

VNQ, Study Phase II :

Documenting, contextualizing and promoting Vivons nos quartiers initiative

Executive Summary

Anna Goudet*, Catherine Paquette**, Alexandra Charette***

February 2021



* Anna Goudet, Ph.D. candidate in Urban Studies, INRS-UCS

**Catherine Paquette, candidate for the Master's degree in Urban Studies, INRS-UCS

*** Alexandra Charette, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Concordia University



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Executive Summary

This report presents a synthesis of the data collected in the second phase of the project « Documenting the *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative: towards inclusive and welcoming districts for refugees and immigrants”. The project *Vivons nos quartiers*, begun in the wake of the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2015-2016, and adapted to realities on the ground with the arrival of asylum-seekers, as of 2017, was developed and implemented in partnership with the Concertation Table of agencies serving refugees and immigrants (TCRI) as well as Centraide of Greater Montreal. The main objective of *Vivons nos quartiers* is to pool and share best practices for inclusion at the district level in Montreal. This report aims to contextualize the *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative and to analyze it from three different perspectives. There are three distinct and independent sections. *Reception and integration of immigrants with precarious status: relations between actors.*

The first section traces the historiography of the reception and integration of persons with precarious status and draws on the statements of our informants and on documentary research. It traces the evolution of reception and settlement policies regarding refugees and asylum-seekers at the provincial and federal level as well as the relations between governmental and non-governmental actors. It also brings to light the preponderant role of the community sector in reception and integration over the last forty years and also the tradition of collaboration.

The reception and support of immigrants with precarious status in Quebec was financed and provided mainly by organizations with a religious vocation until around 1970. It was the arrival of refugees in the 1970s that spurred community and faith organizations to structure the reception of refugees and asylum-seekers. Following the adoption of the action plan *Quebecers Each and Every One*, the provincial government funded community organizations so that they could offer reception and settlement services. However, they had to periodically take on this task alone

depending on the moves towards disengagement or re-engagement of the provincial and federal governments over the following fifteen years.

The Canada-Quebec Accord of 1991 gave Quebec the entire responsibility for the integration of permanent immigrants within its borders. The community sector providing settlement and integration services was called upon to reposition itself in the face of an important new actor with its own mechanisms for the governance of integration: the provincial government. The relations between community organizations, with their long experience and expertise in the settlement and integration of newcomers, and the Quebec government, with its new responsibilities, evolve with the activism and resilience of the former, and the responsibility and skill acquisition of the latter. The community sector obtained, early in the 2000s, an institutional recognition which fostered the establishment of more egalitarian relations and collaboration with the provincial government. The community organizations are still today a leading actor in the settlement and integration of asylum-seekers, refugees and other immigrants. Their contribution to the reception of the Syrian refugees and the asylum-seekers arriving at the Quebec-US border attests to this. The response of the community sector for reception and settlement demonstrates the resilience and the adaptation of community agencies as well as the capacity for concerted action of the community and institutional actors. To this capacity for action are added local projects often developed by experienced community actors. The latter help to foster the inclusion of newcomers as well as intercultural and citizen rapprochement. The *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative is one example.

Vivons nos quartiers: a project for local concertation led by community actors

The second part of the report proposes an analysis of local governance of the integration of newcomers with precarious status. This analysis draws on the study of two projects for local concertation implemented in Montreal districts, supported by the community sector for immigrant reception and integration and aimed at intercultural rapprochement. It examines the

conditions for the implementation and sustainability of the projects, the obstacles and the achievements.

The *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative gave rise to the establishment of several local committees for cultural rapprochement. The two committees observed in this research, the local committee for rapprochement of Ville-Émard/Côte-Saint-Paul (VECSP) and Réseau Action immigration (RAI) in Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, emerged in areas where the proportion of immigrants in the population has increased in recent years. The local committees for intercultural rapprochement fulfill three functions: informing and empowering committee members; raising awareness and creating links between actors on the committee; organizing activities for intercultural rapprochement in the districts. These committees face four major challenges: the lack of funding; the weight of the exclusive coordination by the lead agency (despite attempts at sharing responsibilities); the mobilization of the members; the awareness and knowledge of intercultural rapprochement issues among members. As agencies for local concertation, these committees are necessary for creating welcoming communities and they contribute to the pursuit of collective reflection on the role of different local actors in intercultural and citizen rapprochement.

Newcomers' experience of reception and integration at the neighbourhood level: a photovoice project

The third section concerns newcomers' experience of reception and integration at the district level. Using a Photovoice method, it looks at the way newcomers residing in the districts where the concertation projects analyzed in the second section are deployed perceive their physical and social environment. The Photovoice interviews demonstrated that, to feel welcomed, newcomers need a collection of different spaces: green spaces, community organizations, businesses, spaces for sports and recreation, safe streets and places where they can find help and socialize.

Six major features of districts foster the well-being of research participants: being accessible and functional (the functional dimension); being well maintained and neat (the esthetics and security dimension); meeting expectations regarding assistance (the support dimension); providing opportunities to meet people (the sociability dimension); fostering participation and engagement in the life of the community (the social participation dimension); creating memories and symbolic landmarks (the symbolic dimension).

Newcomers associate differentiated perceptions and uses with the spaces according to their needs and individual characteristics. Thus, any space has the potential to be welcoming. Four recommendations for the establishment of welcoming communities in the districts studied are put forward: to act on social dynamics, to act on the urban environment, to act on access to information, to act on citizen participation.