2005-10

NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN OLD NEIGHBOURHOODS : BREAKING OFF WITH HISTORY ? A MONTREAL CASE STUDY

Inédits

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Document de recherche / *Working paper*

decembre 2005

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December 2005

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Résumé/Abstract

Dans les villes contemporaines, les quartiers historiques sont considérés comme des atouts importants. Spécifiquement, au cours des années 1990, les anciens quartiers industriels sont devenus des espaces clés pour attirer les entreprises dans le domaine des nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication, et en particulier les petites entreprises de multimédia. Certains chercheurs ont avancé l'idée selon laquelle les villes disposant de quartiers historiques et patrimoniaux étaient particulièrement bien dotées pour accueillir les entreprises dans le domaine du multimédia. S'appuyant sur cette tendance, le gouvernement du Québec a lancé, en 1998, un projet d'envergure de redéveloppement urbain en créant la Cité Multimédia. Ce projet immobilier était destiné à créer des emplois dans le secteur émergent des technologies de l'information et à revitaliser une anciennes zone industrielle située à proximité du Vieux-Montréal et du centre-ville et concentrant des ateliers et des entrepôts. Considéré par plusieurs observateurs de la scène urbaine comme une histoire à succès, ce projet était unique en Amérique du Nord car il utilisait une stratégie de création d'emploi comme levier pour redévelopper une zone dévitalisée. Il est intéressant de voir comment l'image du quartier a dû être entièrement redéfinie afin de convaincre les entreprises d'y aménager.

L'objectif de ce texte est de mettre en lumière les manières par lesquelles un nouveau quartier a été créé. En s'appuyant sur la presse écrite locale, nous analysons les stratégies et les éléments discursifs qui ont été employés par les acteurs publics et institutionnels engagés dans le processus de redéveloppement. Comment la promotion du projet a-t-elle contribué à repenser le paysage urbain? Nous examinons également les principes architecturaux et urbanistiques sous-jacents à la conception du projet. Quelles images ont été associées au projet? Comment ont-elles été mises en forme? Le cas à l'étude suggère que, bien que l'histoire et le patrimoine aient été utilisés comme des atouts, ils ont été relégués au second plan afin de faire place aux représentations urbaines rattachées à la nouvelle économie.

Mots clés : nouvelles technologies, quartiers historiques, marketing urbain, Montréal.

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Heritage districts are considered to be one of a city's most valuable assets. During the 1990s, industrial heritage sites became a key element in cities' strategies to attract new high-tech firms and, more specifically, small multimedia firms. Researchers have argued that cities retaining these historical districts are better able to attract multimedia firms. Drawing on this trend, the Government of Québec in 1998 launched a major redevelopment project in Montréal called the Multimedia City. This real estate project

was aimed to create new jobs in the growing information technology sector and revitalize an abandoned industrial and warehousing district strategically located near the city's downtown core and historic quarter. Considered by many as an example "that works" – a "success story" – this project was unique in North America because it used job creation as a tool to redevelop a once blighted area. It is interesting to look at how the images of the neighbourhood had to be completely redefined in order to convince people to move into the area.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the ways in which a new neighbourhood was created. By using local press reports and marketing materials, I will analyze the strategies and discourses put forward by the public and institutional players involved in the redevelopment process. How did their depiction of the project contribute to reshaping the urban landscape? I will also look at the design and architectural principles that guided the planning of the project. What images were linked to the project? How were they socially shaped? This case suggests that, while history and heritage are assets, they paradoxically had to be cast aside to make way for new representations linked to the changing urban economy.

Keywords : new technologies, industrial neighborhoods, image-making, Montréal.

Heritage districts are considered valuable assets for cities (Freestone, 1993; Hamel, Pelletier and Poitras, 1996; Reichl, 1997). During the 1990s, industrial heritage sites became a key element in cities' strategies to attract new high-tech firms and, more specifically, small multimedia firms. As Kotkin (2000) and Wolfe (1999) have argued, cities retaining such heritage zones are considered to be better able to attract new-economy firms – specifically multimedia firms – and knowledge workers. Drawing on this trend, the Government of Québec in 1998 launched a major redevelopment project in Montréal called the Multimedia City. This property complex had a twofold objective : to create new jobs in the emerging multimedia and information technology fields and to revitalize an abandoned industrial and warehousing district strategically located near the city's downtown core and historic quarter. Considered by many as an example "that works" – a "success story[1]" – this project was unique in North America because it used job creation as a tool to redevelop a once blighted area. It is interesting to look at how the images of the neighbourhood had to be completely redefined in order to convince people to move into the area. My hypothesis is that this kind of urban imagery should be viewed "as a constitutive element in the production of the city" (Eade and Mele, 2002, p. 6). This paper argues that a whole new set of representations of the area were put forward by its main promoters (i.e., a former Québec minister of finance, the mayor of Montréal, the managers of the project, the advocates of the multimedia industry, and the real-estate developers active in the district) to provide the neighbourhood with a different status and identity based on a set of ideals embodied by the new economy.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the ways in which a new neighbourhood or section of a city was created and recreated. By using local press reports and marketing materials, I will analyze the strategies and urban discourses put forward by the public and institutional players involved in the redevelopment process. How did their depiction of the project, along with their marketing strategies, contribute to the reshaping of the urban landscape? I will also look at the design and architectural principles that guided the planning of the project. What images were linked to the project? How were they socially shaped?

My objective in this paper is not to assess the impact of the Multimedia City on Montréal's performance in a specific economic sector, nor is it to assess the project's overall economic impact[2]. Rather, my goal is to highlight the ways in which a new

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1 In June 2002, the Multimedia City received third prize at the Metropolis Awards project. Metropolis defines itself as an international association of 77 global cities. Since its inception in 1998, the Multimedia City has probably become the most high-profile redevelopment project in Montréal. It is regarded by urban planners as a triumph of urban design and a model of public financial aid to new businesses. For instance, between 1999 and 2002, over a thousand articles on the project and program have been published in Quebec's newspapers and magazines.

2 Although the Montréal metropolitan area, with a population of 3.4 million, is still a major manufacturing region, it has become recognized since the 1980s as a centre of high technology jobs (aeronautics and aerospace,

neighbourhood was created. The urban-project approach used to rebuild the neighbhourhood was, first and foremost, a marketing and image-making process that laid bare the underlying interests and issues of the project's various stakeholders (Ingallina, 2001, p. 27). The initiators of the Multimedia City engaged themselves in a process aimed at transforming one section of a city. How did participants involved in the city's social and economic life manage to forge a common vision of the neighbourhood? What characterized their approach?

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part briefly reviews the historical development of the neighbourhood, formerly known as the *Faubourg des Récollets*[3], in order to contextualize the economic redeployment strategy that was chosen. The second part presents the main components of the project. The third part analyzes the image-making process. In order to show how the new neighbourhood was shaped, I used the local press[4]. I put together a catalogue of images, visual clichés and representations that were featured in the conversion process undertaken by the project's boosters and promoters.

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biopharmaceuticals, manufacturing of computer and microelectronics equipment). For a critical analysis of the impact of science parks on employment growth in Canadian cities, including Montréal, see Shearmur and Doloreux (2000). In 2001, jobs in specific economic sectors such as law and legal services, accounting, research and development, engineering, design, and computer programming represented almost 8% of jobs However, this share is lower that the one prevailing in other Canadian metropolitan areas like Toronto and Ottawa (Polèse, 2002).

3   The historic name of the neighbourhood is St. Ann Ward. It was developed as an industrial suburb of Montréal in the 1840s. By 1901, more than 20,000 employees worked in St. Ann's factories (Lewis, 2000, p. 102).

4I   Undertook a press review on the development of the Faubourg des Récollets and the Multimedia City between June 1997 and May 2001 of the following newspapers : *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, *The Gazette*, and the weekly business paper *Les Affaires*. Other newspapers aimed at the Montréal business community were also used.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the late 1980s, certain local observers have considered the *Faubourg des Récollets*, site of the Multimedia City, to be Montréal's answer to New York City's SoHo, an area where a few audacious artists have chosen to set up their studios (Lamarche, 1997, p. B11; Truffaut, 1997, p. A5). The area consists of industrial buildings and old warehouses which offer specific architectural features prized by artists, such as vast, open interior spaces. The area is located just outside Montréal's central business district as well as its historic district, Old Montréal; it is also adjacent to the Bonaventure expressway and the Lachine Canal (see map 1 and figures 1 and 2).

Map 1 : Location of the Multimedia City
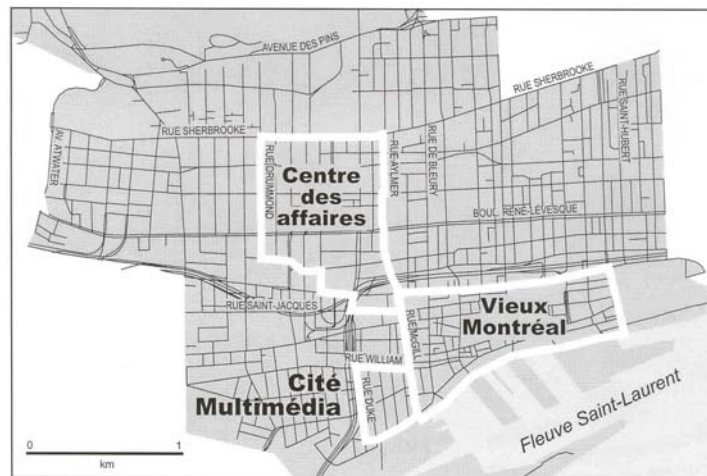
The history of the *Faubourg des Récollets* is closely linked to the history of Montréal's industrialization (Malo, 1991). During the first decades of the 19th century, the area was primarily residential. Starting in the 1840s, industrialization of the district began in earnest, the result, among other things, of its close proximity to the harbour and the Lachine Canal, an area traditionally considered to be the cradle of Canadian industrialization. Up until the 1930s, many factories (foundries, rolling mills, shipyards, sawmills, flour mills, etc.) were established in the area (see figure 3). Between the late 1950s and early 1970s, industrial decentralization and deindustralization, the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, and the closure of the Lachine Canal in 1970 brought the area's industrial dynamism to an end. In addition, the construction of mega-projects and tall office buildings aimed at modernizing the downtown area in the 1960s and 1970s, combined with the building of the nearby Bonaventure elevated expressway, isolated the district from booming new business and retail areas.

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Figure 1 : Aerial view of the
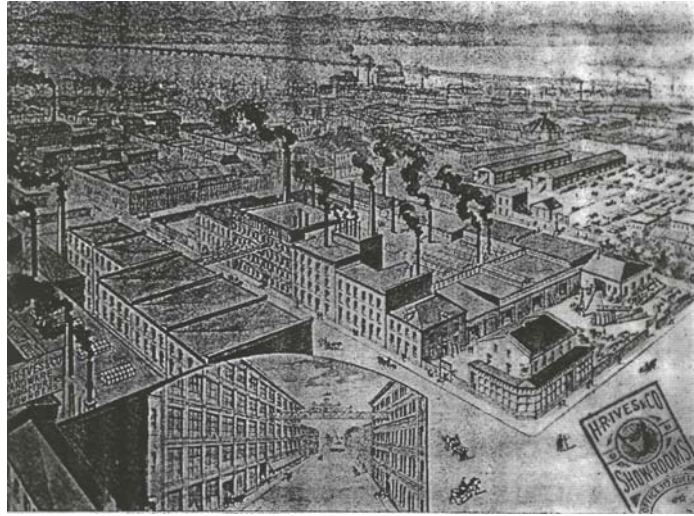*Faubourg des Récollets* **in 1991**

Vue à vol d'oiseau du faubourg des Récollets et de son environnement, 1990, P. Malo.

Figure 2 : General view of the Multimedia City
with the Lachine Canal in the foreground, 1999

Figure 3 : View of the factories in the
***Faubourg des Récollets*, late 19th century**

Despite its derelict character, the district retained some of its assets. Thus, during the 1980s, many entrepreneurs and artists were prompted to settle in the area, drawn by low real-estate values and affordable rents, the district's historical significance, its prime geographical location – which made it an attractive piece of Montréal real estate – and its industrial cachet (Lessard, 1998). During the same period, the city of Montréal, through one of its real estate corporations (the *Société immobilière du patrimoine architectural de Montréal* or SIMPA) bought a large number of buildings and empty lots in order to develop an upscale area of mixed residential and commercial use known as the *Quartier des Écluses*. Modeled more or less on London's Canary Wharf, this major real-estate redevelopment project was to give new life to the old industrial zone (La Mothe, 2001, p. 34-35; Sénécal, 1998). However, the real estate downturn that affected Montréal in the early 1990s forced the local administration to abandon the project.

In 1996, another municipal agency, the *Société de développement de Montréal*, or SDM (which had replaced the SIMPA) asked a non-profit organization, the *Centre d'intervention et de revitalisation des quartiers*, or CIRQ, to conduct public hearings with a view to finding a new use for the district. Owners, tenants, workers and inhabitants of the *Faubourg des Récollets* were invited to discuss their vision of the area's future (Sénécal, 1998). A paramount idea emerged from the public hearings : that arts and new technologies were key activities that could revitalize the area. Two groups were particularly involved in the revival strategy : the *Agence du Faubourg*, an

association of residents and businesses, and the *Association culturelle Quartier Éphémère*, a group of artists. A business innovation center (*Centre d'entreprises et d'innovation de Montréal*), located in the area since 1986, also played a leading role in elaborating a concept focusing on culture and technology. Finally, the idea of choosing information technologies to stimulate redevelopment of the area was based on the fact that two of Québec's leading multimedia firms, Discreet Logic and Intellia, were located in the neighbourhood (Germain et Rose, 2000, p. 153; figure 4).

**Figure 4 : Discreet Logic,
one of the first multimedia firms to locate in the district,
established its offices in a converted machine shop in 1997**

This brief summary of the district's recent history shows that, by 1996, several elements (various artists and creators, new businesses, industrial heritage, and affordable rents) were in place to spur the area's regeneration.

2.   JUNE 1998 : THE MULTIMEDIA CITY IS OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED

Governments as well as private firms are preoccupied by urban economic restructuring. Since the second half of the 1990s, most North American and Western European cities have tried to position themselves as places where the new, knowledge economy based on information technologies has replaced the old economy based on industrial production. According to some urban analysts, the presence of high-tech firms encourages urban regeneration and revitalization (Kotkin, 2000, p. 20; Wolfe, 1999). This is particularly true for urban neighbourhoods. In the context of globalization and increased competition between cities in order to attract firms – and particularly high-tech firms – the idea of establishing distinct high-tech industrial parks or districts is part of a strategy designed to ensure a city's status and influence in the new economy (McNeill and While, 2001).

In order to better position Montréal at the forefront of the development of the knowledge- and information-based economy, the government of Québec, with the collaboration of the city of Montréal, adopted a strategy somewhat unique to North America by creating the Multimedia City (Bordeleau *et al.*, 2001, p. 15; Manzagol, 2000, p. 214). The purpose of this strategy was to cluster multimedia firms in a single site within designated buildings. The Multimedia City was an urban redevelopment project reserved exclusively for companies that operate in the information technology and multimedia fields. The objective of this planned office park was twofold : first, to stimulate the creation of 10,000 jobs in the multimedia sector by 2010[5], with the help of a financial assistance program implemented and managed by the government of Québec[6], and second, to promote the regeneration of the *Faubourg des Récollets*.

In 1997, the government of Québec decided to actively encourage the development of multimedia firms by offering generous job-creation subsidies. The first action undertaken was the establishment of a new financial aid program, which also included the establishment of an Information Technology Development Centre (ITDC) to support start-up companies in the field. The first designated ITDC building was built in the *Faubourg des Récollets* the same year. Given the interest generated by the financial

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5   Between June 1998 and June 2002, the Multimedia City created 5,860 jobs in Montréal. It is estimated that the total amount of government aid invested in the program is CAN$360 million (Baril, 2002, p. E2). The total budget for the Multimedia City project was estimated at over CAN$1.2 billion. This covers the tax incentive program for companies, launched in 1998 and scheduled to end in 2013, which is aimed at creating jobs; the construction of eight office buildings; the reconstruction of urban infrastructures; the construction of housing projects in the area; and other smaller construction and restoration projects.

6   In the first months following its launch in May 1998, the program's success literally overwhelmed its promoters. They estimated that they would be able to attain their goal of creating 10,000 jobs in four and a half years instead of the projected ten years. However, in June 2002, the promoters of the program were forced to review their estimates after the Internet bubble burst in 2000. Other reasons that can be used to explain the City's reversal of fortune are its high-priced rents and the overestimated need for office space.

assistance program aimed at multimedia businesses, the government of Québec decided to expand its plan by creating the Multimedia City.

Launched in June 1998, the City was, first and foremost, a real-estate development managed by a public-private consortium known as the Cité Multimédia. The partners in the consortium were the *Société de développement de Montréal* (SDM), which owns 85% of the real estate located in the area, SITQ Immobilier, the real-estate branch of the *Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec*, the investment arm of one of the largest pension funds in North America, and SOLIM, the real-estate subsidiary of the *Fonds de solidarité de la Fédération des travailleurs du Québec*, a major trade union whose membership consists largely of construction workers. The consortium's aims were to restore a few historically significant buildings and to erect new buildings. A total of eight developments have been built, yielding some 150,000 square metres of new office space (figure 5).

**Figure 5 : General view
of the proposed Multimedia City, 1998**

But the Multimedia City, funded by a combination of institutional and public-sector interests, was also a job-creation program. The new businesses that chose to establish themselves in the properties managed by the consortium obtained a financial benefit in the form of a government tax credit. Under the plan, the government of Québec

reimbursed 40% of employee salaries, up to a maximum of CAN$15,000 per year per eligible job. This financial help can be renewed until 2010[7].

Given the government's generous tax-credit program, and the hype which surrounded the Internet economy in 1998 and 1999, the Québec Department of Finance, responsible for managing the program, was literally overwhelmed by applications. As a result, the managers of the multimedia office park that forms the Multimedia City had to rethink their strategy and quickly come up with a way to redevelop an entire neighbourhood which would be capable of accommodating the growing number of new-economy workers[8].

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7 To establish themselves in the City, businesses had to obtain an eligibility certificate from Investissement Québec. According to the Québec Department of Finance, the information and communication sector included businesses active in computers and telecommunications. This sector also included businesses whose primary mission is to produce multimedia content and applications.

8 Even if the buildings were not yet ready to accommodate the new jobs, grants were awarded as soon as the firms agreed to move into the area by signing a lease with the Consortium.

3. URBAN IMAGES AND REPRESENTATIONS

To create a vibrant urban image for the Multimedia City, the project's promoters had to erase from the public memory the negative images linked to its industrial past. The project's depictions in the print media illustrate that the promoters are intent on breaking away from the grim industrial history of both the *Faubourg des Récollets* and the city of Montréal. The proposed "branding" program – creating a new identity for the area – is clearly oriented toward a future that is more positive and brighter. Indeed, a whole new identity has been conceived around the project and the "creative" people expected to work there.

As a way of understanding how the representations of the neighbourhood were constructed in relation to its new meanings, I have organized the images of the Multimedia City which appeared in the print media between June 1997 and May 2001 into five categories : (1) Montréal; (2) the neighbourhood (3) multimedia workers and firms; (4) the built environment; and (5) the infrastructure. Based on these five categories, my analysis reveals the different means by which a government-sponsored urban redevelopment project was positioned as the potential saviour of both the local and metropolitan economy. The project would achieve this in two ways : by creating new jobs – especially jobs for young Montrealers – in a new, emerging industrial sector, and by rejuvenating an abandoned district. Put differently, in the course of its development phase, the Multimedia City was depicted in the local media as a metaphor for successful state intervention – intervention which would help reverse the decline that Montréal experienced during the 1970s and 1980s.

Montréal

Many local observers portrayed the Montréal of the 1970s and 1980s as a city in decline[9]. With the weakening of the traditional manufacturing and transportation sectors[10], a demographic decline, and "the erosion of Montréal as a pan-Canadian financial and corporate command centre" (Germain and Rose, 2000, p. 118), the city was one of the least economically healthy in Canada. The negative image associated

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9 The "decline" of Montréal as Canada's metropolis can be traced back to the early 20th century. Many factors and events contributed to the changing role of Montréal in the early decades of the 20th century : "The decline of the British Empire, its resources consumed by the First World War, the rise of the American 'empire', and the inability of Montréal elite and their heirs to reposition themselves and their empires would have a significant impact on the shift of the Canadian economy's centre of gravity and thus on Montréal's position in Canada's urban hierarchy" (Germain and Rose, 2000, p. 29).

10 Evidence shows that the "general trend has been one of 'conversion' rather than deindustrialization." In fact, the 1980s saw "considerable diversification of the manufacturing base of the region" (Germain and Rose, 2000, p. 132). However, while the Montréal metropolitan area's manufacturing sector remained dynamic, some areas within the region have been particularly hit hard by the loss of manufacturing jobs. This is especially true for inner-city working class neighbourhoods located along the Lachine Canal.

with this decline has been recognized as a significant barrier to new investment. While Montréal benefited from a positive image as a cultural capital and a cosmopolitan centre, it seemed, during the 1980s and early 1990s, to lack the vitality of its rival, Toronto, in being able to attract new investments in the growing service sector industry.

How would a project like the Multimedia City change the image of Montréal from a poor, declining industrial city with structural unemployment into a vibrant and thriving place to work and live? With this project, one commentator has written, Montréal had become the "city of a hundred keyboards[11]" (Désiront, 2000, p. 27). According to its promoters, who saw it as the keystone of the new knowledge-based economy in the metropolitan area, the Multimedia City would help Montréal to become one of the world's top places for the development of new information technologies[12]. A few months after the first cranes appeared in the district, the Québec minister of finance responsible for the program declared that Montréal was now the "second multimedia centre in the world (after the American west coast)" (Presse Canadienne, 1998, p. C15). In other words, this project "puts Montréal on the map of the great high-tech centers of the world" (Binsse, 1998, p. C4).

Potential tenants were enticed to move into the new buildings by Montréal's competitive advantages : the availability of a highly educated, qualified and bilingual workforce; the presence of four universities, the quality of life, and the competitive costs of doing business in the metropolitan area. This project "gives Montréal the image of a city that has regained its dynamism" (Chabot, 2001).

Superlatives and hype were constantly used by the project developers to assess its impact on the future of Montréal. The Multimedia City was described by its main supporters as a "vast project that has become Montréal's pride"; it is "an asset for the development of Montréal's tomorrow"; a "symbol of the success of the intervention on the government of Québec in the new economy"; the "first sign of renewal in the historic centre". However, the extent of the government of Québec's intervention in the project considerably troubled the private developers of Montréal's downtown core. Many of them believed that the subsidy-driven new office park built by the public-private consortium would likely provoke a real-estate crisis in Montréal. In the face of their criticism, the provincial minister responsible for the program declared in June 2000 : "Before our involvement, when the developers where in charge, what was going on? The image of Montréal was a huge mountain of grey dust. It is not the case any

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11 This image, coined by a journalist, alluded to Montréal's 19th century nickname, "Montréal, the city of a hundred steeples", which refers to the city's numerous churches.

12 Montréal's boosters were constantly referring to the different benchmarking studies – published by magazines such as Wired or by accounting firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers – that rank the city among the world's top technocities or high-tech meccas.

more, the grey dust has been swept away[13]" (Presse Canadienne, 2000, p. C3). According to the minister, in other words, the Multimedia City had substantially boosted the real-estate market in Montréal and private developers should thank the government of Québec.

Neighbourhood

When referring to the neighbourhood where the Multimedia City is located, its promoters repeatedly used such well-known terms as *technopoles*, *technopolis*, *scientific-* and *high-tech clusters* and *cyberdistricts* to convince companies active in the new economy to move into the area. Analogies between the City and Silicon Valley in California, Silicon Alley in New York, *Silicon Sentier* in Paris, and the Multimedia Gulch in San Francisco were a common occurrence. According to their supporters, these areas provide occupants with the defining features of an innovative milieux : inter-company synergy, critical mass, spatial proximity, complementary services, strategic alliances, etc. In brief, these milieux offer ways of operating and doing business that promote exchange and the pooling of talents and resources. Ultimately, the grouping of similar businesses into a small area should optimize creativity, innovation and productivity. Other shorter statements which underlined the project's unique and distinctive character – "it is an address, a neighbourhood" (Mailloux, 2000, p. 6) – were seen as enough to convince players in the new economy to move into an urban area that had become young, trendy, and vibrant.

Prior to the launch of the Multimedia City in 1998, the prevailing urban and economic conditions in the *Faubourg des Récollets* were bleak. At least, this is the picture painted by the Multimedia City's promoters. Their images of the *Faubourg des Récollets* evoked the industrial era and its grim features : dirty, polluting factories; contaminated soil due to the presence of heavy industries like foundries; abandoned industrial buildings; brownfields and empty lots; a lack of services. The notions of *abandonment*, *decline*, and *decay* were omnipresent (see figure 6). Indeed, prior to the arrival of multimedia activities, the district helped sustain the image of Montréal and its older neighbourhoods as places which, like most industrial cities of the rust belt, were in decline and facing the challenges of economic restructuring. The same terms were repeatedly used to describe the neighbourhood's obsolescence. Before the launch of the Multimedia City, the *Faubourg des Récollets* was *deserted*, *abandoned*, *old*, *obsolete*, *degraded*, *decaying*, *rundown*, *desolated*, *derelict*, a *no man's land*. Not to mention that the district's place-names were somewhat outdated : with names such as King, Queen,

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13 "Du temps des développeurs, sans notre intervention, qu'est-ce qui se passait? L'image de Montréal, c'était une vaste montagne de poussière grise […]. Ce n'est plus ça, la poussière grise a été balayée" (Presse Canadienne, 2000, p. C3).

Prince, Duke, Wellington, William, the area's streets had nothing particularly modern or original to offer to their future occupants[14].

Figure 6 : A warehouse being converted into condominiums and a privately owned building awaiting redevelopment, 1998

Firms and their workers

How is the new economy different from the old one? Firstly, the companies that chose to establish themselves in the City had names that evoke a knowledge-based economy based on ideas, creativity, and entertainment. Thus, we find companies with such names as DotCom, Cryo Interactive Entertainment, Generation.Net, Toon Boom Technologies, Voo Doo Arts, Teamsoft, Microïds Canada, Kaotic Technologies, Versatile Media One, etc. There is no doubt that these companies were drastically different from the old industrial economy companies that were was once active in the area : Darling Brothers Foundry, Ives & Allen Foundry, Royal Electric, MK Plastics, etc. Secondly, their methods of operation also differentiated them from the former occupants of the area. In the era of the Internet economy, firms established strategic alliances and partnerships. They created informal links and personal relationships that encouraged technological transfer and the exchange of ideas. Thirdly, the workers of the new economy were radically different from the workers of the industrial economy. They included graphic artists, computer programmers, Web-site designers, engineers, musicians, animation artists and other knowledge workers.

In the Multimedia City, one could encounter knowledge-based economy entrepreneurs, architects of cyberspace, and other similar virtuosos of new information technologies – all of them young, trendy and very qualified. An entrepreneur has even coined an acronym to characterize these hip, young workers : YETI, which stands for Young Entrepreneur Techno (Malboeuf, 2000, p. A1). According to some observers, these

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14 In July 1999, the mayor of Montréal, in light of the growing interest in the neighbourhood, suggested that some street names be changed in order to better reflect the new vocation of the area. The mayor proposed names like "Pixel" and "Marshall-McLuhan". Many heritage advocates and journalists made fun of the mayor's idea (Ducas, 1999, p. A3).

young Web whizzes should be earning enough to buy lofts in Old Montréal (Buzzetti and Cauchon, 1999, p. B2). However, this rosy portrait hides the fact that, in 2000, most multimedia workers, although certainly young, held non-unionized jobs that paid them an average annual income of only CAN$32,000 for a 45-to-60 hour work week (Normand, 2000, p. B1).

Given the fact that most of the old businesses left the *Faubourg* many years ago – they either closed down or relocated elsewhere – it is difficult to draw a clear picture of the typical old-economy worker. We can nevertheless imagine that he was a manual worker with few qualifications who worked by the sweat of his brow. This image probably well represents the type of jobs that once prevailed in the district during the industrial era. However, some industrial workers were better off than others. For instance, many of those employed in foundries, such as moulders and blacksmiths, were skilled workers who managed to form unions (Bradbury, 1995, p. 112). Despite the fact that some factory workers might have been more successful than others in coping with the challenges of industrialization, most of Montréal's workers faced harsh working conditions characterized by low wages, poor sanitary conditions, irregular and long working hours, and hazardous working environments (Bradbury, 1995; De Bonville, 1975; Linteau, 1991).

The architects and planners responsible for the design of the area strongly believed that the hip young creators working in the Multimedia City needed a specific urban and architectural environment in which to produce. This environment had to be completely different from the one that characterizes the central business district. According to the director of the City, creative individuals working in small multimedia firms didn't want to take the elevator to the 35th floor of a tall office building (Leblanc, 2000, p. G4). They wanted, above all, to work in a friendly, walkable urban environment that offers direct contact with city life. They also wanted close access to a bicycle path as they might enjoy cycling or roller-blading to work (Dubé, 2001, p. 35). According to the president of the Greater Montréal Convention and Tourism Office, the citizens of the City and other international Internet workers were somewhat more sociable than other people, and this explains the need to provide them with a variety of meeting places such as cafés and restaurants (Malboeuf, 2000, p. A2).

According to the Multimedia City's promoters, it is obvious that this new neighbourhood had to set itself apart from the traditional central business district and from the old industrial district. To make sure that the workers of the City benefited from a stimulating environment, the architects and planners chose the "campus" approach, allowing for the creation of a complete urban setting that incorporates residents, employees and services. In other words, the site layout parameters were aimed at

developing an integrated neighbourhood, including pedestrian pathways and landscaped streets. In order to successfully meld the old area with the modernity of information technology, some of the new buildings have a high-tech look – through the use, for example, of glass curtain walls and contemporary materials such as steel and aluminum – while others were designed to acknowledge their historical settings by using red brick, thereby quoting 19th century urban industrial architecture (figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7 : The Multimedia City under construction, 1999

Figure 8 : The new buildings of the Multimedia City, 1999

The *Faubourg des Récollets* was clearly affected by the burden of its industrial heritage : the area was rife with abandoned shops and warehouses, polluted factories, remnants of red-brick shops, ruined buildings and streets, damaged structures, and so on.

The global planning and design strategy adopted for the Multimedia City – that some commentators have called "project planning" (*urbanisme de projet*) as opposed to the more traditional urban planning approach based on a comprehensive plan or zoning ordinance – was fairly new for Montréal. According to the creators of the architectural and urban design program, the objective was to construct a work environment which fostered exchange and cross-fertilization among companies. The architecture was designed to be comfortable for workers, who were bound to spend a lot of time walking

back and forth given that their jobs required frequent meetings with business partners. The architectural strategy also relied on the participation of a great number of architectural firms. As such, the project was deemed to be a "fine, collective effort" that binded together both builders and buildings.

The project's designers maintained that they have taken the district's historic character into consideration. For example, the development scale, urban morphology and original street grid all respected the former urban fabric, albeit to a limited extent. In addition, certain historically significant buildings have been preserved and some 19th to early 20th century industrial-architecture design principles have also been used. Despite the claims of the City's designers, however, very little industrial heritage has actually been saved.

The City's promoters displayed a determinist belief in the impact that the urban design and architecture would have on the behaviour of workers and users. It was as though their design would foster a more creative environment and be conducive to face-to-face social interaction and business linkages. In this sense, the City's designers were reclaiming the old modern-architecture utopia of human-environment interaction. Their vision of urban design and architecture maintained that a direct relationship exists between physical form and social behaviour. Architects and urban designers conceived the City's physical space so that it would cultivate an ideal form of inter-company collaboration. Their goals were to offer the characteristics of place which companies desire, such as human scale and a sense of place. To do so, they used well-known strategies and design gestures like contextual additions and the tentative salvage of architectural remnants, while creating a new social urban fabric attuned to the needs of the young workers.

Infrastructure

The last type of image that I have identified in the local newspapers concerns the City's infrastructure. Whereas in the 19th and 20th centuries the industrial infrastructure which contributed to economic productivity consisted of canals, railroads, and electricity, the infrastructure of the 21st century new economy consists of elements that are both underground and aerial, namely, fibre optics and satellite dishes. The new knowledge-based economy and culture required radically different infrastructures than the ones that sustained the economy of the industrial era. This is why the City's promoters emphasized the fact that the area and its designated buildings were all equipped with the latest telecommunications network equipment, such as a fibre-optic backbones and satellite dishes. With such a powerful network, "electronic data can travel at the speed of light beneath the streets of the Multimedia City" (Rioux, 1999, p. A4).

The *Faubourg des Récollets*' infrastructure was completely obsolete. Not only did it date back to a different century, it was literally in ruins. The streets, sidewalks and underground conduits were in desperate need of repairs. This situation reinforced the perception that, before the arrival of the Multimedia City, the district was on the verge of collapse. In order to change that perception and to improve the state of affairs, the City of Montréal undertook a major modernization plan in 1999. This had a negative impact of the Multimedia City's image as the entire area was turned into a vast construction zone, with no end in sight (Dubé, 2001, p. 32).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, two observations can be made. The first one concerns the social shaping of a new identity for the neighbourhood. The second relates to the notion of "urban project". Regarding the new identity of the Multimedia City, I have shown how it is based on the imagery of the Internet economy put forward by its main participants : the firms and their workers, their specific lifestyles and tastes, the kind of services provided, and the spatial and functional organization of the district. According to the City's promoters, all these components required a distinct urban environment that simultaneously combined the old and the new. The result, however, is somewhat artificial : the chosen heritage preservation strategy relied on façadism and vague historical reminders.

Given the fast pace with which new-economy businesses have evolved in the last few years – including their vocation and their spatial needs – one can question whether the district's newly created identity will survive the ever-changing economic realities. How durable will the new identity be? This case study highlights the fact that we are facing two irreconcilable time spans : the changing one imposed by the market, and the fixed one of the neighbourhood and the city's history. Once they are constructed, the buildings of the Multimedia City will stand for many decades. To our knowledge, no measure has been planned to allow for their probable conversion to another use. The accelerating rate of change in the production needs of new-economy companies means that government agencies attempting to engage with capitalist systems will have to respond to situations that are both volatile and dynamic.

This case suggests that, while history and heritage are valuable assets, they paradoxically have to be cast aside to make way for new representations linked to the changing urban economy. The socially constructed images of the project erased all references to the history of the neighbourhood. For instance, no positive depictions of the *Faubourg*'s people or of its industrial past have been put forward by the promoters of the Multimedia City[15]. Nothing has been retained which talks about the history of the industrialization process and the workers, their daily lives and struggles.

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15 In June 2002, a group of artists known as Quartier Ephémère, which had been active in the district since the early 1990s, opened a new centre for the promotion of the visual arts, known as the Fonderie Darling. The centre is located in an abandoned foundry leased by the Multimedia City's managers. The developers and designers of the Fonderie Darling adopted a strategy which radically opposed the one put forward by the Multimedia City's promoters. Instead of erasing all traces of the district's past from the building walls, the designers preserved most of it. In addition, the first exhibition emphasized the history of the neighbourhood. Montréal's art and architectural critics praised the Quartier Éphémère for its daring attitude (Chabot, 2002, p. B7; Gironnay, 2002, p. B7; Lamarche, 2002, p. B8).

By choosing amnesia instead of memory, the Multimedia City's boosters were trying to pull the neighbourhood out of the margins and into the centre, relative to the local and global economy. This strategy is similar to one adopted by numerous cities which were coping with the challenges of economic restructuring in a context of urban competition (McNeill and While, 2001, p. 300-301). The builders of the Multimedia City were chiefly concerned with Montréal's competitive advantage in the new economy, and as a result they focussed on improving the city's marketability by changing its image. The packaged environment they developed was viewed as a fundamental tool which could be used to enhance the reputation and desirability of the neighbourhood and of Montréal. According to this strategy, the promotion of the district's high-tech profile signalled the passing of the post-industrial age.

This paper has demonstrated that the new images associated with the neighbourhood were selectively chosen by the project's promoters and the media. Memory did not play an important role in the process. Rather, the project's planners and designers developed a new set of images and references to produce a different urban space. The language used in newspaper articles actively served to construct the representations of the new neighbourhood[16]. As a result, the Multimedia City has up to now largely been shaped by marketers, journalists, politicians and real-estate developers. It will be interesting to see, in the coming years, how the area's workers and residents make sense of their new neighbourhood and experience it. Will the meanings applied to the district by the individuals and social groups who use it coincide with the ones put forward by its promoters? Are the area's occupants going to make the district their own?

The notion of urban project refers to a dynamic approach that involves the participation of different social actors and considers multiple dimensions : economic, spatial, social, and cultural (Ingallina, 2001, p. 10). This notion also leads us to rethink our way of conceiving and defining urbanity and the city. In our contemporary metropolitan areas, social networks are growing increasingly fragmented as a result of cultural pluralism. The approach chosen by government technocrats and politicians for the Multimedia City does not incorporate the complexity of our contemporary cities. Instead, their approach primarily emphasizes a sector-based and top-down strategy. Only multimedia and information technology are promoted, the economic dimension takes precedence over social or cultural considerations, and the state assumes the planner's role. Therefore, the project doesn't really set itself apart from the mega-projects planned by

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16 In June 1998, heritage advocates criticized the Multimedia City's developers for demolishing an industrial building that had historic value as the site of the first commercial electricity generating plant in Montréal. In addition, according to heritage advocates, the demolished building was replaced by a structure that did not acknowledged the architectural specificity of the surrounding buildings in terms of height and density (Fianu and Pratte, 1998, p. B3; Proulx, 1998, p. 81).

technocrats during the 1960s and 1970s[17]. It is as if today's urban planners failed to learn from the unexpected negative effects of single-purpose urban redevelopment projects. In fact, this shows that, although the significance of urban heritage and history is better understood today than it was twenty-five or thirty years ago, social actors display an ambivalent position towards its status in the contemporary city. Perhaps the old urban fabric is ill-adapted to the contemporary economic, technological, and cultural forces that are reshaping our metropolitan areas. That said, despite the narrow vision of planning and design that sustained it, we can hope that the experience of the Multimedia City – whose development has been rushed along in many ways – will serve as a laboratory for the future of urban design and the understanding of urban and industrial heritage.

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17 I am thinking here of previous mega-projects built or planned in Montréal, like the Olympic stadium and the Maison Radio-Canada, which were supposed to revitalize the neighbourhoods in which they were located.

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