

Research report summary

RE-MIXING THE CITY :

Civic Participation of Young, Quebec Immigrants and Visible Minorities

The Conseil permanent de la jeunesse
With the collaboration of the
Conseil des relations interculturelles

BACKGROUND

In 2002, the Quebec society welcomed 37 578 immigrants and registered 72 200 births. While 138 163 children were born in Quebec in 1962, only 19 132 immigrants chose Quebec as their land of destination. In 40 years, the number of births has diminished by half while the number of immigrants has doubled. This transformation has profound demographic consequences. According to the Statistics Canada census data for 2001, over a million Quebecers aged 15 and older are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Quebec is an increasingly multicultural society, especially in Montreal. The diversity of origins is even more pronounced among the younger generation, and peer relations with other young people of different origins are now more frequent. Since the adoption of Bill 101 in 1978, all children must go to French-language schools, except those having one parent who went to school in English in Canada. For more than 25 years, the French-language public schools, mainly in Greater Montreal, have therefore opened themselves to children of all origins.

The determining presence of young people of many ethnocultural origins is still not reflected in the public sphere. Many of them are still encountering severe difficulties in the labour market, as was reported in a 1997 study by the ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration. These difficulties in achieving integration also appear to be endemic in political life, when one examines the groups of young people who exert the most influence in the public sphere. The Conseil permanent de la jeunesse is especially concerned about this issue.

The issue was initially raised by the Conseil des relations interculturelles, who described it in the following terms in an advisory report, a few months before the Quebec Youth Summit in February 2000:

In terms of representativeness, the situation of young people from the various ethnocultural minority groups has not significantly improved over the past two decades. [...] They are absent from the political landscape and the public institutions of Quebec society. [...]. It is compellingly clear that from one generation to the next, a democratic deficit still remains for citizens of immigrant origin.

The holding of that event, a few months later, unfortunately did not provide any grounds for contradicting that assertion. Among the few hundred youths who took part in the Summit, very few were from the ethnocultural minorities. Moreover, none of them were present even among the hundred or so young representatives of some twenty youth organisations invited to take part in closed-session discussions with the Government and representatives of the various other partners.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Are the young people from the ethnocultural minorities full-fledged Quebecers? The answer to this question of course is YES, but that answer does not spring up spontaneously. If young Quebecers of all origins came to be represented in equal proportions within youth organizations, then a crucial first step would be taken towards a real dialogue, and we could answer the question more confidently. Young Quebecers, who are tomorrow's citizens, must begin speaking to each other right now. They must not wait until intercultural tensions break out in the open before engaging in a dialogue. Right now is the time for us to find the means so that the voices of young immigrants, those of the children of immigrants, and those of the young people of the visible minorities will be distinctly heard, within the full concert of voices with all the other young Quebecers.

To achieve this goal and promote closer intercultural convergence, the members of the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse decided to carry out a research project on the participation of young Quebecers from the ethnocultural minorities in the main consultative organizations involving Quebec's youth.

A preliminary study identified the various research options. A collaboration was initiated with the Conseil des relations interculturelles (CRI) in order to associate it as a partner in this research project, which aims to provide answers to several questions that concern both Councils:

- What is the place held by young Quebecers from the ethnocultural minorities within the main consultative organizations involving Quebec's youth?
- What are the places for participation, and what are the causes espoused by young Quebecers from the ethnocultural minorities?
- What are the factors that limit participation for these young people, especially in the main consultative organizations involving Quebec's youth?

THE DEFINITIONS

In order to clearly highlight our subject, in the first chapter we defined certain parameters and concepts. The young people targeted by the study are Quebecers aged 18 to 29. The category of "youths from the ethnocultural minorities" includes both young first-generation immigrants and second-generation (children of) immigrants, and both categories taken together form the combined category of "young people of immigrant origin" (or: "from immigrant families"). On the other hand, the "visible minorities" category includes mostly young people of "immigrant origin", while also including a few individuals who are third-generation immigrants or more. That is why we used the expression "young people of immigrant origin and from the visible minorities". "Civic participation" was studied under three different angles: democratic participation, political participation, and participation in civic society. The Conseil mainly focused on this last form, which includes active involvement in social movements and associations, including the national organizations of Quebec youth. These include mainly the organizations that participated in the Quebec Youth Summit, together with some national organizations included in the *Répertoire des organismes jeunesse* of the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The second chapter brings together the previously acquired information on the subject. Indeed, much has been written about the participation of young people in political life, on the one hand, and on the integration and participation of Quebecers of immigrant origin in public life, on the other hand. But our literature review also showed that the studies dealing with both problems together are much fewer in number. And among these, none deal specifically with the participation of young people of immigrant origin and members of the visible minorities in the youth movement, and even less in the national organizations of Quebec youth.

THE STATISTICAL PORTRAIT

The third chapter traces a portrait of the young Quebecers of immigrant origin and from visible minorities. In the 2001 census by Statistics Canada, there were 250 020 young Quebecers aged 15 to 29 years and who are of immigrant origin. Among these, 108 762 were immigrants and 109 903 belonged to visible minorities. Overall, 72 685 belonged to both groups at once.

The young immigrants originate mostly from Asia and the Americas, whereas among the total number of immigrants, all ages combined, Europe still remains the first continent of origin. Close to 90 % of young immigrants live in the Montreal region.

The portrait also reveals that the unemployment rate of young immigrants is markedly higher than the average rate, but that it tends to diminish quickly with the number of years spent in this country. Such is not the case, however, for the young people in the visible minorities, whose rate of unemployment remains very high, even among those who were born here. The situation is especially serious among young Blacks and also among young Arabs and West Asians.

The portrait concluded by comparing knowledge of the French language and the English language among young people according to immigrant status. The percentage of young immigrants (ages 15 to 24) who know French is 88.4% compared to only 73.0% for older immigrants (age 25 and older). Younger immigrants are also twice less likely than older immigrants to know only English among the official languages. Also, 64.6% of young immigrants state that French is their first official language, but 85.8% of the young second-generation (i.e., children of) immigrants are in the same situation, which is only 0.6% less than young Quebecers of third-generation immigrant status or more.

Finally, the statistical portrait of young Quebecers from immigrant families and the visible minorities presents the results of a study conducted by the CPJ on the place these young people occupy in Quebec national youth organizations. Among the 54 organizations answering the questionnaire, only 7% of the young people sitting on their executive committees or boards of management were of immigrant origin or members of visible minorities.

THE FOCUS GROUPS

The last chapter of the research report presented a content analysis of the topics debated by six discussion groups involving 42 young Quebecers engaged in various social groups. Each group had some special characteristics, but all were made up of young people of immigrant origin or members of visible minorities, except the last one that was a control group, made up of young Quebecers of the French-speaking majority.

The young people of immigrant origin or members of visible minorities who were seen were actively involved in all sorts of associations and for all sorts of causes, often related to the situation of young people in their communities or other youths of immigrant origin. The analysis of the discussion groups clearly established that the issue that mostly motivated these young people was to achieve better representation in Quebec society, whether as young people, as young people of immigrant origin or as members of visible minorities, or as young women of immigrant origin or belonging to visible minorities. This need for representation was in strong contrast to the motivations of the young people in the control group, which involved such issues as Quebec sovereignty, education, sustainable development, or the living conditions of young workers.

The main goal of the discussion groups, however, was to determine what the obstacles were to the civic participation of young people of immigrant origin, especially in Quebec national youth organizations. The many obstacles identified are either those which all young people must overcome, or those which more specifically affect young people who are of immigrant origin or members of visible minorities.

THE MAIN RESULTS:

The Obstacles that all Young People Face

According to the participants, one must first wish to set involved. This first obstacle is to overcome by letting go the **“each-person-for-themselves” attitude**. The individualism that prevails in our society, which affects everyone is not restricted to the young. The second obstacle is **disillusionment**, the belief that there is no use trying and that it is impossible to change things, even with the best of intentions.

But willpower alone is not enough. One must also have the competencies necessary for participating. For instance, the participants spontaneously evoked **lack of time** and the **difficult economic conditions** experienced by many young people. The young women stated the very fact of **being a woman**, not only because of the difficulties in reconciling family life with one’s other activities, but also because of persisting sexism. Finally, one must also overcome one’s **lack of knowledge about the rules of the game**: the world of social and political involvement has its own rules, which are not usually taught in school.

But again, having the will and the abilities are still not enough. The places for involvement must also be open to their participation. The group participants pointed out the **lack of information** provided by organizations. In fact, the organizations that complain about the apathy of young people make no effort to get them interested in their activities. In the second place, in order to gain entrance into the places of involvement, one must first break through the **“circle of insiders”**. One must have the benefit of good relations in order to gain access into the strategic places for decision-making. This observation was made in particular about youth organizations and ethnocultural organizations. In the third place, one must also overcome the distrust towards young people that prevails outside youth organizations.

Some Obstacles Faced by Young People From Immigrant Families and Visible Minorities

According to our group participants, young people of immigrant origin and members of visible minorities must also overcome some additional obstacles, unknown to the longer-settled Quebec population. The first of these is the **lack of models** and the **negative side-effects of quotas**. Young

people of immigrant origin have few examples of citizen participation to inspire them. Equal opportunity programs or quotas are sometimes used to alleviate this difficulty. They allow some persons or young people of immigrant origin or members of visible minorities to gain access to certain decision-making positions. According to the participants, such measures also produce negative side-effects. They occasionally favour some young people who do not possess the necessary qualifications, and who are chosen to act as token figureheads without actually providing the models that are truly needed.

Another obstacle to avoid is **ghettoization**: one must venture outside of one's community in order to enter Quebec's broader civic space. The pressures to withdraw into one's own community are twofold, according to our informants. These pressures come both from the ethnocultural communities themselves and from Quebec's longer-settled population.

The statistical portrait shows that a very high proportion of young people of immigrant origin and members of visible minorities have mastered French. But be that as it may, it does not automatically mean that no **cultural distance** remains. In certain cases, a lesser mastery of the french language can be an obstacle. But in other cases, differences in lifestyles and cultural identities or affinities may move these young people away from the longer-settled Quebec majority. This distance is a major obstacle to participation, and civic involvement when we consider the importance of interpersonal relations.

Our young participants of immigrant origin, especially those belonging to visible minorities, also raised the issue of **discrimination** and **racism**. According to them, a subtle form of racism often shows up non-verbally. Many of these young people reported having experienced discrimination in the world of work, which leads them to believe that similar practices may well prevail in the chapters of organizations that could allow them to gain access to Quebec's civic space, which includes Quebec's national youth organizations.

Finally, the last obstacle, and not the least, that must be overcome by young people from immigrant families and the visible minorities, is the **denial of the problem by the majority**. Our young participants of immigrant origin and members of visible minorities are clear on this: according to them, their problems, specifically with respect to their civic participation, are considered taboo for Quebec society. They feel very keenly that this subject must not be discussed. Besides, this is an observation that was reinforced by most of the participants who participated in the control group, where they found it very difficult to acknowledge that the young people from immigrant families and visible minorities could experience greater difficulties than theirs in gaining access to positions of influence, particularly in Quebec's national youth organizations.

SOME SOLUTIONS

The immediate goal of this research project was to determine what obstacles prevent civic participation of young Quebecers of immigrant origin and those belonging to visible minorities. A more long-term goal was also sought, one that would contribute in removing those obstacles, so that young Quebecers of all origins could fully participate in national youth organizations and within Quebec society itself.

Our young participants who took part in the discussion groups were asked to suggest solutions in order to improve the civic participation prospects for young people of immigrant origin and those belonging to visible minorities. Here are the results of their suggestions.

Most participants believe that young people **must be better informed and made more aware** with respect to civic participation and the places for civic involvement: the various organizations must be better promoted. The actions of young people must be sought out first on the local level. They must be provided with the necessary tools as early as high school, they must be informed about the roles they will be called upon to play in social change, and they must be given responsibilities and be introduced to values such as being actively aware of their environment.

The participants also believe it is necessary **to make involvement better known**. The advantages of civic involvement could be highlighted, for such efforts are often belittled as useless despite their great benefits. They must be shown the benefits of civic involvement.

Another possibility to consider would be to **present young people with models** they can identify with. In order to carry the message of involvement over to young people, other young people must be induced to play a part. They must testify about their experiences, and communicate their passion through direct relations with other young people, in particular in the schools, but also through publicity campaigns for mobilizing participation.

Several participants stated that **young people must be supported in their involvement**. Their actions must be recognized: they must be given moral or financial support, which could take the form of school credits or income tax credits. Others argued that it is necessary to promote the value of involvement, not through financial means, but simply by recognizing the importance of civic involvement and, more especially, the importance of the people themselves who get involved.

Finally, it is necessary **to work on the identity of young people**, to address more directly the issue of Quebec's inclusive identity in a spirit of active intercultural convergence and reassure the cultural communities so that they will feel fully accepted by society. One participant suggested setting up an organized council of young people from cultural communities, with representatives of different origins, in order to bring together the young people from immigrant families and the visible minorities.

For their part, the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse and the Conseil des relations interculturelles consider that actions must be initiated immediately to promote the civic participation of young Quebecers from immigrant families and visible minorities. In order to determine the concrete measures to be taken, both Councils have decided to organize a discussion forum that will bring together a number of young Quebecers of all origins who are involved as citizens. Indeed, the first order of business now is for young people of all origins to speak with each other and decide together what should be done to RE-MIX THE CITY!