



# Opinion Paper on the use of vacant space in Montréal: a youth perspective



This Opinion Paper was developed during 2016 and 2017, i.e., the thirteenth and fourteenth years that the Conseil jeunesse de Montréal was in existence. It was adopted by its members on June 20, 2017.

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The Conseil jeunesse de Montréal (CjM) is an advisory committee created in February 2003 by the Montréal municipal administration. Its goal is to better take into account the concerns of Montrealers aged between 12 and 30 and to invite them to take part in decisions that affect them.

Composed of fifteen members representing the geographic, linguistic, cultural and social diversity of Montréal's young people, its mandate is to regularly advise the mayor and the Executive Committee on all questions relative to youth and to ensure that young people's concerns are taken into account in decisions by the municipal administration.

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# Opinion Paper on the use of vacant space in Montréal: a youth perspective

*In this document, Ville de Montréal, the official name of the governmental entity,  
is synonymous with the Montréal municipal administration.*

*First of all, everything related to the question of abandoned buildings seems to be marked top secret, or, at the very least, evokes some discomfort. Nothing is clear on the matter of vacant property. The opinions expressed with regard to this question go from one extreme to the other. Some people see a sign of our economy's strength and vitality, which appears as a series of changes and transformation in the urban fabric. In contrast, others consider this a tangible example and obvious manifestation of the impoverishment of an urban economy that is adapting poorly. Still others, of more moderate opinion, claim that it is a "necessary evil" and that no major city can avoid this scourge. For them, a city rebuilds and evolves on its existing foundations. Not to mention on its ashes.<sup>1</sup>*

# Preamble

This Opinion Paper was developed in a context in which there is renewed interest in vacant lots and buildings. For the last several years, resident groups, associations and not-for-profit organizations have been created with the purpose of revitalizing and beautifying them, and occupying them during a temporary period. By showing an interest in these spaces, young Montrealers are reaffirming their sense of belonging to their city. By committing themselves to these spaces, youth are making a commitment to their city, participating with all their creativity.

In January 2016, at its twenty-ninth Montréal City Council simulation, participants at the Jeune Conseil de Montréal adopted a bylaw on vacant spaces. These eighty young people, aged 18 to 30, were already conscious of the question of vacant space as one of the city's pressing issues.<sup>2</sup>

The Ville de Montréal is not standing still and is coordinating its efforts with this collective will by “calling on the involvement and creativity” of its residents to ensure “the conservation and enhancement of Montréal's heritage.”<sup>3</sup> The major consultation effort led by the Division du patrimoine through its *Entretiens d'avril* in spring 2016, the international *Symposium Montréal transitoire* in January 2017 and the presentation of the 2017–2022 draft heritage action plan in February reaffirm the municipal commitment to making vacant buildings one of the major issues of the Action Plan, which is to be adopted shortly.<sup>4</sup>

The Conseil jeunesse de Montréal developed this Opinion Paper as part of the collective movement to find solutions to provide an appropriate response to the vacancy problem. First, this Opinion Paper explains the context of the problem, presents the challenges and potential leverage actions and describes inspiring initiatives. It then presents three priority avenues for intervention and sixteen recommendations to the municipal administration. The goal is to encourage the transitional occupancy of vacant buildings and spaces with a view to improving quality of life and preserving heritage districts. We hope these ideas can find a place in the development of the desired collective intelligence.

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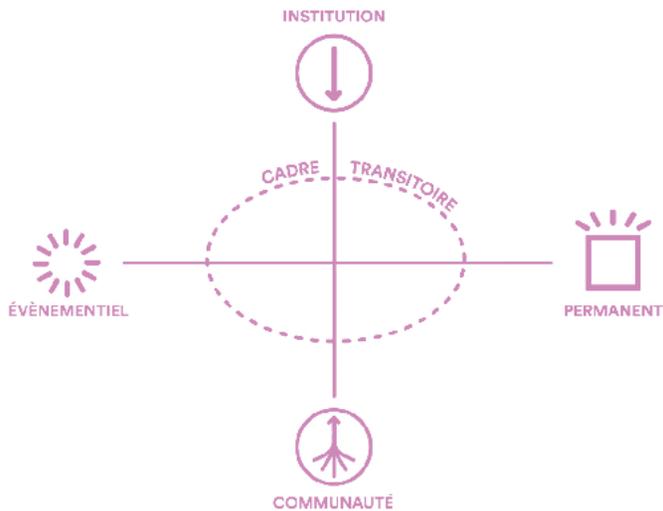
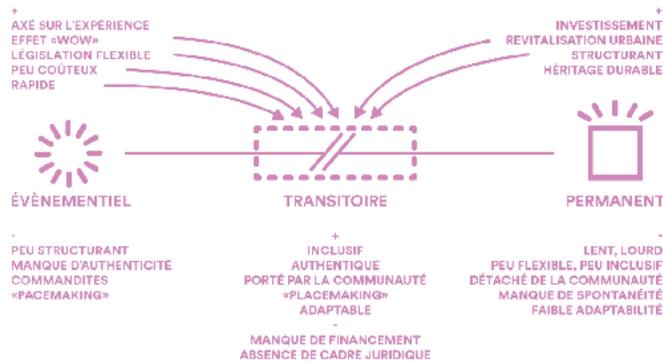
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# Preface

**JÉRÔME GLAD** Cofounder of La Pépinière

**Opinion Paper on the use of vacant  
space in Montréal: a youth perspective**



The intersection of events, transitory and permanent initiatives

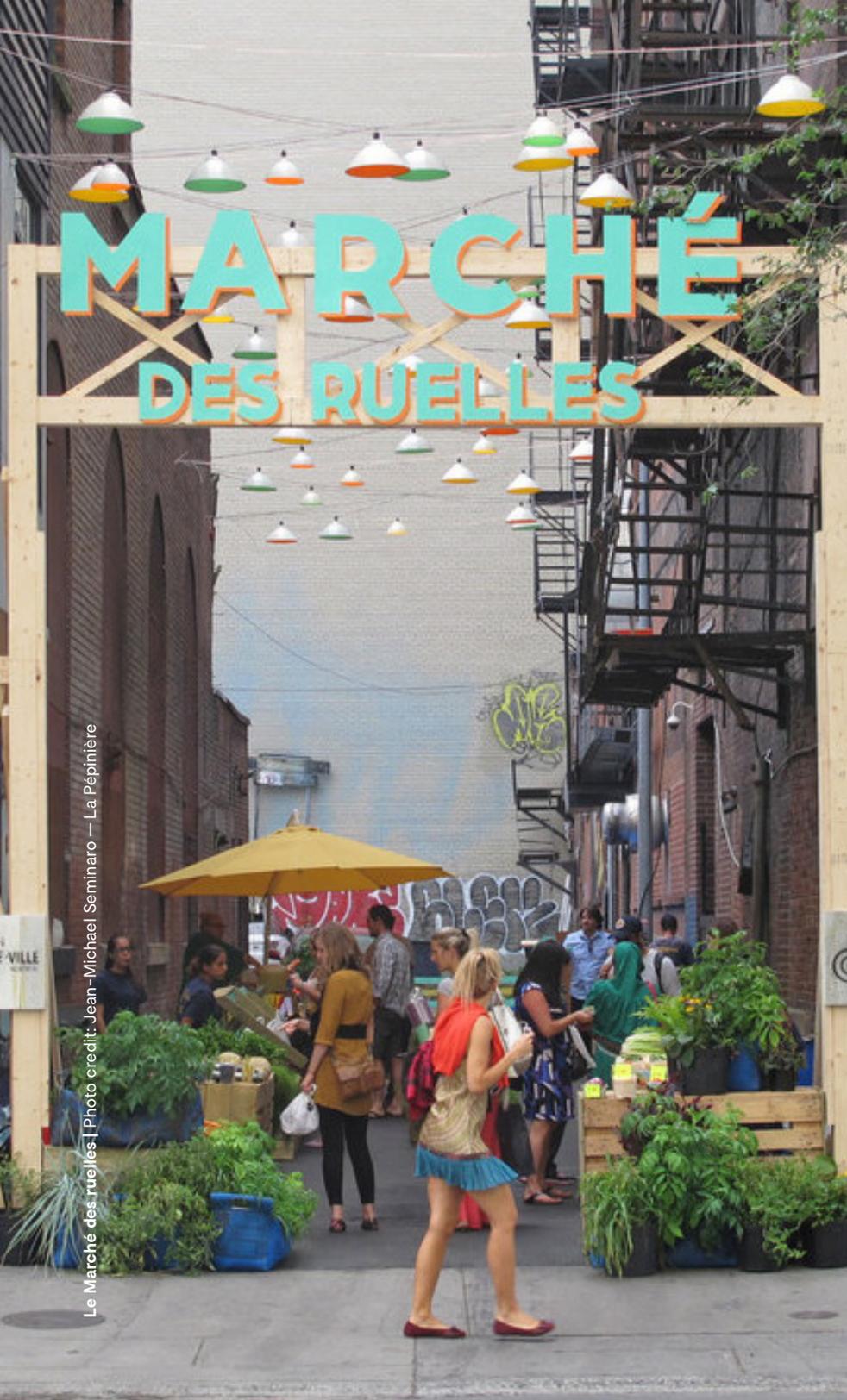
La Pépinière, a not-for-profit organization, has been reviving underused spaces in Montréal for three years. It has been building, programming and managing ephemeral, temporary and transitional collective spaces. These spaces have added sparks of life in an urban environment which for the previous half-century evolved more in light of the automobile than for humans. At their scale, they have contributed to making Montréal culture visible, providing a showcase for the creativity and quality of life that make this city unique.

While these projects have used exterior spaces, originally La Pépinière was created for indoor events. However, since the challenges and delays related to renovating and occupying a building were immense, we did not wait for the perfect conditions to get started. We preferred beginning with small initiatives, with exterior seasonal projects that were less costly and more quickly deployed.

During the years, such small projects provided very important benefits to our young team, allowing us to become known, refine our vision, experiment with our model, and create a structure, learn from our (minor) errors so that we could move, step by step, toward greater challenges. By taking advantage of event-planning regulations, we were able to test things with more freedom, and speed. No need for plans stamped by an architect, no need for permanent occupancy permits, no need for an ironclad market study to obtain millions of dollars, no need for millions, in fact. This was a time when pilot projects were popular in Montréal: if it's a pilot project, why not try it?

It was always possible to refocus a project that wasn't working, or to end it. It is the very principle of "agile development"—applied to the city.

In addition to the possibility of easier deployment, the pilot project has multiple virtues. It's a kind of market study, a direct test with clients. It is also a kind of public consultation, since the pilot project



Le Marché des ruelles | Photo credit: Jean-Michael Seminaro — La Pépinière

provides feedback on the experience and participants realize their comments can have an impact. It is also a very good tool to unite a community since the pilot nature of the project makes it visible, allowing people to work outside of the box, and interests more of them to discuss it and contribute to it. These spontaneous projects are more accessible, open and participatory, in contrast to traditional planning that is undertaken in a vacuum, which has disillusioned a generation of residents who are used to public consultation efforts.

Let's compare two projects to revitalize emblematic Montréal buildings with opposite approaches. First is the Empress Theatre in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. In 2012, the municipal administration, as owner, agreed to hand over the property to a not-for-profit organization on the condition that it raise \$12 million to renovate according to an ideal project plan. This was equivalent to asking for the moon. The lead organization devoted a great deal of time and managed to collect more than \$8 million in funding commitments, two-thirds of the objective set by the City. But it was too little, too late, and after several years, the project was back at zero. The Empress Theatre has been abandoned for more than 20 years.

Contrast this with the example of the Tour d'aiguillage Wellington, under the control of the Montréal Service de la Culture. In 2015, Productions WeArt and Ateliers créatifs Montréal were selected after a call for proposals related to this abandoned tower. Before they even had access to the interior and were waiting for funds and renovation permits, the two organizations occupied the public space in front of the building with temporary installations, which included a refreshment stand, a stage, workshops and presentations. These efforts were a very effective way to get the project going before the building was even renovated, increasing its visibility, building team experience and inspiring confidence among potential funders. It was also a very concrete way to quickly involve a great many people who will help to provide site animation in the future, including the microbrewery that will manage the refreshment stand.

Using this example as inspiration, where would the Empress Theatre be, if without waiting for major renovations, we had imagined transitional uses? If instead of waiting to renovate the entire building, we had started step by step by first occupying a space on the ground floor to use as a pop-up cafe, creating a signal, making the ongoing project visible, would this have brought together new support and new stakeholders? Refine our vision? We would have been able to test outdoor film screenings, or a seasonal space in the rear parking lot, a variety of pilot projects, while promoting the growth of small organizations, by climbing a gentle slope rather than braving an insurmountable wave.

Pilot projects, temporary and transitional, concentrate on reaching a common objective through rapid initiatives, instead of compartmentalized, protracted planning which is beset by various constraints and regulations. These projects can revive hope that things can be done right away at a human scale, with less-costly projects, focusing more on people than concrete.

While regulations, both for events and permanent installations, are well defined, we have noted that there is a wide legal gap with regard to more transitional situations. Montréal is well known for its events, and has developed a broad expertise in event planning, and creating a framework in which anything is possible, allowing for creativity with the fewest constraints, so as to concentrate on getting spectacular results, quickly. Regulations for transitional uses could be based on this framework. On the other hand, it is important to recognize the transitional as a tool to provide value-added, not just a temporary expense. In this way, the transitional has the potential to be just as beneficial as a permanent project and thus should be better recognized for funding and as an urban planning tool in its own right.

# Glossary

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**Bottom-up approach (*ascendante*)**, in urban planning, starts with recognition and support of practices and initiatives created by local actors and residents, then, potentially, to a formal recognition by authorities (elected officials, municipal employees, etc.). This approach is designed to ensure the legitimacy and acceptability by local communities of decisions, in particular through civic participation. It also emphasizes the democratic rights of residents within the municipal planning process.

**The terms common property or civic assets (*actifs civiques*)** refer to property assets built with public funds (post offices, schools, hospitals, and public places) which are currently underused, vacant, abandoned or sold or rented to private interests. A community movement exists which focuses on the reappropriation and requalification of common property.

**The term community hub (*pôle communautaire*)** refers to a space which brings together related services and community organizations for the benefit of the local public. In the province of Ontario, this concept is connected to an initiative that allocates underused spaces in schools for the creation of these kinds of hubs.

**Meanwhile-lease initiative (*bail d'intérim*)** is a unique rental contract that allows the occupancy of commercial spaces for other types of (non-commercial) uses while the landlord continues to look for commercial tenants. The interim tenant is required to leave the space with only one month's notice, at any time. In compensation, the rent is substantially lower than the market rate. This initiative was developed in London, as part of a pilot project.

The expression **preservation through occupation** designates a practice supported by international built heritage conservation organizations who note that the best way to ensure the protection, maintenance, security and eventual adaptive reuse of a heritage site is to occupy it, even if on partial or temporary basis.

The expression **social value** refers to the recognition that heritage is the result of a social construct, dependent on a process attributable to a specific place and time. Communities confirm and construct their identity through the concern they show for their heritage, a concern which is not limited to elements with official status. Today, social values are viewed as equal to the historic, architectural and aesthetic values traditionally attributed to heritage sites, in order to evaluate heritage significance with a view to its protection and conservation.

The expressions **temporary uses** (*usages temporaires*) and **transitional uses** (*usages transitoires*) have similar meanings and this Opinion Paper uses them interchangeably. However, certain distinctions exist that are important to understand.

**Temporary use** is used when referring to a use for a space intended as “in the interim”. These intentions do not imply a concrete commitment as to the future of the space. Temporary uses are characterized by small-scale, reversible actions, a community commitment, of informal, often self-managed, structures and the presence of social capital, rather than major investment.

**Transitional use** refers to uses that mark a transition from one use to another. The approach is progressive, with a flexible final result. This strategy focuses on the “in-between” value as a catalyst which can evolve toward a permanent use.

Neither of these strategies, however, is dependent on a permanent use of the space in question.

**Top-down approach** (*approche descendante*) in urban planning consists of a needs analysis approach for development that descends from above (elected officials, civil servants, planners, etc.) toward the bottom (residents and users). An example of this paradigm is a master plan: a planning tool created by professionals which is then presented to the public.

## List of acronyms used

<b>CBC:</b>	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CHUM:</b>	Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
<b>CMM:</b>	Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal
<b>CNESST:</b>	Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail
<b>CSDM:</b>	Commission scolaire de Montréal
<b>ICOMOS:</b>	International Council on Monuments and Sites
<b>MUHC:</b>	McGill University Health Centre
<b>NFPO:</b>	Not-for-profit organization
<b>SDC:</b>	Société de développement commercial
<b>SNCF:</b>	Société nationale des chemins de fer français
<b>UNESCO:</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Rehabilitation of the former Wellington watch tower by Manceuvres and Ateliers créatifs Montréal | Photo credit: Christine Kerrigan



# 1— Introduction

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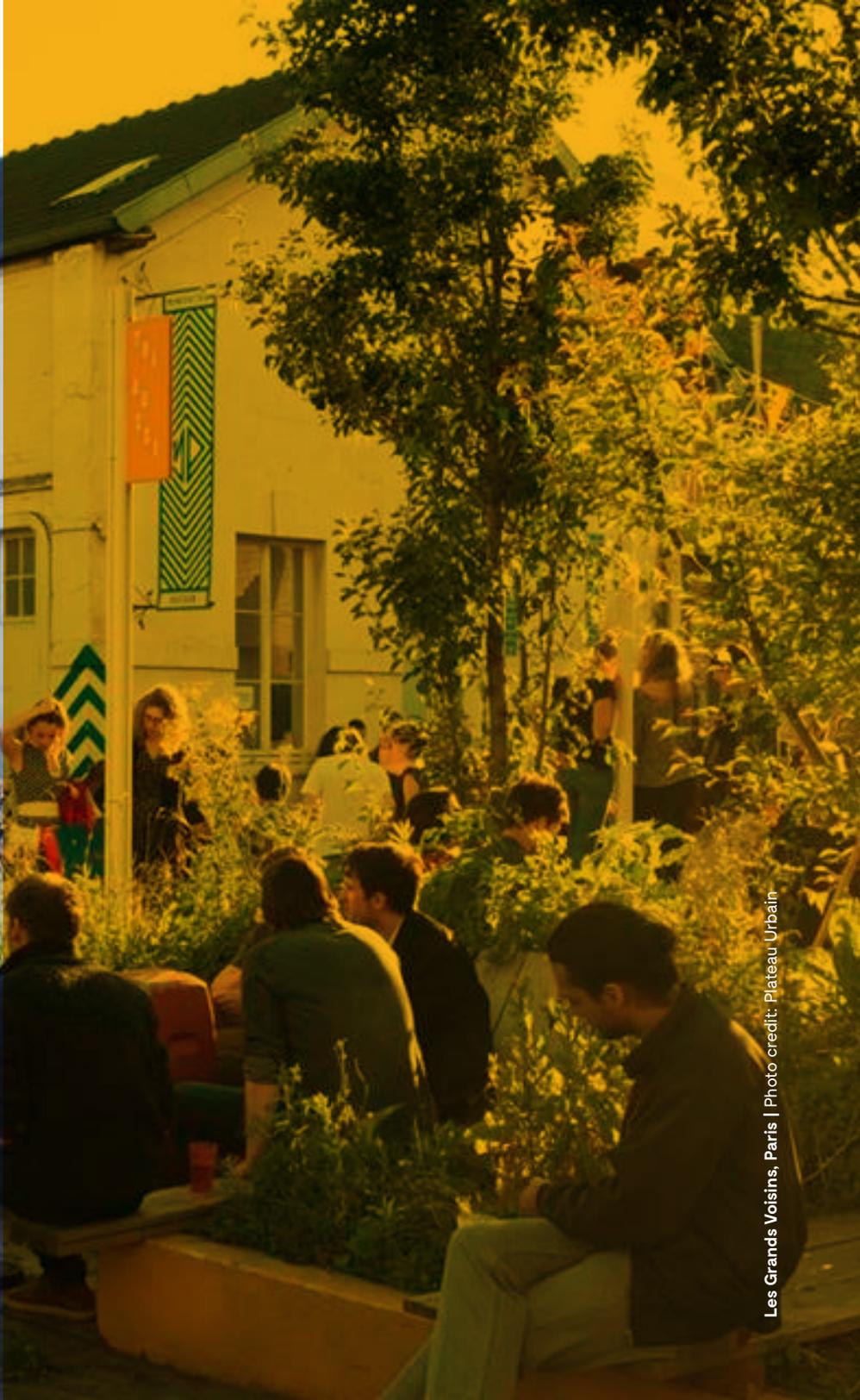
In 1986, the Commission des biens culturels du Québec, predecessor of the Conseil du patrimoine culturel du Québec, published a study of vacant and burnt down buildings. At the time, the phenomenon of vacant and abandoned properties was already a national concern. According to this study, the number of vacant, burnt down or boarded-up buildings in Montréal was calculated to be 500 at the time. This number is striking because of its similarity to the official figures from the municipal fire department, which recently recorded 500<sup>5</sup> vacant buildings in Montréal in 2009. More recently, in 2016, our research counted almost 900<sup>6</sup>, of which 121<sup>7</sup> are of heritage interest. While the 1986 study was primarily focused on heritage buildings, the more general problem of vacancy was clearly defined as a threat to the oldest districts within Montréal city limits. The harmful effects of vacant, abandoned and non-maintained spaces comprise a problem that Montréal has faced for decades, without, however, changing its response.

The former United States embassy in Ottawa is one of the many telling examples of the limitations of the current public approach to vacant buildings. Since 1998, the National Capital Commission has annually spent approximately \$200,000<sup>8</sup> to maintain this building, which is completely vacant. Over the years, several possible conversion projects were considered and in August 2016, a public consultation was launched to obtain the opinion of Canadians on the matter. Today, after 18 years of vacancy, and millions spent on maintenance of this architectural jewel, still no one is benefiting from it. The Director of Parliament Hill in Ottawa explained this situation with the following comment: “We’re waiting for the big idea.”<sup>9</sup> Research demonstrates that abandoned buildings, sometimes forgotten and often considered a hornet’s nest by managers or those seeking to develop them, can often be the most attractive places for young people with big projects.

The search for permanence and the Big Idea, which sometimes never appears, is profoundly based in the classic architectural and urban planning ideals, and consequently, in the way we plan cities. Successive layers of rigid urban planning and building code regulations have, for example, progressively consolidated barriers to the “right to the city”<sup>10</sup>; the right to invest, the right of all active and entrepreneurial Montrealers to imagine their environment. Today, heavy administrative processes and highly inflexible regulations inhibit innovation with regard to the use of the urban environment and access to affordable space by vulnerable communities.

Tools belonging to the top-down approach are still in use in Montréal despite being more adapted to a context of stable urban growth, predictable socioeconomic conditions and large public budgets. They are remnants of the functionalist planning approach in the Modern era, known for its lack of coordination with residents and local communities. At times, resulting in the destruction of irreplaceable heritage. Over the years, this approach has proven to be inadequate in response to rapid change, a more uncertain economic context and the fluid movement of social and financial capital, as is apparent in the current situation in 2017.

For each vacant building or empty lot there is, undoubtedly, a complex network of actors each with his or her own intentions, aptitudes and frame of mind. Consequently, when a space is vacant, i.e., in a transitional phase, it is particularly vulnerable to pressures and disagreement about its use.<sup>11</sup> This friction arises from property owners, governments, and temporary project leaders. Conversely, at times, the lack of an appropriate regulatory framework can allow other people to take over the spaces for illegal purposes, activities that diminish the sense of safety of adjacent communities and negatively impact the experience of residents and visitors.



Les Grands Voisins, Paris | Photo credit: Plateau Urbain

Since the contemporary evolution of Montréal has led to a strong formalization of professional practices and regulation related to urban space, the challenges we face today, and the vacancy problem, require intervention strategies that are much more flexible and adapted to the current context. What are needed are solutions designed not only to facilitate new development but, especially, to optimize and make use of what already exists. Montréal is not a finished product and will never be one. A great many interconnected processes and decisions make it a city that is constantly evolving, always in transition. Efforts related to the use of vacant spaces must take this into account.

### **Montréal in transition: an approach for youth**

According to several studies, people involved in existing transitional projects around the world are primarily young adults, generally well-educated, who are leading entrepreneurial, recreational and social projects.<sup>12</sup> In addition, due to a lack of major funding, transitional projects depend to a great extent on social capital from social networks and the circular economy, spheres in which young people are generally better placed than are the traditional actors. Finally, transitional projects have characteristics of great importance to young Montrealers: co-operation, experimentation, flexibility, democratic attitudes and a local vision.

Transitional use projects for vacant spaces can benefit young people to a great extent by allowing them to circumvent certain barriers which they face today. These initiatives offer youth with few financial resources and a maximum of creativity to face market requirements in an alternative way, providing them with a space for living or working, for creation, entertainment or to socialize.

As the saying goes, the proof of a pudding is in the eating. Everywhere in the world, transitional projects are succeeding without a need for major budgets, without excessive risk-taking, based on the micro scale, responding to local needs and based on a circular and collaborative economy. Developed organically on the basis of community values, they have the potential to be more inclusive than traditional public engagement processes, and allow for collaboration among a greater number of people; enabling a veritable *vivre-ensemble* (living together collectively).

Finally, transitional projects are as much projects that meet immediate needs as catalysts to long-term change. This allows for iterative and flexible urban development, which protects and enhances Montréal's natural and cultural spaces, too often left to fend for themselves.

12. Oswalt, Overmeyer, Misselwitz, 2013.

# 2— Methodology

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## 2.1 Mandate

In order to prepare a portrait of the theoretical and regulatory framework for vacant land and buildings in Montréal, and to document the different issues related to their use, the Conseil jeunesse de Montréal issued a call for bidder. The organization Entremise was selected to draft this Opinion Paper, based on a study of vacant space in Montréal, and designed to present examples of inspiring projects, locally and abroad, from a perspective of seeking to promote the well-being of young Montrealers.

With this in mind, the study also set out to discuss projects initiated and managed by youth in Montreal (aged 12 to 30). However, upon exploring this question more deeply, it was discovered that the use of vacant buildings and lots by young Montrealers is done informally. For this reason, there is little documented evidence, information or ways to contact the young people involved in such projects. Still, youth play an important role in the projects analyzed in this Paper, even if they are not always responsible for the initiative or its management. There appears to be a series of barriers of varying complexity which compromise the potential for involvement of the under-30 in the use of vacant spaces and buildings in Montréal.

## 2.2 The team

Entremise is a not-for-profit organization founded in 2016 with a mission to make vacant space accessible for temporary and transitional uses at a modest cost. Entremise's mission is to make better use of the cultural, economic and environmental potential of assets that enrich Montréal communities. Their team and those who collaborated with them have a broad knowledge of the issues related to the problems of vacancy and use of urban spaces.



Louis-Hippolyte-La Fontaine House, national historic monument since 1988, vacant | Photo credit: Lapointe56

## 2.3 Approach

### Step 1: Literature review and field research

This step consisted firstly of a review of documentary information leading to a summary of the principal issues related to vacancy and a portrait of transitional uses in Montréal and elsewhere. A variety of documents were consulted, including media articles, documentary films, monographs, scientific articles, official reports and documents (charter, bylaws, code, etc.). Secondly, field research was done through interviews with local actors.

### **Interviews with users, regulators and owners of vacant land and buildings using the situational analysis method**

Situational analysis is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to develop an in-depth comprehension of an issue. The objective is to then create recommendations with targeted strategies for intervention. With this method, a situation is defined as a complex interpersonal episode analyzed in its larger context of interrelations. Completed through semi-directed interviews, situational analysis allows for the collection of a multitude of points of view from different sources, providing information about problems and solutions produced by various actors.

## Summary of interviews conducted between February 3 and February 23, 2017

Project	Type	People contacted
<b>Champ des possibles</b>	Land	Caroline Magar, Development coordinator, Les Amis du Champ des Possibles
		Louise-Hélène Lefebvre, Director, Direction de la culture, des sports, des loisirs, des parcs et du développement social of the Plateau-Mont-Royal Borough
<b>Arpent Vert</b>	Land	Simon Maltais and Simon Leclerc Active residents
		Mikael St-Pierre, Cofounder, Lande
<b>Centre du Plateau</b>	Building	Cristina Romero, Division Manager, Direction de la culture, des sports, des loisirs, des parcs et du développement social of the Plateau-Mont-Royal Borough
<b>Quartier Éphémère</b>	Building	Caroline Andrieux, Founder and artistic director, Quartier Éphémère and Fonderie Darling
		Clément Demers, Director-general, Société AGIL

## Step 2: Analysis of results and development of recommendation hypotheses

In this step, firstly a summary report was created covering the discussions and major issues arising from the event *Montréal transitoire*. Secondly, the interviews were tabulated and evaluated in order to highlight key ideas.

In light of the key ideas raised by the literature review and field research, a series of recommendations were formulated and guidelines for intervention outlined.



A pilot project is indecision that is positive, as it results in action.

**JÉRÔME GLAD** Cofounder of La Pépinière

## Step 3: Verification of recommendations with experts and development of guidelines for intervention

Two discussion sessions were subsequently organized with various experts in order to evaluate and discuss recommendation hypotheses. These sessions were designed to ensure that the recommendations and following guidelines were realistic and responded appropriately to the needs of the municipal administration and other stakeholders.

This quote by Bruno Latour, French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher resumes the mindset of this study: “It is impossible to know everything before acting. One must try to succeed at something first, understand what comes out of it, before trying again, and thus build incrementally. Through this approach, theoretical and practical frameworks mutually enrich one another.”<sup>13</sup>

13. (Our translation) Latour, 2007.

## Symposium on temporary and transitional uses

A collective reflection on the deployment of transitional urbanism in the city was developed by Entremise with the Ville de Montréal. The event took place on January 26, 2017, at the Écomusée du fier monde.

One of the key ideas confirmed at the symposium was the distinction between transitional uses and temporary uses. While for many people the word “temporary” evokes a provisional solution, the word “transitional” suggests an innovative means to link economics and culture to these transitional zones given their time-related and ephemeral aspect. Considerable intellectual and financial resources are increasingly being invested in these in-between phases to the point that a transition culture is being developed. Internationally, several city networks are emerging to share best practices and find viable organization structures for these new models in order to facilitate their calibration, create a breeding ground for resources and serve as experimental labs around the world.

*To consult the Montréal transitoire symposium report (in French) on the Montréal official website: [www.entremise.ca/ressources](http://www.entremise.ca/ressources)*



# **3— Montréal's vacancy problem**

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### 3.1 A Montréal definition of vacancy

The notion of vacancy is complex and it has multiple academic, legal and other definitions.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, it is appropriate to adopt a broad definition that focuses more on the use potential of a space than its physical state or a time frame. Vacancy thus relates to buildings and land suitable for occupancy, but unoccupied, regardless of the length of time, or the reasons for its disuse.

This Opinion Paper also presents vacancy as being an interim period, i.e., a transition between the former occupancy and a new one. Every vacant space is unique and is difficult to classify according to an architectural or use typology, which is why it is better to classify it according to its particular potential for occupancy.

Vacancy is also seen here as an opportunity to rethink the municipal approach to urban planning. Without a new framework, vacant spaces will continue to represent high risks and costs for landlords and the community. Living well collectively, developing sustainably and making use of affected properties also means learning to value the existing built fabric. The regulatory, judicial and fiscal framework should not invite urban developers and planners to see vacant land and buildings as invitations to demolish and rebuild anew, as the term vacant can be misleading. A space is never totally empty; for example, the vegetation found on some empty lots has been found to have great ecological significance for the environment and for the local population.<sup>15</sup>

While this Opinion Paper focuses primarily on vacant land and buildings, i.e., spaces that could be occupied but remain unused, these recommendations could just as well apply to underused spaces, i.e. those that are only partially occupied, this would be in keeping with Ville de Montréal policies related to sustainable development and heritage.

### 3.2 An incomplete, inaccessible portrait of vacancy in Montréal

While several recent initiatives provide a better idea of the extent of the vacant space problem in Montréal, the portrait remains incomplete and scattered: some data are public, others, private, even inexistent.

According to Lande, an organization that facilitates resident appropriation of vacant land, there are more than 25 sq. km. of vacant land in Montréal.<sup>16</sup> This corresponds to the equivalent of about one hundred times the area of Montréal's Botanical Garden. One third of vacant land in Montréal is public, belonging to the municipal administration, the government of Québec, or to a lesser extent, to the federal government and parapublic corporations.<sup>17</sup>

According to the results of a 2007 study by the CMM (*Identification des espaces disponibles à l'intérieur de la zone blanche et évaluation du potentiel d'accueil des municipalités de la Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal*), it appears that more than 210 square kilometres of gross vacant land is available in the non-agricultural zone (*zone blanche*) for urban development purposes. Of this 210 sq. km., almost two thirds (127 sq. km.) is available for residential uses while the remainder (82 sq. km.) is designated commercial or industrial.<sup>18</sup>



## Montréal's vacancy problem

During the latest survey, officially Montréal counted 894 abandoned buildings, 121 of heritage interest.<sup>19</sup> In the Ville-Marie Borough alone, there are at least 43 vacant buildings, a figure which does not take into account partially occupied buildings, even those with a vacancy rate as high as 90%. These properties include several large hospital buildings, rendered excess with the construction of two University hospital complexes (the CHUM and the MUHC).

Following the demolition of the Redpath Mansion in 2014 after 27 years of abandonment, data on vacant buildings and land were collected by the City but have yet to be made public. To this day, only Heritage Montreal's H-MONTRÉAL portal provides Montrealers with access to information on vacancy and allows them to collectively help develop a database on vulnerable sites, including vacant properties. While Montréal includes 19 boroughs, only one (Ville-Marie) provides access to data related to vacant land and buildings through the City's own open data portal. This portal also includes important supplementary information, such as the heritage protection status of the buildings.<sup>20</sup> The Plateau Mont-Royal Borough has put a non-exhaustive list of vacant buildings and land on its website.

The lack of accessible data, coupled with their low quality, not only negatively affects real estate developers or individuals looking for rental space, it also compromises communication among different departments in the municipal administration. For example, in November 2016, CBC highlighted the fact that the lack of data on vacant Montréal buildings could endanger the lives of firefighters.<sup>21</sup>

19. Renaud, 2016. 20. *Inventaire des bâtiments vacants – Planification pour la réhabilitation du cadre bâti du centre-ville*, 2016. 21. Hendry, 2016.



It is possible for property owners to register their vacant buildings with the Ville de Montréal, but this is not mandatory. In addition, there is a charge for registration, with the cost varying among boroughs. Nevertheless, the registry is a useful and relevant tool that should be promoted to allow vacancy data to become more useful, and public. The municipal administration could use this tool in order to keep track of vulnerable buildings, for example, those for which a notice of deterioration has been issued.

Finally, with regard to commercial spaces, prior to 2003, a rental tax was assessed on unoccupied spaces. However, after that date, the City began to issue commercial occupancy certificates to replace this tax and to certify that a commercial use was in conformity to current regulations. These certificates, which are still in effect, have the purpose of collecting information on the location of the commercial space, the number of storeys, the nature of the activity, current and previous occupancy as well as the date the activities started. Unfortunately, these data are limited and do not provide a complete portrait of Montréal commercial vacancy, due to a lack of resources to ensure proper updating. Note that this process is done manually, by the landlord, which may compromise the response rate and the reliability of data.

## RECOMMANDATIONS

1

That the Ville de Montréal update existing missing data (e.g. the vacant building registry for each borough) and collect missing data in order to complete the portrait of vacant and underused spaces (public and private), by systematizing the inventory among the different municipal departments and encourage the creation of a central tool that standardizes the data and makes it public, in accordance with the open data policy in effect.



Heritage homes on Esplanade Avenue that have been deteriorating for many years | Photo credit: Gabriel Deschambault

## 3.3 The causes of vacancy in Montréal

Vacant spaces appear and disappear as the city is transformed. Without attempting here to analyze and present all reasons for chronic vacancy, it has been noted that in many post-industrial cities, recurrent socioeconomic factors help sustain high vacancy rates. Economic restructuring, urban sprawl and demographic decline are often cited as determining factors.<sup>22</sup> In addition, since construction and development are often long, costly processes, many spaces remain vacant in the city for the long term. The factors causing vacancy are multiple and some of them are particular to the situation in Montréal.

### 3.3.1 Development pressures and speculation

Property taxes play a major role in Montréal's vacancy problem. The city's dependence on this source of revenue appears to encourage the emergence of cycles of deterioration–destruction–reconstruction, which are often long and have a negative impact on urban vitality. While property taxes are supposed to be a development incentive for owners, they do not seem to always play this role. For example, in the case of a heritage property, the incentive seems to be weaker than the costs associated with the costs of adaptive reuse.

In fact, in certain cases, the way property taxes are calculated in Montréal encourages deterioration, vacancy or abandonment of buildings and land, without any consideration for urban vitality or the heritage interest of the property. Property taxes are calculated according to the valuation of the property and its components, meaning that they diminish when the building on the property deteriorates or

becomes vacant, because its value is reduced. In this way, the property owner benefits from a reduction in property taxes when a building is abandoned. It is important to note that if the building located on the property has no value at the start, as is the case for certain “big box” stores, the owner is even less likely to invest in maintaining or occupying it over the long term.

In the case of buildings that merit appreciation, such as heritage sites, the challenges are of another kind. If property owners improve the condition of their property, this is translated into an increase in value at the time of re-evaluation, leading to an increase in their property taxes. If this increase is not accompanied by additional revenue, property owners will have no incentive to make improvements or renovate. In contrast, they will even be encouraged to allow the building to deteriorate since annual expenditures increase with a renovation and add to the cost of the project. This mechanism threatens the fate of heritage buildings for which the revenue potential is not enough to cover all costs of maintenance or renovation. This is demonstrated by the recurring cases of arson and demolition of heritage buildings in Montréal.

Without strong fiscal or regulatory measures, property owners can leave their land vacant while they wait for a transaction or development that will be more profitable for them. However, it has been observed that economic and contextual changes can act as catalysts to action and innovation, as is demonstrated by the development of the old Faubourg des Récollets industrial district (today's Cité du Multimédia).

## Quartier Éphémère

The recession that struck Montréal in the 1990s played a significant role in the use of vacant land and spaces. Several sites downtown were particularly affected, including the Centre de commerce mondial and 1000 de la Gauchetière. The value of these properties collapsed, the banks no longer wanted to finance their owners, which prevented the start of potential projects. Without a tenant or upcoming projects, many spaces became vacant. On the other hand, the crisis allowed the use of some vacant spaces, as was the case for the Fonderie Darling at the time.

## Arpent Vert

The start-up process was very lengthy. In addition, the change of status from a publicly owned vacant lot into a community space was not communicated to public services employees. One day a city owned truck came to our already landscaped lot and dumped snow on all of it. The site was later used to store debris from the demolition of an adjacent building. It was very difficult to open a channel of communication for residents who tried to notify the municipal administration of these incidents.

**SIMON MALTAIS** Active resident

Montréal's vacancy problem

### 3.3.2 Administrative and regulatory constraints

Time is the worst enemy of vacant sites because the impacts of vacancy, such as deterioration of the structure, evolve exponentially. The size of the Ville de Montréal's administrative apparatus and the multiplication of departments and paramunicipal agencies involved in real estate also lead to major delays. The successive layers of zoning regulation, building code, health and safety measures, and heritage conservation policies are also significant. These also act as obstacles to the implementation of solutions to vacancy that could be rapid, flexible and economical.<sup>23</sup>

For example, chapter 2 of division 2 of the *Règlement sur le civisme, le respect et la propreté of the Ville-Marie borough (CA-24-085)* directly concerns requirements for the use of public land.

Article 27 of this bylaw addresses the prohibition of planting trees, bushes and plants on public land without a directive from the borough council. Proponents of a garden project must remember to include a request for authorization to grow plants in the public domain in their plan or find a way to get around the bylaw.<sup>24</sup>

Contrast this with the City of Paris, which created a new provision that allows all residents to add vegetation to their city. As of June 2015, residents can make an online request to plant on public land. This permit is issued in just a few days, which allows for rapid and flexible action on empty land in the city.

23. Bishop and Williams, 2012, p. 215. 24. Lande, 2016, p. 15.



Arpent vert | Photo credit: Simon Leclerc

### 3.3.3 Transformations and transfers of urban land uses

Revolutionary changes in work, consumption and lifestyle that are apparent in post-industrial countries have led to the problem of vacant commercial and industrial spaces in many cities. According to the authors of *The Temporary City*, it appears that the majority of these spaces will never revert to their original function.<sup>25</sup> This vacant real estate will continue to be incompatible with current economic requirements, in the sense that market pressures seek high productivity and revenue. Capital is very flexible, while building use cycles are slow and unchanging.<sup>26</sup>



“What is most important is to have the courage and political will to move forward, without having all the answers.”

**DINU BUMBARU** Heritage Montreal

We are in an urban planning era in which projects are designed to respond to market needs, within a given time frame, without developing a vision about long-term durability or use, as is demonstrated by the piecemeal development of many condominium developments. This approach is quite different from periods previous to the modern era in Montréal (1950–1970).<sup>27</sup>

“Once combined, these factors create a definite negative impact on city districts, especially the oldest ones, where the largest number of vacant properties is found.”<sup>28</sup>

## RECOMMANDATIONS

2

That the Ville de Montréal commission an independent study on the direct and indirect impacts to the urban fabric of real estate pressures and speculation in order to create appropriate measures to reduce the harmful effects on sites of cultural significance.



Demolition of the Redpath mansion in 2014 | Photo credit: Martin Chevalier

# **4— Vacancy: impacts and leverage**

**Opinion Paper on the use of vacant  
space in Montréal: a youth perspective**

The vacancy problem is complex because its effects are cumulative. The more time passes, the more buildings and land which are not maintained will deteriorate. This deterioration brings danger, hazards and high costs for landlords and the Montréal community. The presence of such spaces tends to diminish the sense of security in a district, as well as its social and economic vitality. It also leads to the deterioration of natural and built heritage. Vacant spaces are open to appropriation, but also to loitering.<sup>29</sup> A lack of security can be felt in zones with vacancy issues, which can affect the physical and psychological well-being of nearby residents.<sup>30</sup>



“There are two types of risks to property owners: those linked to the image a vacant building projects and those related to the intrinsic condition of the building.”

**CLÉMENT DEMERS**

Director-general, Société AGIL

## 4.1 Impacts on urban safety and health

Abandoned properties help create a vicious circle of deterioration of the urban environment. Tenants and property owners avoid maintaining or renovating properties as long as a lack of security is widespread. In support of this statement, a study conducted in the United States reported that police departments report 3.2 times as many calls related to drugs, 1.8 times more theft-related calls and twice as many calls for violent crime in neighbourhoods with abandoned, unsecured buildings as in neighbourhoods without vacant buildings.<sup>31</sup> Abandoned spaces are more often the scene of violent crimes such as murder and sexual violence.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, decision makers do not seem to want to respond to persistent social issues when abandoned buildings continue to tarnish the image of a neighbourhood.

In contrast, the rehabilitation of deteriorated urban spaces has been proven to reduce the rate of violent crime. More specifically, it appears that planting on empty lots helps residents feel safe and reduces the number of crimes reported to police departments.<sup>33</sup> In 2015, the *Urban Studies Journal* published a joint study conducted five years previously by the U.S. Forest Service and the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation. This study indicated that two types of intervention on vacant land had a reductive effect on criminal acts, particularly violent crime. The first action, stabilization, encompasses cleaning and planting by residents. The study showed a non-negligible impact on the reduction of break-ins into surrounding homes. The second action, community reuse, presents important benefits in the reduction in the number of violent acts.<sup>34</sup> That is why Youngstown, Ohio, and other U.S. cities have created centralized, easy-to-access programs which include requirements for project submittal. This way of functioning permits the filtering of less serious projects and guarantees a bidding system that is equitable for everyone.

## 4.2 Impacts on adolescents

Vacant properties can create several hazards for young people. A correlation between vacancy and delinquency has been observed (vandalism, drug use, etc.). Vacant buildings can serve as a refuge for runaway youth and are attractive for children who do not benefit from active parental protection.<sup>35</sup> For example, consider one heritage building, the Snowdon Theater, located in the Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce borough, which was subject to arson. Furthermore, the three young perpetrators of this fire saw nothing wrong with promoting their exploits on social media.

Canada Malting, an abandoned industrial building, is also a site that has been adopted by young urban explorers. According to the *Urbex playground* blog: “Despite limited access to the building, the site is still visited often. A lot of graffiti covers every part of the accessible walls, yet during our three visits we were never alone. Moreover, 13- and 14-year-olds appear to have adopted the place as a playground. Clearly at ease in this labyrinth, they run from one room to another, refusing to take the slightest precautions to avoid accidents. It is only a question of time as to when an accident will occur.”<sup>36</sup>

## 4.3 Economic impacts

Boarded up and abandoned buildings reduce quality of life in an area as well as negatively affect its image. The direct economic losses related to the non-use of vacant buildings cause substantial income loss for the community. All these square metres, in their current condition, are evaluated at a depreciated value and provide a strict minimum in property taxes and various fees.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, no economic study exists on the subject, even if theoretically, such an exercise could be completed based on the evaluation roll or on rental values.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to generating minimum receipts, the non-use of space leads to costs for the entire community and property owners. First, house sale prices diminish around vacant sites.<sup>39</sup> Proximity to such a site can lead to a decline in neighbourhood property values of as much as 18%.<sup>40</sup> Insurance premiums for adjacent properties can increase from 5 to 10%, and some owners even find it impossible to obtain insurance.<sup>41</sup> Even if vacant properties have materials risks different from that of an occupied building, the term vacant is not even defined in many provincial insurance contracts.<sup>42</sup>



Vacant storefronts on Saint-Laurent Boulevard, 2015 | Photo credit: Isabelle Beigeron / TC Media

From the point of view of entrepreneurs and investors, costs occurring during a vacancy period (insurance, security, etc.) lead to a reduction in site maintenance. Costs are even more significant if the building becomes the scene of illegal activities or if certain problems arise that prevent development or sale. Currently few incentives exist to ensure that landlords maintain their buildings and keep them secure when they are vacant. In addition, recent studies demonstrate that the vacancy period usually lasts longer than estimates by the owners.

Consequently, it is not unusual for landlords to wait for untold amounts of time until the ideal conditions arise before investing in the property; yet, they are not penalized for the negative impacts on society during the vacancy.

#### 4.3.1 Commercial arteries

In October 2016, a headline in *La Presse* stated that “Montréal ‘represented a commercial desert.’” This announcement was related to the fact that one space in four on several key arteries in the city was vacant. In March 2015, CBC television had previously reported similar facts and the report pointed the finger at negligent landlords. Both underlined the fact that at the time, no bylaw required landlords to be responsible for finding tenants for their vacant spaces.



## Saint-Denis Street faces vacancies

Today, Saint-Denis Street is facing a problem of vacant commercial spaces. The local business development associations (sociétés de développement commercial, SDC) play key roles in the search for solutions and try to work with landlords. According to Caroline Tessier, SDC Saint-Denis director, the SDCs are the first organization to contact by people wishing to work on the problems associated with vacant spaces and vacant buildings on commercial arteries. In the past, landlords were sometimes excluded from these discussions. Today it is necessary for them to be more involved, although they are sometimes hard to contact. The SDC Rue Saint-Denis has explored certain initiatives to occupy vacant boutiques, including “pop-up stores” and artwork in store windows, but the response of landlords has been weak. According to Ms. Tessier, PRAM-Commerce and PRAM-Artère en chantier subsidy programs are good models to fund transitional uses as well as a good pretext to contact landlords.

## 4.4 Ecological Impacts

According to an estimate by Heritage Montreal, since 1960, almost 55,000 buildings have been demolished in Montréal.<sup>43</sup> These demolitions, whether they occur in waves or singly, have profoundly marked the city landscape. Subsequently, the reconstruction of these sites can also have significant environmental impacts. According to the Green Preservation Lab, of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, the ecological footprint of new construction is measured by the amount of energy required to extract resources, transport and transform raw materials, produce construction materials and transfer them to the construction site, and the transport of construction and demolition debris to landfill and recycling sites. This means that it can take up to 80 years for a new building, even one that is 30% more energy efficient than the average building, to compensate for the ecological footprint created by its construction. Note that in 2013, 35% of waste buried in Québec landfills come from the construction and demolition sector. Today it is clearer than ever that the greenest building is one that already exists.

In Québec the *Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2015–2020* states that “departments and organizations are invited to consider the preservation of the built and natural heritage as well as the renovation of existing buildings prior to opting for the construction of new buildings...and, when it is possible, to encourage multi-functionality of buildings.”<sup>44</sup>

## 4.5 Impacts on vulnerable cultural heritage

It must be remembered that heritage sites were designed at a time when habits and standards of living were quite different, which adds additional challenges to adaptively re-using them. The challenges of finding suitable uses and the high cost of specialist labour, combined with a lack of political will and gaps in regulations, mean that a great many heritage sites in Montréal stand empty today.

Once abandoned, a site loses its prestige and character. Most of the time, its deterioration leads to demolition and reduces recognition of its potential utility and value for Montrealers in general. Deterioration also affects its potential for occupancy and future profitability. The duration of the vacancy and the absence of tenants accelerate deterioration and significantly increase the cost of restoration or rehabilitation.

Vandalism, in addition to damaging the site and its components, is also a clear sign of vacancy. If doors or windows are forced open, the building is more vulnerable to weather extremes. Opening a building also creates another kind of invitation for ill-intentioned occupants, which increases the danger of illegal activities inside.

Criminal and accidental fires are also a risk. The Service de sécurité incendie de Montréal considers vacancy as a level 4 risk, the highest level on the scale. In 2016 alone, more than a half-dozen vacant heritage buildings were demolished due to major fires. Fire also threatens the adjacent context and nearby buildings due to the high density of the urban setting.

The theft of reusable parts and construction materials, which affects the vulnerability of buildings, has been increasing over the last several years. In the more particular case of heritage buildings, the sale of components for resale can mean the loss of an irreplaceable cultural artifact: furnishings, a work of art, or machinery, for example. Certain architectural fixtures, such as mantelpieces, woodwork, cast-iron radiators, are sometimes unique and made to measure for the building.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.5.1 Demolition by neglect

Some heritage properties are legally protected from demolition. However, landlords can fight against this designation by deliberately letting the site decline until it becomes dangerous. Once officially identified as a public safety hazard, the municipality or the government can be held responsible if they do not act by having the property in question demolished. This subterfuge allows landlords to circumvent heritage regulations and build on the site in a way that would otherwise be unavailable.<sup>46</sup> The cost of non-built lots, considered as rare jewels, is quite high when compared to built lots. The practice appears to be profitable even if the complete degradation of a building can take many years.

Recent examples include the Redpath Mansion (in 2014) and the former Ukrainian detention and immigration centre (2015), two of Montréal's heritage buildings that were demolished because of

neglect and major deterioration.<sup>47</sup> “The Redpath Mansion was finally demolished on March 19, 2014, rewarding a property owner who had acted negligently and failed to respect his obligations to the City and his neighbours. The reasoning for the demolition was the same demagogic argument par excellence used in so many cases over the past 40 years: the building was supposedly a threat to public safety. In this case, that assertion had been proven false by a 2010 study conducted by an engineer mandated by the City of Montreal, and verified at the request of Quebec Culture Minister Maka Kotto in 2014, which concluded that the masonry structure was “in good condition.”<sup>48</sup>

However, the public security argument can be exploited in the other direction where there is political will. Let's take the example of a badly deteriorated Victorian-style commercial building constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at the corner of Saint-Laurent Blvd and Pine Avenue: end result was quite different. In this case, in 2011 the Plateau Mont-Royal borough used the same public safety argument, raising the issue of safety for pedestrians, but to encourage, even force, the property owner to restore the building within a maximum of 300 days. While existing regulatory and legal tools allow this type of action, they are underutilized by the municipal administration.

## Quartier Éphémère

The Fonderie Darling is an example of heritage revitalization in which the concepts of urban renewal and temporary occupancy overlap. The Quartier Éphémère organization was established in 1994 in an old warehouse located at 16 Prince Street, in Griffintown. Made available free to the project by the Ville de Montréal through the SIMPA initiative, the organization used the building for exhibition space and artist studios until 1999. Its presence in an abandoned industrial district responded to its mandate, which was to revitalize peripheral parts of the city through artistic activities. Numerous in situ projects greatly helped to publicize art in the district.<sup>49</sup> In 1997, Quartier Éphémère also organized the *Panique au Faubourg* exhibition, a series of artistic installations in abandoned buildings in the old faubourg des Récollets district. This was one of the leverage projects that led to the birth of the Fonderie Darling as we know it today.

**CAROLINE ANDRIEUX**

Founder and artistic director, Quartier Éphémère and Fonderie Darling

49. Fonderie Darling, 2013.



## The state of schools in Montréal

The Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM) owns about sixty buildings, many of which have heritage value. This examination of transitional uses arrived at a key time for the CSDM, presently looking to find solutions for the future of its excess properties. According to Ms. Cousineau, independent commissioner at the CSDM, these institutions have a great deal of responsibility, which they must be able to share. Just as is the case with the municipal and provincial authorities, the CSDM must serve as a model with regard to the protection and enhancement of heritage. A boarded-up school building is a powerful symbol for a community and should push the CSDM to find solutions. Waiting for the big idea may not be the best approach. Ms. Cousineau also pointed out that the renovation of an existing structure is more in keeping with sustainable development principles than is construction of a new building. She also underlined the importance of a better understanding of individual contributions, i.e. the means to establish so that people working in schools can accomplish things that lead to preservation and conservation of spaces (e.g. regularly open windows to avoid the growth of mould).

## 4.6 Existing municipal action levers

“Currently, it does not seem that the Ville de Montréal lacks the means to intervene; at most, better coordination in the application of such regulations would be desirable.”<sup>50</sup>

Normally, regulation through the Civil Code of Québec will mitigate the excesses of the free market. Its principles structure the notion of private property and the right of usage of a property by its owner. However, how far do these rights go in the case of significant abandonment? From a judicial point of view, the Ville de Montréal could, in theory, through the extended powers granted by its Charter, intervene with regard to the vacancy problem whereas shareholders have this decision-making powers in the case of private companies. At this point, we can wonder what is the position is of residents with regard to building vacancy and the rampant disappearance of their heritage?

In the case of heritage sites, property rights should hardly permit demolition by neglect. Collective interests and the common good should prevail with regard to respect and protection of heritage that enhances our common environment by maintaining what the past has bequeathed us. When a property owner cannot or no longer wishes to fulfil his or her responsibilities, it is up to the community to take over, accompany, support or constrain.

The Ville de Montréal has several tools to encourage the use and maintenance of vacant buildings. The *Règlement sur l'occupation et l'entretien des bâtiments* stipulates that: “Through the standards and measures in effect, a municipality can control problems of disrepair or ruin of buildings located within its jurisdiction and force building owners to maintain their properties.”<sup>51</sup> The main enabling authority related to this can be found in Section 145.41 of the Act Respecting Land Use Planning and Development.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond the occupancy and maintenance bylaw and the City Charter, borough councils can establish standards and bylaws related to the maintenance of private property.<sup>53</sup> As a result, certain boroughs have included provisions regarding the cleanliness of private properties in their bylaws. For example, the Ville-Marie borough decided to integrate such provisions into its civics, respect and cleanliness bylaw.<sup>54</sup> While private-property maintenance requirements are relatively similar for all boroughs, seeking uniformity and provisions that concern vacant land more specifically would help clarify maintenance and occupancy standards throughout the city.

50. (Our translation) Adam, 1986, p. 10. 51 et 52. (Our translation) Guide *La prise de décision en urbanisme*, 2010. 53. Charter of the Ville de Montréal, 2016.

54. Règlement sur le civisme, le respect et la propreté, 2015.

## Vacancy: impacts and leverage

Although many people are happy with the potential arrival of new legislative powers for the municipal administration in Bill 121, it appears that application of regulations will become more complex with regard to implementation. Maintenance bylaws are difficult to apply because, absent incentives or will, authorities do not use available tools to prevent property owners from being negligent. Already facing a lack of resources, the municipal administration is a victim of a sociopolitical culture that tends to diminish resources even further. In this context, how can bylaws requiring a minimum of public safety and maintenance of vacant spaces in Montréal succeed?

During the Montréal transitoire symposium in January 2017, one of the major issues raised by experts was fiscal incentives, which currently do not respond to the problem of vacancy. The idea of establishing regulatory and fiscal measures more adapted to this reality was mentioned several times: Increasing property taxes instead of reducing them for vacant lots, obligatory non-occupancy permits, consolidated bylaws on maintenance and occupancy—and their application, prioritizing and protecting heritage sites in urban development, special status applied to owners who allow temporary projects, etc. These were some of the varied measures that could encourage the use and reappropriation of existing spaces.



North west corner of Saint-Laurent Blvd. and Pine Ave., 2017 | Photo credit: Philippe Du Berger

## RECOMMANDATIONS

3

That the Ville de Montréal consult users' practices and study the quality of biodiversity in empty public lots in order to prioritize the appropriate use of existing spaces, with nature and biodiversity considered as a value by the community, instead of developing new spaces at great expense.

4

That the Ville de Montréal act as model property owner and adopt a municipal policy that gives priority to the use of vacant and under-utilized heritage buildings prior to renting or constructing new buildings.

5

That the Ville de Montréal agree to further develop the notion of social value and diversity in historic perspectives when applying the evaluation grid for municipal heritage, in accordance with the current international heritage conservation movement which focuses on the involvement of affected communities.

6

That, with regard to its actions related to the use of empty spaces, the Ville de Montréal prioritize districts and buildings with heritage value, which are both threatened with degradation and judged important, both by young people and by experts, because they are part of the identity of Montrealers.

7

That the Ville de Montréal consolidate and reinforce fiscal measures in order to discourage neglect, abandonment and demolition of properties of cultural significance (e.g. mandatory registration in the central registry of vacant buildings).

8

That the Ville de Montréal clarify the standards and make bylaws related to the maintenance of vacant buildings and lots uniform, and that it acquire the appropriate tools to apply them, in particular with regard to sites of cultural importance.



Children play on site of Batiment 7, South-West Borough, 2017 | Photo credit: Jamie



# **5— Use of vacant space: temporary and transitional occupancy**

Opinion Paper on the use of vacant  
space in Montréal: a youth perspective

Occupancy, temporary or partial, is a proven solution to vacancy problems.<sup>54</sup> In many cases, a temporary use is possible without the need for major or costly modifications, which would be the case for permanent actions. In fact, most temporary uses do not require an entirely functional building or a lot that has been formally landscaped, while occupancy can reduce the direct impacts of vacancy in several ways.



“This is the era  
of access.”

**CAROLINE DE JESSEY**

SNCF Immobilier

### Improved public safety

Occupancy helps discourage crime, illegal occupancy and its inherent risks, such as fires. The implicit monitoring by occupants and their activities reduce the risk of crime and can raise owner awareness of suspicious activity nearby.

### Improved condition

In many cases, a simple overall cleaning can make a space usable. Once people have appropriated a space, in particular people involved in creative activities, the space becomes dynamic and inviting. Several examples demonstrate that contributions from the community help enhance abandoned spaces. For example, les Amis du Champ des Possibles, in the Plateau-Mont-Royal borough, have organized several clean-up days, increasing the use potential of the Champ des Possibles.

### Improved long-term perspective

Occupied and maintained spaces are attractive and dynamic, which makes them appear in a much more positive light than do vacant spaces. This allows potential purchasers and tenants to see the space as functional and vibrant, which provides a better idea of what it could be used for over the long term.

55. Historic England, 2011, p. 9–10.

## Reduced deterioration

Elsewhere in the world, the saying “maintenance through occupation” is often used. Once a space is occupied and heated, maintenance problems are less likely to occur and more likely to be noticed and addressed rapidly. Often, regular maintenance is ensured thanks to the occupants themselves. This kind of continuous maintenance prevents repair and renovation costs from skyrocketing, and avoids the needless alteration of the urban fabric.

## Reduced operating costs

The responsibility to pay for public utilities and insurance costs can be transferred to the tenant or occupant. However, even if temporary use can generate rental income, it has been noted that other benefits are much more significant than the potential income from this type of use.

## Recognized heritage value

Heritage values, whether historical, architectural, contextual, social or other, do not arise by themselves. If no one uses or visits sites that bear witness to our history, it is possible that such values will remain dormant. Additionally, cultural and heritage organizations increasingly seek means to attract new audiences and raise awareness among the public on cultural issues. Temporary occupancy of heritage space allows uses that are outside of the normally considered possibilities. They also motivate local communities to protect and interpret these spaces in new ways, and to increase their commitment to them.



“The best way to preserve our heritage in intermediate periods is to occupy it.”

**CAROLINE DE JESSEY**

SNCF Immobilier

## Arpent Vert

When it was an empty lot, no one dared go there. A Lande sign appeared and this led to meetings among neighbours. Now people come just to hang out, sunbathe or read; children go there to play.

**SIMON MALTAIS** Active resident

## Quartier Éphémère

When occupants pay property taxes as well as electricity, at the same time as paying a modest rent, they provide a presence in the building. This is an ideal situation for property owners.

**CLÉMENT DEMERS** Director-general, Société AGIL



## 5.1 Transitional urbanism: One way to create a thriving city

The transitional urbanism movement began in the 1970s, especially in western Europe and has become increasingly fundamental in urban planning processes around the world. Since that time, an increasing number of projects characterized as temporary or transitional have been implemented internationally. Several popular phenomena, such as temporary public places, green backstreets and community gardens are examples of this movement common to Montréal.

As transitional uses have a high potential to respond to the vacancy problem and allow for the definition of new uses, a plurality of individuals and organizations have gradually become more interested in this strategy to develop alternative models for occupying vacant spaces—whether residential, institutional, commercial, artistic—for events or mixed uses.

The multiple variations of transitional urbanism that exist, the resultant organizations and their potential to reinvent the post-industrial city have been explored in depth by a Berlin group, Urban Catalyst, in a study done for the European Union over more than a decade (2000).

## 5.2 From temporary to permanent

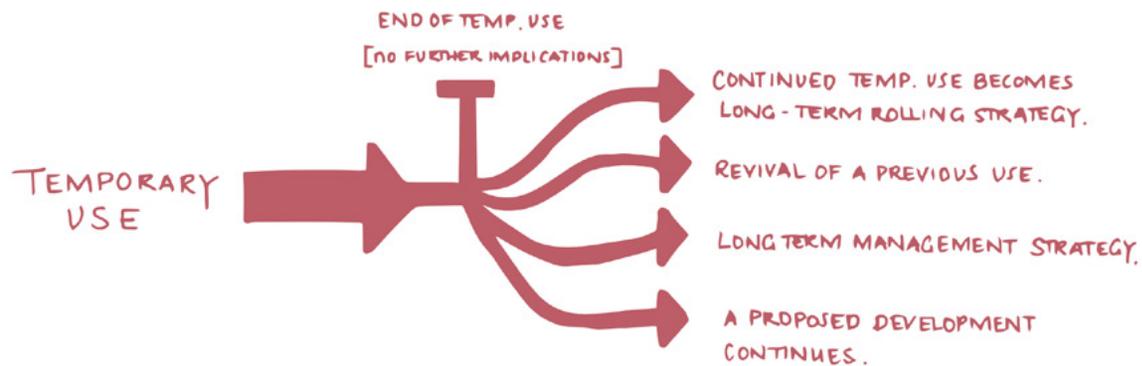
By definition, a temporary project is one which is of limited duration and which is not defined solely in terms of a time horizon. In that respect, while some temporary projects only last a few weeks, others extend over several years. This means that it is mostly the intention that defines the temporary aspect of a use. The key is in the understanding of intentions, success factors and the processes related to the project goals of the creators (the public, urban planners, administration or investors).

Temporary projects have four main characteristics. Firstly, they are small in scale and can grow in stages. Secondly, their budgets can remain relatively modest, reducing financial risk. Thirdly, they offer a great deal of involvement to users, inspiring change.<sup>56</sup> Finally, temporary uses generally occur in what are called “informal structures”. These structures are, in most cases, created by social capital and therefore can remain self-managed by the communities themselves. The approach used is, first and foremost, iterative and flexible.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, temporary uses are often a gateway to a more durable occupancy. Experimenting with temporary uses encourages appropriation, thereby contributing to improvement in the perception of previously disused space. Beyond the many immediate positive effects, using a site temporarily has the potential to stimulate creativity and imagination among a broader group of stake-holders, which can then be used to redevelop a site permanently.

Certainly, it is key to involve residents at the very start of the process.<sup>59</sup> Through these smaller-scale projects, local communities can be encouraged to mobilize and unite, resulting in stronger and more resilient communities.

*The potential outcomes of temporary use | Photo credit: Lilian Tuohy Main*



58. Conseil jeunesse de Montréal, 2016.

## Quartier Éphémère

Temporary uses have been an opportunity to raise public awareness of drastic urban changes that have occurred in a historically significant industrial district. Temporary uses became a lever to transition toward a permanent use that created a flagship heritage renovation project: The Fonderie Darling.

**CAROLINE ANDRIEUX** Founder and artistic director, Quartier Éphémère and Fonderie Darling

## Champ des Possibles

A series of small actions allowed residents to develop a sense of ownership and collaboration. Many young people are interested in the Champs des Possibles project, but how can we ensure their inclusion? This is still a challenge.

**CAROLINE MAGAR** Development Coordinator, Amis du Champ des Possibles

## 5.3 A new form of civic participation

Temporary uses respond to local and cultural needs, or simply provide an opportunity for residents to meet and socialize. Cohabitation in these spaces creates a feeling of connection to a collective project. Through this kind of public expression, and the redefinition of urban space, a new form of citizenship is born.<sup>59</sup> Civic participation is coupled with empowerment and an increased will to enrich communities through participation. Putting this new form of civic appropriation to work opens doors to discussions on urban development, and brings about new ways to think about the city.

In the book *The Temporary City*, the authors demonstrate that residents who felt they had something to offer, lead to greater participation in a project.<sup>60</sup> If this is the case, it is not surprising that the top-down planning process, which works at a large scale and over the long term, may not gain a community's attention or participation, which are focused on the short term and are anchored in the present. Moreover, truly motivated residents feel frustrated and powerless within existing processes, such as public consultations, which minimize genuine contributions to decision-making.<sup>61</sup> Transitional urbanism initiatives help make a more fundamental change in the relationship between formal (or top-down) and informal development (bottom-up). Here is an opportunity to respond to widespread changes in the roles that experts fulfil, in regards to the democratization of current processes, and question the evolution of the role of the expert in urban planning, where he or she is no longer an interpreter, but a facilitator, an essential agent for the creation of networks, opportunities, interaction and appropriation.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, vacant spaces offer the possibility of helping communities becoming increasingly autonomous. Their use is of particular interest to young people, who generally have fewer resources, as the facilities for their idea exist already. In this way, youth can create projects that are both essential to them and are directly connected to the needs of their community. The importance of giving legal access to spaces becomes an issue of well-being and growth for residents, especially in the case of vulnerable population groups. Absent a municipal policy, it is appropriate to take into account the regulatory framework in order to manage the use of these spaces.

A lack of landscaped and maintained green spaces is viewed by many people as a clear sign of municipal neglect. This idea results from a lack of information among residents about the means they have to shape the city. Neighbourhoods can only change when residents perceive vacant spaces as opportunities: Remember that currently Montréal has 25 sq. km. of vacant properties. Given that 45% of Montrealers live in what are considered food deserts (i.e. an area without access to fresh fruit and vegetables within a five-minute walk from home), and that the 25 square kilometres of vacant lots could produce up to 140,000 kilograms of vegetables per year, we can imagine agricultural production responding to this pressing need for food with the potential offered by Montréal vacant spaces.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, thousands of residents are working together in cities—both across the country and internationally—demonstrating that community autonomy is a force with the potential to collectively manage resources. This approach recognizes the fact that communities no longer ascribe the same importance to public administrations, which consequently are progressively losing their status as the public benefactor. Henceforth, access to lots can allow communities to manage things by and for themselves in order to maintain their needs.<sup>64</sup>

### 5.3.1 New intermediary organizations and governance models

Mandating an intermediary, who has the knowledge and flexibility for temporary projects, allows major property owners to compensate for their own deficiencies in this respect. The arrival of temporary and transitional uses as multi-disciplinary strategy emphasizes the need for new intermediary organization governance models that can provide effective support to key stakeholders in the implementation of new urban practices.

Bain Saint-Michel, a heritage property currently under restoration in Montreal, is a good example of a new governance model. This former public bathhouse will be made available to community organizations tasked with maximizing its use. The borough will manage it in collaboration with the community using a co-management model that will allow the sharing of resources to develop the programming for the benefit of residents of the surrounding areas.

64. Voicu and Been, 2008.

Saint-Michel public bath on Saint-Dominique street |

Photo credit: Édouard Plante-Fréchette, Archives La Presse



## Le Centre du Plateau

The process took much longer than we thought it would. We thought the selected organizations could officially take over the spaces in January, but in the end it will happen in March. We underestimated the time needed to prepare the setting and establish a team available to answer questions. We had to link the borough's priorities to our wishes, make a choice as to the types of organizations and target more specific themes: sports, recreation, and culture. Announcing this availability generated more requests than we expected. We created a monster!

**CRISTINA ROMERO**

Division Manager, Direction de la culture, des sports, des loisirs,  
des parcs et du développement social of the Plateau-Mont-Royal Borough



## Encourage inclusion

According to Dorothee de Collason, Ville Inclusive project manager at Exeko, vacant spaces are an opportunity to help disadvantaged and marginalized people. She referred to a situation that is of great concern in the community setting, the example of homeless centres located in churches that close down and are not relocated (St-James, Open Door). This increases the vagrancy problem and has an impact on the sense of security in adjacent areas. The vulnerability of those using these support centres is increasing. The Exeko approach includes a presumption of equality of intelligence and emphasizes potentials rather than problems. For example, Exeko worked prior to, during and after the redesign of public spaces in transition, such as Cabot Square, Viger Square and Place Émilie-Gamelin. The objective was to ensure that the input of all users, including the most marginalized, was taken into account and that everyone felt welcome when the space reopened. “If we don’t use this approach, we’ll end up just pushing the problem over to the next person,” explained this presenter. She concluded with a comment on the Montréal Transitoire Symposium: “It is relevant, logical, and necessary.”

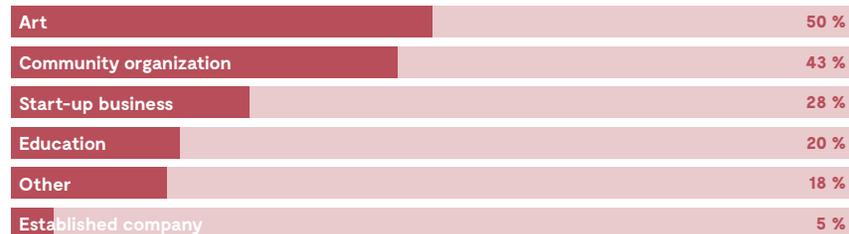
Viger Square before it was demolished, 2014 | Photo credit: Allen McInnis



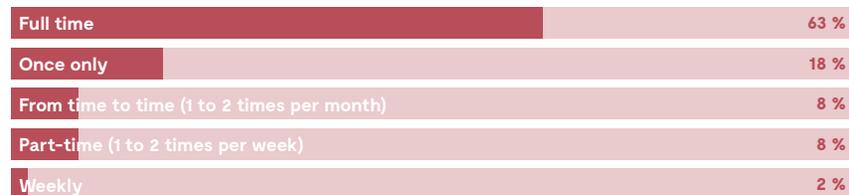
## 5.4 Meeting the needs for affordable and transitional spaces

In little time, Entremise has already received about 50 requests from individuals and groups looking for affordable space in this city, even without issuing a call for tenders. An online questionnaire was created to record the needs of these potential users and to create a database. Here are the responses to some of the questions asked; they underline the needs with regard not only to affordable and accessible space, but also in terms of duration.

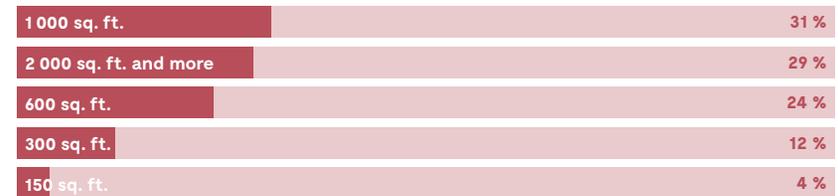
### What is the best description of the activities of your organization?



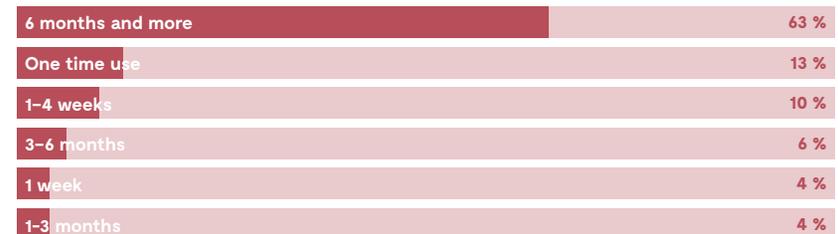
### How frequently will usage be?



### How much space do you need?



### For how long do you want to occupy the space?



### Are you willing to share the space with other users?





## A cultural approach

The cultural milieu includes a plethora of projects but it is sometimes difficult to specifically determine needs. Possible uses are multiple, and of two types in particular: opportunities to showcase projects, and workspaces. Valérie Beaulieu, general director of Culture Montréal, underlines that cultural organizations may be in precarious situations. That is why the current approach of Culture Montréal is to aim for the long term, for example by creating 25-year leases. However, the need for temporary spaces is also felt, but they must be secure and adapted to the specific needs of organizations. According to Ms. Beaulieu, these spaces are more appropriate for dissemination (showcases) than for workspace. How can they be combined with the other needs of the arts community, such as education or student projects? Cultural facilities may need substantial budgets: they require security, equipment and adaptation. Art is also a way to appropriate vacant public spaces. Ms. Beaulieu enumerated certain factors for success: be sensitive and open to the needs of the milieu, organize community collaboration and encourage inclusion.

## 5.5 A recognized strategy to protect cultural heritage

Historic England, the organization responsible for more than 300 historic sites in that country, states that the best way to protect a building is to keep it occupied, even if the usage is partial or temporary.<sup>65</sup>

Several iconic examples of built and cultural heritage are affected by the vacancy problem; the value and potential for resident reuse of these sites lifts the veil on the many challenges to come. Despite these challenges, heritage sites are now seen as being well adapted to temporary uses. Over the years, occupancy has become recognized as a built heritage protection tool by various charters: ICOMOS international charters, Burra Charter of 2013, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the Charter of Venice, since 1964.

However, it must be noted that adapting sites of cultural significance can, in some cases, compromise their qualities. Yet a protracted search for the most appropriate use can easily lead to degradation of the site. Transitional uses can be a favourable solution for both users and conservationists, on condition that occupants are sensitized to the heritage values of the space and understand how to use it without compromising them.

Last March, during discussions on vacant and vulnerable heritage buildings organized by the municipal heritage department, more than 120 experts were consulted. Temporary and transitional uses were recognized as one of five major cross-disciplinary ideas. Temporary and transitional uses are mentioned three different times. First is the authorization and monitoring of municipal buildings to be used for temporary occupancy in order to ensure continuous maintenance. Among implementation methods, action was set in motion with the organization of the event Montréal transitoire. Experts benefitted from presentations of similar foreign experiences with regard to transitional uses, workshops on ways to apply them to Montréal and instituting facilitation measures to encourage them going forward.

65. Historic England, 2011.

## RECOMMANDATIONS

9

That the Ville de Montréal commit to identifying departments as gateway services for the central administration and the boroughs, in particular the city heritage division and the boroughs' culture, sports, recreation and social development divisions, to supervise and facilitate resident projects related to vacant public spaces and to recognize determinative local initiatives that already exist in Montréal.

10

That the Ville de Montréal establish clear and transparent priorities related to the transitional use of vacant and underused buildings and lots in order to produce an easily understandable, image-based guide or a toolbox. This will encourage a transitional culture for vacant spaces in Montréal among a variety of stakeholders, including young people.

11

That the Ville de Montréal financially support bottom-up projects through a central responsible agency that will assess 1% of the budgets of major public projects, analogous to the provincial public art policy, in order to multiply small participatory and inclusive projects.

12

That the Ville de Montréal continue to develop and encourage the emergence of new organizational models facilitating the inclusion of young people (12 to 30) in the urban planning process in Montréal (e.g. co-management of the Champ des Possibles).

13

That the Ville de Montréal create an easily understandable and image-based best practices guide, in order to manage transitional uses of public and private heritage sites, emphasizing the principle risks and how to address them, from a conservation perspective.

14

That the Ville de Montréal financially support the creation of a local and international network of expertise related to transitional urbanism in order to encourage the exchange of information and knowledge, the provision of tools and resources and a listing of projects created.



Photo credit: Les Amis du Champ des Possibles

# 6— Toward transitional urbanism in Montréal: The major challenges

Opinion Paper on the use of vacant space in Montréal: a youth perspective

The Canada Maiting Plant, abandoned industrial site on the banks of the canal Lachine, 2008 | Photo credit: @notsamjetsam





Meeting in a church converted into a community space in the South-West Borough | Photo credit: Le Salon 1861

## 6.1 Obstacles of human nature

The idea of recognizing the value of built and natural heritage, in the broadest sense of the term, is based on valuing what exists already, and preserving this value. However, in order to be taken into consideration, this value must be understood by those involved, and reinforced by regulatory, legislative and fiscal mechanisms. Vacant lots and buildings are not an opportunity for tabula rasa development. For example, “the presence of some plant diversity is important. Since we live in a large, concrete city, the presence of existing vegetation has a value that merits better recognition, better respect and better protection.”<sup>66</sup>

At the heart of the densely constructed urban fabric, the presence of openness created by un-built land is highly significant for young generations seeking autonomy. For young people, greened vacant lots can be an opportunity for being together, taking the time for oneself, contemplating the landscape, developing critical judgment and thinking about the future of our cities. Such spaces offer both a testimony to the past and a stimulating lever for the future. Consequently, the emptiness that these spaces represent must be accepted, as must be the opportunities for improvement which they can offer.<sup>67</sup>

In the case of buildings, there is increasing understanding of the social and cultural importance that a site can hold for the community and the ecological footprint of its initial construction. However, while some informal uses may be beneficial, they are as yet not well recognized and are often discouraged by the municipal administration. This prevents the participation of a wider diversity of urban stakeholders in the valuing of existing built fabric.

Consequently, one of the greatest challenges is to demonstrate to public and private developers the real advantages of preserving these sites of interest, both as a long-term investment, as for the short term effect on the local community. For this, communication with property owners as to the value of built and natural heritage is necessary, as well as support and awareness for tools for documenting the type of site, the architectural components to be preserved, the context, the surrounding community, and understanding of the owner and potential occupants. Recognizing the value of the existing naturally encourages the development of temporary and transitional uses as an optimal and iterative revitalization strategy.



Le Village au Pied-du-Courant | Photo crédit: Jean-Michael Semiharo — La Pépinière



“Some things work, others don’t. This is part of the experience. You have to dare. Accessibility is key in this. If transitional urbanism becomes something costly, exclusion will reappear.”

**CAROLINE DE JESSEY** SNCF Immobilier

## 6.2 Logistical barriers

### 6.2.1 The legal framework

Temporary leases with short termination notice are not legally prohibited, but they are rarely used in practice. One of the reasons against them is the supplementary costs they entail. Temporary leases require more management because of the higher turnover rate. For public property owners, this means more civil servants have to be hired at a time when municipalities face resource limitations. As for the private sector, landlords also prefer reliable long-term tenants. Property owners are also likely to refuse short-term leases to avoid missing out on signing a long-term lease, which will provide greater profit. However, recently there has been an increase in property owners internationally specializing in temporary leases. The trend toward “pop-up” boutiques is evidence of this.

Temporary leases, as with any lease, must include clear rental provisions and advance notice conditions. A one-year lease, renewable with three months' termination notice is an excellent starting point. The two parties must both benefit from the agreement so that a solid trusting relationship is created between them. In cases where the landlord fears that the tenant will not want to leave at the appropriate time, hiring an intermediary, well-informed about the potential risks, may help create proper communication between the two parties.

The complexity of insurance coverage is also a significant obstacle to temporary use.<sup>68</sup> In order to hold an event on public land, third-party liability insurance is mandatory. Insurance premiums depend on the situation, in particular the type of activity, number of participants and the type of property. If the signing authorities must be protected against all types of damages, the premiums will be too high for most community and cultural organizations interested in temporary uses. In this kind of situation, the presence of a third party is essential, as is a regulator that understands the context and can help expertly guide smaller and more vulnerable organizations.<sup>69</sup>

For the Village au Pied-du-Courant project, La Pépinière, the lead organization, assumed the insurance costs while allowing organizations [e.g. Jeunes Marins Urbains and the LAAT library (Lieu d'arts, d'architectures et de territoires)] to benefit. Le Village au Pied-du-Courant hosted initiatives that were hard-pressed to find other sites.<sup>70</sup>

For public land, Canadian jurisprudence is quite clear, according to Mistaya Hemingway of *Conscience urbaine*. Although jurisprudence indicates that the Ville de Montréal cannot require secondary insurance for public land under its jurisdiction, anyone wanting to hold an event is required by the administration to conform to this stipulation. The request is clearly stated, by all boroughs. This insurance is often very expensive and can discourage community actions. Filling out an occupancy permit for a vacant municipal property is not easy for most people. Complications also arise from the fact that detailed information about the exact nature of what will be done on the site must be provided. It is sometimes difficult to know exactly what will be done in informal and artistic ventures, given the creation process.<sup>71</sup>



## The case of Gestion immobilière Quo Vadis

Gestion immobilière Quo Vadis is a multidisciplinary company whose mission is to preserve and restore the historical and architectural value of landmark buildings, with the objective of adapting them so as to provide a variety of rental solutions for entrepreneurs and creators. Natalie Voland, president of Gestion immobilière Quo Vadis, spoke in particular about Salon 1861. This project, which takes place in an abandoned church, was designed to reconstitute a community through social business models by using real estate as a catalyst for economic development and community integration. The question raised at the beginning of this project was: in what ways can a church, by definition a community living space, have the same importance as in the past? Ms. Voland thinks the question of how the private sector can support such efforts should also be asked, since private developers are too often excluded when the community is involved.

## 6.2.2 The regulatory framework

One of the major obstacles is the question of regulatory frameworks and the complexity of interaction among the different levels of government. In a document proposing solutions related to adapting the regulation of vacant land in Montréal, the Lande organization wrote: “Montréal’s regulatory framework has very little place for the temporary use of spaces.”

“What is apparent is that seeking to appropriate vacant land belonging to the City for a temporary project is a task that requires some knowledge of the division of powers between the central city and the boroughs, as well as of the responsibilities of the various departments at each level of the municipal organization. [...] In temporary appropriation programs, the provincial administration plays an important role in the development of a policy to address a problem that exceeds the financial capacity of cities, which consequently requires collaboration and coordination with higher levels of government.”<sup>72</sup>

In several other major cities, when the municipality owns a piece of land, it is now possible to make a request for temporary use online. Occupancy is permitted and even encouraged, while permanent use projects and property rights remain unharmed.



“The challenge of transitional use remains, in part, due to the fact that regulations are emphasized, a very bureaucratic approach. It would be helpful to think in terms of regulation grey zones.”

**DINU BUMBARU** Heritage Montreal

72. (Our translation) Lande, 2016, p. 20.

While the standards set by zoning are applied uniformly, other bylaws allow some flexibility. These include regulations related to Site Planning and Architectural Integration Programs (French abbreviation: PIIA), conditional uses, Special Planning Programs (French abbreviation: PPU), minor variances (in French, *derogations mineures*) and Specific Construction, Alteration or Occupancy Projects (French abbreviation: PPCMOI). These regulations confer discretionary power, meaning they allow some latitude in decisions, but this latitude does not go far enough for short-term use. Permit requests are common in boroughs where regulations are stricter, such as the Plateau-Mont-Royal and the processing time can significantly slow down a project. These projects rarely need a zoning change. However, when a change in use is accepted, the permit, once delivered, confers an acquired right to the site for the designated use, which makes the question of temporary uses more complex. This means the Ville de Montréal should think about integrating particular variance measures or special permits for temporary occupancy with a shorter time frame, which would not have precedence over acquired rights.

Building code compliance for temporary uses is also an obstacle, especially for short-term uses. However, there are creative ways to bring a building up to code stipulations and satisfy safety requirements. The CNESST refers to this as an “administrative provision that allows a request to the competent authority to present a different design, in the form of a request for a different measure.”<sup>73</sup>

Decontamination is also a major issue. Constraints related to the contamination of buildings or soil are frustrating to potential temporary occupants. The astronomical costs related to this process sometimes even surpass the market value of the building or lot in question.<sup>74</sup> In one study, Pierre Legendre, an advisor to the municipal Service des travaux publics de l'environnement, revealed that 4,200 hectares (42 square miles), i.e. approximately 60% of all vacant land on the island of Montréal, is potentially contaminated. The study of soil contamination on the island of Montréal is relatively recent and available results are only fragmentary. No complete inventory of contaminated sites exists and it is therefore difficult to create an accurate portrait of the situation.<sup>75</sup> Caroline Magar, coordinator of Amis du Champ des Possibles, confirms that many properties are contaminated in Montréal, according to municipal standards. This is the case of the Champ des Possibles. In the case of contaminated land, if vegetation or urban agricultural projects are planned, plantings must be done in containers, which is not necessarily an ecological option. The toxicological reality of contaminated land is very complex and not generally understood. During interviews for this Opinion Paper, several people mentioned the possibility of alternative decontamination as a potential solution.

## Quartier Éphémère

The combination of the strengths of each person is essential, working together so that things will succeed. For example, the fire department was very helpful, allowing Quartier Éphémère to meet safety objectives in a creative way.

**CAROLINE ANDRIEUX** Founder and artistic director, Quartier Éphémère and Fonderie Darling

## RECOMMANDATIONS

15

That the Ville de Montréal commit to reducing administrative, regulatory and technical roadblocks directly related to the emergence and implementation of transitional uses in Montréal, by promoting actions such as:

- Facilitating access to compensatory measures and creating a framework for creating standards for transitional uses.
- In conjunction with the Urban Plan, facilitate access to permits for transitional occupancy and study the idea of temporary zoning to encourage better use of sites in transition.
- Create an agreement template for the temporary occupancy of public spaces in order to ensure equitable allocation of roles and responsibilities between the municipal administration and temporary users, including youth.
- Consolidate partnerships in order to expand, and make more comprehensible, insurance policies available to organizations and individuals working in public spaces.
- Commission an independent study to define real risks, rather than perceived risks, of contamination in Montréal lots and buildings in order to encourage decontamination solutions, e.g. through innovative partnerships among public administrations, property owners and civil society.

16

That the Ville de Montréal establish a series of pilot projects, including young people in the processes, to fuel discussions about administrative, regulatory and technical structures to be adopted to encourage transitional projects, paying particular attention to:

- Reducing harmful effects related to transfers to users, and supporting a phased approach to increasing longevity through determinative uses over a longer time horizon.
- Promoting diversity in users and uses: young people, seniors, start-up companies, freelance professionals, and marginalized groups.



The space in front of 77 Bernard street | Photo credit: Vivre le patrimoine

# 7— Examples of Montréal initiatives

Opinion Paper on the use of vacant  
space in Montréal: a youth perspective

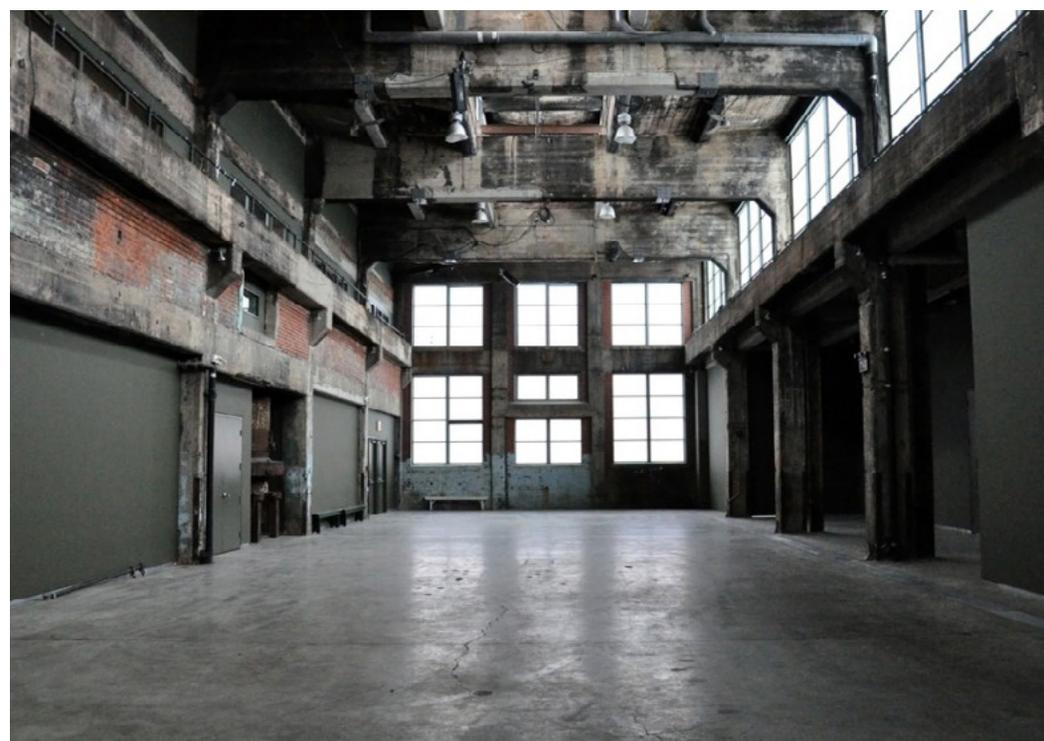
## 7.1. Quartier Éphémère: The city serves art

[fonderiedarling.org/mission.html](http://fonderiedarling.org/mission.html)

Quartier Éphémère was established in 1994 in an old warehouse located on Prince Street, in Griffintown. Made available free of charge by the Ville de Montréal, the organization used the building for exhibition space and artist studios until 1999. Its presence in a historical abandoned industrial district responded to its mission at the time, which was to revitalize peripheral parts of the city through artistic activities.

Numerous in situ projects greatly helped to publicize art in the district.<sup>76</sup> In 1997, Quartier Éphémère also organized the *Panique au Faubourg* exhibition, a series of artistic installations in abandoned buildings in the old faubourg des Récollets district. This was one of the leverage projects that led to the birth of the Fonderie Darling as we know it today. The many temporary projects completed in situ, the recycling of the foundry and “the many artistic endeavours hosted there have appealed to the public’s imagination, strongly influencing the perception of the Faubourg des Récollets and shaping its evolution.”<sup>77</sup>

After Quartier Éphémère highlighted the foundry’s potential, it learned that the building was to be demolished. The organization asked the Ville de Montréal, at the time the building owner, for a one-year delay in order to develop a project for the site. Quartier Éphémère occupied the foundry by first installing a construction site trailer. The group was finally able to bring together enough partners and resources to prevent demolition, renovate the building, make it its headquarters in 2006 and transform the site into a creation hub and artist residence under the name La Fonderie Darling.



The project came to fruition thanks to collaboration with the municipal administration, including recognition of the foundry as a heritage property in 2001, and a total of \$4 million in financial support provided by the provincial and federal governments and private partners. Renovation was conducted in two separate phases. In 2002, the Ville de Montréal transferred the public building through a long-term lease. The adjacent building, occupied by artists, was then renovated and acquired by the organization.<sup>78</sup>

## 7.2. Les Amis du Champ des Possibles: From brownfield site to an urban biodiversity reserve

[amisduchamp.com/a-propos](http://amisduchamp.com/a-propos)

Champ des Possibles (CDP) is a local community project to appropriate and manage an abandoned urban field, transforming it into both a public green space and an urban biodiversity reserve. CDP is an empty lot covering approximately 1.5 hectares (15,000 square metres). It had previously been a railway marshalling yard, dismantled and abandoned 40 years ago. Since then, the property was colonized by urban flora and fauna, offering a vast green space in a dense Montréal neighbourhood: Mile End.<sup>79</sup>

For some time now, the community has been using the land as a green space and to provide a shortcut to the Rosemont metro station. In 2006, the Ville de Montréal announced a revitalization plan for the Saint-Viateur Est sector, in the heart of Mile End and adjacent to CDP. The plan included the reuse of CDP as a municipal public works yard. Residents and members of Mile End's residents' committee mobilized to oppose the transformation. They were successful. The Amis du Champs des Possibles organization (ACDP) was created and later mandated to co-manage the space jointly with the municipal administration (Plateau Mont-Royal Borough). ACDP was founded to represent the interests of residents and their vision for the future of the property. The organization developed proposals for the use of this green space and an urban biodiversity preservation plan. Today, not only is the green space the habitat of a hundred animal and plant species, but also a park, a favourite spot for artists and a place for contemplation.<sup>80</sup>

## 7.3. Lande: Creating new public spaces

[landemtl.com/qui-sommes-nous](http://landemtl.com/qui-sommes-nous)

Lande facilitates the permanent or temporary reappropriation by residents of empty lots in Montréal. The organization helps uncover the potential for such spaces to improve the quality of life in Montréal's central neighbourhoods. Lande believes that everyone can and must help transform the city. The organization helps people take ownership of Montréal in order to create livelier and more inclusive communities. It provides an interactive map which allows users to find an empty lot near where they live and indicate their interest in helping to transform it into a community garden, a green space or playground. Lande creates groups of residents and supports them in projects to transform vacant land.<sup>81</sup>

The Arpent Vert project transformed a small, trash-filled vacant lot (covering 1 arpent, or 0.35 ha) in the Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve borough. In summer 2015, a small sign was posted in the middle of the abandoned space surrounding the properties at the corner of Lafontaine and Valois streets. Neighbourhood residents quickly responded. A volunteer committee first organized a major clean-up event and then started a real occupancy effort. Progress was beset by road-blocks and described as a true bureaucratic puzzle.<sup>82</sup> “We were lucky we had the Lande organization behind us,”<sup>83</sup> remarked one volunteer.

The occupancy permit was granted thanks to the involvement of the Borough's elected officials. Municipal employees came to spread earth, allowing residents to plant bulbs and plants offered by the Sentier Urbain organization. “Just this, with the greenery and the addition of street furniture, Arpent Vert became a gathering spot... People came there this summer to eat an ice cream, read a book; children played together.”<sup>84</sup>



81. Lande, [n. d.]. 82, 83 et 84. Hacker, [n. d.].

## 7.4. La Pépinière: Reusing exterior spaces

[pepiniere.co](http://pepiniere.co)

La Pépinière was initially created to occupy a large hangar that was 80% vacant, located behind the Biscuiterie Viau plant in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. It was an immense, flexible space, which the organization thought could house an enterprise “nursery”—an incubator for micro-entrepreneurship. After several months without progress, La Pépinière decided to adjust its mission and aim for the development of exterior spaces since the obstacles seemed smaller. By choosing to work on event-planning regulations, it became possible to try out things with greater freedom and relative speed, even when existing regulations were not adapted to the proposed uses. Here are the concrete projects developed by La Pépinière.

The Jardins Gamelin project includes a vast public terrasse with a liquor licence. From a regulatory perspective, it is impossible to have a permanent liquor licence. The solution was found in an event permit which allows for the sale of alcohol four days a week during five months. Although the project takes place over a season, instead of just an event, the legal fuzziness means the project’s objectives can be achieved, which helps make Jardins Gamelin a popular summer meeting place.

The Village au Pied-du-Courant is a seasonable sand beach, along Notre-Dame Street, between Parthenais and Fullum. It offers a large playground for both adults and children. When a swing set or playground equipment made of tires is installed, standards for playgrounds are not applied. La Pépinière has also been able to propose informal play areas, based on the adventure playground concept, which has been a hit with everyone.

At the Jardineries, located at the base of the Olympic Stadium, transitional uses play a role in the progressive transformation of the Olympic site by providing programming to the Esplanade, which is otherwise deserted. The first year, a giant sand box was installed, adjacent to an octagonal concrete slab which functioned as a stage and dance floor.

The ephemeral buildings constructed on such sites are considered artistic installations (an example is the Jardins Gamelin greenhouse), and not as permanent structures. While plans generally require approval by an engineer, an architect’s stamp is not necessary. Structures do not have to meet strict construction code requirements, which are costly, excessive and not adapted to projects of this type.

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# **8— Examples of International initiatives**

**Opinion Paper on the use of vacant  
space in Montréal: a youth perspective**

## 8.1 A brief summary of inspiring initiatives

### 8.1.1 The city reimaged: Large-scale strategies

#### **Camelot Europe, Great Britain, France, Germany**

[uk.cameloteurope.com](http://uk.cameloteurope.com)

The Camelot group is a community real estate broker that manages several vacant buildings and spaces of major heritage value in Europe, offering protection through occupancy. People looking for housing can apply to live in one of the spaces offered by Camelot. They pay below-market rent in exchange for a temporary lease and certain restrictions such as the number of visitors at the same time and pets.

#### **Renew Newcastle, Newcastle, Australia**

[renewnewcastle.org](http://renewnewcastle.org)

For varying periods of time, the non-profit Renew Newcastle (located in Newcastle, Australia) manages properties that are vacant, derelict or in need of renovation. They rent such spaces to artists, cultural projects and community organizations until the buildings are sold or a long-term tenant appears. Newcastle's downtown and historic district had been in decline for several decades and suffered from high vacancy rates. The initiative helped in the revitalization of these districts through the arrival of many artistic, cultural and social economy entrepreneurs.



#### **Living Streets, Ghent, Belgium**

[leefstraat.be](http://leefstraat.be)

Living Streets is an annual event that takes place on a particular site for two months. Residents can transform their street to make it into their ecological dream setting. Each of these living laboratories explores one aspect of the new urbanism paradigm. The proposals allocate less space to cars and more for social interaction. Living Streets is an initiative led by a hundred residents that takes place in dozens of streets. In co-operation with stakeholders and municipal departments, residents think of ways to ensure that new streets and new neighbourhoods are designed with the approval of everyone. The experimentation has had a resounding success in Ghent, and other European cities hope to use it for inspiration.

### 8.1.2 The city creative: Contributions of artistic and cultural actors



**Hidden Door Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland**

[hiddendoorblog.org](http://hiddendoorblog.org)

Nine days a year, the Hidden Door music and arts festival takes place on a vacant UNESCO world heritage site in Edinburgh. From a contemporary point of view, it can be difficult to revitalize world heritage sites. This initiative, together with other major art festivals such as the Venice and Australian *biennales*, demonstrate the power and motivations of art communities for revitalization of complex sites.



**KAAPALI (The Cable Factory), Helsinki, Finland**

[www.kaapelitehdas.fi/en/kaapelitehdas](http://www.kaapelitehdas.fi/en/kaapelitehdas)

Finland's largest cultural centre (5,000 sq. m.) is housed in a former cable factory. Knowing that the site was gradually evolving toward total vacancy, its owner, Nokia telecommunications decided to rent it, at low cost, as creative use spaces. In 1987, once the site's potential was demonstrated, the City of Helsinki and Nokia collaborated on the permanent development of the site and its transformation into a multifunctional cultural space.

### 8.1.3 Temporary markets: Reimagining historic arteries



#### **Pop-up stores, Camden Town, London**

[camdowntownunlimited.com](http://camdowntownunlimited.com)

In 2006, Camden Town Unlimited (CTU), a business development non-profit, experimented with pop-up stores. CTU agreed to offer a contract to owners, including insurance coverage, very low rents and leases lasting no longer than six months. These conditions allowed small stores and companies to develop innovative concepts that include a social value-added.



#### **Brixton Market Village, London**

[brixtonmarket.net/brixton-village](http://brixtonmarket.net/brixton-village)

The temporary rental strategy of Brixton Market Village has provided a second life to the old heritage market of Granville Arcade in London. The initiative led to more durable protection of the site and raised awareness among local stakeholders. The market also became the centre of a strong local economy due to a strategy that started by offering space for free during a three-month period for a variety of activities.

## 8.2 Inspiring initiatives: Suggestions from keynote speakers at Montréal transitoire

### 8.2.1 *No Longer Empty: Using art to connect vacant properties to communities in New York City*

#### **Project context**

Concretely, what does targeting a space that has been abandoned—whether for months or decades—represent? How can we decode the message that the space and its opportunities are sending us? The actions of No Longer Empty began after the 2008 stock market crash, in a context in which several well-liked New York institutions had been abandoned. Beginning with simple gestures, the organization progressively brought artistic action to the heart of buildings. It was apparent that there was a real demand for this kind of project. No Longer Empty wanted its actions to take root. It was able to understand the stories of the community, which needed to be told, as well as the new, emerging stories.

#### **The project development process used by No Longer Empty**

The projects unfolded over several phases of deliberation and reflection. Before choosing a space, partnerships were formed with communities. Once this was done, they would select and study the space, its context and history.

#### **The challenge of time limitations**

Management of temporary leases is a challenge in this kind of project. Occasionally, stakeholders are disappointed they have to leave the space. This means it is necessary to plan for and manage this issue which is specific to temporary and transitional uses. Sometimes, the positive impact of a project can be felt for years after the end of the project, depending on the relationships created by completion of the project.

#### **Honour history and the integrity of residents**

It is sometimes difficult to take into account the migrations of groups in neighbourhoods, as Carol Stakenas mentioned, citing one of the organization's projects in the Bronx. Some projects raise problems for groups that have another vision of the future of a space. That is why it is essential to recognize the importance of public discussions of such questions, informing residents not only when a project starts, but also earlier on.

Being able to fully understand the needs of the community is an important issue. Some tools, such as the Theatre of the Oppressed (a participatory theatre technique designed to increase people's sensitivity and provide them with information), were used to explore certain conflicts that divide a community and offer other intervention strategy options. A mapping tool can also be helpful to identify neighbourhood needs.

**Project example: We are more than ourselves**

Whether done in large spaces or in other, smaller settings, some projects relate art to specific needs. We are more than ourselves, designed in partnership with a blood donor organization, explored the meaning of different types of circulation in the neighbourhood, including blood in the human body, leading visitors to become interested in this theme and donate blood.



“Empty space is an opportunity.”

**CAROL STAKENAS**

Director, No Longer Empty



Heritage building in the Bronx, NYC | Photo credit: Nathan Kensinger



# LA CHAUFFERIE

ACCUEIL

CAMPING

SNACK

BOUQUETTES

MATERIEL DE SPORT

BOUCLES

Les Grands Voisins, Paris | Photo credit: Plateau Urbain

### 8.2.2 Plateau Urbain: Upscaling temporary urbanism in Paris

In France more than 8.3 million sq. m. have been vacant for more than five years. The Île-de-France region has more than 2.9 sq. m. of unused space. Plateau Urbain manages the short term availability of vacant buildings for communities. The founders of Plateau Urbain state that they have not invented anything; similar projects existed previously, which offered good inspiration. The main objective was to make the process more frequent. The organization is proud of the interest in making spaces available to people who are considered “outside of the market”, allowing them to stay in central districts instead of being required to move to outlying areas. Plateau Urbain has also joined with community organizations complementary to its model.

The departure point was to focus on landlords of unoccupied spaces. Dialogues began with some of them, without selecting any particular building. Plateau Urbain works with a few square metres or several hectares, in the very short to the long-term. In its work, the association does not mark up the cost of using a space. Its approach is one in which the costs of an empty building without market value are disclosed; it proposes uses that would compensate for increasing costs. Plateau Urbain has helped generate a laboratory of new uses and a different property market. This model requires conscientious work and a tight market so as not to create downtime. The organization has to respond rapidly and have a list of potential users available for each space. It must start to search for tenants at the very time a temporary occupancy agreement is created. The selection must then be made rapidly. If the building remains without an occupant for too long, prices skyrocket and the space is no longer accessible.

Plateau Urbain brings simple arguments based on a strong economic model as well as solid legal and technical support. In this way, it has been able to acquire about ten benefactor members. The presence of members from the traditional property market has increased confidence in transitional urbanism. In 2016, Plateau Urban launched a website, which has more 1,100 registrants for 8,000 sq. m. of vacant space. Demand is so high that the organization has been able to fill 1,500 sq. m. of property in a dozen days. The website has become a district analysis tool for communities and private owners. The Plateau Urbain role varies from that of a consultant, to project supporter, developer and manager. Each project must be local and have its own identity.

In the example of the Grands Voisins project, in the 14th Arrondissement, the City of Paris planned to transform the former Saint-Vincent-de-Paul hospital complex (more than 20,000 sq. m.) into a green housing development. Plateau Urbain took on management of the project. The uses include a mixture of housing for vulnerable people, spaces for associations and economic actors (start-ups) and artist studios. This successful experience demonstrates the possibility of a mixture of uses and people cohabiting a single site.

### 8.2.3 Société nationale des chemins de fer français (SNCF): Redefining the role of large public property owners in France through temporary art sites

The French National Railway Corporation is the second-largest property owner in France, after the State. It owns 20,000 hectares of land and 26,000 buildings, with an average age of about 74 years. It sees its material assets as France's railway DNA capital. SNCF has developed a broad collection of real estate assets over 150 years. SNCF Immobilier has three missions: to modernize and optimize spaces for railway service, exploit and develop spaces that are inappropriate for railway use and develop housing for railway workers.

Beginning in 2015, SNCF Immobilier has been encouraging the artistic use of its vacant spaces. Projects are selected according to three criteria: identity (all selected projects must take into account the characteristics and history of the site); inclusion (project must offer opportunities to bring the entire population together; urban well-being (projects must encourage an appreciation of the site and the well-being of its users).

The Ground Control pilot project was developed to revive a former warehouse dating back to the 18th century. It became a true alternative living space. Over four months of programming, Ground Control received 400,000 visitors. Through this initiative, SNCF demonstrated the inclusiveness potential of revitalized spaces, which has enabled it to stand out as an urban development player. The role of railways in the collective imagination was one of the indisputable factors in its success. Independent of the aesthetic quality of the projects, a real concern for dialogue with local stakeholders, based on a temporary occupancy agreement gave a highly particular colour to the project.

Since Grand Control, a new cultural project model has emerged in train stations. It is far from an advertising model, and is part of a dynamic process of exchange and sharing. This fits in well with the stations' use value, which are, par excellence, spaces for exchange. Culture provides wonderful leverage to uncover the potential of these sites. Finally, the project for vacant railway land helps change the public's perception of SNCF, which has become an urban player improving quality of life.

SNCF had not done and projects prior to these temporary artist sites, it jumped into this adventure in a spontaneous way because the strategy became obvious. Some things worked out, others did not, but that is all part of the experiment. According to SNCF, you have to be daring. Moreover, SNCF found solutions to many problems through the quality of relationships developed with project managers. Some projects even avoid regulations, with tempered risks.

Prior to project realization, a petition was created calling into question the lack of protection for artists' intellectual property on the sites. The specifications were criticized as being insufficiently creative, providing maximum protection for SNCF and too many restrictions for managers of potential projects. Given that they were unable to commission a work, a new model had to be created.



Ground Control, Paris | Photo credit: SNCF

# 9— Summary of recommendations to the Ville de Montréal with regard to its responsibilities

Opinion Paper on the use of vacant  
space in Montréal: a youth perspective

## 9.1. Recommendations

### Ensure data on vacant and underused space is optimized, integrated and made public

1

That the Ville de Montréal update existing data (e.g. the vacant building registry for each borough) and collect missing data in order to complete the portrait of vacant and underused spaces (public and private) held among the different municipal departments, and encourage the creation of a central tool that standardizes the data and makes it public, in accordance with the open data policy in effect.



## Prioritize, protect and make use of sites of cultural significance with care for the existing built environment

2

That the Ville de Montréal commission an independent study on the direct and indirect impacts on the urban fabric of real estate pressures and speculation in order to create appropriate measures to reduce the harmful effects in sites of cultural significance.

3

That the Ville de Montréal consult users' practices and study the quality of biodiversity in empty public lots in order to prioritize the appropriate use of existing spaces, with nature and biodiversity considered as a value by the community, instead of developing new spaces at great expense.

4

That the Ville de Montréal act as model property owner and adopt a municipal policy that gives priority to the use of vacant and underutilized heritage buildings prior to renting or constructing new buildings.

5

That the Ville de Montréal agree to further develop the notion of social value and diversity in historic perspectives when applying the evaluation grid for municipal heritage, in accordance with the current international heritage conservation movement which focuses on the involvement of affected communities.

6

That, with regard to its actions related to the use of empty spaces, the Ville de Montréal prioritize districts and buildings with heritage value, which are both threatened with degradation and judged important, both by young people and by experts, because they are part of the identity of Montrealers.

7

That the Ville de Montréal consolidate and reinforce fiscal measures in order to discourage neglect, abandonment and demolition of properties of cultural significance (e.g. mandatory registration in the central registry of vacant buildings).

8

That the Ville de Montréal clarify the standards and make bylaws related to the maintenance of vacant buildings and lots uniform, and that it acquire the appropriate tools to apply them, in particular with regard to sites of cultural importance.

## Encourage and support community-led activities for empty spaces and support intermediary actors emerging in transitional urbanism

9

That the Ville de Montréal commit to identifying departments as gateway services for the central administration and the boroughs, in particular the city heritage division and the boroughs' culture, sports, recreation and social development divisions, to supervise and facilitate bottom-up projects related to vacant public spaces and to recognize determinative bottom-up initiatives that already exist in Montréal.

10

That the Ville de Montréal establish clear and transparent priorities related to the transitional use of vacant and underused buildings and lots in order to produce an easily understandable, image-based guide or a toolbox. This will encourage a transitional culture for vacant spaces in Montréal among a variety of stakeholders, including young people.

11

That the Ville de Montréal financially support bottom-up projects through a central responsible agency that will assess 1% of the budgets of major public projects, analogous to the provincial public art policy, in order to multiply small participatory and inclusive projects.

12

That the Ville de Montréal continue to develop and encourage the emergence of new organizational models facilitating the inclusion of young people (12 to 30) in the urban planning process in Montréal (e.g. co-management of the Champ des Possibles.)

13

That the Ville de Montréal create an easily understandable and image-based best practices guide, in order to manage transitional uses of public and private heritage sites, emphasizing the principal risks and how to address them, from a conservation perspective.

14

That the Ville de Montréal financially support the creation of a local and international network of expertise related to transitional urbanism in order to encourage the exchange of information and knowledge, the provision of tools and resources and a listing of projects created.

## Create a structure adapting to transitional use of vacant and underused spaces

15

That the Ville de Montréal commit to reducing administrative, regulatory and technical roadblocks directly related to the emergence and implementation of transitional uses in Montréal, by promoting actions such as:

- Facilitating access to compensatory measures and creating a framework for creating standards for transitional uses.
- In conjunction with the Urban Plan, facilitate access to permits for transitional occupancy and study the idea of temporary zoning to encourage better use of sites in transition.
- Create an agreement template for the temporary occupancy of public spaces in order to ensure equitable allocation of roles and responsibilities between the municipal administration and temporary users, including youth.
- Consolidate partnerships in order to expand, and make more comprehensible, insurance policies available to organizations and individuals working in public spaces.
- Commission an independent study to define real risks, rather than perceived risks, of contamination in Montréal lots and buildings in order to encourage decontamination solutions, e.g. through innovative partnerships among public administrations, property owners and civil society.

16

That the Ville de Montréal establish a series of pilot projects, including young people in the processes, to fuel discussions about administrative, regulatory and technical structures to be adopted to encourage transitional projects, paying particular attention to:

- Reducing harmful effects related to transfers to users, and supporting a phased approach to increasing longevity through determinative uses over a longer time horizon.
- Promoting diversity in users and uses: young people, seniors, start-up companies, freelance professionals, and marginalized groups.



## 9.2. Intervention priorities

It would be difficult to respond to all questions related to the technical and organizational frameworks to be adopted to encourage temporary and transitional use without emphasizing the importance of supporting pilot projects, according to the following priorities.



### Action priority 1

**Deploy a variety of transitional uses in a vacant public building of heritage value (e.g. a surplus hospital)**

Given that:

- The Ville de Montréal owns several vacant heritage buildings;
- The Ville de Montréal has a responsibility to act as a model in the management of the buildings it owns;
- Heritage buildings are more at risk when vacant;
- A heritage building presents a series of particular challenges when transitioning from one use to another.
- These public buildings were created and maintained by public funds, which means it is appropriate that they be used by members of the public.

### Action priority 2

**Deploy a series of temporary uses in vacant storefronts on a commercial artery in difficulty (e.g. Fleury Street East in Montréal-Nord)**

Given that:

- Several commercial arteries suffer from vacancy rates as high as almost 25%;
- The presence of empty storefronts is a sign of a decaying economy, which can seriously affect real and perceived property values in a district;
- Existing business development associations are favorable intermediary agents;
- A financial support program exists to improve the economic dynamism of problematic arteries, PRAM – Artères en chantier;
- Commercial spaces can also house non-commercial uses temporarily with less difficulty than other kinds of typologies.

### Action priority 3

**Increase the availability of space in underused municipal buildings and lots (e.g. office space, meeting rooms, etc.)**

Given that:

- An underused building or lot will pose less challenges than an entirely vacant building or lot;
- The response to the call for bidders for space at the Centre du Plateau was greater than what was available at this site (more than 400 responses)
- Some borough departments, such as those responsible for recreation, parks and community development have shown a particular interest in facilitating temporary uses in underutilized buildings;
- These public buildings and spaces were created and maintained by public funds, which means it is appropriate that they be used by members of the public.

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