with respect to a rapprochement. To illustrate her point, she spoke of her experience concerning a rapprochement with the black anglophone community association of Côte-des-Neiges: "We tried different things. We met with the director, defined the common objectives, etc., but basically it didn't work." She added, "Together we developed a project that was moderately successful because it was the City of Montreal and the Ministry of Relations with Citizens and Immigration that had involved us in this project." In her opinion, it was a promotional effort. Thus, what is most important is a clear willingness on both sides to draw closer together.

By way of explanation and to provide additional information, K.D. added that the problematic involving the history of blacks in Quebec and the rest of Canada is tied to the question of black immigration from the United States. This history is characterized by the
relationship between the white and black communities, a relationship marked by racial
discrimination. This history today affects the positioning of blacks in Quebec, a positioning
evidenced particularly by their efforts to combat racism and discrimination.

M-C.B. commented on what actually transpires within coalitions in which 10 to 15
communities are represented. According to her, from the outset a primarily North American
method of functioning is used and “if representatives of other organizations attempt to have
their own way of operating recognized, unfortunately nothing comes of it.”

What happens, R.M. said, is that “people call on us to open up to the cultural
communities, not to cooperate with them.” Generally speaking, the coalitions in which she
has taken part have already begun their activities and, according to her, there is no room for
other visions. “We also need others to be willing to work with us, using our methods and our
know-how and following our rhythms.” Also, occasionally, she finds herself among people
who have a wealth of information at their fingertips and who are well acquainted with the
studies conducted on the subject under discussion. She therefore feels that she is not up to
speed because she herself is not familiar with the data. “We get there and we don’t have the
data… We are not on an equal footing with the others in terms of the cooperative effort. Thus,
we have to adjust without having the time needed to conduct the proper reflection and to do
work that is as valuable as theirs.” Consequently, “persons within the cultural communities
feel manipulated to a certain degree… They come to us for the implementation, for the success
of such-and-such a program, so that we may be a stakeholder in it.”

On this point, K.D. referred to the distinction already made between vertical
cooperation with the institutions and horizontal cooperation within the community. In her
view, situating the cooperation process in a horizontal dynamic at the community level would
enable the community to make its own gains and to reappropriate, or recover, its knowledge in
terms of social practice.

M-C.B. talked about strategies that her group has tried to develop collectively. What
these strategies involve are simple actions intended to increase others’ knowledge and create a
feeling of belonging. The pitfall, according to her, lies in the fact that the process does not go
beyond this level. There also exists the permanent double difficulty of, on the one hand
adapting to different waves of immigration, often involving people who speak neither official
language, and on the other, the emergence of new organizations and to constant changes in
personnel.

E.G. brought up the subject of a lack of physical space for reflection. She suggested
that, with its Vivre Ensemble evenings and its roundtable gatherings, her centre could offer the
necessary space where people from the community could view their practices from a certain
distance. Speaking of her experience in terms of cooperative efforts, she mentioned her
participation in the Comité d’immigration de Solidarité populaire Québec (Quebec People’s
Solidarity Immigration Committee) as having constituted “a space for reflecting on what we
do as a community organization with regard to this reality.” She concluded, “There is no
miracle solution in terms of intercultural cooperation. There may be ideal ways of doing
things that we know about, but the structure of organizations does not always allow us to act
in accordance with these ideals.”

With regard to new conditions and the goal of fruitful cooperation between the various
communities, M-C. B. said that, first, the question of interculturalism must be put on the
agenda at coalition meetings in as open a manner as possible, even if this disturbs some
people, because “in adding a point, we change the agenda.” Therefore, it is necessary to
identify ways of encouraging participation and collaboration that will ensure representation
and make it possible to make progress on issues together.
E.G. asked, “Do we push for representation at all costs?” In this respect, she commented that perhaps “it’s easier in a place like ours where those who are interested can come because it’s not a pre-established cooperation space.” However, M-C.B. wondered, “How do we demonstrate our openness? And how do we guarantee representation?” Because, in her opinion, after groups have worked together for some time, they tend to see themselves as representatives, even if this is not the case. They may be representative of a trend, of a movement, but they are not representatives in an overall sense, and therein lies another pitfall.

K.D. pointed out that much of the time it is the funders who insist on representation and this is often the reason that representatives are sought. According to her, in this regard, it is important to ask such questions as: Where does the insistence on representation originate and what are the objectives behind it? With respect to representation, do we invite the person, the community or the association, and what is our goal when we seek their participation? If we don’t know, we end up not making contact with any of them. Next, we must ask ourselves the question: do we want to enter into a cooperation process?

R. M. added that it is important to know why we want to cooperate with others and also why they seek us out. In reality what happens is that “people feel they are being used to a certain extent. The organization’s involvement is sought in terms of the implementation and success of a program, but working together – sharing ideas, know-how and different practices – is another matter.” In short, “the cooperation process begins with a fundamental question: ‘Why do we want to cooperate?’ It is only after this question is answered that we can determine the means to do so.” But she also posed a preliminary question, “Is this possible given how the entire social and community dynamic is structured?”

E.G. sees another important condition, that “both sides be accepting of critical examination of their own practices”, because, in her view, often when people gather together, they assume a defensive posture, demands are made, a power relationship is involved, and there is no real involvement. Thus, she wondered, “is cooperation only possible if we agree to see the darker side of each of the organizations?” M-C.B. agreed. However, she cautioned that this kind of questioning could call into question the entire structure of organizations and, at the same time, destabilize the whole network. E.G. reacted by saying that “if we want to get through a crisis, what is needed is leadership that is somewhat visionary and open in nature. What is needed is someone who, faced with the instability of members, can bring us all to the coalition table, can see where we’re headed and harness the energy necessary for rebuilding things. Otherwise, failure is a certainty. Everything will come crashing down.”

Contrary to what E.G. said, R.M. does not see the question as centering around a power relationship. In her opinion, there is a need to share that is not recognized. “What is frustrating is the lack of recognition of the fact that others can present different ways of doing things because this causes problems, it upsets the structure, the person involved, the established system.” She is convinced that cooperation must be fundamentally based on exchanges.

According to K.D., the dominant concern is that of bringing ethnocultural communities, that are seen as lagging behind, to gain acceptance of their one way of doing things. “One group will learn and another will contribute. In this framework, exchanges are unbalanced. There really aren’t exchanges as such. Rather, the framework consists of one group getting other groups to adopt its approach.”

Lastly, the participants agreed on the importance of sensitization activities and dialogue concerning interculturalism in Quebec. But each person has a different perspective on the
subject. E.G. believes the three suggested activities must be considered as "underlying practices." She explained: "I would see the first two activities (concerning the communities' needs and the sociocultural movement in Quebec) as constituting an essential step. But I'm not sure that we can view the third activity (sensitization in terms of the intercultural approach) as a prerequisite to action. It is primarily when we are confronted with this reality that we are able to undertake this action." E.G. believes that the intercultural approach constantly plays a role in any cooperative initiative. In this sense, sensitization is not a prerequisite to concerted action but, rather, a requisite practice in our cooperative efforts.

R.M. thinks it is true that "ethnocultural organizations need to learn about the history of the socio-community movement in Quebec," but such learning must be reciprocal. She added that, in the course of activities, adjustments can be made with regard to sensitizing people to the intercultural approach, but first it is necessary to take the time to establish a dialogue.

M-C.B. sees sensitization sessions as being important in terms of resolving problems that arise during the cooperation process. "They would allow for mutual recognition and an understanding of the context that would allow all. All the participants could then to be positioned at the same level, and we would even learn things about the different social movements."

K. D. concluded by saying that "the intercultural approach is essential in community work." All the actors, including the ethnocultural communities, need to have a certain understanding of interculturalism. According to her, the belief that an immigrant does not require intercultural training is completely false. "She is a step ahead. She lives continually in an intercultural context. Being in an unknown environment, she experiences this confrontation in her daily existence. But as for being able to master what is going on within her and within his community in relation to how others portray his community, this is another matter. This is not mastered." In her opinion, this lack of intercultural training can result in prejudices, biased portrayals, and other, more problematic types of relations within the community.
IV

SUMMARY OF THE PLENARY MEETING BETWEEN THE THREE DISCUSSION GROUPS

At the conclusion of the focus group discussions, the participants in the three groups met for a day of collective reflection on their participation in this research-action. And to conclude this initiative, they were encouraged to propose concrete approaches for improving conditions with regard to participation in cooperation processes where there are representatives of communities of various origins.

During this day-long work session, the participants had the opportunity to expand upon the comments they made during the focus group meetings. They provided specific details about the cooperation process and proposed other ways of fostering intercultural cooperation. In addition to the participants’ summarizing their basic thinking on different issues, a number of new arguments were presented that merit attention.

Inadequate existing structure

The existing structure for cooperation at the community level does not address the requirements involved in intercultural cooperation. Some believe it must be completely revamped, while others think it has to be adapted to the needs inherent in intercultural cooperation. M.C. commented that it is also necessary to take into consideration the impact made by organized cooperation mechanisms and the monopolies that these can create. She therefore suggested that the existing structure be transformed so that it is accessible to all. “It is important to remember that it is also within this structure that the state’s evaluation mechanisms develop and it is these mechanisms that essentially control what is and is not tied to the state. Most of the participants think it is impossible to do away with this structure, but new ways of working within it must be sought.

Isolation within the community

One of the problems common to everyone in the area of community work, is isolation. The community groups must fight against this isolation and enable people from different environments and ethnocultural communities to participate, to express themselves and to put forward their ideas. In S.R.’s view, improving the possibilities for participation often requires the existence of a more or less organized structure. As he sees it, “community work is part of the state’s functions in the sense that, the society being a civil society, this work is a component of or movement within the state.” Furthermore, if it is the state that we wish to change, it is necessary to have ties, relations, exchanges with it. In this perspective, social transformations necessarily involve the question of power relationships and it is precisely this, in S.R.’s view, that ethnocultural groups often overlook. With regard to this idea, K.D. wondered, “Is the existence of a civil society possible without reference being made to the state?”

In the same vein, the participants believe it is essential to ask other fundamental questions such as: What is the purpose of cooperation? When we talk about cooperation, what are we aiming for? What type of cooperative effort do we wish to develop?

Five concerted-action models

During the plenary meeting the participants identified five possible cooperation models. Some already exist and others are possible choices for cooperative efforts to be utilized at the community level.
1- Cooperation with the state and with institutions. This form of cooperation is generally imposed by the state and adhered to by the institutions, which are determined by already-established orientations.

2- Cooperation among groups. Through such cooperation, the groups seek to enhance the solidarity that exists between them and thereby gain in strength and increase their capacity to intervene and to act. This cooperation process, understood in terms of solidarity between the groups, centers around specific issues and is often intended to respond to the political requirements of the state.

3- Cooperation wherein the community approaches the state or institutions. The community thereby seeks a collaborative approach to dealing with specific problems. This type of cooperation can demonstrate differences in mentality and different ways of doing things within the ethnocultural communities, and can lead the state to recognize the know-how of each community.

4- Cooperation without the involvement of the state. This form of cooperation, initiated by grassroots groups according to demands presented by the particular life environment, can serve as a true sociopolitical space. It does not depend on outside funding and does not develop in reaction to state policies. This kind of cooperation, which we can refer to as alternative cooperation, remains very marginal but appears to produce real social change.

5- Cooperation between communities. This form of cooperation is based on a process of mutual knowledge and recognition with regard to the knowledge and know-how that the different communities possess. The process enables the communities to work together in a more balanced way on joint projects. This form of cooperation calls for the communities to commit to an ongoing exchange between themselves.

Conditions favouring to cooperation

Ideas expressed during the focus groups were discussed briefly and from there the participants added a number of new conditions favourable to intercultural cooperation. These can be summarized as follows:

- It is necessary to establish ties between the different existing coalitions without necessarily creating a new structure.

- It is necessary to create macro and micro collective events that will bring members of the different communities together to discuss common problems. This is a matter of promoting “movements” within which all the communities can feel a real sense of involvement.

- It is necessary to use the existing autonomous cooperation spaces to address the intercultural question and generate a meaningful dialogue on this subject within the Montreal sociocommunity movement.

- It is necessary to seriously reflect upon the needs of the communities in order to determine the true place that the ethnocultural organizations and the communities themselves can occupy within the different cooperation spaces. It is also necessary to remain vigilant so as to ensure that the communities' specific needs and approaches are taken into account on a continuous basis. Indeed, the place accorded to the particular needs of ethnocultural communities by the coalitions will determine whether the communities decide to remain or leave.
It is necessary to call into question the current cooperation process in order to create openings for more active and enriching involvement in this type of work by all the parties concerned.
V

INTERPRETIVE READING

Situating the problematic

The frequent presence of diverse ethnocultural communities within coalitions currently represents a challenge with regard to the participation mechanisms utilized within the cooperation process. It is a challenge that involves the old-stock Québécois groups that often constitute the majority within coalitions. These groups can either take the steps necessary to ensure the expression of cultural diversity in the planning and development of concerted actions, or they can ignore the complexity of the intercultural dynamic and impose homogeneity with respect to practices, in keeping with the tradition of the majority.

This research-action on the subject of cooperation demonstrates that inequalities exist and there is discrimination in terms of relations between groups: certain groups have been excluded from the decisional process, even at the community level, owing to their cultural specificities.

To better understand the problematic regarding cultural pluralism and relations between cultures within the practical framework of cooperation, it is necessary to consider a new type of community involvement which address the dynamic of cooperation between community actors from different cultural horizons while respecting the participants’ equality.

This research-action demonstrates that the participants are mindful of the fact that the state establishes its role as that of a regular instigator at the base of the cooperation process. This process is becoming increasingly complex due to the growing diversity of the population and its needs. It is a process that until now has been neither able to resolve the tension that exists between francophones and anglophones nor the tension that exists between these groups and the other ethnocultural groups. The crisis in terms of intercultural relations is an ongoing one and results in increased social fragmentation, greater lack of understanding and more pronounced mutual prejudices, as well as polarization and antagonistic relations between the groups.

As for Montreal community groups, which are profoundly influenced by Canadian multicultural policies and interculturalism within Quebec society, they have always expressed their willingness to accept cultural differences. However, this willingness does not always ensure that ethnocultural groups are able to truly participate in the cooperation process.

For their part, the ethnocultural communities, despite their desire to participate, are not able to take their rightful place within these coalitions. The mere presence of these communities at the table does not, in itself, constitute an openness. It is necessary to find the means to ensure equitable participation of the various groups with respect to both the choice of subjects for discussion in the cooperation process and the search for solutions.

Axes of interpretation

It is understood that with regard to consideration of this problematic, opinions were strongly determined by one’s belonging to an old-stock Québécois group or to a Quebec group of some other origin. Thus, our interpretive analysis is divided into three parts. The first part concerns the analysis of opinions expressed by representatives of organizations and groups comprised mainly of old-stock Québécois: we delimit the representatives’ positioning with regard to pluralism in the cooperation process, as well as the particular work performed by the groups with respect to the defense of rights.
The second part of our analysis deals essentially with the ethnocultural and multicural groups' experience with regard to participating in coalitions, their positioning in relation to groups composed primarily of old-stock Québécois, and their posture with respect to the official discourse concerning the integration of immigrants into the host society.

The third part of the analysis deals with the ideas that stemmed from the participants' interaction. It includes a conclusion regarding this cooperative effort the goal of which was to lead participants to develop possible courses of action.

It should be emphasized that this categorization is not a matter of articulating generalities. Rather, it underlines the participants' positions and tendencies based on their belonging to a particular organization or community.

5.1 First axis: Old-stock community at the threshold of diversity

To begin with, it must be emphasized that the opposition to "host society" versus "immigrant communities" influences community organizations' thinking and the action they take. Even if it is a classification that stems from the institutional discourse, the community milieu is very influenced by this discourse. Furthermore, the belief that the host society is more advanced and the ethnocultural communities are more traditional in nature leads to unilateral interpretations of integration. Thus, organizations, the majority of which are made up of old-stock Québécois, cannot help themselves from acting as host groups. Their level of self-reflection and self-questioning regarding their relations with other communities therefore remains very fragmentary.

Owing to this fact, the old-stock Québécois community usually adopts a vague approach with respect to cultural diversity and the issues raised by intercultural relations. These groups have neither the time nor the funding to conduct sustained reflection on these subjects. Their priorities center around action. Reflection is often considered a luxury that the groups can only rarely allow themselves to engage in. At the same time as the state progressively offloads, the community centres, in their capacity as service organizations, rapidly become state subcontractors. These organizations thus find themselves increasingly limited in terms of their social function.

Overloaded with work, the majority of participants say that they have developed their way of thinking about cultural diversity and intercultural relations in the heat of action. Many organizations operate without any real autonomy and lose all sight of their mission, which could be that of seeking social alternatives, in the race against the clock that becomes, more and more, also a race for funds.

A feeling of powerlessness can also be seen among community actors with respect to cultural diversity. The immediate reaction to diversity is to find ways to bring about integration into the host society. It would appear that we are still at this initial stage. However, with regard to communities of diverse origins, old-stock Québécois organizations can assume a role that is different from the government's role, by not simply responding to the government's demands. These organizations in fact possess another type of power – the power to accord others their place, to establish different ties and to answer the needs of this population.

In summary, interculturalism has been dealt with only in the etymological sense, without understanding the dimensions of this concept that can transform ways of grasping various social issues. Moreover, the approach that organizations adopt with respect to cultural diversity depends, in large part, on the individuals who work on these questions; the
organizations they belong to do not, themselves, have a clear vision or explicit policy in this regard. Given the constant turnover in personnel, it is difficult to find organizations that have a solid, sustained position on the subject.

Another important factor that needs to be emphasized is each organization's isolation, which is a function of its aims and radically determines the limits of the reflective process. The little contact there is between groups from the diverse ethnocultural communities results in a mutual lack of knowledge and a tendency for each group to turn in on itself. During this research-action, we indeed observed that each participant from a particular group wished to, above all, demonstrate the specificity of his or her community organization. This tendency to be interested only in specific objectives may explain the sense of powerlessness that is felt within community groups in the face of society's growing cultural diversity.

It is clear that the ethnocultural communities' participation in the cooperation process is not always of great concern to old-stock community organizations. The members of these groups generally understand their role to be that of defender of people's rights with respect to government institutions and their policies. It is primarily for this reason that they wish to take part in the cooperation process, which is viewed as a means to solidifying their power with respect to negotiating with the decision-makers.

Presently, old-stock community groups function based on a method of operation that depends largely on the policies of government, which is thereby subtly controlling these groups' actions. In this regard, questions concerning the community sector's autonomy are included among the issues having to do with cooperation. These questions are being asked at a time when government is overseeing community actions through the funding of programs that, first and foremost, promote the implementation of its policies.

It appears that the current structure of the Quebec sociocommunity movement does not reflect the cultural pluralism of Quebec society. For this reason it is difficult – and for some, impossible – to work within this structure using an alternative approach. Addressing the cooperative-process structure in order to ensure equality among the different participants can be seen to constitute an innovative approach if the actors within the structure are also committed to such change.

It also appears that the basic principles established within coalitions do not always facilitate work with immigrant or ethnocultural organizations. Positions on this subject were divided. Even if many hesitated to completely relativize these principles, all the participants agreed on the need for groups to change their practices in order to make a place for the practices of immigrant or ethnocultural communities.

The emergence of a certain passivity within the traditional community sector should also be noted. Without the incitement – either positive or negative – of government, the community organizations continue to operate in their customary way, totally dependent on government funding. With few exceptions, they are less able to instigate action and the result is a lack of motivation. This explains why there is often also a lack of continuity in their projects. Greater usage of the cooperation mechanism could give the communities another chance to develop their own distinct discourse; it would allow them to structure their thinking regarding societal problems and to perform their sociopolitical function in an integral and autonomous fashion.

Unfortunately, it seems that government controls community actors' level of knowledge through criteria linked to funding. It is because of the state's supervision of funded projects that the communities' independence lessens and their ideology becomes impoverished. Thus, the positioning of the different actors in relation to the decision-makers
depends, in general, on their degree of dependence and also on the importance of institutional directives in the development of their action.

Cooperating – working together – means listening in order to be able to act together and to make decisions after a process of reflection. Therefore, all the parties at the table must have the opportunity to present, in an atmosphere of total equality, their view of the problems involved and their approach to solving these problems. The absence of in-depth treatment of the intercultural question in terms of the cooperation process appears to be primarily attributable to work overload. Community actors lack the necessary economic and intellectual support as they work with the cultural communities to meet the challenge that the communities represent in the general context of Quebec society.

Obviously, the problem concerning cultural differences arises, but the organizations are so caught up in the institutionalized rhythm of community life that this awareness still does not lead to significant practical responses, other than in certain exceptional cases as in the case of the Quebec federation promoting women’s security. Funding cutbacks in recent years have reduced the scope of the organizations’ activities in terms of alternative approaches to society’s problems. The organizations become state subcontractors.

The representatives of the so-called old-stock Québécois community have socioeconomic concerns tied primarily to the question of solving the problems of the general population; they do not concentrate on the issue of cultural specificity. Thus, the Association of Women’s Centres admits to having failed in its efforts to attract women from ethnocultural communities. The association also acknowledges that prejudices exist in this milieu. It is important to add that Quebec actors who work towards the integration of the immigrant communities are often unaware of the particular characteristics of these communities. Self-questioning about the place of interculturalism in the cooperation process leads to self-questioning about intercultural practices in Quebec society in general.

Within certain coalitions there is the tendency to operate in typical North American fashion (i.e. meetings are held, there is the decisional process, etc.). Yet it is precisely within such coalitions that it is necessary to adapt current practices to meet the demands of pluralism and to agree to work differently. It is necessary to raise questions of cultural pluralism and interculturalism and to include these in the agenda regarding day-to-day policies of cooperation. It is essential also, to create sufficient space for reflection. On this issue specifically, in order to make intercultural cooperation possible generally, the parties must conduct profound self-examination and agree to cast a critical eye on their own practices. It is important also to deconstruct prejudices that impede change in the cooperation process by endeavouring to be less defensive and to make fewer demands.

Generally speaking, the ethnocultural organizations are called upon to take part in the cooperation process to facilitate the implementation or the success of a given program. They are often left to the side during the preliminary study of the specific issues: the particular know-how that these communities can bring to society is not recognized. In order for intercultural cooperation to be possible, what is first needed is reciprocal recognition of different practices.

5.2 Second axis: A perspective from the ethnocultural communities on concerted-action

It can be stated at the start that the actions of the ethnocultural organizations are usually strongly dictated by the needs of their community, particularly those of newly arrived immigrants. These organizations must first deal with post-migratory phenomena such as the
safeguarding of their culture and their community, the sense of loss of identity, and socioeconomic integration in the workplace and in the host society.

Clearly, ethnocultural organizations find themselves dependent upon government policies, especially those pertaining to the integration of immigrants: often it is thanks to government programs that they are able to develop intercultural activities. Although the organizations are confronted with cultural adjustments on a daily basis, their principal concern remains offering basic services to their community. It is owing to this sometimes ambiguous relationship with the institutions that the need arises to defend people’s rights and to devise ways to gain recognition for the way of life, knowledge and know-how of the immigrant or ethnocultural communities.

These communities experience, on a more or less acute scale, culture shock that leads them to resist both assimilation and the isolation of their community. In this context, for these groups the cooperation process constitutes a contradictory force: on the one hand, it is a process that allows them to escape isolation; on the other hand, their knowledge and know-how are often neither taken into consideration in the reflection phase nor the decisional phase of the process. Ethnocultural organizations also quickly learn that often they are called to participate in coalitions at the insistence of the institutions that fund the cooperation process. This engenders a malaise within the ethnocultural organizations resulting from the fact that they are regularly summoned to take part in the cooperation process. It should also be noted that these organizations are often excluded even before the process begins, in that they are completely unaware of what they need to know beforehand in order for there to be equitable participation: they do not have sufficient knowledge about the subject to be discussed or about the relevant preliminary studies.

Since the ethnocultural organizations are more affected by isolation, to some extent they conceptualize the cooperation process differently than do old-stock Québécois organizations. As the ethnocultural organizations see it, the process should above all enable the different communities to come into contact with one another, to learn about each other and exchange points of view. For them, sitting down at a table means offering their different points of view for the good of society; they wish to be part of public life and they want to be open to society in order to understand it. They do not believe that the cooperation process should be conceived as primarily a means of presenting demands. It should be above all a space for authentic exchanges between diverse communities; it must promote intercultural dialogue on the major social issues.

In the cooperation process, ethnocultural groups also learn that, even though their relationship with the host society is the greatest challenge they face, there are other communities in the picture as well. They are thus not alone in being pushed to the side and experiencing difficulty in making their voice heard. Given this, it is not surprising that the ethnocultural organizations present within a coalition end up banding together: they share the feeling of being different and experience the same kind of exclusion from the societal debate of which they are also a part. This explains the fact that in the cooperation process, there is a difference in the nature of the relationships that develop between the ethnocultural organizations themselves and the relationships that develop between them and old-stock Québécois organizations. In general, when they deal with old-stock Québécois organizations, a spirit of solidarity tends to develop between these ethnocultural groups. In the cooperation process, the ethnocultural groups feel more at ease when they are accepted, although they are different, and when it is recognized that each community has its own ways of solving social problems.

Multicultural organizations such as the Coalition for Refugees have brought the debate surrounding cultural diversity to the public stage. They attest to the fact that at the grassroots
and local levels, the cultural diversity problematic is very much present. In this regard, it is important also not to overlook all the intercultural work that is done outside the community movement. The cooperation process within the community is underdeveloped because its full potential as a forum for dialogue between different communities sharing the same region or as a forum for becoming aware of and creating alternative approaches to social problems has not yet been fully explored.

Generally speaking, the ethnocultural communities maintain an attitude of resistance in the face of government impositions that impact their practices and their values. Obviously, these communities' identity is often called into question by the host society's majority; yet, the very fact that their members have come from other countries means that the communities are more open to listening to other communities and to experiencing change. In this respect, intercultural relationships are not subject to majority-minority criteria. There exists a rich diversity in terms of worldviews and this richness must be safeguarded, nourished and shared.

It is also important to recognize that, in Quebec, there sometimes exists a protectionist vision concerning ethnocultural communities. It is a certainty, also, that the various ethnocultural groups often feel they constitute a minority: within the cooperation process they can become even more aware of their differences and of the limits these differences entail. It is in this respect that certain groups feel the need to create alliances and movements in order to ensure the survival of the services that the immigrant or ethnocultural communities require.

It is a fact that the ethnocultural organizations have not often engaged in profound reflection upon the question of identity. Yet this question is of fundamental importance to them: either they preserve their culture and their own values or they adopt the values of the host society. There is no clear middle ground. The period of transition from one culture to another has yet to be explored in terms of the question of a permanent identity.

A last aspect of the overall issue worthy of attention is the fact that, most often, specifying that French is to be the working language within coalitions has also constituted a determining exclusionary factor. The fact that the vast majority of workers in the community sector are francophones has also caused communication problems. The cooperation process serves as a space for dialogue and discussion wherein language plays a key role. The presence within coalitions of people who have not mastered French poses a problem. An environment must be created that will allow for this difficulty to be overcome. It is important to take the time necessary so that all participants can take part in the process and be heard equally. In this way, any unintentional discrimination can be avoided. In our discussion groups, the case of one participant clearly showed the significance of language barriers: she expressed her opinions in English using intonations particular to her country of origin. Given the unequal level of bilingualism among the participants, it was not easy for the woman to make herself understood by francophones from here or elsewhere.

5.3 Third axis: Towards intercultural cooperation

During this focus-group discussion experience, in which we were both instigators and witnesses, it should be noted first of all that during the meetings, the participating representatives of various organizations came to feel that they formed a cooperative group dealing with intercultural issues. It would seem that their gathering together and taking part in these meetings filled an existing need: the need to meet in a non-institutional space with the single goal of conducting self-reflection and reflecting upon the relationships between them.

Another aspect of the group experience that should be underlined is the willingness of all the participants to be spontaneously open with the other group members, the richness of the opinions expressed, and the intensity of the ties established during the meetings.
Considering the different fields of activity in which the participating community organizations are engaged, their diverse involvement at the regional and local levels, their specific areas of expertise, their different work approaches and the nature of their previous relationships, this experience serves as an example of highly meaningful dialogue, mutual learning and recognition, and the expression and creation of renewed ties that promote communication and intercultural cooperation.

The meetings served as a way for the organizations to step outside their particular environment and encounter other perspectives, other milieus, other cultures and other methods of functioning. They externalized their lack of knowledge and their fears. Often, also, they demonstrated their lack of agreement with and even opposition to certain ideas. But essentially together they learned a little more about their respective areas of work, the difficulties they face and their expectations. This research-action provides us with a portrait of the different community organizations’ current situation. This portrait reveals a continuing multiplication of organizations, with no real cohesion and no reflective analyses that would enable them to respond to existing sociopolitical challenges.

This experience constituted the expression of not only a pluralism of cultures but also a pluralism of ideas. It is precisely the focus on this pluralism that allowed for the clarification of the cooperative process. Various forms of cooperation were analyzed by the participants, who examined their activities and their opinions with the goal of proposing measures to bring about intercultural cooperation. Even though they were at times astonished by the multiplicity of cultures within society, having to a large degree failed to take note of this phenomenon, they demonstrated their willingness to make the necessary changes in order to improve their intercultural practices.

Meanwhile, relations with the state take various forms: the old-stock Québécois or ethnocultural community groups or federations whose work consists of making demands and defending rights have more of an oppositional relationship with the state. For their part, the other organizations, even if their relations with the institutions are sometimes strained, generally maintain their role of service dispensers and thereby respond to the sociocultural needs of their respective communities. Thus, through this dialoguing experience, they have become more aware both of their role as members of a civil society within the state structure and of the urgency of establishing ties between the communities and the funding institutions. Analyzing the cooperation process from the perspective of pluralism has led community organizations to consider new relationships with the state and to refuse to act as simple subcontractors stripped of their autonomy with regard to the management of projects. In addition, they have come to see the need to reappropriate and regenerate their sociopolitical spaces outside the bounds of the state.

The representatives of the groups and a few organizations that are more involved in defending the rights of the communities have indicated they are prepared to persevere in the group democratic process in order to form alliances. This persistence is seen as necessary despite the difficulties that minorities encounter when they attempt to make themselves heard.

The participants also favour the creation of a neutral space that would lend itself to reflection and in which it would be possible to establish relationships other than power relationships – a space that would allow for horizontal cooperation between the community organizations, a space within which it would be possible to innovate, and a space within which the ethnocultural communities could have their own specific knowledge and know-how recognized.

The question behind the dialogue that took place was this: if we wish to cooperate, what type of cooperation should we develop? Despite the questioning of the validity of the
cooperative process, this activity demonstrated its potential as a creator of solidarity within the milieu. The participants support the idea that a plurality of know-how facilitates conflict resolution. Towards this end, it is important to sensitize and train actors within the community with respect to interculturalism. This cooperation process should also make it possible to relativize the power of decision-makers of all kinds and the place that money occupies in project development within their respective organizations and within coalitions.

In summary, if, despite reforms, the present cooperation process remains ineffective in terms of serving as a space for demonstrating the pluralism of society, new spaces must be found – spaces in which the different actors can themselves define the criteria of their participation and the participants can be in charge of their time and express their interests as they see fit, without the pressure of institutional obligations. IIM is considered by the participants to be a meeting place for reflection in this regard.
CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

At first glance, cooperation within the community milieu, seen in a pluralist perspective, remains a practice that is very much dependent upon the decisional power of the old-stock Québécois majority. Cooperation remains an ideal in the sense that it encourages the equitable participation of communities of diverse origins. It constitutes an interculturally underdeveloped space within which it is very difficult to express cultural diversity. At the same time, state participation in the cooperative process in regards to managing society’s cultural diversity, although based on pragmatic criteria, remains highly deficient with respect to theoretical and practical orientations.

Therefore, in order to fully understand the intercultural dimension of cooperation within the framework of community work, it is necessary to consider a new type of relationship between the different communities: horizontal cooperation, which is independent of state and academic interference, could enable the ethnocultural communities to participate fully in the cooperative process.

Analysis of the focus group discussions also demonstrates that old-stock Québécois groups have adopted a position of openness with regard to cultural diversity and are interested in making a place for other communities. However, the structure within which community organizations and groups operates does not truly accommodate pluralism. This structure was conceived according to a traditional way of functioning in which cultural diversity is an unrecognized phenomenon.

Even if, theoretically, these organizations tolerate and sometimes insist upon respect being shown for cultural pluralism in the cooperative process, they do not succeed in expressing this in practice. The strategies applied by these organizations with the intention of encouraging the participation of the cultural communities have been inefficiently developed because the participation of ethnocultural organizations within coalitions has often been limited to a strictly physical presence: without drawing upon their own particular know-how.

This study shows that the community sector has difficulty adapting to pluralism within society. It continues to have trouble moving away from a homogeneous vision of society and then taking the appropriate steps. If true democratization is sought, then all peoples and groups that make up society must adapt to the reality of pluralism. The concept of cooperation should be reconstructed by establishing new relationships between the different organizations summoned to participate in the cooperative process.

The conceptual construction of the cooperative process that the participants developed in the course of this project points out the lack of cohesion within the community in this regard. Each group has its own way of understanding the cooperative process and of understanding its relationship with other people in this process. Approaching the question of cooperation from an intercultural point of view can fundamentally contribute to the way cooperation is conceptualized. Within this perspective, the old-stock Québécois community takes its place alongside the other communities. Thus, there can be mutual recognition of the right of all communities to exist and to express themselves. Of course, the problem of cultural diversity will remain complex and unresolved.

The intercultural approach provides us with a new way of understanding the dynamic of the cooperative process and the relationships that develop therein. This approach also requires making a critical judgment about the value of different languages and the specific know-how that must be recognized during the cooperative process. We are in favour of a process that incorporates dialogue, interaction and the development of ideas.
An intercultural cooperative process at the community level must be undertaken in order to develop a strong, independent way of thinking that allows for the development of alternatives for the future of society and the peoples that make up society. Henceforth, the central resulting question that must be answered is whether this form of cooperation, which validates the participation of diverse cultures, is indeed achievable. This line of questioning has been at the heart of this research-action project.
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