

## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

### Étude sur les besoins et les aspirations des résidents de l'îlot de l'ancienne biscuiterie Viau. Synthèse des recherches effectuées : présentation des résultats et des pistes d'actions

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### Introduction

This case study focuses on research conducted by the Incubateur Universitaire Parole d'excluEs (IUPE), a university incubator based at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and directed by Jean-Marc



Fontan from the Department of Sociology. The incubator is part of the Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales (CRISES) of UQAM and is also affiliated with the university's community outreach centre (Service aux collectivités). IUPE has conducted more than twenty small community-based research projects since its creation. All research projects are completed with the aim of community mobilization.

We will develop the present case study out of the collective experience drawn from collaboration with Parole d'excluEs. Moreover, we will highlight the collaborative work we did in reference to one specific research project named "Étude des besoins et des aspirations des résidents du secteur Viau". In conclusion, we will identify how the work done by IUPE elaborates on the four domains of excellence: community relevance, equitable participation, action and change, and research design.

### The university incubator Parole d'excluEs: The co-construction of knowledge and the promotion of civic action

Founded in 2007 by Jean-Marc Fontan and Pierre-Joseph Ulysse, researchers with the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and the Université de Montréal, IUPE's mission is to promote knowledge sharing and capacities for action. Through the use of community-based research, IUPE works to encourage approaches to citizen mobilization that are supported by the action model developed by Parole d'excluEs. The incubator, as a new tool for community-based research, was developed in response to a request for support submitted by Patrice Rodriguez, a University researcher, to the Service aux collectivités of UQAM and the

## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

Regroupement québécois de recherche partenariale en économie sociale. Parole d'excluEs has opted for the specific form of a university incubator in order to allow for the transfer of collaborative academic practices in research and training that exist in Brazil (Dubeux, 2004). Such practices are our model as they have supported initiatives of the solidarity economy in urban and rural areas over a period of two years.

The mission of IUPE comprises two main areas of work. First, the incubator performs the community-based research activities required to support interventions taking place where the action model Parole d'excluEs is implemented. And secondly, alongside the first mission, IUPE engages in critical reflection about the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research it carries out.

The action model proposed by Parole d'excluEs is used to combat poverty and exclusion at the neighbourhood level of two Montreal boroughs. This model is based on the mobilization of citizens, representatives of civil society organizations, public agencies and university research facilities. The intervention is carried out in two sites: Pelletier and Viau. Pelletier is a neighborhood along Pelletier Avenue in the borough of Montréal-Nord and Viau is a residential area located around the former Viau cookie factory in the Maisonneuve neighbourhood of the borough of Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Within each intervention site, an organizing committee was created to support a group of citizens that is representative of the community. Representatives from community and institutional organizations as well as a representative of IUPE sit on these



committees. The first research work realized by IUPE arose from the needs identified by the members of the organizing committees of each of these sites.

### Research purpose

#### Supporting citizen driven collective action to fight poverty and social exclusion

From 2008 to 2011, some twenty community-based research projects were initiated. These research projects mainly addressed topics of citizen mobilization (Boisvert et al., 2010), social mix (Leclerc, 2011), a local exchange trading system (lets) model named Accorderie (Rolandeau, 2012) and urban agriculture practices (Renaud & Royer, 2012).



Some of these studies also allowed the critical analysis of methods and knowledge produced by projects developed by Parole d'excluEs. For example, the first intervention research of IUPE examined the methods and criteria used by the members of the Pelletier organizing committee for choosing tenants of the buildings owned by the social housing corporation SHAPEM, located on Pelletier Avenue (Brutus, 2008). Another research project focused on the innovative dimension of the action model implemented by Parole d'excluEs (Parole d'excluEs, 2010), and yet another focused on the process used to involve citizens from the Viau site in land planning decisions concerning sections of an old railway line (Gauthier, 2012; Levesque & Lambert, 2013).

Other studies were employed to examine the feasibility of the implementation of specific projects, such as the Rassemblement pour l'emploi, a job search network (Londono, 2012), and the creation of a buying club for each of the two Parole d'excluEs intervention sites (Akartit, 2009; Enriquez, 2010).

Finally, two studies focused specifically on citizen involvement in research, which constitutes an essential component of both the Parole d'excluEs approach and the community-based research method developed to fight

## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

poverty and exclusion at the two sites. By creating collaborative knowledge with the individuals concerned, these studies identified the broad guidelines that were eventually adopted by a local collective to revitalize their communities. These two citizen research projects allowed for data collection on the needs and aspirations of the people living or working in the Pelletier and Viau sites (Fontan & Rodriguez, 2009; Boucher et al., 2010). In this case study, we will refer to the latter citizen research project, which occurred within the Viau site of Montréal.

### Research design and methodology

#### Research on the needs and aspirations of people living in the Viau site: an innovative way of doing community-based research

The Parole d'excluEs project is part of a movement to reclaim the power to act collectively in research. This approach promotes a sense of civic engagement, the mobilization of residents and the involvement of people experiencing poverty and exclusion in activities that are planned and discussed in an accessible community venue. Citizens are viewed as key stakeholders in the identification of problems and the proposal of solutions; they are at the heart of the collective action that is initiated in order to resolve community-based concerns.



This research approach involved engaging a population living in poverty and exclusion in the research process. This included conducting a citizens' survey, by which the participants collectively identified appropriate means for revitalization of the neighbourhood, which was considered to have "missed the

boat of development". The participation of citizens in the study on community needs and aspirations has taken many forms. Citizen representatives were invited to become members of the monitoring committee of the research. Depending on their availability and interests, citizens participated in the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, including holding interviews with residents living in the area. Finally, these

individuals were engaged in the data analysis and in the validation of the research findings that were presented to the general population.

Once the monitoring committee was set up, the first step of the research was to design open-ended questionnaires that would not suggest any particular responses and would minimize unease among the respondents. Data was collected in the form of short interviews that were held either as "man-in-the-street" interviews or individual conversations.

These interviews were held with residents, directors of community organizations, storekeepers and representatives of public bodies. Separate questionnaires were designed for each of these groups. The interviews were recorded after having assured respondents that their responses would remain confidential.

In terms of methodology, the interview data had to be coded for meanings attributed by the respondents and for the recurrence of topics. The summary transcription of the interviews, retaining the strongest terms and the logical connections made by the interviewees, were used to fulfill these two tasks, which made for a responsive, flexible and versatile method. Thematic analysis was then used to process the gathered material (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2008). Based on the keywords used by the interviewees, themes were identified, which then served to establish summaries of each interview. The identified keywords were also grouped into categories that corresponded to the questions asked and the desired type of information.

#### Citizen mobilization

In addition to revealing concrete knowledge on the neighbourhood through the work of researchers, practitioners and citizens (knowledge sharing), the study also had a second objective. This study was part of the effort employed by the Parole d'excluEs



## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

action model to mobilize different groups representing the population living or working in the neighbourhood. Both the “man-in-the-street” and individual interviews allowed contacts with the local population to be established, while also promoting the visibility of the Parole d’excluEs project and the community venue made available to the residents. Conducting interviews with storekeepers, representatives of the local community and regional institutional organizations also contributed to the overall aim of neighbourhood revitalization by spurring an interest in the project goals among these businesses and organizations. Finally, the study contributed to the promotion of activities proposed by the community venue. In this case, the members of the research team were also able to promote neighbourhood parties and information events by distributing flyers or by wearing the image of the organizations involved. In return, the neighbourhood parties contributed to the study by facilitating the recruitment and collection of information from new respondents. Over a period of four months, about 250 people were consulted in total.

The continuous presence of students in the community venue allowed residents and students to establish connections with each other. Often, residents would come to the community venue just to talk with the students. Such relationships go beyond those traditionally found between researchers and “subjects” of a study, to the point where some residents expressed heartfelt sorrow at the announcement of the students’ departure. To acknowledge their departure at the end of the research, we invited the residents who had close relationships with the students to a festive dinner, followed by a seminar on the preliminary results of the study on the needs and aspirations of the population living in the Viau site.

Finally, the presence of members of the research team, including both students and researchers, participated in the organization and implementation of related tasks. In this way, the team members engaged in landscaping and in the planning, preparation and realization of events such as block parties or the AGM of Parole d’excluEs.

### Arguments for community-based research and the co-production of knowledge

The first argument in support of community-based research is the involvement of monitoring committees that were based on partnership, which allowed for both an appropriation and a validation of the research results. Some cultural constraints often make it difficult for students or researchers to achieve in-depth interviews. Alternatively, a broad and rich collection of information is achieved by recruiting local stakeholders and citizens to conduct research interviews. In this way, citizens themselves hold interviews with people who may otherwise restrict themselves to more superficial answers or may refuse to meet with researchers that they are unfamiliar with. To talk openly about the problems they experience, citizens often prefer to deal with local stakeholders or citizens who have gained their trust. In addition, the discussions that take place within the



monitoring committee diverge significantly from traditional research approaches. These include topics such as the joint analysis of the results, the process of validating and disseminating the results of the study, the integration of comments gathered in

the final report, and the long-term engagement of researchers in the field.

The second argument in favour of community-based research is the continuous presence of research activities and active involvement of researchers in the field. Involvement is sustained over a number of years in order to support long-term projects working against poverty and exclusion. This process allows for other needs for research or knowledge transfer to emerge from the work of either the organizing committees or the activities of the citizen committees. In turn, these needs can be heard and give rise to new research projects. The participation of one professional researcher on each organizing committee is required; this



## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

position is for monitoring the quality of the research, as well as to address and report new research questions as they arise. The rise of new research questions often results in the production of one or more new research projects.

When a research question is retained by an organizing committee, a community-based research approach is commenced. A monitoring committee is quickly formed, which becomes a space for the collective management of the research process and ensures possibilities for direct contact between the research team and citizens interested in the topic. When conditions allow for it, citizens are also present on the monitoring committee, in which case they are able to participate in the full research process. This includes involvement in both data collection and various knowledge dissemination activities at public assemblies, university conferences, seminars, and community forums/meetings. In this way, residents from the Viau site were able to meet with elected municipal officials (Lévesque and Lambert, 2013).

The third argument for community-based research is that research questions are proposed directly by the citizens. Two examples illustrate this element. The first example is how upon completion of the study on the needs and aspirations for the Pelletier site, a resident remarked that very few documentary films existed about “people like us”. She was referring to excluded people who faced mental health issues. We then took this observation into account and included the production of video documents throughout the community-based research process. A video of about ten minutes was created for each research site. These short documentaries allowed us to present research in a format that was complementary to the information contained in the research report and to represent the situation as perceived and expressed directly from citizens’ standpoints.

The second example is drawn from a request for research that arose in the wake of civic mobilization activities that took place after the presentation of the results of the research conducted on the Pelletier site. From the different exchanges between citizens, an intervention priority emerged, namely that of responding to the financial difficulties experienced by a very large number of families residing in this neighbourhood pocket. IUPE researchers were asked to help members of the Regroupement citoyen de

l’îlot Pelletier (RCIP) to identify the most appropriate tool for responding quickly to the problem of food insecurity experienced by families. Once the research proposal was established and the funding obtained, two studies were conducted. The first identified the various options available to the citizens of the Pelletier site. The second study took the form of a feasibility study on the establishment of a buying club. The results of this study allowed better documentation of the financing package that was submitted by Parole d’excluEs to the Centre local de développement de Montréal-Nord to obtain the funds necessary to start a buying club. The latter has been in operation since the winter of 2010.

### Impact of community-based research design and outcomes

When an impact is observable at the micro local scale, are we dealing with generalizable research rather than an “anecdotal experience”? Is it conceivable that community-based research projects can have a wide impact on the regional or national institutional framework? Might we consider that the collective action that emerges can have a significant impact on the operating logic of macro structures such as the market (make it more inclusive) and public policies (bringing them to better take public interest into account)? Can structural elements emerge from this research that lead to the emergence of a new mode of action for the non-profit sector?

To date, IUPE research has effectively:

- Generated support for the implementation of collective action
- Encouraged citizens to adopt new life habits, which also have an impact on collective life
- Proposed new institutional behaviours and policies in order to reduce the distance between professionals and users of public services
- Demonstrated the importance of new cognitive routines.

Of the studies conducted by IUPE, those on the identification of the needs and aspirations of the populations of the Pelletier and Viau research sites embodied a different type of research that was founded on the community-based research principles of knowledge co-production and collective action. Not all studies conducted by IUPE necessarily have that scope. Some projects provided improved insight but did not involve

## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

practical components such as organizational learning opportunities or behavioural changes.

However, the situation was very different for the research done on the theme of food security. It supported decision-making, informed choices and led to the establishment of a buying club that has come to change the quality of life for residents and the collective capacity to act. The establishment of the buying club has resulted in the adoption of new behaviours, which are indicators of the quality of the knowledge transfer affected. Therefore, there is direct evidence from this project of increased knowledge co-production and collective action.

### Lessons-learned

The changes listed above have an impact on social theory and help create the beginnings of societal changes and improvements. However, our experience shows that the changes identified and explored does not necessarily translate into a societal reframing, neither at the community level nor at the institutional public policy level. For that to occur, the current *modus operandi*, more or less incidental, would have to make way for one that mainstreams and institutionalizations the proposed innovations, which is difficult to achieve. For example, the lessons learned from the research conducted with Parole d'excluEs have limited resonance in both the university and scientific domains. To change that, we would have to broaden the scope of the methodological and epistemological assets by deploying the effort required to obtain recognition from the authorities of Quebec universities and from the scientific community at large. The establishment of a Chair of strategic research at UQAM on the methodology and epistemology of partnership-based research (Chaire de recherche UQAM sur la méthodologie et l'épistémologie de la recherche partenariale, CMÉRP) responds to this objective and will allow for both a recognition of this type of research in academia and an advancement of the reflection on what is needed to promote this strategy among university institutions and major granting agencies.

The objective of our comparison between Parole d'excluEs community-based methods and traditional research practices is not to engage in a fundamental discussion of methods. The scientific performativity of both methods is variable, and neither close collaboration between the actors and the researchers (in the incubator method) nor more experienced

researchers (in conventional research methods) are guarantors of higher research performativity. Nor does the coproduction of knowledge by actors and citizens to promote territorial revitalization guarantee that these stakeholders develop the capacity to transform a society's institutional framework.

How might results be achieved that are determinative for an inclusive and sustainable coexistence? By facilitating the involvement of citizens in the affairs of society through community-based research; by working transparently in order to validate and disseminate the results of a research on a continuous basis; and by closely linking the research process to the development of collective action based on ethical and moral foundations, namely social justice, equity and solidarity. All of these strategies offer ways to rethink the relationship that exists between "science and society".

This increased accessibility of the affairs of society could hardly take place without a politicization of the actors involved. This stands in contrast to the present division of labour, which leads to a shirking of responsibility and a certain a-politicization on the part of the institutional and community stakeholders. Up to a certain degree, the neoliberal hegemony of late modernity, operating with powerful institutional mechanisms that permeate the market, the state and civil society, are driven by the following specialized and segmented logics of action: the economy is synonymous with "market" and a matter reserved for entrepreneurs of liberalism; politics has become the responsibility of political parties and the state; and the social is reserved to civil society and to associations in charge of social mediation.

The experience of community-based research within IUPE demonstrates the significant value of research and action that seek to restore a place to citizens in the production of collective solutions to social problems and to politicize the field of collective action. This requires parting with the hegemony of a society operating in silos and with a liberal economy that essentially seeks to be decoupled from social matters. The recognition of the importance of the empowerment of the poor and excluded and the support of their engagement in participatory structures and in collective action lead to a hybridization or combination of knowledge that is likely to bring solutions that are better adapted to the needs of the poor and excluded. By questioning the nonsense of the ever-increasing institutional distance between government organizations and the public, between

## 2014 CCCR national summit case studies

producers and consumers, and between representatives and the represented, it is possible to reintroduce the political into collective civic and community action.

### Domains of research excellence

What conclusions might we draw from this community-based research project? We present our conclusions in the framework of the following four domains of excellence in community-based research: community relevance, equitable participation, action and change, and research design.

### Community relevance

The entire research project maintained great relevance to the affected community. Throughout the research, it was possible to mobilize citizens to serve on a resident monitoring committee, which later became the Comité local d'implication citoyenne Maisonneuve. The research collaboratives moreover allowed the joint identification of the main tasks to be performed in order to improve the quality of life of residents in the areas concerned. In addition, the research gave rise to other research activities that were considered important by the community. These included the implementation of a food security service, the land planning of a section of an old railway, a critical review of the theatre work done with the Ollin Théâtre Transformation playback group, and an activity that encourages reflection on social mix.

#### Indicators important for assessing community relevance:

- Citizen mobilization
- Development of new knowledge
- Identification of clear courses of action with the community

### Equitable participation

This research project allowed strong involvement of citizens. In fact, each research project conducted by IUPE has a monitoring committee for the research composed of at least one citizen and one professional counsellor. This ensures the presence of different types of knowledge. In the case of

this research, interviews were also conducted by residents. They collaborated in the administration of the survey and data collection.

#### Indicators important for assessing equitable participation:

- Formation of a mixed committee for the monitoring of the study
- Participation in the management of the study

### Action and change

The effects of this research project are slow to surface. We will respond to this indicator by referring to a similar study that was conducted by another IUPE team (Fontan and Rogriguez, 2009). In the case of that study, the transition to the action and change were clearly observable. Through the below examples, we see concretely that the elements identified in the study take shape around projects working to improve the quality of life of residents.

#### Indicators important for assessing action and change:

- Formation of a citizen action plan to support the revitalization of the sector
- Citizen involvement in the realization of projects emerging from the action plan
- Participation in the governance of the implemented projects