

# Annual Report 2022-2023

Abridged version



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## A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTORS



Pascal Brissette,  
Director



Nik Luka,  
Associate Director

credits : Caroline Hayeur

News media and public debates are abuzz with renewed concerns about prosperity in the face of a housing crisis, the slow crucible of dealing with climate change, and the growing movement of populations because of political strife and landscape change. Even as these questions continue to dominate the airwaves, less is being said about how we can understand cities and the leading roles they can and must play in the coming decades. The Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Montréal aims to help Montréal to continue developing as a cradle for open social innovation. Montréal may not be a megalopolis, but it can serve as a field for experimentation and innovation, and it has all the tools to do so with its four universities and the cutting-edge sector developing here in the domain of artificial intelligence. Our multidisciplinary project teams continue to tackle complex questions, conjugating different kinds of knowledge to take meaningful action on matters of concern.

McGill's 201<sup>st</sup> year of existence was a busy one for CIRM, with an exciting array of activities, events, new projects, continuing endeavours, and many moments of engagement with diverse communities of practice across the University and beyond the campus bubble. In early May of this year, the World Health Organization downgraded the

COVID-19 pandemic from a public-health emergency—a symbolic milestone that maps well onto our annual reporting period. From tentative steps into a stable (albeit new) 'normal' in August, we have successfully embraced the return to full engagement with in-person events at the CIRM premises and with project partners across Montréal. The academic year started with a grand event to officially endorse the Elbira Zipitria Chair in Basque Studies, as invited guests and dignitaries convened for an Inaugural Colloquium in September, topped off with the signing of the agreement between McGill University and the Etxepare Basque Institute. The first holder of the Chair will join us later in 2023, and CIRM is delighted with the fruits of this promising new collaboration focusing on linguistic and cultural pluralism. Similar in-person gatherings over the course of the academic year were a welcome relief from the hybrid and online modes of engagement that have become the norm since 2020.

Over the last 12 months, CIRM has hosted or co-hosted dozens of events, many of which took place in person, with hundreds of participants. New and continuing operating grants held by our members in 2022-23 total \$2.7 million. Meanwhile, within McGill's administrative ecosystem, CIRM joined

colleagues in welcoming a new Dean of Arts, Lisa Shapiro, and a new Principal, Deep Saini.

CIRM continues to focus on helping researchers, private- and public-sector practitioners, and civil-society organizations to connect and establish fruitful discussions that lead to meaningful change. We nurture these relationships beyond singular research projects to develop new partnerships through other initiatives. Our bi-faculty alliance between the Faculties of Arts and Engineering is flourishing, with many ongoing and new initiatives that embody transformative non-conventional contributions to society through the humanities, social sciences, and applied areas of endeavour.

Exciting work continues apace to nourish partnerships spanning Montréal's economic, social, cultural, and governmental sectors of Montreal, and uniting research being conducted within various disciplines and universities across the metropolis. As the world grapples with post-pandemic realities, CIRM is embracing the renewed enthusiasm we all need to enhance everyday life in Montréal and beyond.

***Pascal Brissette (Director)***  
***Nik Luka (Associate Director)***

## MISSION

The Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Montréal (CIRM) is committed to fostering the development of concrete projects that combine the knowledge acquired in the university context with the daily lives of Montréalers.

### ***Six action-research axes define the multidisciplinary interests linking the members of CIRM:***

1. *Digital culture, art, literature, and performance*
2. *Language, belonging, and plurilingualism*
3. *Economy, social innovation, and social transformation*
4. *Mobility, urban planning, and environment*
5. *Governance, institutions, and citizen participation*
6. *Immigration, living conditions, and religion*

### ***The Centre's mission is***

- ❖ to stimulate research in Montréal studies and to federate the research being done in the various disciplines and universities; and
- ❖ to develop partnerships, themes, and basic and applied research projects with the social, cultural, community, economic, and governmental sectors of Montréal. It pursues this mission to foster the creation of resilient, sustainable, egalitarian, and inclusive living environments in the metropolitan context, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations.

## CIRM IN NUMBERS

**82 members**

**31 disciplines**

**20 universities and organizations**

**6 action-research axes**

### **1 BMO Postdoctoral Fellow**

- ❖ **Sam Victor**, McGill University

### **2 Resident Scholars**

- ❖ **Mary Anne Poutanen**, McGill University
- ❖ **Leila Ghaffari**, McGill University and Vivre en Ville

### **3 Visiting Scholars**

- ❖ **Alexander Gaio**, University College Dublin
- ❖ **Pavel Kunysz**, Université de Liège
- ❖ **Fabio Scetti**, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3

**31 employees and consultants**

### ***CIRM***

- ❖ **Pascal Brissette**: Director, CIRM
- ❖ **Nik Luka**: Associate Director, CIRM
- ❖ **Stéphan Gervais**: Scientific Coordinator
- ❖ **Audray Fontaine**: Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator
- ❖ **Assunta Fiorita**: Administrative Supervisor
- ❖ **Elissa Kayal**: Administrative Coordinator
- ❖ **Julie Levasseur**: Communication Coordinator
- ❖ **Karolina Roman**: Digital Content Editor
- ❖ **Amélie Ducharme**: Research Assistant
- ❖ **Camille Delagrave-Ajduk**: Communication Assistant
- ❖ **Edmuelle Berre**: Communication Assistant
- ❖ **Ines Zorgati**: Community Manager
- ❖ **Marie Chartrand-Caulet**: Community Manager
- ❖ **Pierre Antoine**: Event Manager
- ❖ **Anthony Bell**: Community Manager

### ***Data for Society Hub Project Coordination Team***

- ❖ **Pascal Brissette:** Project Director
- ❖ **Karolyne Arseneault:** Project Coordinator
- ❖ **Esmaël Mourtaza:** Project Manager
- ❖ **Luc Véronneau:** Solutions Architect
- ❖ **Audray Fontaine:** Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator
- ❖ **Julien Vallières-Gingras :** LADIREC Coordinator
- ❖ **Sara Meref:** Communication Assistant
- ❖ **Angelina Mazza:** Communication Assistant

### ***Collaborators – Data Governance***

- ❖ **Ana Brandusescu:** Senior Research Advisor – Data Governance
- ❖ **Jonathan van Geuns:** Data Governance and Design Manager

### ***Technology Infrastructure and Development***

- ❖ **Mohammad Moshawrab:** Developer
- ❖ **Alaeddin Dhahri:** Developer
- ❖ **Wesley Phillip Van Wyk:** Developer
- ❖ **Arina Chatigny-Vincter:** Business Intelligence
- ❖ **Saeb Panahifar:** Developer
- ❖ **Ada Yetis:** Developer
- ❖ **Hicham Semlani:** Developer

### ***Laboratory for Collective Narratives and Discourse Analysis (LACONDA)***

- ❖ **Julien Vallières-Gingras:** Coordinator
- ❖ **Yu Chen Shi:** Research Assistant
- ❖ **Elisabeth Doyon:** Research Assistant
- ❖ **Amélie Ducharme:** Research Assistant
- ❖ **Lisa Teichmann:** Research Assistant
- ❖ **Louis-Robert Beaulieu-Guay:** Research Assistant

## EVENTS

Over the past year, CIRM has planned, organized, and/or participated in a total of **37 public events**. Through their formats and themes, these have expressed the wide range of expertise of the Centre's members and partners. The topics of these meetings also align with current and critical issues facing Montréal, whether in terms of sustainable and inclusive development, social and cultural development, or city resilience. The following figures detail this year's event programming.

### THREE INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, the [Elvira Zipitria Chair in Basque Studies](#) was [officialized](#) with a one-day colloquium on Basque and Québec perspectives on language teaching and usage. The Chair is the result of a partnership with the Etxepare Basque Institute. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, a conference entitled [1971-2021 : 50 ans de corpus montréalais](#) was held to mark the anniversary of this corpus and to pay homage to the sociolinguists of Québec from the formal origins of this work in the 1970s. Finally, as a component of [Les Entretiens Jacques-Cartier](#), a one-day international conference was organized under the title *Collaborative design and the revitalization of Lyon and Montréal today*.

### ELEVEN CONFERENCE-EXPERIENCES AND VARIOUS EVENTS

- Three stage-reading series were organized in early 2022 spotlighting [Québec drama in English](#) (1980-2010).
- Two landscape-exploring events were organized in Spring 2022 as part of *Jane's Walks* with the [Centre d'écologie urbaine de Montréal](#). These provided insights into local history, planning, development, and civic engagement through the simple collective act of walking, observing, and sharing.
- Designed in partnership with community organizations from various neighbourhoods, [Montréalers and Islanders](#) is a series of three participatory events exploring environmental and economic issues related to the St. Lawrence River as well as access to its shores. Due to COVID-19 emergency measures, it was adapted into a series of [three podcasts](#).
- In September 2022, a [knowledge dissemination workshop](#) was organized to stimulate reflection and the development of concrete and concerted actions to make Montréal a play-friendly city for children.
- An exhibition was held at McGill University in the winter of 2023, with the vernissage in early February 2023. Entitled [Drawing Conclusions: Popularization of Science through Comics](#), it enabled participants to interact with the authors of comics. The exhibition was a continuation of a previous conference-festival, [Faire trembler les fondations](#).  
The documentary [Une tour sur la Montagne](#) was broadcast as an official CIRM event in mid-February via Zoom, showcasing the life of architect Ernest Cormier and the influence he has had on Montréal as well as the impacts the city had on him.

### **TWO 'MONTRÉAL AS SEEN BY...'**

These events are [encounters](#) where a public figure who is passionate about Montréal shares impressions of the city with students and citizens.

### **THREE CIRM SEMINARS**

In these events, researchers, public- and private-sector actors, and community workers are invited to discuss a recent publication (monograph, collective work, article, report, etc.) about Montréal or an urban theme relevant to Montréal communities. One was entitled *Citizen empowerment and dialogue in Montréal and Vancouver*, centring on the edited collection [Sustainability, Citizen Participation and City Governance](#); another one, *L'anglais en débat au Québec*, focused on the book [L'anglais en débat au Québec: mythes et cadraques](#); and a third one, *Looking at 2022 municipal election through the lens of linguistic diversity*, showcased the edited collection [Voting in Quebec municipal elections: a tale of two cities](#).

### **ONE CIRM WORKSHOP**

A participatory workshop, *Une ville pour jouer*, took place in September 2022, devoted to the consolidation and/or the critical juxtaposition of hypotheses and methodologies as used by CIRM members in their ongoing research thanks to the Centre's interdisciplinary expertise and feedback from this community of practice.

### **SEVENTEEN DATA FOR SOCIETY HUB WORKSHOPS**

Eleven meetings with partners led by the DSH coordination team to monitor the progress of work related to the development of a three-part digital platform for data sharing, visualization, and analysis. At the same time, the LACONDA team ran a series of six workshops on computer-assisted text analysis methods and tools.

**OVER 645 PEOPLE** have taken part in the events coordinated by CIRM this year!

## PARTNERSHIPS

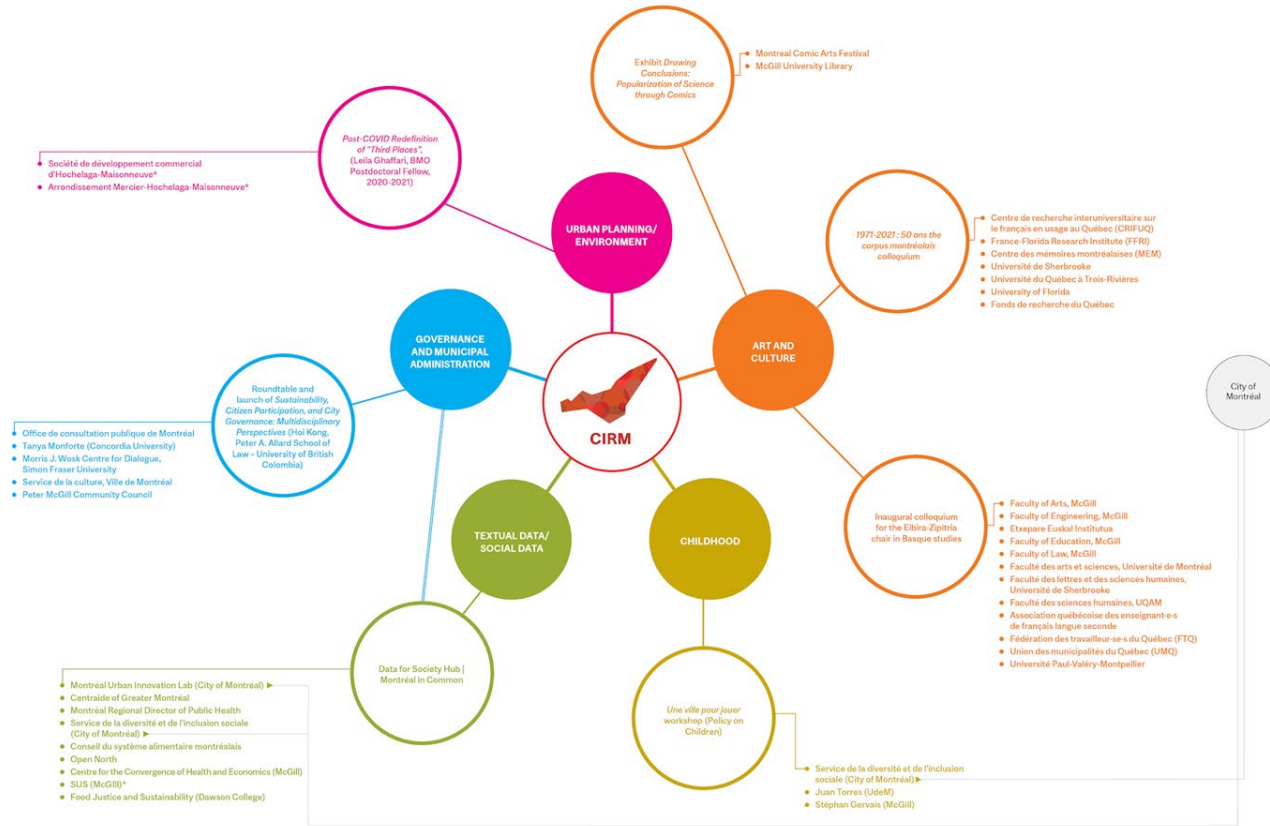
**Over 130 meetings were held with partners** from the community, municipal, private, and university sectors.

In parallel with the work it does for its members, CIRM also works to nurture and enrich relationships with many local (non-academic) partners by means of concrete collaborative action and projects, as demonstrated by the data shared below.

Resulting from a unique partnership between [MR-63](#) and CIRM, a special initiative has now been created by the Fonds de recherche du Québec (as part of its *Grands défis de société – Changements climatiques* programme). This funding, totalling \$32,000, was granted to the Centre to set up a research collaborative and collective impact laboratory (Laboratoire d'impact MR-63). The MR-63 Impact Laboratory comprises four focus areas for MR-63's domains of activity: Culture, Heritage, Ecological Transition, and Territorial Inclusion.

**Over 100** collaborators and partners have been involved in CIRM's activities, events, and research this year, including the City of Montréal, the [Office de consultation publique de Montréal](#), the [Montréal Urban Innovation Lab](#), the [Société d'habitation et de développement de Montréal \(SHDM\)](#), [Chez Doris](#), the [MEM – Centre des mémoires montréalaises](#), the [Montréal Comic Arts Festival \(MCAF\)](#), [Culture Montréal](#), and [MR-63](#).

# CIRM'S ACTIVITIES AND NETWORKS 2022-2023



\* Unconfirmed partners

# COMMUNICATIONS

## **Knowledge Mobilization and Outreach Tools**

### **Two podcasts**

The [Montréalais and Islanders podcast](#) was launched in the fall of 2021 to broadcast our eponymous conference-experiences, which had been held in June 2021 (without an audience due to the ongoing pandemic). The podcast from the first season, which reached **over 200 listeners**, comprises three episodes of approximately 80 minutes apiece. The second season of conference-experiences took place in May and June 2022, and two of the podcasts resulting from these events were released during Winter 2023. All episodes are hosted on the Anchor platform and accessible via Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, and RSS feeds.

### **Two Digital Notebooks**

The [Digital Notebooks](#) are interactive knowledge-mobilization tools intended for diverse publics (notably non-specialists) as well as for researchers and practitioners. They aim to ensure the continuity of the events organised by CIRM through short articles, photos, and videos, as well as offering summaries of the featured activity and the participating panelists. Since their launch, two issues (*Montréalais-e-s et insulaires : Nordicité fluviale montréalaise* from December 2022 and *Montréalais-e-s et insulaires : Le Saint-Laurent : lieu de rencontres* from March 2023) have been read

**over 131 times**. It bears noting that *Montréalais-e-s et insulaires : Le Saint-Laurent, lieu de rencontres* was the first Digital Notebook to be released on Adobe Online, and that the rest of CIRM's Digital Notebooks have since been migrated from Issuu to this platform.

### **Fourteen blog posts**

CIRM's main blog ([The Urbanologist](#)) is intended to be a space for discussion on various facets of urban life in Montréal and elsewhere; researchers, fellows, and practicing professors are invited to share their work in progress, reflections, and so on. The Centre's other blog, dedicated to the [Data for Society Hub](#), provides special insight into the activities and ideas that underpin this technological endeavour; it offers updates on the status of their projects, as well as conversations with contributing participants. Both blogs are hosted on [Medium](#) and have reached more than **644 readers in the past year**.

### **Three event recordings**

The [Multimedia](#) section of CIRM's website contains digital versions of events that have been recorded in audio or video format, including those held virtually. The aim is to keep an archive of CIRM's various activities and to disseminate the opinions and knowledge shared during these discussions to a wider audience over a longer period of time.

## **Social media**

Over the last five years, CIRM has been taking advantage of social media to enhance communications among citizens and researchers. To ensure optimal reach and impact, CIRM has also maintained a dedicated communications team.

The data presented here (as of 31st March 2023) demonstrates the results of this strategy and the fruitful work of CIRM's communications team.

**801** subscribers to the CIRM newsletter—an increase of 32.8% since 2021-22

**2768** followers across all the CIRM social-media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn)—an increase of 13.6% since 2021-22

**610** social-media posts and email campaigns

**644** unique views of CIRM and DSH blog posts

# STRATEGIC PROJECTS

## *Montréal neighbourhood portraits: from static to dynamic*

Conventional neighbourhood portraits, typically produced for official purposes on intervals of about five years, do not evolve at the pace of contemporary life and thus lack useful information about neighbourhood dynamics 'in real time'. Moreover, they rarely take advantage of the knowledge generated by cutting-edge locally-relevant research produced within universities in the study context. CIRM has undertaken a new strategic project to develop a methodology for dynamic neighbourhood portraits.

This is done in collaboration with the [Table de quartier Peter-McGill](#), the [Office de Consultation publique de Montréal](#), and other local and Canada-wide partners. From a social innovation perspective, our project intends to identify and put in place the conditions for ongoing and effective collaboration among key actors. We will also draw on insights on data management and methods that were generated through the [Montréal en commun](#) initiative. Our work will define the conditions for scalable production of ever-evolving and dynamic neighbourhood portraits, including data produced by university partners (e.g., student associations) and digital tools developed within the digital humanities, notably the computational analysis of media discourse.

## *MR-63 Impact Laboratory*

Building on a unique partnership between MR-63 and CIRM, with financial support from the Fonds de recherche du Québec, a research collaborative has been launched in the form of a 'collective impact laboratory'. This brings together CIRM members and their students who, through their expertise, will be able to guide the MR-63 team on strategies to adopt for the construction and management of their site and the new building, as well as anchoring their activities in the Montréal artistic and community milieu of Griffintown.

### ***Densification: more than numbers ...***

Density and densification are ambiguous but versatile ideas that get mobilized by actors focused on growth and development, ecology, housing affordability, social solidarity, and urban social justice. At CIRM, we believe that this is a burgeoning issue for contemporary society.

Densification and its challenges in terms of (sub)urban development represent major challenges for Montréal, where ambitious policies have been set by local and regional authorities. Curbing sprawl and reducing energy consumption are obvious strategies for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations, yet densification disrupts familiar landscapes and causes angst for diverse publics. It is a tough nut to crack, and it is a touchy subject in urbanism. Densification can sometimes get limited to simple quantitative targets in public policy or the cut-and-dry work of pro-forma analysis that determines the financial feasibility of building projects. and that it is time to get more sophisticated in talking about the various opportunities and challenges that are represented by this tongue-twisting word. How should we encourage and at once control densification to

guarantee accessibility for increasingly diverse populations to interesting milieux de vie in a period of rapid change in real-estate development? How do biodiversity, quality of life, comfort, and public health intersect with processes of densification? What sorts of cultural and social questions should be foregrounded in public debates? In response to these questions, CIRM is developing its first annual symposium, inviting public-, private-, and third-sector stakeholders to participate in coalition-building discussions on how to make densification work well economically, socially, and ecologically.

Planned for October 2023, the event will punctuate a new collaborative series of interdisciplinary action-research projects involving CIRM members, local government, civil-society organisations, and experts from across North America and Europe. The Centre's Associate Director, Nik Luka, is working with the CIRM team to develop an exciting programme of public events and focused workshops with researchers, practitioners, and expert citizens.

### ***Building the Montréal Community: Stories, Memories, and Identities***

Exploring Montréal in all its diversity, with the plurality of the narratives, memories, and experiences, this upcoming book is the result of a collaboration between the [Centre des mémoires montréalaises \(MEM\)](#) and CIRM, both of which are committed to deepening knowledge about Montréal and disseminating it to diverse publics. The book, to be published in both English and French, seeks to understand how the multiple collective identities of Montréalers—those based on age, gender, class, language, religion, nationality, or something else entirely—have shaped the city’s institutions, territory, culture, and communities. Written by historian Paul-Étienne Rainville, a CIRM researcher and post-doctoral fellow at the University of Toronto (under the direction of Sean Mills), the book explores the many elements that have contributed to Montréal identities—both singular and pluralistic.

Several people associated with CIRM have contributed to the production as well, including Karolina Roman (who is responsible for the English translation along with Denbeigh Whitmarsh), Mary Anne Poutanen (who edited and validated the substantive content), and Stéphan Gervais (who coordinated the editorial effort).

### ***Tackling Women’s Homelessness***

Montréal has introduced various important measures to mitigate homelessness and the crisis of affordable housing, including the city’s By-law for a Diverse Metropolis, the transformation of hotels into temporary shelters, and focused investments into the construction of social housing. Much remains to be done, with pressing social issues yet to be addressed in and through housing. Together with its partner Chez Doris, CIRM sought to provide stimulating and innovative responses to these urban problems by identifying action-research initiatives that will create synergies with the opening of the new Chez Doris overnight shelter, while directly supporting its operation and development. This project, led by Jill Hanley (School of Social Work, McGill University) and her students, aimed to identify tools available to Chez Doris staff and good practices for maintaining a safe and welcoming shelter for women experiencing homelessness, who often also face addiction and mental-health issues.

CIRM coordinated a series of meetings and workshops linking Professor Hanley, her students, and the staff of Chez Doris to develop the refuge’s internal regulations in ways that promote both fair and inclusive access to its services while reflecting the cultural, sexual, and social diversity of women at risk of homelessness in Montréal.

### ***Exhibition: Drawing Conclusions***

As part of the [Shaking the Foundations Conference](#) in 2022, CIRM and the [Montréal Comic Arts Festival](#) invited five researchers affiliated with the Centre and five comic artists to get familiar with popular science through comics and to pair up in order to create short science-based comic strips that were exhibited in the main hall of McGill's McLennan Library Building from 7<sup>th</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2023, where they were seen by thousands of students, professors, and members of the public. The exhibition will be shown again during MCAF's 12<sup>th</sup> edition in May 2023.

## BMO POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW

The main objectives of the BMO Graduate Fellowships are to stimulate new interdisciplinary research on Montréal and to support recipients in establishing fruitful partnerships with key stakeholders from Montréal's social, cultural, economic, and municipal sectors.

The 2022-23 Postdoctoral Fellow is Sam Victor, whose research explores the intersection of ethics, knowledge, and religion. To date, he has focused ethnographically on evangelicalism in the United States and Canada, where he has conducted long-term fieldwork. A social anthropologist by training (M.Sc., Université de Montréal, 2018; Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 2023), he endeavours to better understand people's lived experiences of the ethics and politics of epistemic relations in the context of religious pluralism and secularism. His postdoctoral research project, supervised by Professor Hillary Kaell, is entitled *Religion in Public, Material Heritage and the Social Value of Sacred Spaces in Montréal*. It focuses on the material, spatial, and aesthetic dimensions of the public expression of religion, examining the status of sacred spaces in Montréal's public sphere and how church members adapt to the secular norms of municipal institutions regarding religious heritage properties.



Across Canada, heritage churches are being transformed into secular spaces, such as residential condominiums, fitness centres, and even nightclubs. Some are at risk for demolition. In the context of this repurposing of sacred spaces, the postdoctoral research project expands outward from a case study in Montréal, focusing on an evangelical Anglican congregation that meets in a 19<sup>th</sup> century building with protected heritage status. The leadership's vision hinges on what they call 'co-consecration'. It is their proposed alternative to the typical trajectory of *de*-consecration that takes place before a church building is rezoned and repurposed for secular use, or for demolition. Seeking to avoid such a fate but also recognizing that upholding consecration solely as a Christian space is unsustainable in a secular pluralistic cityscape, the church under study imagines co-consecration as a means for extending the sacredness of the space beyond conventional secular/religious boundaries. The building, the priest insists, is managed not to maximize profit but to optimize social impact, creating a new kind of sacred space that belongs foremost to communities which are pluralistic in nature, rather than solely to the religious congregation.

Several questions drive this research project: What might this church's merging of theological ambitions like co-consecration with pragmatic legal and economic strategies teach us about our current analytical limitations in conceptualizing religious claims on public space. Where do this church's efforts fit (if at all) within the broader landscape of changing expressions of religiosity in Canada where researchers have observed a rise in people's desire for their spiritual lives to contribute to correcting the perceived injustices of neoliberalism? What place does its vision and mission hold for communities, such as indigenous groups and more recent immigrants, that do not have access to the privileged regimes of material heritage that benefit historic Christian institutions?