

BRIEF

Royalmount: A mega project representative of a gutsy city

Presented to the Agglomération de Montréal

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January 11, 2019

I am Andy Nulman, proud supporter of the Royalmount project. I am the co-founder of the Just for Laughs festival, the founder of gaming platform *Play the Future*, and I was involved in Montreal's 375th Anniversary Celebrations. Today, I am speaking on behalf of myself, the Montrealer. On December 19, I presented my perspective on the project, in person, to Members of the Commission. To further my support, and perhaps to increase your understanding of the points I raised at that time, I will outline in more details the ideas I touched upon during my presentation.

The Mega-Project Reaction Flow

A simple reflection on the development of Montreal's mega projects over the years will show that the reactions we are witnessing for Royalmount are just normal. I do not think that there was ever a mega project that just went ahead without any opposition. I listed the revitalization of the Lachine Canal area, Mont-Tremblant, the New York High Line, but there are so many more projects, just in Montreal. To better understand the phenomenon, here is the typical chain of reactions that can typically be expected for any mega project (we are currently at Stage 2):

| | Reaction | Length | Period |
|---------|---|--------|--|
| Stage 1 | Euphoria following the initial announcement for the project | Short | Prior to the project's implementation |
| Stage 2 | Resistance (detractors) | Long | Prior to the project's implementation |
| Stage 3 | Resigned acceptance | Short | Following the project's implementation |
| Stage 4 | Embracing the project and bragging about it | Long | Following the project's implementation |

The Psychology Behind Some Typical Reactions

There is widespread knowledge that resistance is a typical reaction to change. I think that it would also be relevant to keep in mind that psychology plays an important role when there is change, newness, conflicting views and decision-making involved. If we take the concept of cognitive dissonance for instance, this is what is happening now as decision-makers and Montrealers are weighing the pros and cons of the project. We might think that some aspects of the project are great, but that they might have a negative impact on others. The good news is that people have a tendency to reduce any cognitive dissonance by justifying a decision, and they are likely to do so when they see how grand and real the Royalmount project is once it goes ahead. In other words, we can expect that when people will have the Royalmount project in their city they will start bragging about any positive impact it may have.

There's also another interesting concept called the confirmation bias. It is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms one's pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses. So as the media emphasizes problems that don't actually fall under the promoter's responsibilities (such as social housing and traffic management), the more challenging it will be to change their perspective, despite Carbonleo's flexibility and willingness to do everything it can to optimize (through private investment) the aspects of the project that are related to said problematic areas. In other words, having a positive attitude towards the project can go a long way.

And finally, there is one bias that can have a positive effect on Royalmount. The self-serving bias implies that people tend to attribute positive events to their own character but attribute negative events to external factors. In the case of Royalmount, they are likely going to attribute the success of the project to it having benefitted from the support or blessing of Montreal (administration and residents). On the other hand, they might blame Carbonleo for any perceived negative impact.

In Conclusion

Royalmount is a gutsy project, to say the least. But this is part of the reason why it attracts the top international players in the game, such as the gathering of great minds from so many different fields of expertise during C2-Mtl. The project also has some major benefits, that should not be undermined:

- No use of public money
- International status
- Revitalizes an obsolete industrial sector
- Its vision is one to counterbalance e-commerce
- Provides a venue for resident-shows (which currently does not really exist in Montreal)

Royalmount is far from being “just another mall”, and it is definitely not a “catastrophy”, as some detractors have said. Far from it. I, too, can find negative aspects to anything. The example I gave in December was a cure for cancer. I could tell you that we have to think about overpopulation, but I could change my perspective as say that it gives hope and changes lives. Attitude changes everything but also can motivate any progress to move forward as a city.