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From neighbourhood to arrival infrastructure?

Hospitality areas in hostile times

What you need to know

In recent years, many refugees and asylum-seekers have joined new permanent immigrants, notably in Montreal. Local intervenors are increasingly called upon to deal with problems of reception instead of just integration, especially at the local level. Hence, Centraide launched the "Vivons nos quartiers" initiative for more inclusive and welcoming neighbourhoods for refugees and immigrants.

What is this research about?

Our objective was to concentrate on the neighbourhood as an area of hospitality in order to understand the reception dynamics starting from the vision that new immigrants have of the neighbourhood on their urban experience. What places do they like to frequent in their everyday life? Do these places vary according to their status on arrival (economic immigrant, refugee, asylum-seeker)? And with what types of social relations are these places associated? Two neighbourhoods receiving immigrants were studied: the borough of Saint-Laurent and the western sector of downtown, Peter-McGill. in Montréal

How was the research carried out?

After meeting with our partners, we obtained an SSHRC Partnership Grant for research on neighbourhoods in transition. Thanks to CARI St-Laurent-Services aux immigrants, 18 immigrants with different statuses and who had arrived less than three years before were selected in Saint-Laurent and only 1 in Peter-McGill, the pandemic having interrupted recruitment. Newcomers were interviewed and asked to locate the places they frequented on maps. Observations were also made to confirm their urban experience.

What have we learned from the research?

The interviews showed that the process of integration of immigrants does not occur within the limits of the neighbourhood, which remain insignificant for the most part, but rather following the daily functional and emotional destinations. Hence, the representations of the neighbourhood do not correspond to boundaries but to a spatial expanse supporting mobilities on which the trip chains operate (to use the distinction made by B. Montulet in 2005). It follows that the notion of a welcoming neighbourhood has no meaning for them: migrants arrive in a neighbourhood and try to find stability there in order to continue their migratory trajectory. This corresponds to the notion of arrival infrastructure proposed by Meeus et al. in 2019.Everyone has their own framing of the neighbourhood (more cultural, familial, professional, etc.). The presence of children in the family influences this framing: parks are important, as are all the spaces where the whole family can move around (such as in shopping centers). Mothers are more often in discovery mode with regard to the neighborhood, an attitude that is absent from those who are looking for work. The status of immigrants upon arrival makes less difference than expected. However, we can distinguish between those who are mobile and move easily with different modes of transportation (including by car, even if they have been here for a short time), and those who are more sedentary due to multiple uncertainties. But among the diversity of places mentioned, some come up often (see photo): the CARI (for the relational qualities of the staff), the Bibliothèque du Boisé (whose aesthetics impress), the CEGEP (also frequented by the natives), the parks, and especially Tim Horton's (a place where one can receive friends, families, where one can in turn be welcomed!). The neighbourhood experienced by the newcomers is therefore different from that of the stakeholders, for whom it is a targeted territory that allows them to identify and anchor themselves in a community.

How can you use this research?

Taking seriously the variety of the types of places (especially commercial ones) to which migrants are attached and without underestimating the power of this relationship; granting importance to the needs of mobility and of being able to move throughout the city; being sensitive to the different ways people frame the city and taking seriously their respective migratory trajectories; granting more importance to urban places in the understanding of arrival in a neighbourhood. Those are the main ideas which can inspire stakeholders in all neighbourhoods, but also all those who are committed to ensuring the welcoming of newcomers, including in public debate.

Who is leading this research?

Annick Germain, professor at the Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Centre Urbanisation Culture Société, carried out this research along with a team of masters and doctoral students in urban studies: Islem Bendjaballah, Catherine Paquette, Léa Dallemane, Gabriel Jean-Maltais, Charline Godard-Bélanger and Jeanne Laroche.

Learn more

This project is in partnership with Centraide, Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI), Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants à Montréal (BINAM) and CARI St-Laurent-Services aux immigrants.
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