



# **MONTREAL, MY CITY, MY CHOICE?**

**Opinion regarding the sense of belonging of the young**

**Synthesis**

*Will the young choose to stay or leave Montreal?*

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Of late, there has been much talk about the rivalry between the City of Montreal, its suburbs and adjoining towns, and other cities throughout Quebec in terms of choice of residence.

We increasingly see Montrealers leaving their city to take up residence in other municipalities, because these locations tend to offer a better quality of life.

This situation is particularly noticed among young families.

**How do young people view this phenomenon,  
and how do they perceive their city?**

## **THE SENSE OF TERRITORIAL BELONGING OF YOUNG MONTREALERS: WHAT AND WHY?**

As young Montrealers exhibit a constantly diminishing sense of belonging in relation to their age, the *Enjeux sociaux du Conseil jeunesse de Montréal* (CjM) Committee set out to discover the reasons that would explain this phenomenon. The question regarding territorial sense of belonging well deserves to be analyzed, as major urban centres find themselves in a competitive environment in terms of choice of residency.

The present opinion will therefore undertake to bring elements of comprehension and answers to the problem of the sagging sense of territorial belonging of the young of 12 to 30 years of age from a socio-cultural as well as an economic viewpoint. It presents the state of the current situation, an analysis of the results based on gender differences, exemplary initiatives, as well as identifying possible plans of action to promote the development of a greater sense of territorial belonging in the younger generation.

Our study was based on the results of an opinion poll and of sessions of public consultation of young people between the ages of 12 and 30, a first in the history of municipal public consultation. Nearly 700 young people were consulted by way of a survey, and some one hundred more met in person during three different sessions. We also called upon the expertise of stakeholders, and launched an innovative event to promote the sense of civic pride and belonging: Young Montrealers' Day.

## THE REALITIES OF YOUNG MONTREALERS

The overall portrait of young Montrealers is characterized by:

- **A visible spatial distribution.** The young tend to be concentrated in various locations according to certain factors.
  - Those of 14 years of age or younger live predominantly in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the City. They are also present in specific sectors with a particularly high density of immigrant population.
  - Those between 15 and 24 are found mainly in the central neighbourhoods.
  - Those of 25 years of age or older are not concentrated in any particular area of Montreal.
- **A wide socio-economic and cultural diversity.** Amongst the young in Montreal we see school children, students, workers, drop-outs, First-Nations, immigrants, and others from various cultural communities. Their realities are as diverse as young Montrealers are themselves; some live difficult economic situations, a feeling of exclusion, precarious and marginalized living conditions, etc.
- From this diversity have emerged various concerns linked to the development of a sense of territorial belonging.
  - *Economic issues* that concern predominantly those young people living in precarious situations. Housing, education and employment constitute the prerequisite conditions to the development of a sense of territorial belonging. These issues represent basic rights that we must respect, and a need to survive that we must address. Consequently,
    - Young Montrealers, especially young families, tend to migrate to the regions because of the high cost of housing and high price of real estate. This directly impacts their degree of attachment to Montreal.
    - Economically distressed neighbourhoods are often home to the less educated members of our society. This lower level, or lack, of education constitutes a hurdle that reduces the number of opportunities to integrate the job market and which, in turn, makes many young people in this situation question their sense of belonging to Montreal. In the same way, the drop-out rate is another sign of the lesser sense of belonging that inhabits certain young people, in this case, to the world of education that constitutes one of the major sub-groups of territorial belonging.
    - Young people face situations of high unemployment, as well as the current norm of atypical employment.
  - *Socio-cultural issues* that primarily concern young, single-parent families, young immigrants, and young people living on the streets:

- Young Montrealers face problems linked to the disintegration of the family and identity crises accentuated by their precarious living conditions. In this regard, young single-parent families represent the highest proportion as compared to other types of households, that is to say, 28% live below the low income (poverty) line (*Institut de la statistique du Québec*, 2003).
- Regardless of their country of origin, an important proportion (88.3 %) of young immigrants to Quebec resides in Montreal (*Secrétariat à la Jeunesse*, 2001). This important population flux can create difficulties on the level of socio-cultural integration, such as adapting to a new environment, access to services, employment, language, this last constituting an essential element to the development of a feeling of territorial belonging:
  - Despite having attained a higher level of education, a proportionally greater number of young immigrants are unemployed (*Fondation du Grand Montréal*, 2006).
  - Whether alone (often the case with young refugees) or living with family members, young immigrants can sometimes experience feelings of isolation, having, in certain cases, mastered neither of the two official languages.
- Homelessness, drug-addiction, street prostitution, and joining street gangs are all socio-urban phenomena associated with numerous young Montrealers. In addition to the lack of resources available to satisfy their basic needs, these young people suffer from behavioural problems linked to marginalization and to the deterioration of their physical and psychological health.

It is in light of the realities of young Montrealers, more specifically, in light of their needs and preoccupations, that the CjM analysed the results of the survey.

## **The Opinion of Young Montrealers**

The results obtained by way of the survey and public consultations allow us to make the following observations: even though the young people we consulted identify with their city, their attachment to Montreal remains tentative, particularly that of young people between 18 and 30 years of age. This tentativeness seems even greater in regard to the neighbourhood, i.e., in regard to the very environment in which they live and evolve. By comparing the issues listed above to the diminishing sense of belonging revealed by the survey and public consultations, it becomes clear that the city of Montreal already intervenes in various ways that contribute to the sense of territorial belonging. However, it remains that this intervention must be sustained, even bolstered.

The following elements highlight the key factors that help or hinder young people's development of a sense of territorial belonging.

### **The young are happy to live in Montreal and proud to be Montrealers**

- *Proud to live in Montreal.* Overall, more than 3/4 of all young people surveyed are proud to live in Montreal and qualify the City as pleasant and multi-cultural, specifically mentioning:
  - its cultural vitality;
  - its welcoming and festive quality;
  - the freedom of expression.

However, geography and place of birth enter into the equation as regards the sense of territorial belonging:

- The young between the ages of 12 and 17 relate more to life at the heart of the City in general than they do to neighbourhood life;
  - Native born Montrealers between the ages of 18 and 30 express a stronger attachment to their city than do those born elsewhere.
- *The way young Montrealers feel integrated to Montreal.* The development of a sentiment of belonging begins, in this regard, with the capacity of the milieu to satisfy the various fields of interest of the young. We observed that this was indeed the case with most of the young (particularly the 12 to 17 age group), but for the 18 to 30 group, the results indicate that the suburbs or regions offer better living conditions:
    - only 1/3 definitely intend to stay in Montreal;
    - while 1/4 intend to leave;
    - and 40% consider leaving.

### **Why do the young not feel a sense of belonging?**

The weight of the individual factors at play in the diminishing sense of belonging was considered in terms of the frequency of the answers provided. They are best summarized by:

- *The absence of recreational and leisure activities and special needs services.* The results indicate that the present services do not seem to satisfactorily address the interests of young people, particularly the girls, (for example: sports facilities and leagues, artistic infrastructures, supervised activities). Similarly, the lack of places to meet, to assemble and to socialize without necessarily involving organized activities was also mentioned, especially by those of the 18 to 30 age group.

We might also mention that those surveyed believe there is a need for *greater visibility of the services on offer*, as well as for sports, leisure and cultural infrastructures. The need for creating more interesting means of disseminating the information has become necessary. In the 18-30 age group, 43% claim to be ill-informed and 10% absolutely ignorant of the services the City has to offer.

- *The poor quality of the urban framework.* More specifically, young Montrealers refer to the issues of protection of the environment, cleanliness, and safety, of accessibility to affordable housing and property, to public transportation and meaningful employment. These aspects are of particular concern to young people between the ages of 18 and 30.
- *The lack of access to education,* of support for young people in trouble, as well as problems of cohabitation with certain elements (groups) within the general population, the role of parents in developing a sense of belonging, and the lack of young people in the political arena.

Some factors, of an economic order, can be seen primarily from a perspective of individual need. These are housing, education, employment and transportation. These constitute a prerequisite to the development of young Montrealers' sense of territorial belonging. The other factors, of a more socio-cultural order, can be seen as stemming from a need for harmonious, relational exchanges with the community, as well as better quality of life. These last strongly contribute to the development of the sense of territorial belonging.

### **What the City can do**

Overall, taking into consideration the realities as well as the perceptions of young people on the subject of territorial belonging, Montreal must strive to create conditions favourable to retaining young people in its midst. Failing to do so could see the City become an ageing metropolis or a temporary stop, a mere passage on the road of life of young people. The City's ability to efficiently conduct social and territorial integration of its young citizens will make all the difference.

In this instance, special attention must be given to young adults, as they are more susceptible to passing on to future generations their sense of territorial belonging or lack thereof. And so, for an important number, those not born or not having grown up in Montreal, this feeling is to be developed rather than reinforced.

To this end, the CjM presents the following recommendations in order to attain a higher and more sustained sense of territorial belonging within young Montrealers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*R1. That the City of Montreal develop a policy for the young with consideration given to the preoccupations of the young regarding each of the main axes of intervention.*

*R2. Housing*

- R2.1.** To reinforce and ensure the continuance of programs such as *AccèsLogis* and *Logement abordable Québec* (affordable housing)
- R2.2.** To consider the needs of both young families and young people in general in its programs on housing and access to property
- R2.3.** To develop and maintain community support for lodging for young people living on the streets or experiencing particular difficulties
- R2.4.** To support innovative real estate development projects such *Benny Farm*

*R3. Education and Employment*

- R3.1.** To continue with initiatives in support of education and school-to-work transition, such as paid internships, the *Classe affaires* project, *Opération Retour à l'école*, and reinforce the equal opportunity in City employment, specifically in hiring young people, women, and people from cultural communities
- R3.2.** To establish links and agreements with schools to organize joint study programs of internships at the municipal level
- R3.3.** To increase support for projects of community intervention for social and professional insertion, as well as for scholastic perseverance and reinsertion

*R4. Transportation*

**In line with the CjM position on active public transportation:**

- R4.1.** To improve access to public transportation for the greater Montreal area
- R4.2.** To ensure a reasonable fare for public transportation services provided by the STM

*R5. Environment*

- R5.1.** To improve its citizens' quality of life by way of strategies and, more specifically, urban planning, the protection and enhancement of natural settings and existing transportation, etc.
- R5.2.** In line with the CjM position on water and green roofs:
  - R5.2.1.** To establish a policy regarding green roof systems in Montreal
  - R5.2.2.** To build and renovate municipal buildings in accordance to "green" standards

*R6. Cleanliness*

- R6.1.** To continue with the interventions of the *Opération MontréalNet* (CleanMontrealOperation) Clean Brigades in view of the results thus far obtained and the possibility of employment it provides students.

*R7. Sports, leisure, culture and meeting places*

- R7.1. Reinforce the actions of the milieu by integrating the young into the experimentation of pertinent activities and projects in an atmosphere of respect.**
- R7.2.** To consult the young in such a way as to provide services in the fields of sports, leisure, and culture adapted to their tastes and availability
- R7.3.** To offer more sports and leisure activities that address the needs of young people of 18 to 30 years of age.
- R7.4.** To adapt a style of managing activities for 18 to 30-year olds, such as offering:
  - appropriate courses to offset the lack of regularity in the schedule of young people
  - intensive two-day training sessions rather than the kind given over a number of weeks
  - ten days annually to be taken entirely at the participant's leisure

<i>R8. Community and intergenerational exchanges</i>
<p><b>R8.1.</b> Between family members (this forms one of the bases for the development of a feeling of belonging):</p> <p><b>R8.1.1.</b> To develop activities addressing all members of the family, more specifically, of immigrant families who have a stronger sense of family</p> <p><b>R8.1.2.</b> To develop motivating activities for all members of Quebec-born families whose family ties, traditionally, are somewhat weaker</p> <p><b>R8.2.</b> Between citizens; between the municipal administration and citizens:</p> <p><b>R8.2.1.</b> To organize events (such as welcoming events for new arrivals, street festivals, neighbourhood parties, Citizens' Day – as is done in Saint-Léonard) by borough.</p> <p><b>R8.2.2.</b> To organize activities that the City can launch and in which it can be a partner, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an event welcoming new arrivals</li> <li>• neighbourhood tours with young residents serving as guides and offered to people from other neighbourhoods</li> <li>• borough festivals (as seen on Radio-Canada's television show <i>La petite séduction</i>)</li> <li>• inter-neighbourhood and intergenerational sports or cultural events that introduce the young to the services offered by the City (ex.: <i>La journée des jeunes Montréalais</i> organized by the CjM)</li> </ul>
<i>R9. Dissemination of information</i>
<p><b>R9.1.</b> At the level of the boroughs, by enhancing the visibility of services, programs, and equipment offered the young. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• during street happenings (sidewalk sales, open-houses, etc)</li> <li>• by promoting the development of organizations and structures of "liaison" such as <i>Plein Milieu</i>, a community organization located on the Plateau-Mont-Royal</li> </ul> <p><b>R9.2.</b> At the City level,</p> <p><b>R9.2.1.</b> by the integration into the <i>e-cité/311Project</i> of an area dedicated to youth (services linked to activities of sports, culture, leisure, employment programs, offers of lodgings, etc.).</p> <p><b>R9.2.2.</b> by promoting with young people the Access Montreal card, which should better take into account their interests</p> <p><b>R9.2.3.</b> by making available assistance and coaching services provided by the City to help young people in their search for affordable lodgings. This service could centralize information regarding existing resources in the field.</p>
<i>R10. Citizen involvement</i>
<p><b>R10.1.</b> To develop opportunities for greater citizen involvement and support the initiatives and projects of the young in the boroughs (ex.: the Lachine Borough Evening of Tribute to Volunteers)</p> <p><b>R10.2.</b> To organize annual youth consultations by borough on the subject of neighbourhood development with follow-up of the concrete actions taken</p> <p><b>R10.3.</b> To publicize to youths the various tools of participative governance the City has on offer</p> <p><b>R10.4.</b> To create a Youth Council for each borough, such as the <i>Jeune Conseil de Montréal</i></p> <p><b>R10.5.</b> To establish close links for open exchanges and discussions between youths and elected municipal officials, such as the <i>Jeunesse enjeu Montréal [JEM]</i> Project of the <i>Mise au jeu</i> organization.</p>

## **WHAT WE MUST ALL REMEMBER ...**

In the wake of numerous situations that well describe the realities of young Montrealers in terms of counseling and living conditions, it appears that the development of a sense of territorial belonging depends mainly on the weight the City throws behind its interventions and actions in regard to:

- the recognition of and consideration given to the diversity of Montreal youths and the specifics of the environment in which they evolve;
- the development of means adapted to the needs and preoccupations regarding employment, housing, places to gather and socialize, leisure, etc.;
- the focus on improving the quality of life in the city;
- the implementation of innovative initiatives, looking to the experiences of others at various levels: local, regional, even international.

Thus does the pride and sense of belonging of young Montrealers grow when the City also acts to promote their integration onto the municipal scene, most notably by way of:

- opportunities to meet;
- exchanges with political and community players;
- the sharing of resources;
- the acquisition and transfer of knowledge;
- the participation in decisional processes on matters that concern them.

This opinion paper by the CjM highlights the importance of studying the perceptions of young Montrealers of the environment in which they live in order to better understand the place their sense of belonging occupies in the dynamics of a territory like Montreal on the cultural, social and economic levels. The sense of territorial belonging of Montreal's youths ensures urban return and, consequently, contributes to the continuance of the City's influence and vitality. Its reinforcement is important to each and every one of us.