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Intercultural creativity in urban environments. How socio-cultural drivers contribute to the emergence of creative cities: The case of Montreal

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Abstract
Several scholars support the idea that the future viability and development of societies depend to a decisive degree on how creative and innovative their urban centers become. One way to understand creativity is through its embeddedness in societal contexts that have specific characteristics due to historical developments. Through the notion of intercultural creativity, which can be defined as the complimentary combination of various culturally based perspectives, knowledge, and skills of people, we provide further understanding of what can shape creative cities. This research focuses on the city of Montreal (Canada), a metropolis considered as one of the so-called innovative and creative cities of the 21st century, to investigate how socio-cultural drivers have contributed to the emergence of this creative city. Through this case study, a diachronic and interdisciplinary perspective is used to show how the political, societal, and cultural context of Montreal historically led to the emergence of creativity. We argue that this creativity is an intercultural one that emerges from complementary opposites. These opposites play a central role in making a creative city, as we elaborate on three socio-cultural and contextually anchored drivers of creativity: biculturalism, cosmopolitism and interculturalism.

Keywords: Intercultural creativity, creative city, innovation, interculturalism, multiculturalism, Montreal

Résumé
Plusieurs chercheurs soutiennent l'idée que la viabilité et le développement futurs des sociétés dépendent en grande partie du degré de créativité et d'innovation de leurs centres urbains. Une façon d'appréhender la créativité est de la comprendre à travers son ancrage dans des contextes sociétaux aux caractéristiques spécifiques issues de l'histoire. Le concept de créativité interculturelle, définie comme la combinaison complémentaire de perspectives, de connaissances et de compétences culturelles variées, nous permet de mieux comprendre ce qui peut façonner les villes créatives. Cette recherche se concentre sur la ville de Montréal (Canada), métropole considérée comme l'une des villes dites innovantes et créatives du 21e siècle, afin d'analyser comment les facteurs socioculturels ont contribué à l'émergence de cette ville créative. À travers cette étude de cas, une perspective diachronique et interdisciplinaire est utilisée pour démontrer comment le contexte historique, politique, sociétal et culturel de Montréal a contribué à l'émergence de la créativité. Nous soutenons que cette créativité est une créativité interculturelle qui émerge de la complémentarité

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des opposés. Ces opposés jouent un rôle central dans la création d'une ville créative, alors que nous élaborons sur trois moteurs socioculturels et contextuellement ancrés de la créativité : le biculturalisme, le cosmopolitisme et l'interculturalisme.

Mots-clés : Créativité interculturelle, ville créative, innovation, multiculturalisme, Montréal

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Introduction

Several scholars support the idea that the future viability and development of societies depend to a decisive degree on how creative and innovative they become (Bonet et al. 2011; Joly et al. 2021; Kakuchi 2016; O'Connor and Shaw 2014). Creativity research is notably concerned with factors that favor creativity, and these relate to both individual personality traits and collective social interactions of creative individuals (Amabile 1988; Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003). Interestingly, the influence of the socio-cultural context on the development of creativity has been somewhat neglected in the literature, although it is an important component of research on creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). One way to understand creativity is through its embeddedness in societal contexts that have specific characteristics due to historical developments (Cohendet et al. 2011; O'Connor et al. 2022; Leslie and Rantisi 2011). In certain social contexts such as organizations and cities, individuals come together to form groups and work together on new solutions. Cities can thus be central places of creativity because they often bring together many qualified and talented people who work together in networks (Florida 2005; 2012; Cohendet et al. 2011). This is especially true because they can facilitate the exchange of ideas and foster collaboration among individuals with diverse backgrounds and skill sets (Graham 2023; Joly et al. 2021; O'Connor and Shaw 2014).

Through a functioning ecosystem of companies, public administration, universities and research institutions, an intensive exchange of knowledge can take place and contribute to creative and innovative value creation (Florida 2005). Researchers refer to cities that foster creativity as 'creative cities' (Evans 2009; Florida 2012; He 2019; Leslie 2005). Besides such institutional factors, cultural factors can also contribute to the emergence of creativity in the context of cities. It may even be considered as a crucial prerequisite for the manifestation of creativity (Glăveanu 2010). Hence, culture should not be regarded as a separate factor, often referred to as the general term of 'environment', but rather as an *integral* part of creative action. It impacts the development, promotion, and inhibition of creativity. When assessing and enhancing creativity, it is essential to consider cultural factors such as ideas, expectations, requirements, priorities, traditions, materials, trends, and techniques.

In this article, we adopt a concept of culture that is most appropriate for studying the phenomenon of intercultural creativity. This concept considers culture as dynamic solution finding (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961) integrating cultural differences of values and practices that manifest themselves in complementary contrasts. Through a creative search, the taken-for-granted is questioned and new effective solutions are found (Landry 2008). We propose a contextualized link between creativity and culture and ask the following research questions: How does culture drive creativity in the urban context and help shape creative cities in general? And more particularly, how did the political, societal, and cultural context of Montreal historically lead to its emergence as a 21st century creative city?

This research focuses on a single case study, the city of Montreal, an international city (Barlow and Slack 1985) that is one of the so-called innovative and creative cities of the 21st century (Cohendet et al. 2010; 2011; Tremblay and Huesca Dehesa 2016). The economic and cultural metropolis of Canada's province of Quebec represents a crystallization point of Quebec's cultural area (Handberg 2015). Here, European tradition and North American modernity, internationalization and regionalism, urban and rural, Anglophone and Francophone Canadians, indigenous people and immigrants come together to form a special alchemy of cultural diversity (Blanche and Dupuis 2019; Rantisi and Leslie 2010; Viola 2012). This is also reflected in important historical product innovations such as *WonderBra, Crocs,* snowmobiles or voice recognition and companies such as *Cirque du Soleil, Moment Factory, CAE,* and *Bombardier*.

The main theoretical implication of this research is to highlight how creativity can be embedded in socio-cultural contexts and how certain complex cultural and historical processes can help to develop creative cities. To understand the emergence of creativity in urban environments, we elaborate three contextually anchored socio-cultural

drivers of creativity: 1) bilingualism and biculturalism, 2) cosmopolitanism and regionalism, 3) multiculturalism and interculturalism.

In the following sections, we first discuss the conceptual background of intercultural creativity as an area of tension between opposites. We then investigate the case of Montreal as a creative city. We conclude with a discussion of the results and reflect on the factors that contributed to the emergence of creativity in Montreal.

Intercultural creativity as an area of tension between opposites

Before exploring the specificities of Montreal as our single case study for this research, we address the concept of creativity. Creativity can be defined as the production of novel and useful ideas, products, services or processes by individuals or groups (Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003). Research demonstrates that creativity is essentially based on two elements. First, personality traits as an *individual* dimension, that involve cognitive, motivational as well as social skills, such as curiosity, openness, flexibility, risk taking and perseverance (Amabile 1988). Second, social interaction of creative individuals as a collective dimension (e.g., in a group). Hence, not only individuals can be interculturally creative, but also *collectives* such as teams (Stahl et al. 2010), organizations (Heidenreich et al. 2011), places (Landry 2011) or cities such as Montreal (Florida 2005; Rantisi and Leslie 2010).

To understand the collective aspects of creativity, it is necessary to consider the concept of culture. Culture can be defined as a system of values and practices that are collectively lived, transmitted, and changed by members of a particular group or society (D'Iribarne et al. 2020; Chevrier 2024; Geertz 1973). Culture enables its members to shape their own and others' actions and behaviors. At the same time, culture is produced by individuals interacting with one another. Therefore, culture is both a collective frame of reference and a product of individual human interaction. In this sense, culture is not limited to national contexts and communities, but rather, it embraces all forms of social systems, including cities. Like two sides of a coin, culture influences and enables human action and emerges in specific socialization contexts (Parsons 1952). Rather than reducing culture to a nation, ethnic group, or stable concept, it is possible to emphasize its dynamic and processual aspects. The focus should then be put on grasping a certain space of experience and finding solutions. According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), culture functions as a system for solution finding. In other words, in social systems, actors find specific forms and ways of achieving objectives. Despite the existence of multiple possible solutions, individuals prefer certain proven, 'dominant' solutions for the optimal regulation of interpersonal activity and for the survival and continued existence of the system they belong to (Parsons 1952). Social systems are based on values, experiences and expectations, which are often unconscious, and rules, methods or insti-tutions can offer possible solutions for problems. Hence, communities that share similar value orientations, such as the creative urban community in Montreal, are likely to develop solution patterns with common characteristics and approaches.

Furthermore, if culture is understood as influencing the way people deal with the challenges of the world (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961), then a larger repertoire of frames of reference can help to capture and understand the world in a wider range, which in turn can help to generate new and valuable ideas. Rather than distinguishing culture as an 'either-or' dichotomy, we consider the question of intercultural creativity from a 'both-and' perspective, integrating differences, opposites and contradictions. Intercultural perspectives can foster unexpected idea combinations, and creativity typically occurs when unexpected (re)combinations of ideas come together (Glăveanu 2010; Lubart et al. 2019). Moreover, creativity can emerge from the tension of opposites, that is, different ideas and perspectives, such as cooperation versus competition, flexibility versus planification, or centralization versus decentralization (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Thinking in terms of opposites is also inherent in the dilemma theory of Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2010), where opposites are not understood as disturbing but as enriching if they can have a positive effect on each other. They are resources that can be combined and complement each other. One side cannot be without the other and possibly these opposites form a greater whole:

> Culture is a pattern by which a group habitually mediates between value differences, such as rules and exceptions, technology and people, conflict and consensus, etc. Cultures can learn to reconcile such values at ever-higher levels of attainment, so that better rules are created from the study of numerous exceptions. From such reconciliation come health, wealth, and wisdom. But cultures in which one value polarity dominates and militates against another will be stressful and stagnate. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2004, 22–23)

This perspective is also represented by the approach of constructive interculturality (Barmeyer et al. 2021). Indeed, to solve an issue, the dilemma theory advocates conscious integration of differences, balancing of divergent values, and transfers this approach to creativity and innovation processes (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 2010). It is precisely these complementary opposites, which also constitute interculturality, that can lead to intercultural creativity (Barmeyer et al. 2021). Hence, it seems that Montreal is an illustrative case study that highlights constructive interculturality through its inherent dilemmas—anglophone and francophone cultures, cosmopolitanism and regionalism, and multiculturalism and interculturalism—explicitly well.

Moreover, individuals who are bicultural or intercultural can play a particular role in generating creativity (Thomas 2016). This is especially relevant for migrant entrepreneurs (Dheer and Lenartowicz 2018). Interculturality emerges through the internalization of at least two cultures that "inter"-act with each other -"inter," Latin for "between." A creative process of negotiation or dialogue then first takes place not in the collective, but at the individual level (Brannen and Thomas 2010).

Bicultural individuals can change frames of reference in such a way that the world is perceived from other perspectives (Benet-Martínez et al. 2002; Fitzsimmons 2013). Seemingly contradictory values, ideas, or practices can be simultaneously cognitively anchored and creatively utilized in this way through "both/and" thinking (Friedman and Berthoin Antal 2005), which is also referred to as cognitive complexity (Thomas 2016, 56): "Individuals who identify with more than one culture have been found to have more complex thinking patterns than those who identify with a single culture. It is this aspect of multiculturalism that is most directly linked to creativity."

Finally, Stein (2010) defines intercultural creativity as the ingenuity of people acting interculturally, where experiential knowledge, perceptions, information, and emotions are combined in intercultural interactions in such a way that the people concerned develop intercultural added value. As previously stated, creativity can take place on an individual or a collective level. Collectives of creativity in urban environments have been studied intensively as there exists a rising number of research that underlines the contextual importance and cultural influence of creativity in cities such as: Barcelona (Spain) (Cohendet et al. 2010; Karaoglu 2024), Calgary (Canada) (Graham 2023), Georgetown (Malaysia) (Khoo 2016), Kanazawa (Japan) (Kakiuchi 2016), Milan (Italy) (d'Ovidio and Cossu 2017), Montreal (Canada) (Cohendet et al. 2010; Viola 2012), Naples (Italy) (De Falco 2018), New York (USA) (Goldberg-Miller and Heimlich 2019), Portland (Oregon, USA) (Fox Miller 2019), and Shanghai (China) (Gong and Xin 2019; He 2019).

Methodological considerations

Following Bansal and colleagues (2018) and in keeping with the approach of Moses and Knutsen (2019), we consider it important to clarify our ontological and epistemological position, especially regarding research paradigms (Burrell and Morgan 1979). Paradigmatic orientation influences not only the methodological approach, but also the research questions, the interpretation and presentation of results, and the structure and style of a scientific paper (Bonache 2021; Rodrigue and Kuyken 2024). Our paradigmatic orientation explains the epistemological foundations on which our research—and thus this article—is based. We situate our case study of Montreal as a creative city within the social constructivist interpretive paradigm (Burrell and Morgan 1979). This interpretive research approach provides meaning to the construction of social realities (Berger and Luckmann 1966), which can be described using research data (Gertsen and Zølner 2020). This interpretive research approach helps to understand the historical embeddedness of strategic practices and thus usually reflects a constructivist understanding of social reality. It appears to us as the most appropriate approach for understanding the emergence of Montreal's creativity.

We also identified a contextualized research approach to help us understand an under-researched phenomenon linked to our research question: How did Montreal's historical political, societal, and cultural context lead to its emergence as a 21st century creative city? Taking our research question as a starting point, we elected a research design that would facilitate data collection, analysis and interpretation. The most suitable research design for this study is the contextualized single case study. Like Piekkari and Welch (2011), we understand case studies as a research strategy that examines a phenomenon in its natural context to develop new contributions for research and practice. Bryman and Bell (2015) emphasize that the qualitative approach links the theoretical perspective to the study, facilitating understanding and knowledge of the case study. Welch and colleagues (2022) emphasize that the main strength of a case study is to reconcile theory and context by generating contextualized explanations. In line with the concept of

Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness, we therefore consider it important to describe these contextual features because they also have a direct influence on the results of our study (Tsang et al. 2025).

To this end, we have opted for a longitudinal socio-historical case study analysis (Senteio and Matteucci 2017), as it enables us to better understand Montreal's evolution as a creative city over several decades. Since it is common in historical and cultural studies, our analysis and interpretation are not based on self-collected primary empirical research data, but on the interpretation of secondary data (Heaton 2008). Secondary analysis of qualitative data has gained in importance since the 1990s and enables researchers to use existing qualitative data for new research questions. This methodology differs from other approaches in qualitative research and has become established in various fields (Heaton 2008).

Montreal as a creative city

The best-known and most widely discussed approach to creative cities in the context of social and cultural factors comes from Richard Florida (2005). To understand creativity in cities and its impact on the economy, Florida (2005) created the catchy concept of the 3T's of economic development: Technology (means), Talent (human capital linked to creative occupations) and Tolerance (openness to difference). Each of these factors is a necessary but not sufficient condition; to attract creative people, generate innovation and promote economic growth, a place should have all three factors. In Montreal, these three factors are present in many respects (Rantisi and Leslie 2010; Stolarick and Florida 2006).

While Florida's approach is easily accessible, it does not consider the cultural particularities of the groups of actors or their interactions, nor does it follow a contextualized, socio-historical approach. Therefore, another approach that considers the emergence of Montreal as a creative city is that of Cohendet and colleagues (2010; 2011), who examine the groups of actors and their interactions. To better understand the phenomenon of the creative city, Cohendet, Grandadam and Simon (2010) developed the model of the "anatomy of the creative city", which distinguishes between the three levels of upper-, lower- and middleground, and relates primarily to the creative industries. It contains special elements of the artistic scene, particularly in the description of the underground. According to these authors, the aim is to ensure that there is a middleground (made up of locations and spaces) that is sufficiently attractive for the creators of the underground and the institutional representatives (of the upperground) to want to meet there. It is ultimately these meetings that create a productive (or 'fertile') ecosystem.

Furthermore, Rantisi and Leslie (2010) examine the policy framework that has emerged to support culture and design in Montreal. The authors explain that this policy imperative is aligned with the rise of nationalist sentiments in the province of Quebec in the 1970s. Since that decade, Montreal has undergone economic and demographic restructuring that has also prompted an interest in urban design. Thus, the authors pay attention to Montreal's spatial diversity, through its specific zoning policies, and highlight the development of creative neighborhoods with distinct identities such as Mile End, Plateau Mont-Royal and St-Henri (Rantisi and Leslie 2010).

Hence, even if Quebec City is the capital of its province, Montreal has been its central condensation point of social, economic, and cultural development for centuries (Linteau 2007). Specific features of Quebec's society and culture, in particular the contrasts that foster creativity, are found 'concentrated' in Montreal, the second-largest city in Canada after Toronto, which in date of 2025, had 2.2 million inhabitants in the city[1] and 4.28 million in its metropolitan area.[2] Its present name derives from *Mont* Royal, the royal mountain discovered by the French in the 16th century.

The urban geographers Klein and Shearmur (2017) distinguish four historical development phases of this city: the *first* phase is the development of industrialization at the end of the 19th century, during which industry took off due to canal and railroad construction. Financed by commercial banks, this industrialization was only made possible by the influx of migrant workers from Europe, notably from Ireland and Scotland.

The *second* phase is the restructuring phase in the mid-20th century after World War II. The construction of roads and the use of the automobile led to a separation of the home and the workplace. At the same time, Montreal was increasingly transformed from an industrial metropolis to a service metropolis. The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, with the creation of numerous ministries and civil service jobs, accelerated this evolution from an industrial to a service society. Indeed, after the decline of classical industry and the exodus of Anglophone companies following the Quiet Revolution, Montreal increasingly focused on the service sector and was able to demonstrate astonishing developments in the field of new technologies.

The *third* phase emerges with new technologies, which occurs in the 1980s. Government industrial policy promoted certain economic sectors, such as aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and telecommunications. This notably explains why Montreal's economic structure can today be divided into eight technology-based sectors: Aerospace, Biofood, Multimedia, Finance, Health, Information and Communication Technology, Clean Technology, and Logistics and Transportation. The city is also home to Canada's most successful computer gaming sector, one of the three most significant centers for aerospace in the world, and boasts the highest density of information technology workers nationally (Stolarick and Florida 2006).

Finally, the *fourth* phase, around the turn of the new millennium, strengthened Montreal's position as a cultural metropolis. In the spirit of the "creative city" and the "creative class" (Florida 2005), culture is used as an economic development stimulus. In this context, certain neighborhoods are upgraded through cultural promotion (Rantisi and Leslie 2010). This development from an industrial to a cultural and high-tech metropolis explains the path to the so-called creative city.

Considering this brief historical overview, what exactly makes Montreal a creative city? Most of the inventions from Quebec originated in Montreal, and they include peanut butter, pantyhose, Crocs, WonderBra and public rental bicycles (Bixi), some of which are now used all over the world (Léger et al. 2016). Contemporary Montreal is also a dynamic creative city, especially in two areas (Cohendet et al. 2011).

First, the city is home to many technology companies in the aerospace industry, video game industry[3], 3D animation, and artificial intelligence (AI). AI is a very promising technology with high value-added content for which Montreal is a major global hub for its research and development (High 2017). Over 250 researchers and graduate students work in areas related to artificial intelligence, notably at McGill University and Université de Montréal. Among its contributions to the industry, there is automatic speech recognition, image processing, natural language processing, and reinforcement learning algorithms (Investissement Québec 2021). Interestingly, more and more multinational technological companies such as Google, Facebook, Ubisoft, and Microsoft are opening labs and offices in Montreal to take advantage of these developments.

Second, Montreal is very active in artistic fields such as literature, film, design, fashion, music, dance, and entertainment, as evidenced by its numerous festivals. With its strong cultural and arts scene, Montreal is an apt example of how artistic elements of creativity combine with technology and are reflected in certain performances, such as *Moment Factory's* techno-artistic productions. A particularly fitting example of creativity of the so-called cultural industry in Montreal that combines technology, talent and tolerance is the *Cirque du Soleil* (Leslie and Rantisi 2011), which also embodies a multicultural and cosmopolitan orientation. With approximately 5000 employees from around the world and shows in over 90 cities, it is a truly international company (Kim and Mauborgne 2004) that uniquely integrates technology and art. Rather than focusing on a locally based, national identity, *Cirque du Soleil* creates a newly imagined community, an "imagination" (Harvie and Hurley 1999). The resulting cultural diversity also makes it easier to appeal to an international audience. Cohendet and Simon (2008) assume that Montreal, as a creative city, provides the foundations of creativity within *Cirque du Soleil* in the first place, which they see as a knowledge-based enterprise whose core competence is the formation and use of creativity.

Enhancing sociocultural drivers for Montreal's creativity

In accordance with this conceptual background of intercultural creativity and the presentation of Montreal as a creative city, we now illustrate how specific sociocultural factors have contributed to the emergence of creativity in Montreal. In doing so, we present three sociocultural opposites generating dialectical tensions that can be seen as major drivers of creativity: 1) the tension between bilingualism and biculturalism, 2) the tension between cosmopolitanism and regionalism, 3) the tension between multiculturalism and interculturalism.

Francophone and anglophone biculturalism influence in Montreal

The first socio-cultural driver of creativity in Montreal is the tension between Francophone and Anglophone cultures. Quebec in general and Montreal in particular are interesting objects of study because they constitute a crossroads of different cultural and linguistic influences (Linteau 2007). Of critical importance is the centuries-long tension between francophone and anglophone history, language, and culture (Meunier 2016; Vallières 1979), which must be considered to understand Quebec's and Montreal's creativity.

Although Quebec is 'only' a Canadian province under state law, like Ontario or Alberta, Quebec demonstrates a distinctive feature in Canada and in North America (Dumont 1993). Quebec considers itself as a *société distincte* (i.e., distinct society) (Arseneault et al. 2019), using the metaphor of an island of 8 million francophones surrounded by an ocean of 400 million anglophones. Like a small 'Gallic village,' Quebec resists a global discourse of homogenization and successfully strives to preserve its French culture and language. The Austrian author and intellectual Stefan Zweig highlights this particularity already in 1911: "This admirable tenacity, with which a few thousand Frenchmen have now resisted their language for a hundred and fifty years, must not be denied respect." (Zweig 1994/1911, 132, translation of the authors).

Hence, the influence of French culture and language have strongly shaped Quebec's society (Dumont 1993; Meunier 2016; Thomson 1988). The French publicist, historian and politician, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), who travelled to North America in 1826 on behalf of the French state to study the legal and penal systems, described the French characteristics he encountered in *Canada* (today identified as Quebec) in a very detailed manner. Tocqueville was struck by the contrasts and inequalities between the immigrant French and English:

> In the cities, the English and the Canadians [Quebecers] form two societies. […] The English show themselves in Canada [Quebec] with all the features of their national character, and the Canadians [Quebecers] have retained all the features of the French character. (De Tocqueville 2003, 189, translation of the authors)

The ongoing contrast between anglophone and francophone culture and identity is highlighted by francophone authors, such as the sociologist Marcel Rioux's (1919–1992) *Les Québécois,* an ethnographic study from 1974, in which he illustrates various aspects of the "collective psyche" of the *Québécois francophones* and their embeddedness in the North American continent. Rioux understands Quebec as a society in a quasi-permanent state of dependency; first on political (British) and then on economic (American) "colonization." In this context, the *Révolution tranquille* (i.e., Quiet Revolution), brought a change of consciousness about this colonization towards social modernization (Rioux 1974).

The *Révolution tranquille* was not actually a revolution, but a significant period of social and political upheaval leading to rapid modernization that lasted from about 1960 to 1966 and ushered profound social, cultural, and economic change (Behiels 1985; Belanger et al. 2000). An important number of reforms under Prime Minister Jean Lesage (1912–1980) contributed to social modernization (Thomson 1984) of "a Québec libre," stated by the French President Charles the Gaulle on a trip to the *Expo 67* (Thomson 1988).[4] In particular, the Lesage government paved the way for more autonomy for the francophone population and created the basis for an active francophone elite—unprecedented in this form—that exerts influence on the fate of its country.

On the other hand, anglophone authors such as Mordecai Richler (1992) or Henry Mintzberg (1995) take a counter-position to these francophone "uniqueness" and identity discourses in their writings. They assume that the appropriation of language and mentality leads to identitarian separation tendencies, which in turn lead to fractures in Canadian society. Mordecai Richler's book *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec! Requiem for a Divided Country* (1992) is a collection of essays on nationalist tendencies in Quebec, language policy, and Jewish society in Quebec and Canada. Richler argues—contrary to Quebec immigration policy—for English as the first language of incoming immigrants rather than French.

Born and still living in Montreal, the bilingual Henry Mintzberg critically and humorously questions the concept of *société distincte,* which risks contributing to the exclusion of other populations living in Quebec as well as francophone populations in Canada. Overemphasizing the special status of Quebec society and limiting the Québécois to francophone citizens, as Mintzberg points out in his very personal essay *The Canadian Condition: Reflections of a "Pure Cotton"* (1995), leads to a demarcation, especially between Anglophones and Francophones. However, this would also neglect the other population groups living in Quebec—autochthonous and immigrant. The metaphors in the following quote allow his tongue-in-cheek humor to shine through, as he states that "pure wool" is the term used by Quebecers and other French-Canadians who like to trace their ancestry to France. However, as for immigrants who came after the year 1760, such as Mintzberg himself, they could still be referred to by the term "pure cotton." These remarks show the vivid tension between anglophone and francophone populations that still prevail in contemporary Quebec society. This has led to an active form of biculturalism that fosters a dynamic level of creativity within the territory where this linguistic tension most prevails, which is the island of Montreal (Viola 2012).

Cosmopolitanism and regionalism in Montreal

The second socio-cultural driver of creativity in Montreal is the tension between cosmopolitanism and regionalism. Cosmopolitanism as a prescriptive concept understands all human beings as members of a single community (Scheffler 1999). Cosmopolitanism includes the encouragement of universal moral standards, the creation of global political structures, or the development of a space for mutual cultural expression and tolerance (Vertovec 2002). This last aspect is important here. Montreal is a place where people of different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds live and interact daily. In a constructive sense, philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah advocates valuing difference as enrichment: "People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life" (Appiah 2006, xv).

Where cosmopolitanism fosters relationships and enriching interactions of actors from different cultures, regionalism is concerned with the loyalty to a particular region with a homogeneous population by enhancing territorial autonomy, the organization of a central state, including regional development policies (Cochrane and Perrella 2012). As in the case of Quebec, regions can thus be delimited by administrative units, culture, language, and religion. The demands of regionalists then concern demands for sovereignty or separatism, but also more moderate forms of greater autonomy (e.g., states' rights, decentralization, or devolution) (Meadwell 1991). In addition to the city of Montreal, regionalism involves emotional attachment to people, places, and institutions in a particular geographic location (Cochrane and Perrella 2012).

The Quiet Revolution provided a decisive impetus for the Cosmopolitanism of Quebec and Montreal in particular (Thomson 1984). Deputy Prime Minister Paul Gérin-Lajoie (1920–2018) was a key figure. He ensured that the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, which had existed since Canada was founded in 1867, was more clearly regulated, particularly regarding international agreements and treaties. The *Doctrine Gérin-Lajoie* gave Quebec the autonomy to negotiate and ratify international agreements and treaties, and ultimately to conduct its own foreign policy independent of the Canadian state.

Another key actor of the Quiet Revolution was Jean Drapeau (1916–1999), who held the office of mayor of Montreal from 1954 to 1957, as well as from 1960 to 1986, totaling almost 30 years. He had the vision of making Montreal an internationally significant city (Paul 2004). To this end, he implemented numerous substantial construction measures, such as the city's subway system, artificially constructed islands in the St. Lawrence River, and the Olympic Stadium with the world's tallest leaning tower, today one of Montreal's landmarks. Drapeau, aided by rising Quebec nationalism, succeeded in Montreal becoming the venue for important international events, such as the 1967 World Expo and the 1976 Olympic Games (Linteau 2007). Liberal economic policies that facilitated foreign investment and promoted many high-tech projects increasingly created a cosmopolitan social class, which in turn had a high demand for education, arts, leisure, and entertainment. In recent decades, Montreal has hosted numerous international music, film, and cultural festivals, such as the *Montreal International Jazz Festival,* the *Just for Laughs International Comedy Festival,* the *Festival International Nuits d'Afrique,* and the *Montreal International Fireworks Competition.*

The World Expo of 1967 and the Olympic Games of 1976 literally opened Montreal to the world. The city, which had previously been rather "provincial," had thus been modernized (Linteau 2007). *Expo 67*'s guiding principle was that technology could help overcome problems of the future. That is why lightweight construction, new architectural spatial structures, novel transportation concepts and visions of space travel were at the center of *Expo 67*. As one of the last great world expositions, it focused on international diversity (Roy and Robert 1967). The employees, especially the Expo hostesses, who greeted and looked after visitors in a bilingual and interculturally competent manner, were the most important ambassadors of Canada and image givers for Quebec (Hurley 2011). Another style-defining feature of *Expo 67* was the extensive cultural program with galleries, opera, ballet, theatre, and orchestra performances.

A second major internationalization impulse came from the Olympic Games in 1976. Following the success of *Expo 67,* Mayor Drapeau wanted to elevate Montreal to the rank of grand metropolis of the world. This major international event saw 92 nations and over 6,000 athletes take part in 198 sporting competitions. Montreal is thus the second French-speaking city, after Paris, ever to host the Summer Olympic Games. Both events contributed to Montreal becoming a *Global City* (Sassen 1991; Taylor et al. 2002).

The concept of *imagineering,* which originally came from Walt Disney Studios and represents a combination of imagination and technology to create a reality out of dreams, plays a role here (Archer 1997). Structures that

constitute the cityscape (office towers, highways, airports, houses, parks), as well as events that celebrate urban life (cultural festivals, museums, sporting events) pursue economic purposes by all means—but not only—and work on the collective imaginary, as Paul (2004, 579) underlines for Montreal: "Since the late 1950s Montreal has been a living laboratory of imagining." These numerous material and immaterial projects also promote a particular representation and interpretation of the cosmopolitan city.

Residents are increasingly confronted with their own identity and internationalism at the same time, adopting cosmopolitan practices and ideals themselves, which are fed by global connectivity and prosperity (Hall 2003). The most successful cultural element in spreading cosmopolitan attitudes is a form of consumerist cosmopolitanism that implements cultures in the form of food, tourism, music, literature, and clothing. Montreal thus becomes a "global bazaar in which exotic cuisines, exotic styles of dress, exotic music, exotic tribal customs can be savoured indiscriminately [...] essentially a tourist's view of the world." (Lasch 1995, 6). All in all, Montreal combines these contrasts of regional and cosmopolitan identity, and links them as multiple identities (Hall 2003).

Multiculturalism and interculturalism in Montreal

In addition to biculturalism and cosmopolitanism, diversity and multiculturalism also contribute to the development of creativity in Montreal as a third socio-cultural driver. Lüsebrink (2018) presents a threefold dimension of multiculturalism in Quebec based on Canada's Anglophone-Francophone bilingualism, the position of First Nations, and immigration. In this context, the long-dominant Anglophone-Francophone biculturalism is increasingly being replaced by multiculturalism. This diversity and multiculturalism can be clearly illustrated in the city of Montreal (Rocher 2015). Like many other large cities, it grew out of several towns that later became neighborhoods through incorporation.

From an urban geography perspective, these different neighborhoods also contribute to creative diversity (Klein and Shearmur 2017). For example, there is a Jewish neighborhood (*Mile End / Outremont*), a Chinese neighborhood, and *Piccola Italia (Little Italy)*, where mainly European migrants live. In *Westmount,* near the *Mont Royal,* resides mainly an Anglophone elite. There also exists a gay quarter, which for many decades has helped Montreal gain an international reputation as a liberal city. The *Quartier des Spectacles* brings together many cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres, concert halls and open-air theatres. The *Saint Michel* District, a very intercultural neighborhood, is home to *Cirque du Soleil* and other artistic institutions (Leslie and Rantisi 2011). The *NDG, Côte-des-Neiges* and *Parc Extension* districts are particularly multicultural, with a large immigrant and student population composed of numerous ethnic communities, and in which neither French nor English language dominates.

A particularly interesting French-Canadian approach to dealing with this complex multiculturalism—and diversity and integration—is represented by the philosopher Charles Taylor, professor at McGill University, through the notion of interculturalism, which relies on dialogue and exchange (Karaoglu 2024). "The crucial process is one in which the different cultures meet and fertilize each other. In this regard, anything that keeps them in separate compartments, any ghettoization, will obstruct the goal. This is the semantic force of the 'inter' in interculturalism. Contact and exchange are essential." (Taylor 2012a, vii)

Charles Taylor's bilingual and bicultural upbringing certainly contributed to this notion of interculturalism, as his mother was francophone and of the Roman Catholic faith, while his Anglophone father, on the other hand, was Protestant. He himself is thus a mediator between cultural opposites that combine in the sense of constructive interculturality (Barmeyer et al. 2021). Taylor, together with Gérard Bouchard, a francophone historian and sociologist, was a member of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission (Bouchard and Taylor 2008) for appropriate orientations and behaviors regarding cultural differences in Quebec. The so-called interculturalism approach of Quebec differs from that of Canadian multiculturalism. While the latter assumes that there is no national majority culture, interculturalism accepts the existence of a majority culture (Bouchard 2011; 2012; Taylor 2012). It seeks largely as a compromise to respect cultural specifics of minority cultures, but at the same time aims to maintain adherence to the core values of Quebec's majority culture (prominent status of the French language, equality of men and women, principle of secularism, etc.). Interculturalism is especially important for Quebec as a—'threatened'—Francophone cultural area in Anglophone North America (Bouchard and Taylor 2008).

This approach, also in contrast to multiculturalism, has been intensively discussed by social scientists (Zapata-Barrero 2016; Modood 2017; Kastoryano 2018). Zapata-Barrero (2017) calls this approach 'post multiculturalism': "[…] interculturalism places more emphasis on a contacts-based policy approach, aimed at fostering communication

and relationships among people from different backgrounds, including national citizens […]. It also views diversity as an advantage and a resource […]" (Zapata-Barrero 2017, 2).

Finally, the creativity-enhancing balancing of opposites and dilemmas of the interculturalism approach is evident in the following quote, taken from the comprehensive final report of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission:

> Generally speaking, it is in the interests of any community to maintain a minimum of cohesion. It is through such cohesion that a community can adopt common orientations, ensure participation by citizens in public debate, create the feeling of solidarity required for an egalitarian society to function smoothly, mobilize the population in the event of a crisis, and take advantage of the enrichment that stems from ethnocultural diversity. (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 19)

In summary, as previously discussed and illustrated by Figure 1, three socio-cultural creativity-enhancing drivers of the city of Montreal (i.e., 1) Francophone and Anglophone biculturalism, 2) cosmopolitanism and regionalism, 3) multiculturalism and interculturalism) are key 'pillars' in understanding what makes Quebec's metropolis a creative city (Florida 2005). Also, these sociocultural tensions have contributed to Montreal's status as an active member of the Intercultural Cities Network[5] (White 2018; 2021).

Discussion and conclusion

In line with our conceptual understanding of intercultural creativity, this research uses a diachronic and interdisciplinary perspective to show how historical, societal, and cultural context can lead to the emergence of creativity in urban environments. According to Florida (2013), this creativity is an intercultural one that emerges from complementary opposites and contributes to the formation of an artistic-creative class. We propose a contextualized link between creativity and culture, answering our initial research question: how do socio-cultural drivers lead to the emergence of intercultural creativity in the political, societal and cultural context of Montreal?

We have identified three areas of cultural dilemma that can be seen as important drivers and enhancing factors for creativity: 1) The tension between anglophone and francophone actors who work bilingually and interculturally

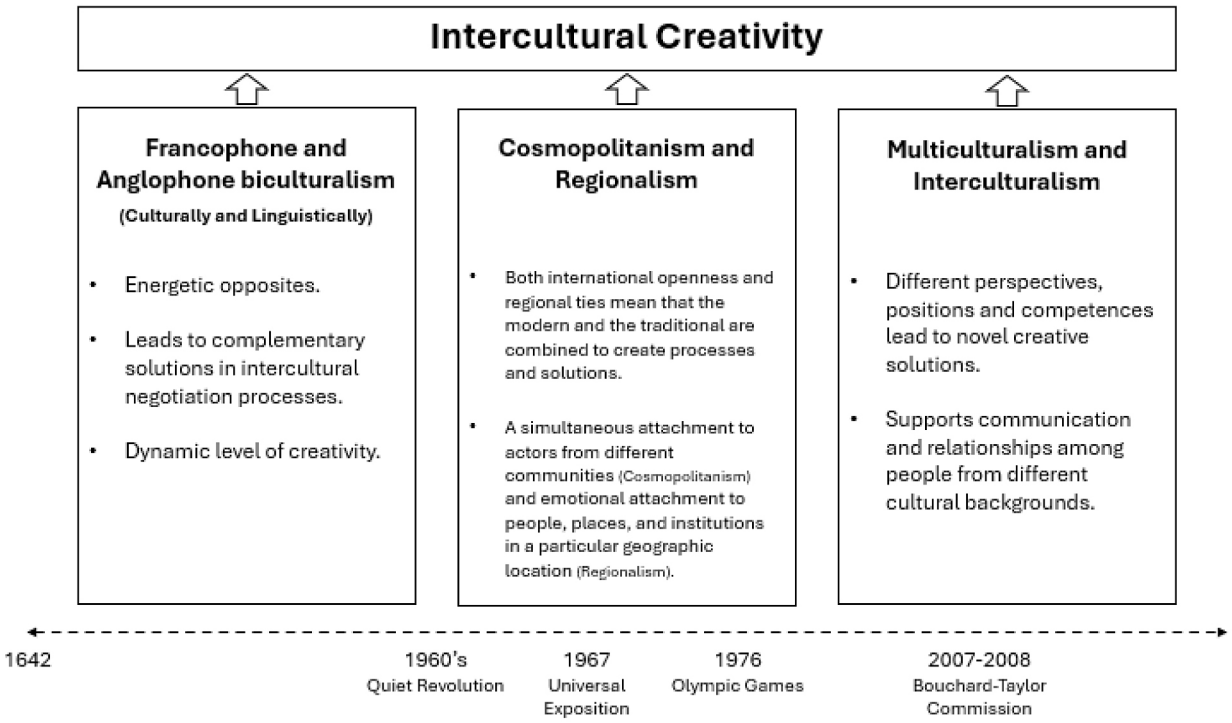

Figure 1
Areas of sociocultural tension as drivers for intercultural creativity in Montreal

and thus contribute to a special hybrid culture, 2) The tension between cosmopolitanism and regionalism, which can be found in the city of Montreal as an enrichment, and 3) The tension between multiculturalism and interculturalism, which has arisen in particular through immigration in recent decades. All three factors contribute in a complimentary way to the expression of creativity in Montreal and serve as an example of how opposites can be constructively combined and contribute to creativity and innovation in cities. This adds a systemic perspective to the existing literature.

Through the notion of intercultural creativity, we provide further understanding of what a creative city can be. We extend previous research on creative cities with two contributions. First, we contribute to existing research on the path dependency of creativity and innovation in cities (Leslie and Rantisi 2011). In doing so, we emphasize that creativity and innovation do not emerge in a "vacuum," but are the result of historical, cultural, and institutional logics that intertwine and lead to a specific expression, as we show with the example of the city of Montreal. Accordingly, we show the importance of the specific socio-cultural context of the city of Montreal in relation to creativity and innovation.

Second, we contribute to research by linking dilemmas with creativity in cities from a socio-cultural perspective (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 2010). Dilemmas can be understood as resources that combine and complement each other. In line with divergent thinking (Thomas 2016), they can enrich social systems as opposites and contribute to intercultural creativity in cities, as we have shown. We link contextual elements that contribute to the existence and the solution of dilemmas in multicultural cities.

Third, we contribute to research by expanding the scope of previous studies on Montreal's creativity to include a social-historical dimension. The three drivers of sociocultural tensions that we discuss make Montreal a special place of creativity and innovation, quite different from other so-called creative cities. This distinguishes our research from previous research: Florida (2005; 2012) looks at creativity in cities primarily at the macro level, but not at the meso or micro level. Neither is Florida's research interested in inherent processes. Cohendet and colleagues (2010, 2011), on the other hand, look at the emergence of creativity in cities on three levels (upperground, middleground and underground) and, most importantly, with the corresponding interactions of the middleground that lead to creativity. Rantisi and Leslie (2010) explore the notion of spatial diversity in Montreal, through its zoning policies for mixed land use (i.e. residential alongside retail and commerce), and highlight the development of specific creative neighborhoods with distinct identities such as Mile End, Plateau Mont-Royal and St-Henri (Rantisi and Leslie 2010). However, these works do not examine the specific context of the city of Montreal from a macro-level socio-historical perspective, as we do.

A central question remains: Was Montreal always creative? Or did it just become creative within the last few decades? We hint at giving an answer: our socio-historical perspective points to the fact that Montreal was not a particularly creative city before the Quiet Revolution. We suspect that this is due to the strong intercultural tensions between Anglophone and Francophone cultures, which did not lead to reconciliation of dilemmas. Likewise, the immigration of multicultural people was rather low up till the 1950s to this point and the actual cosmopolitan opening did not take place until the events of the World's Fair Expo 67 and the 1976 Olympic games. This remains a question that requires further historically based research to fully elucidate.

Since our research was contextual and interpretive, based on an individual case study, we did not carry out a comparison with other creative cities. Our aim was to demonstrate the particularity of Montreal as a creative city, and we think that it differentiates itself from other major (North American) creative cities, such as San Francisco and Austin, because of the three aforementioned sociocultural drivers. Cities like San Francisco and Austin also fit the profile of having tech companies and arts scenes, but they do not have the centuries-old tension between Francophone and Anglo-American cultures, nor the same bilingualism and biculturalism of the people living there. These creative cities may experience tensions between cosmopolitanism, politics, and regionalism, but not to the degree exemplified by the Quebec government's Francophone culture and economic policies. The specific concept of interculturalism—contrasting multiculturalism—that characterizes Montreal is also not found in Austin or San Francisco.

Future research on creative cities could most certainly compare Montreal to similarly sized cities, such as Toronto, Chicago, Austin or San Francisco. This would answer the question of whether Montreal is exceptionally creative, or just averagely. Since patent protected inventions are an important indicator of creativity, it would be useful to examine the number of new patents per year for each city, as Florida has done, to compare levels of creativity. Future research could also delve deeper by comparing the Montreal case with other creative cities that also have tech companies and arts scenes but do not share its unique intercultural dynamics and history. This would help answer

the following question: How do intercultural tensions specifically contribute to Montreal's creativity, rather than its status as a large metro area in a wealthy country with a highly educated population?

Furthermore, it would be equally interesting to investigate at the individual level to what extent migrant entrepreneurs stand out and position themselves in urban creativity and innovation landscapes. Educational institutions such as CEGEPs[6] in Quebec and universities play an important role in raising awareness and supporting students in start-up activities. The North American understanding that science and business—and thus also the creative industries—can and should be closely intertwined helps here. The large number of business incubators facilitates the development and exchange of creative ideas between student idea generators and entrepreneurial idea takers.

Finally, on an urban level, one main question for the future is whether cities like Montreal will remain central places of innovation in times of digitalization and virtualization—and after pandemics such as that of the Covid-19—corresponding digital innovative services and products, or whether will physical places of intercultural encounter increasingly fade into the background? Will these places be increasingly replaced by decentralized virtual social networks? If this is the case, will this digital decentralization contribute to a possible "urban exodus" in favor of the countryside? These questions will certainly be at the center of our global development during this 21st century.

For the future viability of global creative cities such as Montreal, it will be decisive on a societal level how constructively multiculturalism—which is often problematic—is dealt with. In this context, Taylor and Bouchard's (2008) interculturalism approach, which understands cultural diversity constructively, also seems to point the way to creativity and innovation (Karaoglu 2024). Will civil society, the state, and the many other actors in urban innovation ecosystems succeed in activating the positive side of cultural diversity—such as creativity—through negotiation processes? And what strategies and measures should be adopted to achieve this?

End notes

[1] Gouvernement du Québec, https://www.economie.gouv.qc.ca/pages-regionales/montreal/portrait-regi-onal/demographie (consulted july 4, 2025).
[2] Statistiques Canada, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710014801 (consulted july 4, 2025).
[3] With over 230 companies, Montreal is the fifth-largest video game center in the world, after Tokyo, London, San Francisco, and Austin (Investissement Québec 2021).
[4] "Vive le Québec libre!" was a phrase pronounced by French President Charles de Gaulle in Montreal on 24 July 1967, during a visit to Canada for the Expo 67. De Gaulle shouted to a large crowd from the balcony of Montreal's City Hall, "Vive Montréal! Vive le Québec!" and then added, to loud applause: "Vive le Québec libre!" ("Long live free Quebec!").
[5] https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/montreal.
[6] CEGEP (Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel) is an educational institution created in 1967 to provide technical and pre-university education.

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