

Tohu and Artist-run Centres in Montreal: Contributions to the Creative City?

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Introduction

In the context of an economy based on knowledge and symbolism, researchers are increasingly interested in the “creative society” and the essential role of creativity as a major resource for professional and recreational activities. It is postulated that creativity plays a fundamental role in economic and social growth since it “allows a competitive edge to be gained by organizations as well as for the development of new social forms and entry into a social process of knowledge accumulation” (Sacco 2003; Tremblay and Tremblay 2006).¹

Since the theoretical debate on the themes of the creative class, the creative city and cultural districts has already been examined in another article (Pilati and Tremblay 2007 forthcoming), it will not be repeated here. The present article will focus on two cases illustrating the role of territory and the creative city. The first case is Tohu, in Montreal, which is an example of culture-driven urban revitalization based on a model similar to the “proactive cultural district” (Sacco and Ferilli 2006). The second case involves the artist-run centres in Montreal — in particular Édifice Belgo —, which are considered to be a “creation factory” as well as an example of a clustering of artistic activities, located in the city’s Quartier des

1. Quotation of professor Pier Luigi Sacco in January 2005 during the course “economy, institutions and management” for the Master of Arts and Culture Management program, TSM (Trento School of Management, Italy). Economist Sacco is Professor of Cultural Economics and Director of DADI (Dipartimento delle Arti e del Disegno Industriale), IUAV (Istituto Universitario d’Architettura di Venezia). He writes for numerous Italian daily newspapers, including *il Sole 24 ore*. See Sacco (2003) and Tremblay et al (2003).

Spectacles.

Our goal was to examine two cases in Montreal in order to determine to what extent cultural or creative dimensions can effectively contribute to the development of the so-called creative city. This research is not based on a deductive process because it would be difficult to test a specific hypothesis in this area, but rather on an inductive process, by examining these case studies in depth in order to further develop the theories which have been put forward on the theme of the creative city.

However, a few words on the concept of the creative city are in order and thus, a brief literature review will be presented.

Literature Review

The concept of the creative city was developed in the early 1960s by urban critic and sociologist Jane Jacobs.² She was the first person to talk about “creative cities” in her book *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1985), i.e. cities which are particularly innovative, diversified and driven towards innovation. Her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) which became a classic, examined in particular urban areas of the North American city and the conditions influencing urban diversity. Jacobs maintained that diversity and exchanges of ideas play an important role in the creation of a powerful and dynamic urban vitality.

The presence of different ethnic and economic realities in a local context is also an advantage for the community since diversity is a source of innovation. According to Jacobs, the city possesses its own “personality” with some districts developing as a result of individuals spontaneously gathering together for a common purpose.

To build an “urban climate” conducive to attracting new human capital,³ essential to its community, the city and its cultural policies must be able to stimulate this interaction between individuals, support creativity and be enriched by cultural diversity. According to Jacobs (1961), in most cases, the “bulldozer approaches” to planning lead to unpopular results and major development projects, based on the top-down approach – or decided by the administrators for the popula-

2. Jane Jacobs (1961, Pennsylvania - 2006, Toronto) was a critic of architecture and urban planning. Today, her research and theories on the city based on observation contribute to changing North American urban planning.

3. Most research and writings on human capital deal with the effects of human capital on territorial economic growth. Several authors argue that human capital concerns the effects of education on the economic behaviour of individuals, i.e. the way the sum of knowledge, competence and skills embodied in individuals, enables them to increase their productivity and income. These studies essentially use the “education” factor to measure this type of capital. From the 1950s onwards, Lewis (1955) maintained that human capital is important in the growth process of a country. Then, Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) observed that “individuals decide on their education, training and all improvements in terms of knowledge and health” (translation). In 1989, Romer asserted that countries which “possess the optimal stocks of human capital have higher living standards”(translation). On this topic, see Shearmur (2005: 4-6, 2006).

tion, constitute a major aspect of the problem, with catastrophic consequences for cities. Jacobs thus considers that creativity and exchanges of ideas play an important role in the socio-economic development of cities.

Moreover, in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), American economist Richard Florida maintained that ideas, knowledge and information exchange⁴ are the tools needed for the production of new innovations (new technological artefacts and new production methods) and are as essential to economic prosperity as natural resources and financial capital. Thus, products of the creative economy⁵ involve several fields: technology, business and the cultural milieu.

Through his book and recent publications (2004a, 2005), Florida has attracted the attention of the great majority of specialists in urban studies and local and regional development in North America and Europe (Florida 2004b) by suggesting that the cities most likely to attract what he refers to as the “creative class” are those which offer the best natural, social and cultural living environment. Florida’s theory on “creative cities” is centred on the idea that attracting and retaining talents (professionals, people from cultural and artistic communities as well as the education and training sectors) are key processes for the economic development of today’s cities. This class tends to gather together into communities, in specific sectors of the city, generally in affordable housing. Florida affirms that, based on their particular lifestyle, the creative class prefers urban centres, and in particular *cool* city-centres where the population is open to multiculturalism and is tolerant of gays and lesbians.

While Florida’s studies have mainly focused on the link existing between creativity and urban economic prosperity, other authors such as economist David Throsby⁶ (2001) and Sacco (2005) have argued that the purpose of a creative city goes beyond the economic dimension. This is all the more true given that culture depends on a degree of attention to local and global concerns while not being destructive of local solidarity. Therefore, it may become an asset for the territory and a source of social cohesion for the community. Several British and North American cities have fostered the development of districts dedicated to artistic and cultural activities, unique and creative urban revitalization projects with quite surprising results in urban areas (Tohu in Montreal or Newcastle Gateshead in Great Britain, to cite but two examples).

The main critics of Florida’s theories are, among others, Kotkin at the University of California and Glaeser at Harvard University, who argue that *The Rise of the Creative Class* defends new citizens of the Internet era. These critics maintain that the most prosperous American cities are not those in which the creative class is particularly important, but rather those in which taxes are not too high and the bureaucracy and size of government are less intrusive. In his article *Save Us From*

4. On the knowledge economy, see Tremblay and Rolland (2003) or writings by Peter Drucker or Jean Gadrey.

5. On the creative economy, see Howkins (2001).

6. Throsby’s studies focus on culture and the field of “economics of culture.” He gained institutional recognition in this field by publishing an important article in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, 1994.

City Saviours published in *The Globe and Mail*, Patrick Luciani arrives at the same conclusions, adding that “Entrepreneurs and businesses create wealth by risking capital on new markets and ideas, not by governments enticing firms and talent with trendy ideas of global cities, clusters or creativity indexes”.

Apart from Florida’s theories, which have nevertheless brought to the forefront the elements associated with culture and creation, several successful cases of territorial development are being achieved thanks to the strategic creation of a culture-driven model of excellence. Economists Sacco and Ferilli (2006) rely on a model of cultural clustering which is implemented through a form of horizontal integration of different systems. The authors refer to the “proactive cultural district’,” integrated at a third level,⁷ a model which emerges from the limitations of the single-system cultural district and which is achieved through strategic complementarity between cultural systems and production systems, a synergy defined through a territorial specialization and a new spatial organization. Based on this concept, the production and supply of culture are not perceived as profit centres, but are perfectly integrated into the new post-industrial “value chain”⁸ (Sacco and Petrini 2003); this represents a major chain by virtue of its symbolic content. The local system must have the capacity to attribute meaning to cultural experiences. The “value” is part of the post-industrial economy; it becomes a characteristic of individual well-being and constitutes a necessary factor for consolidating a socially recognized and sustainable identity model.

In the literature review referred to in Pilati and Tremblay’s article (2007 forthcoming), the “ industrial district” and the proactive form of the “cultural district” were described; it was explained that the high density of companies – independent from and complementing each other –, becomes a competitive factor for a territory (Marshall 1920). In this integrated system of small businesses, the industrial (cultural) “atmosphere” and information exchanges with the community contribute to ensuring the self-fuelled growth of the district (Becattini 1991). The organization then relies on the tacit knowledge of the community and the exchange and accumulation of social capital. In this context, individuals identify with and develop a sense of belonging to the local culture and the cultural production of the district.

Sacco and Ferilli’s study (2006)⁹ refers to modern economic theory and cites international cases to identify the most important factors of development. Thus, quality of life, the level of innovation, and capability are three highlighted elements. These effects are translated into three vectors of development for the “proactive cultural district’,” these being, the localization of the creative class, found in Florida’s theories, the development of innovation, associated with Por-

7. The first level of the “cultural district” model is conceived through top-down planning interventions; the second level operates through a bottom-up self-organization process (see Sacco and Blessi 2005b).

8. Michael E. Porter’s “value chain” analysis allows “a decomposition of the firm’s activity into sequences of basic operations and an identification of the potential sources of competitive advantages” (translation) (see Porter 1986).

9. For data, consult Sacco and Ferilli (2006).

ter's theories¹⁰ and, finally, Sen's concept of "capability"¹¹ (Sacco and Ferilli 2006: 20). The success of the "proactive cultural district" is based on a strategic complementarity of these three elements (*idem*) and a series of combined bottom-up and top-down elements (Sacco and Blessi 2005).

Based on these premises, our research sought to better understand the concept of the creative city through an empirical analysis of two cases which could have certain similarities to it. The following sections will document two case studies which were conducted to gain a better understanding of the role of territory and actors in the context of the creative city.

It must first be clarified that these two case studies are not intended to be used for theoretical validation. Our approach, which involves developing the theories that have been put forward on the theme of the creative city and the role of territorial actors, is more inductive in nature since theoretical studies were taken into consideration to conduct interviews and analyze the two cases presented here and given that the theory will be considered in light of these results.

Our case studies highlight the essential role that cultural activities can play in the urban revitalization process and these two cases can certainly be placed in the context of culture-driven revitalization. This calls for a definition of a broader strategy for districts or clusters than that involved in several current revitalization initiatives, which are often centred on high technology or industrial sectors and less often on artistic and cultural activities. The two cases referred to here are certainly not fully fledged or well-established districts or clusters, but they are no doubt developing and are aimed at a territorial revitalization which takes account of the growth elements based on the notion of culture.

Two Case Studies in Montreal

The first part of this section will examine how Tohu can be defined as an example of a "proactive cultural district." Using this territorial revitalization project as an example of an aggregation of clusters (Porter), the attraction of a specialized creative class (Florida) and capability (Sen), we will then define the relationships between Tohu and its territorial system, that is, the influences of intervention policies adopted by this artistic and cultural organization which have an impact on various forms of local capital.

The second case study will examine the artist-run centres in Montreal. These organizations are in a way a model of a *creative ecosystem*, involving non-profit groups of artists which are created through some linkage between top-down and bottom-up elements. In the context of Montreal, the artist-run centres are a concrete example in North America of groups of creative people who gather together in specific geographical areas of the city. Our study focuses more particularly on the case of Édifice Belgo, located in the Quartier des Spectacles in Montreal.

10. See Porter (1999).

11. See Sen (1999: 12).

Lastly, we will analyze the influence of the internal and external forces which have contributed to the growth and development of this movement of artists.

Tohu, Cité des Arts du Cirque (Circus Arts)

In the March-April 2005 issue of *Policy Options*, Simon Brault, Vice-Chair, Canada Council for the Arts and Director General of the National Theatre School of Canada, noted that “the correlations documented by Richard Florida between development of the creative sector of the economy and the vibrancy, quality and diversity of a city’s cultural scene confirm the conclusions of other studies conducted recently in England, Australia and Germany which affirm that the revitalization of an urban area must include beforehand an ambitious cultural project.”

He then cited, as an example of this category of revitalization project, Tohu, the Circus Arts City located in Saint-Michel district, in northeast Montreal. This cultural district is an example of a district which supports mixed relations and contributes to defining Montreal as a “creative laboratory.”

Tohu is located in one of Canada’s poorest districts, an area of the city which is undergoing a complete socio-economic transformation. This abandoned industrial site in Saint-Michel district, a pericentral district of Montreal, near the former Miron quarry, has become a landfill site. This district has a population of around 60,000 which, compared to the average of Montreal, is made up mostly of immigrants, young people and people with low educational level and low income.¹² To understand the factors leading to the creation of the “City,” a brief history of the period that preceded the emergence of the Tohu project is in order. This project results from the convergence, during the 1990s, of various territorial actors from the public and private sectors, i.e., the Saint-Michel local community, civil society and the circus movement. Actors in the local community got together as a representative governance organization and created the *Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé* (VSMS) non-profit organization which fostered cooperation between other territorial actors of the public and private sectors. Through meetings between key individuals and exchanges of ideas between the various territorial actors, in November 1999, *Cirque du Soleil*,¹³ *École nationale du cirque* (national circus school)¹⁴ and

12. For a detailed socio-economic profile of Saint-Michel district, see Ville de Montreal (2004).

13. In 1982, Guy Laliberté, creator of *Cirque*, organized activities for the youth hostel in Baie-Saint-Paul. In 1984, he founded *Cirque du Soleil* in Quebec. The company started out as a non-profit organization. It is today one of Canada’s largest cultural and economic multinationals. It has made a name for itself on the international scene through its shows with unique circus arts-inspired choreography. *Cirque du Soleil* employs over 3000 people and 900 artists in various countries (www.cirquedusoleil.com).

14. Founded in 1981, *École Nationale du Cirque* (national circus school) is the only institution in Canada for higher and college education specialized in circus arts. Its primary mission is to train artists in this field. Since its beginnings, the School has trained hundreds of artists in circus arts and the latter pursue their careers all over the world (www.enc.qc.ca).

EnPiste¹⁵ applied their energy in designing a project whose priority is to bring together in one place a critical mass of infrastructure needed for the creation, training, production and diffusion of circus arts, thus laying down the conditions to make Montreal the international capital of circus arts (Tohu 2006).

Some call it “Circus Arts City” while others call it Tohu and both names are correct. Both names correspond to the geographical perimeter occupied by the various organizations which make up the “City” and, at the same time, also designate the NPO, the organization that gave birth to the project. The name Tohu is inspired from “tohu-bohu,” an expression which conjures up the bubbling of ideas and actions, the chaos which precedes renewal or the hustle and bustle of the big city (Tohu 2006), which calls to mind the innovative and evolving nature of the project. Tohu’s main component of intervention is culture, that is, education, diffusion and the development of a public in the circus arts field. This project also includes two other components: an environmental component involving the rehabilitation of one of the largest urban landfill sites in North America, and a social component involving artistic programming aimed at strengthening the socio-community aspect of the district.

The combination of the three elements that characterize the theoretical bases of the “proactive cultural district” can be found in the case of Tohu. First, Tohu is a geographical agglomeration that includes various companies (Cirque du Soleil, En Piste, École Nationale du Cirque, Tohu NPO and, also in the same district, a residential centre for artists¹⁶). Thus, organizations from the same activity sector are concentrated here and share the same need for infrastructure, talent and technology, hence its similarity with the model of clusters (Porter 1986, 1999). Tohu has evolved through an initial phase of development of the circus arts companies that settled in the territory. Since specialized human capital and know-how are needed to create innovation, this has contributed to the development of the district and to the dynamism of the production structure of the area.

Second, Tohu is a place for the diffusion of artistic and cultural practices and is characterized by an appeal/attraction of a new creative class (Florida 2002). In this particular case, it includes creators, artists, producers and choreographers -- people who are directly involved in this field. Since these individuals eat and work like everybody else, other less creative jobs have naturally also sprung up in support of the project. Today, Tohu is one of the largest districts involved in training, creation, production and diffusion in circus arts. It is a cultural crossroads which promotes collaboration between professional artists, specialists, associations and citizens in the creation of activities. It also encourages integrated projects in order to provide a space for diffusion to the national and international circus communities, and allows the cluster’s local creators to come into contact with

15. EnPiste is a non-profit national association of circus arts professionals, companies and institutions. Its goals relate to promoting, developing cohesion and creating initiatives in the circus arts community (www.enpiste.com).

16. This artists’ residence was completed in 2003 to house the Cirque du Soleil artists who were on a visit to Montreal for intensive training and practice.

ideas and influences of creators from all over the world. Pierre Durochet¹⁷ presented the Tohu project as a “diversified sector in which young designers, entrepreneurs, and young people work in harmony in order to create a unique ambiance in Montreal” (translation).

At the same time, it should also be pointed out that many creative people and talented people from fields and disciplines other than those pertaining to circus arts have come to Tohu, in Montreal, drawn by the presence of Cirque du Soleil. These people bring with them new ideas and artistic forms which translate into new lifestyles and trends. Related to the rich and diversified metropolitan context of Montreal, Tohu has become a *creative ecosystem* where the organic, cooperation-based and self-organization components are considered to be essential elements to bring out the authenticity of this district. In support of Florida’s creative class theory, it can be concluded that the “creative core” of the circus community flows through Montreal owing to Tohu’s presence. This territory, which brings together infrastructures and specialized human capital and has influence over circus arts in Canada, becomes a physical and virtual base through which the productions and know-how of talented people and creative people in the sector pass.

Lastly, Tohu carries out activities with a social component which seek to reduce the gaps in terms of cultural capability (Sen 1999, 2000), gaps which often make it difficult for individuals to participate in events and activities. Indeed, when events do not meet the expectations of people in the community, these individuals cannot identify with the content of these events.

Tohu is a project which emerged through a guided process of self-organization. This corresponds to a bottom-up first phase in the sense that a project emerged from the desire for self-organization, a spontaneous network where the founding members sought to promote an exchange of ideas through the creation of alliances and a desire to improve the innovation potential of the circus community.

Consequently, “top-down” or “first-level” actions involving initiatives developed, managed and funded by the public administration seemed to be necessary. They helped to provide society and the community with material assets (physical capital as well as infrastructure) laden with identity and symbolic value, that is, an ecological arts arena and a welcoming pavilion, including a round performance hall.¹⁸

Having analyzed the character of the Tohu district, we will now define the system’s methods of operation (Sacco and Ferilli 2006: 22). It is necessary to understand the governance actions of the “proactive cultural district” which have an effect on its quality, development, attraction and sociability, and which interact with the diversified forms of tangible and intangible capital of the local system:

17. Interview with Pierre Durocher VSMS -Vivre Saint Michel en Santé- leader of projects related to the working group on urban and social revitalization of Saint-Michel district. January 18, 2006.

18. The Government of Quebec contributed \$10 million to the construction of infrastructures for the Circus Arts City. The municipality of Montreal “undertook to pay \$5 million for land development and, in December 2002, concluded an area owner agreement, i.e., a contract similar to an emphyteotic lease with the Circus Arts City by leasing the land ownership for 25 years of 27,000 square metres where Tohu is located today” (translation). Excerpt from Meliani (2005).

physical,¹⁹ human,²⁰ social²¹ and symbolic/cultural.²² Thus:

- Tohu concentrates, in one place, a strong physical and human capital specialized in circus arts;
- It promotes an environmental component through a partnership with those in charge of one of the largest urban revitalization sites in Canada, the Saint-Michel Environmental Complex (CESM),²³ and through its support of bioclimatic architecture designed on the basis of international standards. The ecological theme²⁴ and the cultural infrastructure constitute a context of “cultural mix,” a fundamental premise for sensitizing and enriching human capital. In this respect, since 2005, Tohu has been awarded the “gold” level in the international LEED²⁵ certification program, First Prize — Public Assembly category, a Montreal Award — Landscape Architecture Category, a Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Innovation in Architecture.

Award of Excellence and numerous other honours;

- Tohu offers the public innovative circus arts programming which differentiates itself from a mass logic. The phenomenal public response and its reputation with the media have been surprising. Since its opening in June 2004, more than 200,000 people have been involved in Tohu’s on- or off- site activities (Tohu 2006). Tohu organizes on-site activities in order to mobilize and foster the participation of residents. Thus, every year, Tohu presents the “Saint-Michel Las Fallas” project. Stéphane Lavoie- Communication and Marketing Director for Tohu – explains the significance of this feast: “Las Fallas is a popular celebration of the feast of St. Joseph, inspired from a long tradition of Valencia’s Fallas, in Spain. To foster a sense of belonging to the community, we created a feast related to the myth of fire, an element which

19. The category of physical capital includes the cultural initiatives of environmental rehabilitation and building development.

20. The category of human capital includes actions related to guidance and training.

21. The category of social capital includes opportunities for meetings and multicultural socialization initiatives.

22. Included in the symbolic/cultural capital are initiatives which create a shared moment and influence the individual’s external perception.

23. Tohu is a territory contained within the perimeter of the Saint-Michel Environmental Complex (CESM). It is a cultural centre with five long-term and short-term goals (development of the surrounding areas and four phases of redevelopment of the landfill site), aimed at transforming the site into an industrial, educational and recreational complex. The latter will constitute one of the most attractive parks in Montreal.

24. In 1996, Gazmont settled on the Tohu site. It is the second largest biogas plant in the world, producing enough energy to supply 10,000 households through the processing of biogas stemming from the Saint-Michel Environmental Complex. Tohu has an agreement with this company, under which the steam produced during the turbine cooling process is redirected to the Tohu pavilion in order to heat it (www.tohu.ca).

25. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), i.e. the certification granted to buildings if they are constructed according to ecological concepts and criteria. For further information on the LEED standard -www.usgbc.org.

is shared by all cultures. With the collaboration of an artist, citizens make a gigantic wood sculpture which is subsequently burned, thus leaving a memory as well as creating a feeling of self-fulfillment”²⁶ (translation). In 2004, the first Fallas brought together more than 5000 people, created 14 temporary jobs and involved the participation of over 40 local artists (Tohu 2006). In the case of Tohu, there was a desire to set up a roundtable with the territorial stakeholders.²⁷ Based on the practice of community planning (Jacobs 1961) and participatory logic, Tohu develops projects in collaboration with the City of Montreal and several territorial organizations (large and small community groups in the district involved in delivering direct services to citizens and families, seniors, immigrants, young mothers, etc.) in order to establish the most integrated planning program possible. In 2004, Tohu signed a contract with SSQ Financial Group²⁸ which acted as the principal private partner in its programming and promotion. Tohu’s director, Charles-Mathieu Brunelle, maintained that consultation between the “various protagonists is obviously a difficult process, but ultimately the most democratic course of action”⁹ (translation);

- Since Tohu is an NPO, the diffusion of this culture is essential to promote public awareness of the values that are different from the individualistic logic of the free market and individual profit;
- Tohu also has a policy of hiring locally which is of great interest to the local community. Indeed, this involves employing young people from the district who have had social integration problems -25 permanent employees, around 30 part-time employees and 20 subcontracted employees, including caretakers, security guards, technicians, etc. Tohu has also organized its cleaning and maintenance services, its restaurant staff and its technicians into workers’ cooperatives (Tohu 2006). According to Lavoie “it is a very important phenomenon that people come to Tohu, but what’s more important is that residents in Saint-Michel district welcome them. These residents are thus given responsibilities and feel that they are part of the project and of the same context”³⁰ (translation).
- With regard to a territorial management policy, Tohu seeks to reinforce the basic elements of social capital, i.e., relations with the public administration, local businesses and community organizations. This network also takes the multicultural reality of the Saint-Michel context³¹ into account and seeks to

26. Interview with Stéphane Lavoie- Communications and Marketing Director for Tohu – November 21, 2005.

27. These stakeholders are internal or external actors having an interest in an organization or seeking the advantages related to it. In the case of Tohu, they are citizens, sponsors, collaborators, and various social or ethnic community organizations in the district.

28. *SSQ Financial Group* contributed \$750,000 to fund Tohu over 3 years (2004-2005 and 2006).

29. Interview with Charles-Mathieu Brunelle – Executive Vice-president and General Manager of Tohu – October 31, 2005.

30. Interview with Stéphane Lavoie- Communications and Marketing Director for Tohu – November 21, 2005.

31. For a detailed socio-economic picture, see Ville de Montreal (2004).

reinforce the symbolic and identity capital of the community. The heterogeneous context of Saint-Michel results from the fact that 65 percent of the residents originate from 75 cultural communities. In this respect, Charles-Mathieu Brunelle explained that “these people should be able to appropriate the local culture without rejecting their origins and, on the contrary, contributing to enrich it. We must re-appropriate their culture since the motto is to influence rather than to integrate”³² (translation);

- Tohu also acts as a mediator between the urbanistic services of the City of Montreal, the borough and the commercial organizations since it encourages the urbanistic and commercial development of needs and services laden with symbolic value. Tohu is planning a strategy for development on Jarry Street, a very busy street nearby. Owing to a change in zoning, numerous public and private building projects will be able to be developed there. Tohu is seeking to influence the localization of diversified activities by mediating with the land owners and the stores in the district in order to promote the territorial diffusion of social economy firms and organizations, cultural and environmental companies, organic food stores and fair-trade cafés. Lavoie maintained that “Tohu seeks to influence and to be influenced; the Tohu site is private but also public, it is a closed space but is also open to its community, in keeping with a strategy of on-site public relations between individuals” (translation);
- Lastly, Tohu also seeks to curb the effect of “gentrification.” In Saint-Michel district, only 26 percent of the population are home-owners.³³ To achieve its goal, Tohu encourages the creation of “housing cooperatives”³⁴ as a means to avoid a radical transformation of the social and physical capital of the district.

To conclude, the Tohu project as a whole seems to be effectively oriented towards the three major effects sought, that is, “exerting an attraction for individuals with a creative ethos, producing innovations for the local territory as well as the economic and cultural system, and redirecting individuals and society towards activities laden with experiential value, while responding creatively to the challenges posed by the local context” (Sacco et al forthcoming).

Lastly, the Tohu project is, of course, not entirely completed but can no doubt be referred to as a developing district or cluster.³⁵ Nevertheless, it is definitely an important project with regard to the development of cultural activities in Montreal,

32. Interview with Charles-Mathieu Brunelle – Executive Vice-president and General Manager of Tohu – October 31, 2005.

33. In the metropolitan Montreal area, on average, 36percent of residents are homeowners (see Ville de Montreal 2004).

34. A housing cooperative is “a generally renovated apartment building (or a series of buildings), in which residents are both tenants of their housing unit and owners of the building. It is a collective property, where the building’s residents collectively and independently manage the building and cooperative themselves. Management is conducted through democratic participation in general meetings and active contribution to the various committees. In Quebec, there are nearly 1,200 housing cooperatives with some 23,000 households.” (translation from www.cooperativehabitation.coop).

35. For a typology of clusters, see Tremblay (2006).

especially since Cirque du Soleil has contributed to defining the image of Montreal as a creative city, as has Montreal's Cité du multimedia (multimedia city) in a related artistic field.³⁶ According to Charles-Mathieu Brunelle, the Tohu project is something that has never been done before, "the entire circus world behind a single project, the entire process in a single place." Moreover, he stated that, "here, we can train artists and put on shows, but we can also create new shows, new companies, new processes. It is a bit like the Silicon Valley of the circus"³⁷ (translation)

Artist-run Centres and the Quartier des Spectacles (performing arts district)

To put our second case study into context, a brief history of the socio-political context in which the movement of artist-run centres took form is in order.

These centres came into being in the 1960s, in the context of what was referred to as the Quiet Revolution, an era which brought profound political and social change to Quebec. Thus, a vast liberalization movement was felt in the world of arts, literature, theatre, cinema and culture of Quebec as a whole. These factors, accompanied by the appearance of new technologies, changed the very notion of visual arts as well as the means of diffusion of contemporary creation, and contributed to turning Quebec into a space which is highly conducive to the emergence and diffusion of a movement whose success could never have been predicted.

Contemporary creation at that time was often represented by practices that few private galleries or museums were interested in supporting (Gilbert 2005: 65). Therefore, community structures designed by artists from the visual arts community had to be developed. Some of these artists were forced to develop alternatives and establish parallel structures in order to diffuse their art.

Optica, for example, was one of the first movements to develop in Quebec in the early 1970s, owing to the contribution of independent curator and writer William A. Ewing who sought to compensate for the lack of diffusion of photography.

Over the years, other similar artist movements were spontaneously created and mainly settled in Montreal, as clusters in some sectors of the city. In 1986, those in charge of cultural organizations in Quebec decided to describe them as "artist-run centres," a name derived from a term that was circulating in English-speaking communities in Canada and the United States and which is still in use today (Gilbert 2005). In the same year, in a Vancouver arts school, representatives of 17 artist centres discussed the creation of a Quebec association of contemporary art galleries. This network became an official organization of services and representative governance. Today, it is also a promotion and rallying instrument -- the *Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec* (Quebec association of

36. On the multimedia cluster, as a comparison, see Tremblay and Rousseau (2006, 2005a 2005b).

37. Interview with Charles-Mathieu Brunelle – Executive Vice-president and General Manager for Tohu (www.ccarts.ca/fr/advocacy/publications/documents/ArtofDevelopmentFR.pdf).

artist-run centres, RCAAQ).

When the artist-run centres decided to form this association, their primary goal was to have a voice in dealing with provincial and municipal government authorities. As explained by Gilbert, RCAAQ director since 1990 and founding member, “At the time, the artist-run centres were not in the least represented vis-à-vis the Government of Quebec and municipal authorities” (translation).

It was almost 20 years after the emergence of the first movements and the construction of a solid network across the territory that the artist-run centres were officially recognized by the government. Today, there are around 60 of these centres in 15 regions and 25 cities and towns in Quebec, 20 of which have been set up in the Montreal metropolitan area.

An artist-run centre is first and foremost a non-profit organization, created and led by a group of professional artists in the visual arts field whose purpose is to carry out projects jointly, share and support a space for arts production and diffusion, and stimulate research and growth in the local artistic community. Self-management characterizes the organization of these centres, that is, “groups of artists who traditionally used to rely on others to diffuse their work are now taking charge of their means of diffusion and production and relying on their own means for production” (Idem: 64) (translation).

These movements emerged through self-organized actions and were created through the explicit will of a group of creative individuals whose desire was to improve their innovation potential. It has been shown that, in a context that is not too highly regulated and planned, the interaction of creative individuals can emerge as part of the character of the city (Jacobs 1961; Florida 2004a, 2005). Subsequently, the city responds by granting a form of recognition, in particular financial assistance and investments in physical capital.

In Canada, federal and local policies adopt strategic actions in order to influence the creation of cultural initiatives and to encourage the creation of artistic movements in visual arts. The financing process used is the most democratic possible. The federal government relies on the institution called the Canada Council for the Arts, which supports and fosters a great number of these initiatives, to promote research, diffusion and production of art works. At the local level, the City of Montreal gives the *Conseil des arts de Montréal*³⁸ the mandate to provide assistance to non-profit professional artistic organizations. Our research focuses on the development of a creation centre in Montreal, that is, the future Quartier des Spectacles, of which Édifice Belgo is part. This building, located at 372 Ste-Catherine Street West near the Place des Arts³⁹ artistic centre, was built in 1912 and until the late 1970s, was occupied by a manufacturing plant. With the economic growth of the 1980s, several artistic and cultural organizations settled there. Owing to the presence of a few private galleries and the establishment of numerous artist-run centres, this building is known as the “galleries’ building.” Like a continuously changing living organism, Édifice Belgo is a place of meetings and interactions, where stories grow. This building is an example of a *creative ecosys-*

38. Since 1956 and with a budget of \$10 million in 2005, the Conseil des arts de Montréal has been supporting artistic creation in the Montreal metropolitan area (www.artsmontreal.org/).

39. From www.quartierdesspectacles.com/fr/quartier/.

tem in the city centre. Indeed, in addition to artists who meet each other there, the daily life of the building and its current community have their own organic rhythm which is just as inspiring now as it was in the past. Thus, the present and past of this building are an integral part of on-site performances which are punctuated by the comings and goings of tenants and visitors at any given time.⁴⁰

In the metropolitan context, Édifice Belgo is a building with a strong identity value where individuals with the same creative ethos settle and can thus be considered to belong to the creative class, if such a thing indeed exists. Florida (2002) noted that this class is a community consisting of a clustering of professionals in certain fields, that is, professional clusters⁴¹ that gather together in places which are distinguished by great open-mindedness and tolerance, as in urban centres, where the population is open to multiculturalism, and to gays, for example.

By being in the perimeter of Quartier des Spectacles, not very far from the Gay Village, Édifice Belgo is in keeping with a model of social organization which is characterized by a micro “community,” i.e. “a group of individuals who live and work in a specific sector of the city and jointly share an urban space⁴²” and, to paraphrase philosopher and sociologist Tönnies (1887), who also have common interests, aspirations and feelings. Based on this definition, it can be suggested that the group dimension, within the same geographical space, reinforces the spirit of solidarity, cohesion and protection.⁴³ In their interaction with the territory, these individuals rely on the idea and desire to be recognized in their milieu by their common identity. They have the same goals which mainly involve supporting artistic creation and diffusing creation products intended for the local community.

Certain facts have drawn these individuals to the same space, mainly the attractive prices of the premises and the sense of belonging to the same social movement. However, our focus here is on the method of territorial organization because it is marked by a geographic concentration which can be called clusters.

Economist Michael Porter maintained that “proximity serves to amplify many of the productivity benefits (of clustering).” Since the latter is associated with competition and cooperation, it appears to have an effect on the innovative nature of the community. Édifice Belgo can be considered to play an important role in the process of clustering or developing a cluster in the arts field.⁴⁴ This dimension is

40. From www.quartierdesspectacles.com/fr/quartier/.

41. According to Florida “The creative capital theory stresses that regional economic growth strategies have to go beyond traditional industry cluster analysis to include occupational clusters. These clusters stress what workers do on the job and where they live”(see Florida et al 2005).

42. See Venturini (2004).

43. According to sociologist F. Tönnies (1887), community is characterized by a sense of belonging and shared collectivity which is linked to a natural group. Social organization is based on joint property and solidarity as well as sharing the same work activity and lifestyle. Anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985) then broadened the very notion of community and the relationship with its symbolic value, that is, all individuals share the same values and have a strong sense of common identity.

44. “Clustering” represents a concentration of elements of clusters of activity which are formed and become stable. According to Porter, “clusters improve the access to specialized inputs such as components, machinery, professional services and workers. [...]” Complementarity is an important aspect, as are stimulations and performance measures. Thus, “clusters help to solve or mitigate the problems encountered in more isolated places” (see Porter 1999).

also essential for conducting joint projects, exchanging a large quantity of specialized and diversified, artistic and technical information which accumulates and circulates within this cluster.

During the 1980s and 1990s, an important creation centre was located around Saint-Laurent Boulevard and Duluth Street. In this industrial district, the disused buildings were taken up by 20 or so galleries, artist-run centres, publishing companies and dance companies. This situation was nevertheless temporary because, as pointed out by Gilbert, most artist-run centres rent their spaces,⁴⁵ and are thus “subject to relocation and eviction as a result of real estate developers coveting the places which artists and the centres have made fashionable” (Gilbert 2005: 71) (translation). Édifice Belgo’s vocation could change radically as a result of gentrification. For example, if the building is sold, the vested commercial rights will become obsolescent, thus subjecting the occupants to new residential regulations. If the City wants to maintain the district’s vocation, it must propose appropriate measures so that real estate development can be conducted without driving out the artists and associated organizations. The City could also foster access to ownership among artist centres (RCAAQ 2005: 14).

Today, Place des Arts represents the dynamic centre of Montreal’s art scene, which has been disrupted for many years by numerous planning and development projects aimed at revitalizing a sector much larger than that encompassing Place des Arts itself. This sector involves an area covering approximately one square kilometer in the city-centre, the so-called “Quartier des Spectacles.” Quite an extensive set of cultural infrastructure can be found here, including over 30 performance halls offering almost 28,000 seats, numerous international festivals, art galleries and venues for the diffusion of alternative culture.

At the Montreal Summit in 2002, a consensus was reached on developing a project structured around the idea of creating a district to promote the arts and position this district as a major cultural centre of Montreal and as a destination for international tourism. In 2003, the City, the cultural promoters, the private and public land owners, and the large and small producers of the artistic milieu created the NPO called the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership. It aims to bring a joint vision of development and a comprehensive proposal to implement and organize numerous projects (of the City of Montreal, the Government of Quebec or private investors) by planning and integrating all cultural activities in the city.

It could be argued that the success and sustainable development of this project should be based on a model of the “proactive cultural district,” which is competitive and of high quality, like that of Tohu. In fact, the integrated system of independent and complementary clusters of cultural activity, the creation of an urban cultural climate conducive to exchanges of information between the community and the territory, suggest that this district could produce new ideas and innovations based on its creativity and, thus, transform into an important space with a cultural vocation.

For the project to take shape, Pierre Deschênes – General Manager of the Partnership- speaks of the importance of taking everybody’s interests into account, that is, those of promoters, numerous private and public land owners, and small

45. For more details, see the article by Sacco et al (2006).

and large producers, by combining the interests of stakeholders as was observed in the Cité du multimédia, in that case, private producers but also private and public real estate owners (Tremblay and Rousseau 2006, 2005a, 2005b). According to Benoit Labonté,⁴⁶ “the creators should also retake possession of Édifice Blumenthal (on Bleury Street) which was vacated in 2002 [...]” Moreover, the City is currently examining means to protect these disused spaces, such as tax incentives or a reserved buildings designation so that “artists can emerge and the small performance venues can be the key to the Quartier des Spectacles being able to claim genuine cultural diversity.”

The character and form of an artist-run centre should also be defended since it is centred on creative autonomy. Within this model, visual artists claim to be partly freed from the constraints of the art market and from regarding museum spaces as sacred. They strive to the utmost to manage financial pressure and foster greater autonomy in creation. According to Gilbert, this is necessary for the centres and for art itself.

From this perspective, it can be seen that the territory becomes an immaterial asset, a strategic value and a place where the sedimentation of culture, history and shared institutions (Waldrop 1992) becomes a major factor in the socio-economic growth and development of the territory.

Conclusion

Our research shows that in the “proactive cultural district’,” the role of culture is more that of redefining the identity of the urban system and having cultural experiences seen as a common language, in a rational and emotional dimension (Sacco and Zarri 2004). In the case of Tohu, culture makes it possible to reinforce the social identity and the sense of belonging shared by citizens, which develop “through their familiarity with artistic products – that is, recognizing these products within a symbolic meaning- and also through the fact of living the same cultural experiences” (Hutter 1996) (translation). It should be mentioned that the contribution of art and culture to the socio-economic development of a given context relates to behaviours of cooperation and organization between the territorial actors. It certainly can play a fundamental role in the integration of excluded or marginalized individuals and communities (Pflieger and Greffe 2005: 27) as the Tohu case shows.

Of course, there will always be economic poverty, but more thought should probably be given to the parameters which help to measure the evolving degree of well-being of the post-industrial society in order to take appropriate action. In her book *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, Jacobs reminds us that “we are living in the distressing hour of the failure of development programs” (Jacobs 1992: 11) (translation), and we need an alternative to traditional policies more than ever before. There is no doubt that GDP or income growth is of great importance, but this alone is no longer able to provide development and adequate wealth distribution in post-

46. Benoit Labonté is the Mayor of Ville-Marie Borough and a City of Montreal Executive Committee member. Excerpt from the article by Laveaux (2006).

industrial society. The studies of numerous economists have maintained that the consumption modes are no longer only linked to basic needs but are also linked to the accumulation of an identity capital, that is, associated with the individual's capacity to acquire new sources of meaning and of forming personality. (Sacco and Viviani 2003) Defining individuals in relation to their well-being only –that which they benefit from or acquire – is an essential step, but Sen added that “keeping to this restrictive approach would mean missing an essential dimension of human personality. When their capacity-building initiatives are understood, they can be recognized as responsible human beings” (Sen 1999: 254) (translation).

Therefore, consideration should be given to projects designed to benefit the territorial economy, but which can influence real community participation in the long term, with new mechanisms for building social cohesion. Thus, individuals in socially disadvantaged environments and new residents must be able to easily integrate into the communities and seize the new opportunities which arise in the context of the creative economy. Sen observed that “preferences should not be a question for the elite guardians of tradition [...]” (Sen 1999), but all population groups directly concerned should be able to participate in the decision-making process.

As mentioned above, our case studies highlight the fundamental role that cultural activities can play in the urban revitalization process. This calls for a broader strategy for districts or clusters than that involved in many revitalization initiatives, which are often centred only on high technology or industrial sectors (Tremblay et al 2003) and much less often on artistic and cultural activities. We do not say that the two cases presented here are well-established districts or clusters, but they are developing and are aimed at a territorial revitalization which integrates the growth elements based on the notion of culture, or culture districts.

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