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# PRACTICES AND TACTICS IN “YOUTH” PUBLIC SPACES IN MONTRÉAL-NORD

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> Our project focuses on young people (girls and boys) in Montréal-Nord, the spaces in which they “walk” in and outside the neighbourhood, and how their practices, sometimes quite similar to other practices in the public space in other boroughs, will be considered transgressive by institutions or certain residents.

## Highlights

We are therefore not starting with data on the transgressive practices of young people, but rather with an understanding of how the neighbourhood and its reputation influence the use of public space, in particular by questioning the prohibition of “wandering”, which demonstrates how standing “outside” in public space is necessarily interpreted as a transgression in certain stigmatized spaces.

We are then interested in the tactics put in place by young people to circumvent this interpretation on their use of public space, and thus avoid being controlled by the police in particular, but also by their families and circles of acquaintances.

The young people who have been approached so far can be described as “normal young people”, i.e. neither criminalized nor super-integrated. The idea is to recruit as many girls as boys and to diversify their origins in order to be able to analyze the effects of racism and their impacts on “tactics and practices” in the public space.



Photo credit: Célia Bensali-Hadaud, 2017

## Preliminary results

Based on our observations, a typology of existing spaces was set up to classify/analyze our observation data and types of practices

### 1. Institutionalized spaces designed for young people / where the presence of young people is expected

Whether they are public spaces or places institutionalized as being intended for young people: it should be noted that these spaces have in common the purpose of circumscribing and regulating young people's practices. They are sometimes regulated, at other times they are criminalized or standardized. These spaces are accessible at special times. Receptionists block access to youth for the Maison culturelle et communautaire (MCC) or officers patrol through the parks to ensure safety, in addition to police cars. Some young people are turning away from these spaces. Thus, the parks and the MCC are used by a young, but unrepresentative population. Another part of these young people maintain their presence in these spaces, but their practices differ. Young people will then invest all spaces considered legitimate but divert their uses.

### 2. Commercial and/or consumer spaces

For this population, which is not particularly monitored because of its trajectory, neither totally irregular nor totally socially upward, commercial spaces are relatively interesting. These spaces are closed and prevent these young people from being associated with the stigma attached to young people when they are in public spaces, such as wandering or chilling outdoors. These spaces also have certain amenities that correspond to their needs, such as Wi-Fi, or entertainment goods and services (results of preliminary interviews). They are not necessarily located in the neighbourhood: Some shopping areas are located near the neighbourhood, but other in the city centre.

### **3. Places described as “hotspots” in the neighbourhood and that crystallizes attention**

The Pascal-Lapierre and Roland-Lapierre cross-roads are considered meeting places for the “transgressive” youth of Montréal-Nord. These two street intersections include a shopping street with grocery stores [Roland and Pascal] and streets with apartment buildings. The grouping of racialized male individuals in large numbers in this particular space has led to over-stigmatization of this neighbourhood space. Its influence is such that it is through this microspace that the dominant image of neighbourhood is defined. “Street gang” practices are assigned to this population and this space in particular when talking about Montréal-Nord and its youth “problem.”

### **4. Interstitial spaces to isolate oneself**

Interstitial spaces: e.g. the space behind Henri-Bourassa College which is a camera-free zone where the police do not go. Some young people have transgressive practices such as smoking weed and drinking alcohol. This space mostly corresponds to young people whose means are limited, because they are still very visible. Cars located in car parks also constitute transit zones that make young people invisible.

### **5. Areas “outside” the neighbourhood**

## **What was done this year (between April 2017 and September 2018)**

### **1. Construction of the observation grid. Specific context of public spaces in the North-East portion of the neighbourhood:**

The North-East district is characterized by its poor public spaces. In addition, the significant precariousness that characterizes the populations living in the North-East has also led us to consider a priori the young people of the neighbourhood as potentially more captive of these spaces.

We have chosen to prioritize the places that stand out as important for youth themselves. Nevertheless, we have built a grid sensitive to the diversion and reuse of these spaces in accordance with the characteristics of these populations.

In the grid, we reflected in particular on a typology of the available spaces, the types of actors involved, the means of normalization, but also what seemed to us to be circumvention tactics, etc.

### **2. Carrying out about twenty observation sessions in different contexts:**

We tried to observe a wide range of spaces and events:

The aim was to conduct observations in the spaces available to young people, in which the presence of young people is not perceived de facto as transgressive and then to observe a little more closely the practices of young people themselves within these spaces.

A similar exercise was carried out in spaces perceived as not legitimate, i.e. where the presence of young people was not desired.

The aim at this stage was to identify the different types

of spaces. It is important to note that these are preliminary observations that allow us to better understand the challenges and issues of the neighbourhood.

We obviously have a greater quantity of observations made in public or semi-public or institutionalized spaces (more than half), in which our presence was less disturbing, visible.

Another part of our observation time was devoted to discovering other potential observation spaces. Informal interviews with some youth and walks around the neighbourhood allowed us to identify some of them.

## What is planned for the next year

- > Recruitment of young people (12 have already been approached, 4 girls, 8 men)
- > Implementation of participatory/sensitive mapping workshops in which we would like to add the use of their social networks (Snapchat or Instagram)
- > Monitoring of public interventions (both redevelopment and organization of festive events) on certain sites, which we will ask some young people to comment on as the operations develop, while following the evolution of their “wandering” trajectories according to the progress of the work and the events.

## Type of products planned for next year



> Event



> Conference in a meeting



> Narrative mapping



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