

## Harnessing Montreal's creativity

Five steps that could help create a more successful future for the city

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Freelance

*Friday, October 24, 2008*

Launching The Gazette's Challenge Montreal series, Richard Florida wrote in last Saturday's paper about the importance of the base - the public - in the success of municipal organizations.

The extraordinary creativity of our base, the people of Montreal, has heightened the quality of life in our metropolis. Four citizen summits in recent years proposed the Montreal Charter of Citizen Rights and Responsibilities, which has now been enacted by the city administration, and the idea of participatory budgeting, proposed in that charter, has begun.

Democratization of governance in the public realm has become a major strength of Montreal. Here are my five proposals for advancing the process.

1 - "Tables de concertation," which we might translate as "roundtables of community organizations," are essential to establishing a high quality of living and of development throughout the city: they must receive support from the boroughs and the city.

The importance of citizen participation has been proven over and over again. Citizens led the way in creating the Milton-Park not-for-profit co-operative community, and in transforming the Old Port from an industrial to a socio-recreative site. The business community, with broad agreement, created the internationally-renowned Quartier international de Montréal.

Currently the Quartier des spectacles, and other areas, are undergoing the same process of rehabilitation and re-creation through "tables de concertation" in collaboration with the city. Such roundtables create agreed-upon strategies through conversation among residents, business people, institutions, landowners and students.

2 a - Private-sector investment in "third-sector" or "social economy" organizations creates jobs and social security on many levels, contributing to economic development. Such investment must be broadened and increased.

Citizens have established socio-economic projects such as the Chantier de l'économie sociale, which encourages advances and consolidates the social economy sector of the economy. Another example is the Fonds d'investissement de Montréal, through which private investors, financial institutions and local stakeholders unite to enable low- or middle-income earners and local organizations to take charge of their housing. Many

groups work with the problems of the homeless, which needs to be dealt with much more strategically.

2b - Supervised housing for the homeless must be adequately provided. Speakers before the Quebec Commission for the Homeless overwhelmingly agreed that the many of the problems of the homeless would be solved if people in need lived in supervised housing.

3 - Public consultation should be a major tool of urban planning. The terms of responsibility of the city's Office of Public Consultation (OCPM) should be encouraged and strengthened. An example which should be copied is the way this process works in the Plateau Mont Royal borough.

Public consultation has been highly effective in Montreal. Inspired by citizen-generated consultations about McGill College Ave., the Old Port and other issues, the OCPM was recently inserted into the Charter of the City of Montreal. The process of consultation in all cases involves citizens, through their institutional associations and as individuals. In the Plateau borough, the participatory budget has become a citizen decision-making forum on priorities as well as a form of thorough consultation.

4. Oversight organizations, working with the city, must be established to monitor and express expert opinion on urban-planning strategies, linking them to social and economic needs and to sustainability. The city must establish a policy of sustainability in which proper tree-planting and maintenance must be a first step.

Citizens have established significant and effective oversight organizations. These include Héritage Montréal and Les Amis de la montagne, which protect and advance management in the stewardship of our built and natural patrimony. Similarly, Culture Montréal has strengthened the relationships among cultural sectors and has become a strong voice in the political arena.

5. Montreal needs an independent body that oversees and monitors all aspects of governance, making sure that municipal democracy is fully respected and continues to develop in innovative ways. The media play an important watchdog role, but this is not enough.

A citizen-managed observatory must be established to evaluate and monitor governance of the city of Montreal and the Montreal Metropolitan Community and to publish annually a report informing the public, with an overview analysis much like the annual report on public finances published by the auditor-general.

Phyllis Lambert is founding director and chair of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

## CHALLENGE MONTREAL

Montreal has countless strengths: Culture. Diversity. Knowledge. History. Why does a city with so much going for it find it so hard to make things work?

What does a city need to be successful? How should Montreal build on its strengths? What can it learn from others?

In an ongoing series called Challenge Montreal, we're asking those questions and providing some answers, with the help of innovative thinkers across the region. We're dreaming big.

Last Saturday: Urban thinker Richard Florida says Montreal can become a creative economic model for a world rocked this year by the financial crisis. Go to [montrealgazette.com/challenge](http://montrealgazette.com/challenge) to read his essay, as well as Top 5 lists from influential Montrealers on how to make the city better.

Tomorrow: Imagine if we dared to put Montreal on the international art map? If we spent one per cent of building costs on public art and renewed the artistic licence that made us an international star during Expo 67? What if we made up our minds that Montreal was going to out-Barcelona Barcelona?

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