Social Isolation without Segregation? The Case of Women Living in Scattered Public Housing in two Montréal Neighbourhoods[1]

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Abstract — Building on a qualitative research based on interviews with women living in scattered public housing in Montréal, this paper will propose a "conditional analysis" (Small, 2004) of the question of neighbourhood effects on social network and support. Using two very distinct Montréal's neighbourhoods—one almost completely gentrified and the other at the bottom of the social fabric—as the basis for comparison, I will try to go beyond some of the limits of many works when they propose an explanation to neighbourhood effects in a context where few policy interventions are at work and poverty is concentrated at a relatively low-level. The first line of argument will be to discuss the implicit preconception that proximity in a context of social mix gives poor families access to better public and collective services—such as education or health. I will try to show how this proposition remains inadequate due to micro-segregation processes largely determined by cultural factors associated to class (see, for example, Sennett and Cobb, 1973). The second line of argument will be on social network theories, especially on the creation of social support. I will try again to disentangle some broad expected mechanisms in the creation of social support and "solidarity" at the local level by the coexistence of different populations in the same residential space and the strong and active movement of NGOs—an enduring characteristic of Montréal. Combining these two lines of argument, I will try to explain how the women I met can live isolated from the rest of the urban society without being highly segregated in space, a case understudied in the current debate on urban poverty.

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Introduction

Interest for poverty and low-income families has led to several academic and governmental research initiatives in Québec. During the last decade, studies were led on the spatial distribution of low-income people and families, using various methods and theoretical frameworks (see, for example, Apparicio, Séguin, & Leloup, 2007; Kitchen, 2001; Pampalon & Raymond, 2000). More recently, researchers have analyzed the determinants of poverty through qualitative and quantitative longitudinal approaches (see, for example, Malenfant, Lévesque, Jetté, & White, 2004). Other studies are concerned with social development and NGOs' actions in low-income neighbourhoods (see, for example, Germain, Morin, & Sénécal, 2004; Morin & Hanley, 2004; Sénécal, Germain, & Bénard, 2002). Finally, some studies have tested hypotheses about neighbourhood effects on individual outcomes, like health, adolescent risk behaviours, or employment (see, for example, De Koninck & Pampalon, 2007; Dupéré, Lacourse, Willms, Vitaro, & Trembay, 2007; Frohlich, Potvin, Chabot, & Corin, 2002; Ross, Tremblay, & Graham, 2004).

This study is built as an attempt to combine some theoretical assumptions on neighbourhood effects and qualitative and fieldwork oriented approaches on poverty and urban inequalities. It focuses on social ties of adult-aged women living in scattered public housing in Montréal. As previous syntheses on neighbourhood effects have already underlined, most of the early studies on this issue have been interested in youth and have relied on statistical methods (see, for example, Ellen & Turner, 1997; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Nonetheless, during the last years, this trend has slightly changed with the emergence of a new wave of qualitative and mixed-design approaches on urban poverty, social participation, social capital, and social network (for a synthesis, see Newman & Massengill, 2006). As in these recent studies, the first aim of this project is descriptive as it attempts to provide an empirical basis for neighbourhood studies. The second aim of this study is more analytical as it will propose an interpretation of the differences observed in social network, social support, and access to resources, in two contrasted Montréal neighbourhoods, taking into account both individual characteristics and the evolution of each neighbourhood. The analysis proposed will be based on some arguments formulated by early Chicago urban sociologists, and recently recalled in a study on a Boston *barrio* (Small, 2004). These arguments draw critical attention to attitudes, like personal attachment to the neighbourhood, perception of its evolution, or social distance and stigma, which are features less often included in the analysis of poor or low-income urban families. This project aims to extend these arguments by testing them in a context where the social fabric of the city presents a generally mixed pattern of class and ethnic groups at the neighbourhood level.

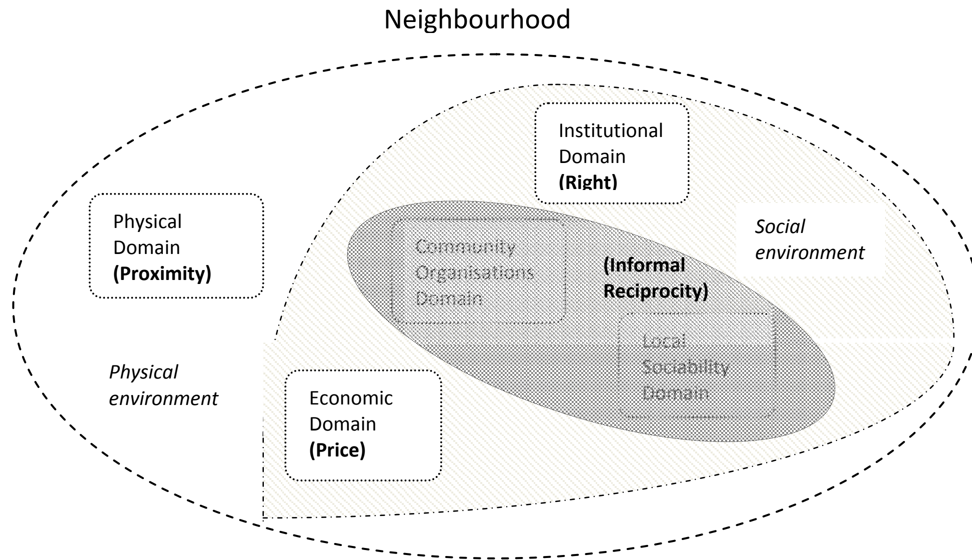
Neighbourhood, social network, and micro-segregation

The neighbourhood received a lot of attention during the last years with a growing number of approaches claiming to disentangle what remains a "black box" for many social theories (Germain & Gagnon, 1999). Recently, Québec scholars have produced a conceptual essay to progress beyond this stage (Bernard, et al., 2007). Their aim was to define the neighbourhood as processes through which resources are unevenly distributed in relation with health outcomes. This essay is of interest because it tries to apply to the Québec context some theoretical propositions about the neighbourhood. As my project focuses on neighbourhood as a space which might provide social network and support, he following comments will only focus on the propositions relative to social network and "informal reciprocity" (Godbout & Charbonneau, 1996). Through this discussion, I would like to introduce some features that are often underestimated in theoretical models explaining the relations between neighbourhood dynamics and access to resources that are embedded in social ties and space.

The model proposed by Bernard *et al.* (2007) is built around five domains: physical, institutional, economic, community, and local sociability; and four sets of rules: proximity, right, price, and informal reciprocity. Figure 1 presents how these domains and rules are linked. The last two domains, which are of particular interest for my study, are ruled by the informal reciprocity between individual and/or organizational agents at the local level. Gift and trust are at the root of the rule, as:

> "The absence of a counterpart in the gift relationship would essentially amount to exploitation: it would tend to deplete the stock of good will, and to ruin the exchange system. However, the nature of the counterpart is different in gift relationship than in systems regulated by prices or rights. It is much less specific in the former case: it is not clear when the "debt" will be repaid, what exactly will be offered as a counterpart, or even to whom." (p.1844)

Figure 1 — Theoretical conceptualization of the neighbourhood



Source: Bernard *et al.*, 2007, p.1843.

Gift systems are open-ended and create social ties, while market or state relationships tend to use them, or even to weaken them. If it works efficiently, informal reciprocity can provide people with access to many resources outside markets and State interventions, and it thus acts as a compensatory social mechanism, especially for actors with little economic or political power. However, these rules of reciprocity do not emerge in every situation, but "apply when one has formed bonds of reciprocity and valued relationship with other individuals or with communities" (p.1845). Consequently, the authors argued that two domains are mainly ruled by informal reciprocity. The local sociability domain provides people with individual benefits, like information and social support. The community organisations domain provides services, eventually creates jobs, and is engaged in action to pursue collective political goals. Therefore, informal reciprocity relies on a sense of community shared at the neighbourhood level both in individual relationships and in community-based organisations.

The previous model is a valuable contribution to research on neighbourhood effects in Canadian social sciences as it sheds light on the rules regulating the informal exchanges embedded in sociability and community-based organisations, which are frequently underestimated by theories. This model can also be read as an invitation to go further in

conceptualizing and explaining some mechanisms that frame social ties and networks at the neighbourhood level.

To begin with, it is useful to recall that the question of community is the object of an old and on-going debate in urban sociology. Since the end of the 19th century, scholars have been reflecting on the relation between urban processes, especially urban growth, and the nature of social ties. Simmel (1903), in a famous text, proposed that ties in an urban context become single-stranded and individualised, since people know each other in single and specialised roles, as neighbours, co-workers, family member, etc. (Simmel, 1990). This interpretation of modern life led to a large number of studies testing the assumption of a disappearance of local ties in mass society. A first set of studies focused on the significance of neighbourhood and local ties for working-class or ethnic communities. For instance, Gans showed that Italian-Americans in Boston lived in an "urban village" (Gans, 1962). Similarly, Young and Willmott described how working-class households formed a vibrant and inclusive community in one neighbourhood of East London by fostering exchange through kinship and friendship. On the contrary, when these households were moved out of their slum housing and relocated in a new development at the edge of the city, their ties of solidarity and support disappeared (Young & Willmott, 1983). As Bridge argues in a recent synthesis, these researches imply a sub-cultural idea of urbanism (Bridge, 2002). On the one hand, urban populations are large enough to foster the formation of distinct subcultures and networks. On the other, the idea of neighbourhood and the segregation between them are of great importance to ensure that groups have the capability to enhance their social status. Segregation, as a "natural process", can enhance social identity, especially for groups facing exploitation and domination on a daily basis, and changes in the social fabric of the city frequently weaken or even destroy their "social order" (for a historical example, see Gould, 1995).

Challenging the conclusion of previous studies, other scholars have tried to address the question of the relation between neighbourhood and the formation of social ties more directly. In the American context, Guest and Avery note a steady decline in the importance of social ties in the neighbourhood using two questions frequently asked in the General Social Survey between 1974 and 1996 about how often respondents spent a social evening with someone else in, or outside, their neighbourhood (Guest & Wierzbicki, 1999). Wellman, in a well-known study on East York, Toronto, proposed what he called the "emancipated community" model, since the social networks of the upper working-class/low middle-class living in this neighbourhood ran over its boundaries and covered the whole metropolitan region (Wellman, 1979). However, these conclusions may be partly determined by the methods used to measure social ties. For instance, Wellman, in his original study, measured the intimate character of a relation by asking the respondents to specify his/her six most significant relationships. However, when he later

reconsidered the data (Wellman, 1996), “active ties” were defined as the people with whom respondents had more frequent contacts, consequently counting more ties at the local level than in the original study.

This can be explained by the different nature of social ties and the various spatial scales wherein they are embedded. Intimate or strong ties are often seen to be less dependent of space than superficial or weak ties (Fischer, 1977). Moreover, the neighbourhood is not the only setting through which someone can gain access to various types of social ties and resources. Here, the question is about “connectivity”: How do people gain access to social ties? How are social ties formed through different settings? Social network analyses have been addressing these questions for a long time. Trying to explain how social homogeneity is created, Eve dismissed the popular idea of people getting together through open chains of contacts. On the contrary, people meet and create new contacts through the family circle, and especially through the stronger ties of kinship, like parent, sibling, or spouse. Therefore, social ties are likely to be cumulative and to form “configurational patterns” wherein a new contact is sustained if it strengthens pre-existing ties (Eve, 1998).

Overall, a lot of studies state that adults create social ties through family, workplace, organisations, and neighbourhood (see, for example, Bidart, 1988; Fischer, 1977). The importance of each social circle in an individual’s level of “connectivity” is variable and it evolves along the different steps of the life cycle. For example, in a large survey of adults living in the Toulouse area, Grossetti observed that neighbourhood accounts for 7.7% of the total relations, “circles” (family, school, university, work, and organisations) account for 59.3%, while the rest are linked to other sociability contexts (children’s related, friendship, or other circumstances, like a few unplanned encounters in public space) (Grossetti, 2004). The relatively low proportion of relations related to the neighbourhood can be explained by the qualitative difference that exists between “circles” and the place where someone lives, as argued by Grossetti, since the formers encompass institutional or organisational ties and the latter implies “common concerns”, like shared walls or building facilities. However, everyone can observe that “common concerns” are frequently at the centre of heated debates within a given location, which may be due to a lack of collective identification and pre-existing ties.

Neighbourhoods are not static as their environment and population change over time. Consequently, these on-going changes induce dialectical attachment and affiliation to places and their evolving characteristics. For instance, Wilson argued in his “social isolation” hypothesis that bad quality of life in the ghettos of American cities is partly due to the housing mobility of middle-class families out of the poor neighbourhoods and to the significant decline this mobility induces in social organisations, such as church, school, or youth centre (Wilson, 1994). Spatial mobility and segregation can thus enhance or weaken the social organisation of a neighbourhood

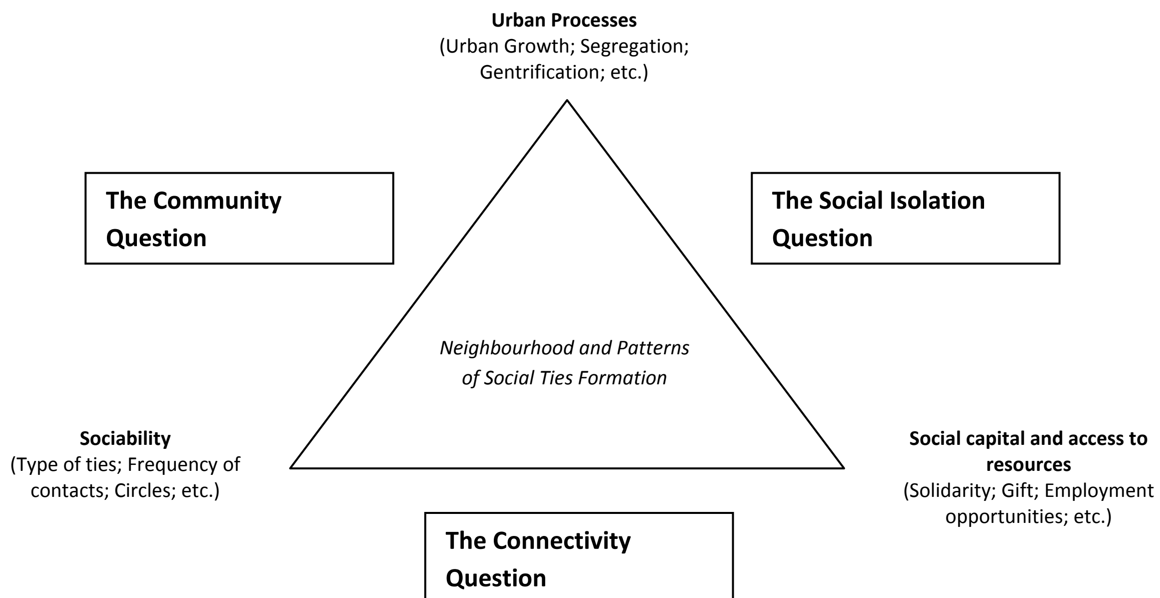
and remove most opportunities for the people left behind to create new social ties through circles or organisations. This process can also be observed at a lower scale. In a research on community-based organisations located in public housing projects in Montréal, Germain and Leloup argued that the social distance between project residents and nearby households weakens any efforts implemented by social workers to organise socially mixed activities, and most of them have simply given up trying (Germain & Leloup, 2006). Small showed the same kind of micro-segregation processes in his study of a Boston *barrio* surrounded by a much wealthier neighbourhood (Small, 2004). Moreover, micro-level segregation can arise in contexts wherein there is little, if any, difference within a population. Elias and Scotson (1965) provided a famous example of this process in their study of a small working-class community where long-time established residents excluded newcomers, even if the two groups were of the same racial, religious, and class backgrounds (Elias & Scotson, 1997). This kind of subtle differentiation is observed in various contexts, as in France's *banlieue*, where people distinguish themselves from the *cassocs* (a contraction for *cas sociaux*—"social cases") (Lapeyronnie, 2008), or in Australian poor neighbourhoods, where people speak ill about these they call the "no-hopers" (Warr, 2005).

"Informal reciprocity" cannot be taken for granted at the local level, as it is influenced by several neighbourhood and individual characteristics. On the contrary, a large number of studies show that it is important to disentangle the various processes that shape the community-based organisations and local sociability domains. Three questions are at stake when asking which relations exist between neighbourhood and the formation of social ties (see Figure 2). As this study focuses on social ties and social support, this paper will only address some aspects of the second and third of these questions. Concerning the second question, people gather social ties and resources through various settings and neighbourhood is only one of them, with connectivity and its effects being highly dependent on personal trajectories and past life events. Consequently, it is important to recognize that there is often more variation in behaviours within a neighbourhood than between them, a long-standing result in studies on neighbourhood effects (see, for example, Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Sampson, et al., 2002). Moreover, the dialectical relation between place and people can produce completely different effects in neighbourhoods with the same demographic profiles and the same physical and built environment (see, for example, Herbert, 1975). As shown by Elias and Scotson (1997), this result can be explained by very small differences between populations or within them, in the individual ability to connect with others.

Concerning the third question, it is also essential to consider this dialectical relation between place and people in relation to the various spatial expression of social and ethno-racial context. One factor is of particular interest: the neighbourhood's evolution and the attitudes it induces among people. Participation, social capital, or access to resources, can be fostered or

undermined by specific changes in the urban environment, and by the social hierarchy and structure that arise in a given context, as when there is a huge social distance between two adjacent neighbourhoods or when a majority in the neighbourhood population becomes a minority. Finally, local relations can also be influenced by the general dynamic by which the social position of a group or a class is legitimised and how this legitimacy is reflected in urban forms (Sennett & Cobb, 1973).

Figure 2 — The Three Questions Encompassing the Relation between Neighbourhood and Patterns of Social Ties Formation



Method

Qualitative method is used as the main research strategy. The project design is built on case studies approaches and in-depth interview techniques. To assess neighbourhood effects, the project is conducted as a multiple-case studies contrasted along various contextual characteristics but in which a population sharing common demographic traits is surveyed. This theoretical sampling method, both involving place and population specific choices (Grafmeyer, 1994), allows for controlling *a priori* for much variation due to individual characteristics as well as testing some hypotheses about the homogeneity of behaviours and attitudes within a group.

The cases were chosen on the basis of exploratory interviews with long-standing civil

servants at the Montréal's housing authority. These interviews gave the inside story of public housing in Montréal, its early development, its recent evolution, and the challenges it currently faces. The selection of cases also relies on previous studies about the location of public housing in the city and its environmental and urban insertion. Finally, prior fieldwork in two other studies on public housing in Montréal provided data which helped to refine the selection criteria. The first one is a survey on the current public housing residents with children. This survey is designed to produce a statistical profile of these residents and provides useful data about their general demographic traits, their residential trajectories and conditions, education and work, and a few indicators on sociability and participation at the local level (Leloup & Gysler, 2009). The second one is a qualitative inquiry on four NGOs located in public housing projects in East Montréal. All four NGOs are involved with families and children living in the projects, they are organized like youth centres and offer support for leisure and educational activities. This study lasted for almost three years and provided useful data on the "social order" and "social regulation" that occur in large housing projects in Montréal (Leloup & Germain, 2008).

Considering the data and conclusions of previous studies and the content of the exploratory interviews, it is possible to build a theoretical typology encompassing four types of public housing projects. This typology relies on two axes. The first axis distinguishes the large public housing projects from the low-density ones. Civil servants interviews and observations made during the study on NGOs intervention helped build the rational for this distinction. It seems clear that the concentration of public housing in some places with a specific architectural design generates an unusual social dynamic, which combines the main traits of an "urban village" with an ambivalent attachment more often seen in poor neighbourhoods. The second axis qualifies the social insertion of public housing projects. This distinction echoes the results of previous studies on the location of public housing in Montréal which show the variety of urban contexts wherein the projects are located (Apparicio, 2002). This observation is confirmed by our study on four NGOs (Leloup & Germain, 2008), two of the projects being located in middle-class neighbourhoods and the other two in lower-class neighbourhoods.

The two cases studied are composed of scattered public housing (also called "inserts" in the Canadian context[2]) located in contrasted neighbourhoods in terms of social class (see below). I chose to study low-density public housing projects as there is a lack of research on this type of projects in Montréal or in other urban contexts.

Within each neighbourhood, the sample of respondents controls for a set of demographic variables. The sample is only composed of women, of French Canadian descent, and living with

[2] "Inserts" mean three level building counting less than 10 units, built on small vacant lots. This kind of building presents itself like a "walk-up" whose frontage looks onto the street.

children. I decided to interview women only for two main reasons. First, women are over-represented in Montréal public housing, since single-parent households compose a large proportion of all residents and women remain more often than men in charge of the children after a separation (Leloup & Gysler, 2009). Second, holding constant the sex of the respondents allows a better comparison between various contexts, as previous studies have shown important differences in the ways women and men build and sustain their social networks and ties (see, for example, Eve, 1998; Warr, 2006). The same theoretical reason explains the choice of not including immigrant women, because some studies have already observed that immigration has a strong effect on networking behaviours (see, for example, Portes, 1984). Finally, the presence of children in the household is required because the study focuses on networking patterns of women expected to be in contact with various public or non-profit services (school, youth centre, etc.), and dealing with a large range of everyday life tasks, such as combining the responsibilities of caring for children and holding or searching for a paid job, making ends meet in order to put food on the table or providing appropriate clothes to all household members (Edin & Lein, 1997).

A total of 35 interviews were completed in the two neighbourhoods: 16 in “Le Plateau Mont-Royal” (middle-class) and 19 in “Pointe-Saint-Charles” (working-class). Participants were recruited through a direct sampling strategy using a list of tenants provided by the local housing authority. From this list, women with French names were identified and they received a letter including details about the research and ethical rules. The letter also specified that the participant would receive $20 as a compensation for her time. Women were called a few days later and asked if they had any question about the study and if they agreed to participate in it. Table 1 shows some general characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1 — General Characteristics of the Respondents

Age	
=<30	6
[30;40[	8
[40;50[	18
>=50	3
Marital status (answer not mutually exclusive)	
Single (never married)	12
Married for the first time	4
Live as unmarried couple	4
Separated	7
Divorced	8
Household size	
Number of persons by household (mean)	3.5
Number of children by household (mean)	2.1
Incomes	
Less than $10,000	16
$10,000 – $19,999	14
$20,000 – $29,999	4
$30,000 – $45,999	1

Interviews were conducted at the respondents' house and were subdivided in two parts. A questionnaire was used to collect systematic data about networks and resources. This questionnaire includes commonly used network analysis tools, such as a "name-generator" and various questions about the people the respondents feel close to, and the type, location, and frequency of contacts. This part of the questionnaire also includes a "resources-generator" which identifies several resources available to the respondents through their social ties, the nature of these ties, and the frequencies of resource exchanges, both received and given (Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2005). Finally, questions were asked about the household situation, the residential career, education and work, and discrimination that someone might have experienced in his/her life. The questionnaire was followed by an in-depth interview mainly focused on strategies participants developed to cope with hardships, especially those related to their children's education and schooling, labour and incomes, and household chores. This interview also provided information about the respondents' personal and residential trajectory, their life in the neighbourhood, the way people felt about its evolution, and what they identified as a burden in

their life. Overall, interviews lasted from two to three hours equally divided between questionnaire and in-depth interview.

The conditional perspective proposed by Small (2004) was used to interpret the data, as this approach does not apply exclusively to ethnographic fieldwork but provides a framework for data interpretation rather than a way to generate or analyze them. This approach can be described as a third way between universalistic and particularistic approaches. The main argument of the former is its search for processes that work in every poor neighbourhood, regardless of its specific traits. In this sense, every *n*-sample of poor neighbourhoods is taken as representative of them all. In contrast, the particularistic approaches consider that poor neighbourhoods are radically different from one another and that the generalizations made about them, even if they are statistically valid, miss the important dynamics of actual neighbourhoods. In other words, particularistic researchers try to show how some specific mechanisms work to produce an outcome in a particular case and avoid pretending that their findings are valid for other cases. As in the first type of approaches, the conditional perspective searches for regularities across neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, it considers those regularities (i.e. observed mechanisms) as conditions and not as universal laws, since they are not always present in all poor neighbourhoods, but rather appear under a set of specific conditions linked to neighbourhood-level factors and residents' individual characteristics. The aim of a conditional approach is then, using a few cases, to properly describe the situation and to formulate logical propositions that take into account the specific conditions at work, such as the level of poverty concentration, the quality of boundaries between poor households and surrounding ones, age, immigration status or respondents' feelings about the neighbourhood.

The data gathered from the questionnaire were compiled into a statistical package. In-depth interviews were recorded on numerical support and transcribed. The data analysis uses mainly qualitative methods, as the sample is relatively small. All the information gathered during fieldwork is compiled with a qualitative software (NVivo) enabling the researcher to combine respondents' "attributes" (demographic characteristics, network data, resource levels), and "discourses" on personal trajectory, social contact and support, or feelings about the neighbourhood changes. Discourse analysis is performed using three levels. The first is thematic and focuses on the content of the interviews. The second is more analytic and focuses on underlying meanings in discourses. Sentences or excerpts wherein people express opposition, repetition, or social categorization, received greater attention, as their analysis helps to elucidate the social forces, which often include contradictory rules and attitudes, that shape people's life in a given society, and determine the ways they see their place in the social hierarchy and structure (Kaufmann, 1996). The third and last level of analysis is designed to categorize the feelings and emotions that the women express during the interviews. This level is added to the analysis in

accordance with Small (2004) and other scholars who claim that phenomena, such as participation, neighbouring, involvement in non-profit activities, can be strongly oriented by personal attachment and attitudes towards the neighbourhood and its evolution (see, for example, Thomas, 1990). To complete the analysis, numeric recordings were listened to while coding the interviews using NVivo. Listening to the interviews gives access to a part of the information which is embedded in the tone and the way a speaker expresses oneself (Kaufmann, 1996).

Context of the study

Montréal is less socially divided than what could be found in many American cities or some European cities. For instance, in a recent study on the identification of micro and macro areas of poverty, Apparicio *et al.* (2008) found that, in 2005, only 38% of households below the low-income threshold live in a micro area where this type of household accounts for at least 40% of the total population. By micro area, these authors mean a census subdivision of around 600 persons, which is smaller than a census tract (Apparicio, Séguin, Robitaille, & Herjean, 2008). Even if poverty is not highly concentrated and does not lead to the formation of ghettos, Montréal remains a city marked by social divisions embedded in spatial and historical processes, which interfere with political dynamics (see, for example, Collin & Robertson, 2005; Copp, 1974). The urban landscape is also shaped by micro-segregation processes similar to those observed in some other Canadian cities and which are largely determined by the relatively poor quality of housing encountered in some areas (H. Smith & Ley, 2008). As a reaction to alleviate negative effects, municipal authorities are mainly engaged in renovation and regeneration policies applying an “inter-agencies and services” and “area-based” model which aims to mobilize all the actors involved at the neighbourhood or area level (Sénécal, et al., 2002)[3]. On the contrary, there are few policies targeting people mobility or poverty dispersion as goals for a social intervention. Therefore, Montréal largely remains a “natural setting”, as Galster and his team recently defined it, where housing supplies are mainly allocated through market and according to household incomes (Galster, Santiago, Cutsinger, & Grace, 2009).

This relatively mixed social pattern of Montréal also applies to public housing design. Indeed, public housing in Canada was built later than in other industrial countries. Before World

[3] It is useful to note that public housing in Canada is funded by three levels of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. In Québec, there is also a set of universal social benefits, such as free public school, welfare assistance, and health care. Municipal government, especially in large cities, are mainly in charge of the local services and develop various programs adapted to the needs of their localities, such as in Montréal, where there is a program targeting low-income neighbourhoods which receive special funding to improve the built environment, to support NGOs’ actions, or to renew public facilities.

War II, barely any housing project supported by federal government had been built in Canadian cities (Rose, 1980). It is only during the 1950s and 1960s that the federal government decided to invest in public housing, and this investment begun even later in Québec (Morin, Dansereau, & Nadeau, 1990). Costs for the buildings were shared by federal and provincial governments, and local housing authorities were created to administrate the units. In Montréal, this program led to the construction of approximately 20,000 units commonly called "HLM" (for *Habitation à loyer modéré*—moderate rent housing). Of particular interest is the fact that Canadian housing policies, due to their late implementation, have tried to avoid some negative effects associated with the construction of huge public estates, which was the case in some cities in the United States or in France (Harris, 1994). In Montréal, only one housing project counts almost 900 units, and 20 others count more than 100 units but less than 200. The rest of the HLMs (around 15,000 units) are located in middle and small scale buildings (Legault, 2002). The 35 women who participated in this research live in a small scale project known as "inserts".

The two neighbourhoods where the study took place are near downtown Montréal (see Figure 3, and Table 2 for general characteristics). The first one, "Le Plateau Mont-Royal" (below "Le Plateau"), is located north-west of downtown. Mostly urbanized during the 19th century, it is a former working-class neighbourhood. Since the eighties, the whole area has been marked by a process of gentrification, which has significantly transformed the face of the neighbourhood with the ongoing construction of condos and lofts, the concentration of brand shops and boutiques on its main commercial streets, and a shift in terms of incomes (Germain & Rose, 2000). Le Plateau is now frequently cited in tourist brochures and newspapers for its commercial amenities, its "urban lifestyle" and its houses with charming outside staircases, a typical urban form in Montréal.

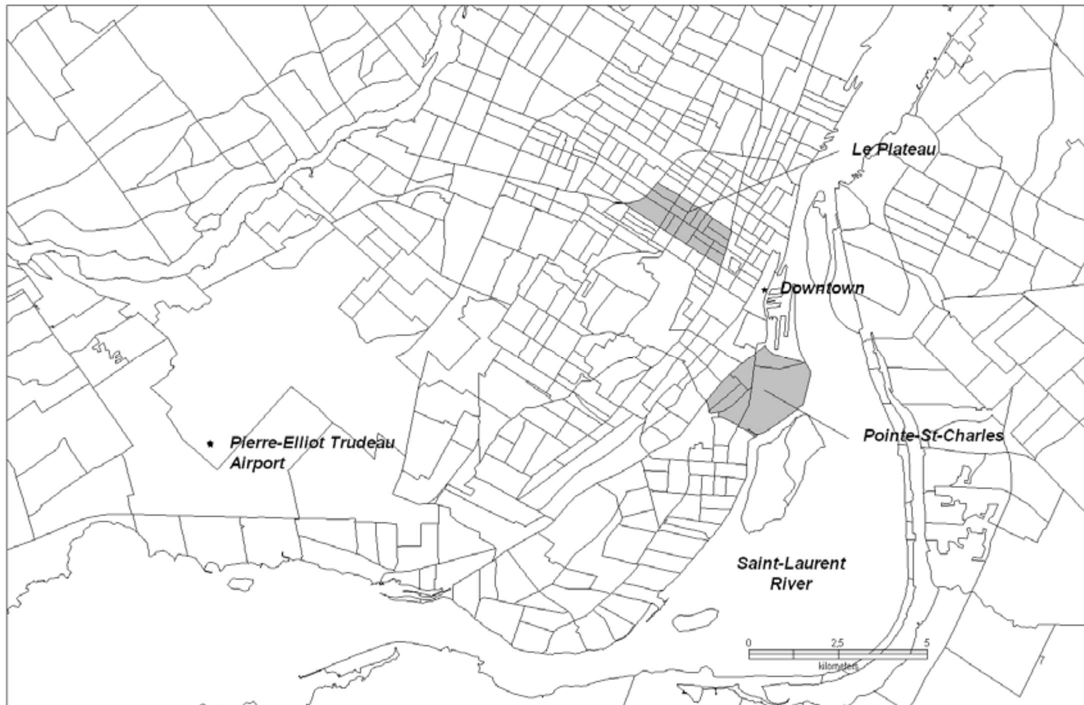
The second neighbourhood, "Pointe-Saint-Charles" (below "La Pointe"), is located south of downtown. Also urbanized during the 19th century, it is one of the bastions of working-class in Montréal history (Copp, 1974). Mostly poor in the old days, this neighbourhood remains disadvantaged in contrast with the rest of the city. Due to its history, the neighbourhood continues to host many grassroots organizations acting in the field of housing or welfare policies. These actors have also witnessed some changes emerging in the neighbourhood during the last years. As geographers have already shown, gentrification also seems to be on its way in part of the neighbourhood, especially near the Lachine canal, a former industrial site now offering many opportunities to transform warehouses into lofts and condos (Walks & Maaranen, 2008).

Table 2 — General Characteristics of the Two Neighbourhoods

	1996		2001		2006	
Variable	**Plateau**	**Pointe-St-Charles**	**Plateau**	**Pointe-St-Charles**	**Plateau**	**Pointe-St-Charles**
Population	34,600	13,095	36,640	13,210	36,465	13,930
% var. (5 year early)	0,0	0,0	5,5	0,0	-0,5	8,0
Single-parent (%)	21,6	42,7	20,0	34,0	18,3	33,4
Ownership (%)	20,0	19,0	26,0	23,0	31,2	23,1
Immigrant (%)	30,1	12,8	28,8	13,9	24,1	19,7
Executive and professional (%)	21,6	7,3	24,7	9,6	26,2	12,0
Working population (%)	70,2	50,6	74,9	56,2	74,4	60,4
Unemployment (%)	14,5	20,6	8,9	15,2	6,4	11,8

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census data, 1996, 2001, 2006.

Figure 3 —Location of the Two Neighbourhoods of the Study



Social ties and resources

The first instrument used to collect data about social networks was a name-generator with which the women who participated in this study were asked to specify the people with whom they are frequently in contact. This instrument also served to collect several data about the frequency, the type, or the origin of each relation, and there is no limit to the number of relations a respondent can declare (in this study, the maximum was 17). A question was added to this instrument which asked the respondent to identify the persons with whom they feel intimate or close to. Tables 3 and 4 show some of these results.

Table 4 — Total Relations Declared

Spatial Distribution

	Building	Street	Close neighbourhood	Neighbourhood	City	Region	Other (mainly outside the city)	Home	All
Le Plateau	6	10	2	11	31	8	10	7	88
La Pointe	11	11	19	67	42	24	16	0	192

Frequency of contacts

	Several times a day	Once a day	Several times per week	Once a week	Several times a month	Once a month	Several times a year	Once a year	Less than once a year
Le Plateau	9	14	21	19	9	8	8	0	0
(%)	(.10)	(.16)	(.24)	(.22)	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	(.00)	(.00)
La Pointe	32	29	50	35	21	15	5	3	1
(%)	(.17)	(.15)	(.26)	(.18)	(.11)	(.08)	(.03)	(.02)	(.01)

Origins of the relations

	Kinship	Childhood	Schoolmate	Children	Place of work	Neighbourhood	Social club	Religious group	Sport club	Leisure club	Other
Le Plateau	40	0	1	2	1	21	5	0	0	0	21
La Pointe	66	6	18	11	8	10	8	7	2	9	36

Women in La Pointe declared more relations than those living in Le Plateau, respectively

192 relations (mean=10.11) and 88 (mean=5.5), while the number of intimates is very similar in the two neighbourhoods (mean around 3.5). Considering the spatial distribution of relations, women in La Pointe have relatively more relations at the local level, especially at the building, street, close neighbourhood (i.e. surrounding buildings), and neighbourhood levels. By contrast, the social ties of the women living in Le Plateau seem to be spatially polarized with relations at the local level, such as the street or the neighbourhood, and at the city or provincial level. In this neighbourhood, there were also four women who mentioned relations with persons with whom they share their apartment (mostly their middle-aged children or other relatives). We therefore added a "home" category while coding the data, which was not included in the first version of the questionnaire. These four women do not form a homogeneous group, with two women highly isolated and the two others included in large social networks.

Table 5 — Intimates Declared

Spatial Distribution									
	Building	Street	Close neighbourhood	Neighbourhood	City	Region	Other (mainly outside the city)	Home	All
Le Plateau	1	0	1	4	19	5	6	6	59
La Pointe	8	6	5	17	13	10	6	0	65

Frequency of contacts									
	Several times a day	Once a day	Several times per week	Once a week	Several times a month	Once a month	Several times a year	Once a year	Less than once a year
Le Plateau	7	3	12	12	3	3	4	0	0
(%)	(.13)	(.06)	(.22)	(.22)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.00)	(.00)
La Pointe	16	20	11	9	8	1	0	0	0
(%)	(.25)	(.31)	(.17)	(.14)	(.12)	(.02)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)

Origins of the intimates											
	Kinship	Childhood	Schoolmate	Children	Place of work	Neighbourhood	Social club	Religious group	Sport club	Leisure club	Other
Le Plateau	27	0	1	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	9
La Pointe	39	0	5	3	2	1	0	1	2	0	8

As a product of this spatial distribution, frequency of contacts varies in the two neighbourhoods, with more frequent contacts in La Pointe than in Le Plateau. The results also show that the distribution of the total relations and the intimates was also similar in terms of frequency of contacts. Nonetheless, some differences emerge when comparing the two neighbourhoods. Indeed, in La Pointe, the frequency of contacts with intimates is higher than for the total relations, women scoring highly on the "once a day" category, while in Le Plateau, the frequency of contacts with intimates seems similar to the general distribution of relations, except for the "once a day" category which is very low for the intimates.

Finally, the last section of tables 3 and 4 presents the context through which the relations were created. As previous studies have already noted, kinship provides a huge amount of social ties to the women interviewed in the two neighbourhoods. However, in Le Plateau, the other

social circles frequently identified in the literature as the sources of social ties (such as childhood, school, or work) are less important than the neighbourhood, a result that can seem contradictory with the previous observations on the spatial polarization of their social networks. These women have nonetheless declared relations at the street, building, and close neighbourhood levels. It is thus more important to compare the distribution of the origins of social ties in the two neighbourhoods: in La Pointe, a lot more relations are created through social circles, both currently active (such as religious group, social club, etc.) or linked to former steps in the life cycle (such as childhood and schoolmates), than in Le Plateau, where it seems that the respondents' social ties are more strictly embedded in the close urban context or in long-distance relations. These contrasted results between the two neighbourhoods may also reflect the fact that the women in Le Plateau seemed to have less opportunity to create new contacts than the women in La Pointe, who have access to more social circles, such as community-based organisations, religious groups, or leisure clubs where they can create new ties or maintain existing ones.

A resources-generator was used to assess the quality of the respondents' social network. Women who participated in this study were asked to say if they know at least one person that can help them in various situations or can provide access to various resources if needed[4]. For example, the respondents were asked if they know someone "able to repair a car, a motorcycle or a bicycle", "who owns a car and that would offer you a lift (for planned activities or in case of an emergency)", "who can lend you a small amount of money", "who can help you compose your resume", etc. Overall, the resources-generator includes 23 items derived from a previous instrument developed for the "Survey on the Social Networks of the Dutch", conducted in 1999-2000 in the Netherlands (Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2005). However, as the Dutch survey aims to measure resources linked to social networks for the general population, all the items are not relevant for the situation of more deprived and low-income families. Some items from the original instrument were thus discarded and others modified according to other studies (see, for example, Edin & Lein, 1997). The resources-generator functions as follow: when a respondent answered yes to the first question, she was asked to specify if the person was a member of her family, a friend, or an acquaintance; there are thus in total 23 items (resources) multiplied by three sources (kinship, friendship, acquaintance), with a total of 69 possibilities.

To synthesize the results (see Tables 5 and 6), items were aggregated in six categories of resources: "mobility resources" (such as knowing someone who owns a car and can provide some transport), "letter, computer, and Internet" (such as knowing someone who owns a computer and can help in typing official letters), "household resources" (such as having someone you trust who

[4] The respondents were also asked to say if they can provide these services or resources for others. These data are not presented in this paper and will be included in further publications.

can take care of your children), "institutional resources" (such as knowing someone who can provide legal counselling or who has a good knowledge of public administrations and services), "employment resources" (such as knowing someone who can help you find a job), and "intimate resources" (such as having a relative or a friend with whom you can share personal difficulties and who can give you good advice). Results seem to indicate that most of the women who participated in this study live in a "dry" environment in terms of resources. Means are very low for almost all the categories of resources, with the items describing household and intimate resources scoring higher than the others. However, maxima for the different categories may in some cases be relatively high (such as for household or intimate resources), and denote inequality and heterogeneity within each neighbourhood. As for the relations, the family network provides most of the participants' resources.

Table 5 — Resources Declared by Category

	Mobility		Letter, computer, Internet		Household		Institutional		Employment		Intimate	
	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.
Le Plateau	1.19	3	0.75	3	3.25	7	1.06	3	0.19	1	2.44	5
La Pointe	2.47	6	1.00	3	3.84	11	0.89	3	0.58	3	3.95	9
Theoretical max.	9		9		24		12		3		12	
(Items)	(3)		(3)		(8)		(4)		(1)		(4)	

Table 6 — Resources Declared by Sources

	Kinship		Friend		Acquaintance	
	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.	Mean	Max.
Le Plateau	5.38	15	2.69	11	1.69	7
La Pointe	7.74	16	4.26	17	2.05	7
Theoretical max.	23		23		23	
(Items)	(23)		(23)		(23)	

Personal trajectory, neighbourhood, and attitudes towards the urban context

The majority of the women interviewed were born in Montréal and sometimes even in the same neighbourhood where they were living at the time of the interview. In Le Plateau, out of the 16 women who participated in this study, 7 were born in the neighbourhood and 7 in another area of the city, while only 2 were born outside the metropolitan area. In La Pointe, only 3 women came from the neighbourhood; however, 9 were born in a nearby neighbourhood located in the centre or South-Western part of the city, such as LaSalle, St-Henri, Verdun, or Petite-Bourgogne, all of them including large working-class populations, 5 women were born in more distant parts of the city, and only 2 outside the Montréal island. Most of the women interviewed have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time, and sometimes for as long as 20 years in the same housing (the mean time of residence in the current housing is around 10 years in both neighbourhoods). As one could have expected on the basis of this residential career, participants to the study do not automatically develop strong local ties which include relatives or close friends. On the contrary, the creation of local ties is also mediated by the family and personal trajectory. As Gisèle[5], a single-mother with a very small network living in Le Plateau, explained:

> "I had a very difficult childhood… It was very strict. There was a lot of unfairness, we were beaten, it was a disgrace, you know… We were not deprived of anything: food, school, and so on. You know, my father worked… I am not talking about that… What I am talking about… Me, well, we did not have much love…"

Dominique, another woman from Le Plateau, also talked about her childhood as an uneasy time in her life:

> "I lived with my parents but I don't really remember them because I lived most of the time with my grand-parents. Then I was placed in an institution for children when my grand-father died. I lived only two years with my parents when I was 18. […] I was placed because I was raised by my grand-parents in a way which my mother cannot deal with it. So, I was placed. It was not my choice."

However, for Dominique, her childhood seemed less difficult than for Gisèle and she remains in contact with some members of her family, which is not the case for Gisèle. Dominique still sees the neighbourhood as an important feature to sustain those relations, as she explained

[5] All names were modified to protect the respondents' identity.

that she plans frequent activities, like playing bingo, involving relatives and friends from the neighbourhood. In Le Plateau, most of the women who participated in this study told stories about their childhood as marked by unstable circumstances or difficulties, such as being raised by a single-mother, being abused by violent parents, suffering from a lack of loving care. They thus have few relations with other family members or those relations where characterized by duty rather than solidarity or emotional support. In La Pointe, even if those kinds of childhood experiences are less frequent, some of the participants have also gone through difficult moments, as Valérie, who has always lived in the neighbourhood and for whom the whole trajectory was marked by ill-health:

> "*[Interviewer] Did your father work?* Well, no, he began to be ill when he was 56. *What kind of illness?* A cancer, he died when he had a second one… but he was a fighter, my father. He died at 61, but it was a big fight, because my father had a lot of courage. […] *But you father never worked?* No. *And you mother neither?* No. *Even when she was young?* Well, maybe, but I don't remember. My father had a depression, and there were some troubles at home, family conflicts, you know, but it was not my father's fault, then he began to be ill."

Consequently, Valérie left school early to help her mother at home, she gave a lot of support to her father when he was in the hospital, and when he died, she felt that she had not received a fair recognition for her devoted help: "you know, there were family conflicts, but when my father died, things went worse. *With the inheritance?* Well, you know, everyone wants something, even if we are not rich, everyone wants her or his share… The only thing that I got from my father was his coat… Hum, it is the only thing I got from him." She now lives on her own most of the time, with her two unemployed adult children still at home, and has a small network composed by her mother, a doctor who helps her since she has started suffering from chronic ill-health conditions, and a friend she meets almost every Sunday to play bingo.

Overall, all the women who participated in this study come from a working-class background, and grew up in households marked by financial and material hardship. Their parents generally had a low-level of instruction, were unemployed, and experienced separation. Despite these circumstances, the women frequently insist in the interviews that their families always had enough money and resources to put something on the table. For most of them, family remains a strong social circle providing emotional and materiel support.

Relations with close relatives are of special importance for the women, and especially with their children. Partly due to their modest social origins, the women who participated in this study dedicated a lot of attention and energy to the education of their children, hoping that they

will fare better than themselves. The women interviewed seem to see the nuclear family as a closed circle and the way through which a child's future is built. Many women talked about their parents, siblings, and children, as "us", "our gang", or "staying among ourselves." As Marianne put it in a few words: "Me, it is my children, my brothers and sisters, four children, there is no need for friends… [Laughs]." Most of the women explained that this perception of the family is based on the will to avoid potential "bad influences" on kids. At the same time, this protective attitude towards children takes place in various urban contexts and can lead to different consequences in terms of social ties and social support. Here, it is important to distinguish between several spatial levels, as both variation in the building and the neighbourhood contexts can have some effects. For example, Natacha, a single-mother of two living in Le Plateau, talked about the ambiance in her building:

> "Sometimes, I am scared when another child comes in my house to play, I am scared that s/he would see something that s/he does not have, that s/he leaves with it, it scares me, those things cost me a lot of money [she had bought a computer and electronic games for her kids], or that those kids will say to another person that I have all those things, and I will be robbed. We have already had two robberies in this building, they smashed the doors. It is scary."

In buildings where there are tensions and conflicts, which seem numerous in this study, the women interviewed tend to avoid all involvement with their neighbours, seen as individuals or as a group, to protect their children and themselves from potential trouble. Nonetheless, in a few cases and places, some women also gave a positive image of their housing projects, but it was more an exception than a rule, and this positive image did not include everybody in the building, as Marguerite, a working single-mother, living in La Pointe, explained:

> "I have a few acquaintances in the project, but I cannot say they are friends. Well, there is a woman I know a little bit more, Olivia. But recently she had too much trouble, and I try to avoid her since I know it can be dangerous for me. *What is dangerous for you?* Well, if the girl, she falls, she has a drug problem, and another problem, and so on. I cannot be involved in this kind of relations being in charge of my children, I will help her, I will care for her daughter, but I cannot stay close to her. I have had my own problems a few years ago, and I don't want to be involved with people like that anymore. Sometimes, we learn from our mistakes."

When they are home, many women have little contact with their neighbours and there are

thus few opportunities for them to develop bonds of solidarity. Some of them even reported that in some occasions their neighbours refused to help them or to provide them with a service, such as caring for children, giving small amounts of food, keeping an eye on their house while they were outside the city. By adopting a protective attitude towards their children, one can even wonder if the women who participated in this study do not accidentally implement a counterproductive strategy in the hope for social mobility they nurture for their children. As they strongly control their environment, they are also reducing their children's socialization opportunities as well as their own. It is however difficult to answer such a question after only one interview, since it only offers a snapshot of the situation. Despite their efforts, many women acknowledged that their children are not doing so well at school, and several of the oldest ones who are still living with their mother do not have a steady paid job.

Moreover, every woman interviewed introduced subtle distinctions between themselves and other families who live in the same building or in the near neighbourhood. This distinction is partly inherited from their own family trajectory, coming from a working-class or even poorer background, but wherein there was always enough food for everyone, with a special attention for the needs of children. Asking community-based organisations for food on a regular basis is then seen as a shame, as Valérie, from Le Plateau, said:

> "For me, it was difficult [to ask for food baskets]. When you have always managed to make it alone… It is frustrating. At the beginning, it was really frustrating. Now, I must say I have been a voluntary worker at the same place for 10 years, but it took me a couple of years to feel comfortable. I don't know how people can manage to ask for food every week? I don't know…"

To deal with her guilt, Valérie is a voluntary worker and goes twice a week to the community-based organisations where she sometimes goes to receive a food basket. Like other women who participated in this study, she sees the people who ask too frequently for food as "dependant" on the social services and community-based organisations, and tries to avoid guilt by being involved as a voluntary worker herself, while the other women who participated in this study declared that they had asked for food two or three times only in their entire lifetime. In this sense, food seems to remain the last taboo for these women, and not being able to provide it is seen as the ultimate social disorganisation.

Women's discourses indicate that the neighbourhood and its changes are also influencing the way social ties are built and the protective attitude they adopt. As Le Plateau has been marked by a process of gentrification, the long-standing residents in the sample are clearly aware of the urban changes and the social shift in the overall population. All the women from Le Plateau

described the neighbourhood as “rich”, “with expensive rents”, “full of new condos”, “with a lot of tourists during the summer, full of trendy boutiques and snobs.” The participants expressed mixed feelings about these changes, as mentioned by Catherine, a single-mother of two children on welfare assistance:

> “Well, you know, it became a wealthy area. I know it is good for my children. They can go to a good elementary school; the services, the parks are good. I also know that we do not really belong to this world. I don’t do my shopping in the boutiques nearby… it is too expensive, it is too snob… and people’s rent around here is $1000 or $1300! F..! They do not have enough money to buy food! […] I don’t want torn clothes for my daughter, I have my pride. We are in a rich neighbourhood; I don’t want my daughter to go school with torn clothes, faded clothes; she will be mocked by other children. I don’t want that to happen. *Do you sometimes go to a second-hand shop for clothing?* Yes, once in a while, but only in luxury ones, the clothes need to have a brand… otherwise, I would not take it.”

The first part of this excerpt expresses an attitude linked to the neighbourhood and its changes shared by several women who participated in this study. This attitude mixes the uncomfortable feeling of not belonging to the neighbourhood’s social world with the perception of opportunities the area offers in terms of school, services, or public amenities. Feeling uncomfortable towards the neighbourhood is also a frequent source of shame and frustration, expressed by Catherine when she describes the lifestyle of the wealthier people in the neighbourhood. The second part of this excerpt reveals that most of the women interviewed in Le Plateau try to hide their social background or that of their children when interacting with other people. They therefore do not frequently sustain relations with neighbours outside their building, and they do not create social ties with people met in parks, public spaces, or when they go to school to attend a parents’ meeting or to drop off or pick up their children.

In La Pointe, women are also aware of the changes emerging in the neighbourhood. The old-timer who have lived their whole lives in the neighbourhood described it first as a working-class area, “full of life and people”, “with a great amount of family activities”, “where there is a radio show called Balconville (balcony city) where anybody can go and sing a tune”, “where kids play in the street and backyard”, and “where nobody is above anyone else, but everybody is equal.” Even if these discourses include their share of romanticism, they reflect different feelings about the neighbourhood than those expressed by the women in Le Plateau. Most of the women met in La Pointe seem proud of their neighbourhood and the main attitude expressed is a strong attachment to it, even if they also acknowledge that La Pointe has a bad reputation as a tough and dirty working-class neighbourhood and that this stigmatized image continues to stick to it.

However, they feel comfortable with its general social dynamic, and most of them still have good friends or acquaintances who live in the area. What is important is that these women feel strong enough to reject this stigma and to be able to laugh about themselves and their situation, like Clothilde when she was talking about the reason why she left her parents' home: "[Laughing] Well it's obvious, for the great love, for my lover, the love at first sight", even if she was never married and raised her three children on her own. The women also underlined that the social composition of the neighbourhood was changing at a slow pace with the renovation of the Lachine canal and the construction of new condos in the area[6]. As Marguerite explained:

> "You can't say that Pointe-Saint-Charles is still a working-class neighbourhood. Just look at all those condos built in the last few years! I have some friends, who want to buy a house, but they can't, they must leave the neighbourhood."

Nonetheless, most of them continue to participate in activities organised in the area, and are used to got to some places where they can take a break or socialize, as Marguerite mentioned during the interview:

> "*Do you sometimes call friends to go outside?* Rarely. If I go out, I will go out alone; I will go to a place where I play pool. I know everybody there, you know, it is in the neighbourhood, you eventually know everybody."

Most frequently, women in La Pointe expressed attitudes of pride and comfort in regard with the social world surrounding them, the only fear they have is about a radical change of the neighbourhood which will force them to leave it, as Valérie said: "Now, I feel protected since I live in a public housing. But when the Mayor decides to sell the building, it will be over; I will have to leave." These attitudes apply especially to the neighbourhood, with some nostalgia, and rarely to the building where the women live due to frequent conflicts and tensions with neighbours.

Conclusion

One must be careful when drawing conclusions from this research since its sample is

[6] The Lachine canal area is a former industrial district of Montréal organized around a canal built in the 19th century to ease navigation on the Saint-Laurent River. It is part of a large renovation process with the construction of new condos in former warehouses and the development of a park along the canal banks.

small and presents specific characteristics, such as the respondents' gender and their ethnic background. However, the study provides qualitative insights on the processes underlying social ties and networks formation in scattered public housing and confirms that these processes vary depending on individual and neighbourhood characteristics.

It seems that in most urban contexts the creation of an "informal reciprocity" relying on "common concerns" shared by a majority in the neighbourhood remains an interesting theoretical concept that does not reflect the reality of the women who participated in this study. However, it appears that the groups or communities with whom our respondents share common concerns and interest are social circles within the neighbourhood rather than the neighbourhood itself, such as a church or a specific organisation. Even if there are differences between the two neighbourhoods (for example, in the number of relations, their spatial distribution, and frequency), social ties still emerge more from social circles (both past and current in the life cycle) than from the neighbourhood or other opportunities of contact, such as unplanned encounters in public space. The urban context also has a role to play here, as the neighbourhood cannot always be seen as homogenous, but rather as divided. Consequently, the relation between individuals and the place where they live is not straightforward but dialectical, and this relation is strongly embedded in the changes and micro-segregation processes that structure the neighbourhood. The women interviewed express ambivalent feelings about their neighbourhood. In Le Plateau, the ambivalence is between perceived material opportunities, especially for their children in terms of school and services, and a mix of loneliness and hiding when interacting with others. In La Pointe, the ambivalence is between feeling comfortable in a place in which people continue to recognize themselves and the stigma that yet sticks to the area. These results confirm what other researchers have found when working on the consequences of gentrification (see, for example, N. Smith, 1996), of poverty disaggregation programs (see, for example, Briggs, 1998), or on "ghetto-poor" or *banlieue* (see, for example, Lapeyronnie, 2008; Wilson, 1997). However, this study stresses that low-income women who live in wealthier neighbourhoods do this at a high social and personal price, considering the low level of resources and emotional support they seem to receive from their social environment.

This study also underlines the importance of attitudes in urban processes, as Small (2004) recently showed. Attitudes remain however largely unnoticed in theoretical frameworks and unexplored in many empirical researches on neighbourhood effects, even if it may be useful to recall that most of these effects probably are mediated by specific attitudes to the neighbourhood, such as ambivalence, attachment, or rejection. Attitudes are embedded in neighbourhood trajectory, as for the women in Le Plateau who tend to experiment social distance and the women in La Pointe who still recognize themselves in the neighbourhood even if they fear its current evolution. Attitudes towards the neighbourhood are also embedded in the individual trajectory

and social position in relation to the processes of micro-segregation which shape its social order. The women interviewed in Le Plateau seem to experiment strong social boundaries (which they might partly be imposing on themselves), even if they live in an urban context where the spatial concentration of poverty is very low. The social consequences of these boundaries need further investigation using longitudinal methods and focusing on adult and children opportunities. The women in La Pointe seem to have little, if any, contact with the wealthy newcomers who live in sub-areas inside the neighbourhood, which tend to be more spatially and socially divided.

Finally, this study underlines the need for further reflection on the place and legitimacy that working-class or low-income people have in city development discourses, which frequently magnify the positive effects of gentrification, socially mixed housing projects, or renovation. To paraphrase the title of a book on working-class identity in America (Sennett & Cobb, 1973), the women who participated in the study, especially in Le Plateau, expressed a kind of "hidden injury of the neighbourhood" which encompasses their feeling about being inadequate in an urban context where wealth seems more visible than before. If this phenomenon has already been investigated in relation to some specific urban processes, such as gentrification, it needs further investigation to be understood in an attitudinal approach dealing with the individual mechanisms that lead to positive or negative effects on various social and economic outcomes, at both the individual and neighbourhood level.

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