

Sustainability

(20793) - PUBLIC SPACES FOR URBAN SUSTAINABILITY: USAGE, APPROPRIATION, AND COHABITATION IN MONTREAL (CANADA)

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Background and objectives

Public spaces such as parks, squares, and pedestrian streets, have substantial contributions to city sustainability, since they provide a wide range of social and health benefits for citizens (Anderson 2016, Chiasura 2004). More specifically, public spaces are meeting places that facilitate and improve social relationships between neighbors, and hence enhance a sense of community (Francis *et al.*, 2012). They also promote innovation and creativity by allowing individuals to have their own ways of using space (Németh, 2012). As such, public spaces help decrease social segregation and tensions (Tonnelat, 2010) and positively influence momentary happiness (Benita *et al.*, 2019). They also enhance democracy by encouraging expressions of political actions (Mitchell, 1995; Staeheli & Mitchell, 2007; Staeheli *et al.*, 2009). Providing enough public spaces is therefore a crucial strategy that city governments use to meet citizens' needs for leisure, community activities and other social interactions (Fan *et al.*, 2016).

Since the 2000s, studies have pointed out important transformations of the design and planning of public spaces, such as privatisation, over-surveillance and judicialization of spaces, especially within urban revitalisation projects (Carmona 2015). Montreal (Canada) is no exception with observed tensions and frustration in public spaces, generated by urban revitalisation and gentrification in different neighbourhoods of the city (Pazarelli 2021, Bélanger 2014). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has been pushing the city government to create more attractive public spaces while assuring a safe circulation space, active mobility and local economic development.

This symposium aims to re-examine public spaces' publicness (Németh 2012) in Montreal, in the context of gentrification and the COVID-19 pandemic. We will concentrate on pedestrian streets, squares, and parks in three neighbourhoods of Montreal, with an affluent one and two others that are undergoing gentrification and ethnic diversification. We explore two following questions: (1) how different social groups (age, gender, and ethnicity) appropriate public spaces and adapt to the physical settings of the space; (2) how walkers, cyclists, and small businesses cohabit in public spaces.

Significance for the advancement of People-Environment relations

Using the case of Montréal, this symposium opens discussions on the production, usage, appropriation, and cohabitation of public spaces, enriching our understanding of the relationship between people and the environment. Our symposium falls within two branches of People-Environment studies: i) design of and experiences in public spaces; and ii) social use of space: crowding, territoriality, personal space. We will add new insight into the experiences and social use of public spaces (Cao & Kang, 2019; Golčnik & Ward Thompson, 2010), especially under social distancing conditions and local economic needs due to the pandemic. The socially and physically diverse contexts that we look at in the symposium will allow us to shed light into use of space by marginalized and non-marginalized populations (Villani & Talamini, 2021). Insight from our findings will inform new design and planning processes to ensure more sustainable and equitable access to public spaces.

Palavras-chave : public spaces, production of spaces, appropriation, public spaces cohabitation