

## CULTURAL MEDIATION: AN ACTION PHILOSOPHY FOR THE CITY OF MONTREAL



© Caroline Loncol Daignault, OBORO

intercultural creativity education  
innovation **cultural** life-long learning  
diversity community access  
citizenship participation

---

### 1. Context

In order to be dynamic and innovative, a 21st Century cultural metropolis like Montreal needs to involve as many creators and citizens as possible in its cultural activities. Among the many difficulties that they face, large sections of the population still feel that they are not involved in the culture and art available in Montreal, despite the use of various dissemination devices and public development. In such a case, how can we democratise culture and create real relationships between artists, artistic creations and citizens? Montreal's response to this question is cultural mediation.

As of 2003, Montreal's Cultural Development Agreement between the city of Montreal and Quebec's Ministry of Culture and Communications has been taking into account the notion of cultural mediation in terms of cultural development. In 2005, Montreal's Cultural Development Policy adopted cultural

mediation as a priority area in order to encourage access to culture for all its citizens. To this end, three financial support programs were developed to encourage initiatives from the cultural sector, professional cultural organisations, Houses of Culture from the city's Cultural Access Network, as well as 19 Montreal districts. The 2007-2017 Plan of action, adopted by the city, the Quebec government, the Canadian government, Montreal Culture and the Metropolitan Montreal Chamber of Commerce, places mediation at the top of the list of guidelines and measures to allow all Montreal citizens to exercise their right to culture.

*Cultural mediation projects involve changing perspectives on a personal, collective and social level, as well as developing culture in different communities. They also contribute to the quality of life and community life.*

## 2. Montreal and Culture

### *Cultural mediation: an action philosophy for the city of Montreal*

Montreal's approach particularly focuses on:

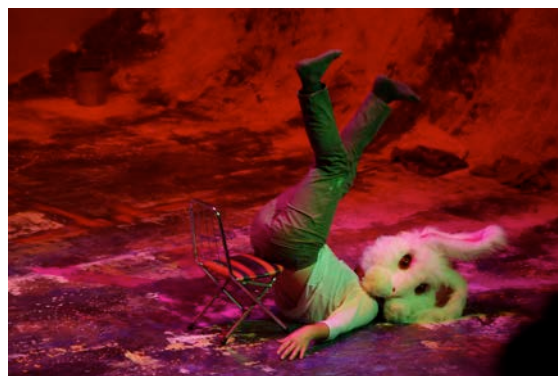
- **close, direct and personal contact** between audiences, artists, participants and forms of cultural expression (discussion meetings, workshops, group creations, guided tours, animations);
- A consideration of **audience diversity, knowledge and skills**, which will help provide support structures adapted to the specificities of different social groups (age, social situation, lifestyle, values system, traditions, socio-economic constraints, geographic remoteness, disabilities);
- Experimentation with innovative forms of cultural participation to renew the mutual forms of cultural transmission and exchange between cultural, artistic and social sectors, as well as developing partnerships.

This approach takes into consideration the aim of diversifying audiences and increasing the use of various cultural facilities, institutions and venues. However, the approach goes beyond increasing audiences by involving the following aspects:

- artistic education,
- social inclusion,
- public education,
- local roots with communities and neighbourhoods,
- territorial development.



© Group Intervention Video (GIV)



©Hélène Langevin, Bouge de là

On a wider scale, cultural mediation projects involve **changing perspectives** on a personal, collective and social level, as well as **developing culture in different communities**. They also contribute to the quality of life and **community life**. As such, cultural mediation can be considered as one of Agenda 21 for Culture's transversal development objectives. The implemented actions favour contact and

encounters between artists, artistic creations and citizens, with the aim of facilitating cultural and inter-cultural exchanges. The diversity of professional artistic approaches and Montreal's ethnic and cultural mix are major assets in terms of creating a dynamic cultural metropolis. Here is an abstract portrait of the city's actions, which have been carried out within the framework of Montreal's Cultural Development Agreement with the Ministry of Culture and Communication, as it aims to nurture cultural vitality in every part of the city.

**Subsidy programs :**

- To support actions from cultural organisations
- For local and neighbourhood development
- For the artists and participants involved

**Cultural mediation projects :**

- They have to be lively, audacious and think outside the box in terms of culture
- They should encourage access to arts and culture
- They should enhance citizen participation in culture

**Monitoring, study and research activities and public events :**

- Imagine, understand, document, share and innovate.



© Théâtre Aux Écuries, La Nef, Circuit-Est choregraphic centre, RIDM/Emily Gan, FIV, Exeko

### 3. Implementation and actions

In order to encourage local cultural development and strengthen citizen participation in Montreal's culture, the city is now supporting neighbourhoods as well as cultural and community organisations to carry out cultural mediation projects all over the city. The projects have been carried out in collaboration with various municipal cultural sectors: the Cultural Access Network, Montreal libraries, the Public Art Bureau, the Leisure Bureau and the Cultural Action and Partnerships Division, which is coordinating the actions previously mentioned in this text.

**PROGRAMS**

Since 2005, hundreds of proposed projects and initiatives have been supported by 3 complementary programs managed by the Cultural Action and Partnerships Division from the city of Montreal's Culture Department, within the framework of the Cultural Development Agreement with Quebec's Ministry of Culture and Communications. These programs have been able to develop thanks to 10 years of fruitful work, which has enriched cultural life for citizens all over the city of Montreal.

The Cultural Mediation program for the districts of Montreal aims to support Montreal's citizens through actions and cultural mediation projects that encourage the creation of special ties with artistic creations, creators and cultural, artistic, literary or patrimonial initiatives. The program promotes encounters and cultural and artistic exchanges in all of Montreal's districts and neighbourhoods, meanwhile supporting

cultural participation at a metropolitan scale. This program also plays a part in strengthening the role of the Cultural Access Network (Houses of Culture and municipal resource centres) in Montreal's cultural development and its demonstration of actions integrated into the city's various cultural sectors to enhance cultural dynamism throughout the city of Montreal.

**Montreal's Cultural Action Program** aims to encourage cultural organisations to engage in cultural mediation among their target audiences. The initiatives that have been supported facilitate cultural appropriation among citizens. These actions create an opportunity for personalised encounters and exchanges that encourage the creation of ties between the Montreal population and artistic creations and creators. They also allow citizens to access Montreal's professional provision of culture.

The **Culture and Community Partnership Program** helps reach out to sensitive populations in order that they become stakeholders within their cultural and social environment. Professional Cultural Organisations are developing their projects in partnership with community expertise. Commitment from both partners and their open approach to the realities of their target populations are the keys to the success of their cultural mediation actions. Through the use of culture, the program aims to contribute to improving the quality of life of its sensitive populations.

*In order to encourage local cultural development and strengthen citizen participation in Montreal's culture, the city is now supporting neighbourhoods as well as cultural and community organisations to carry out cultural mediation projects all over the city.*

## PROJECTS

Cultural mediation projects come in **many forms**: from personalised guided tours to artistic co-creation, they may use discovery workshops, artist residencies within a community or create animated cultural tours. Cultural mediation is centred around opportunities for creation, dissemination and reception and provides a chance to experiment with different participatory practices and open-plan, hybrid formulas; the city of Montreal supports this diversity of practices.

**Who are the participants?** Cultural mediation projects often involve professional artists sought out as key mediators. However, they may also involve animators/mediators, other professionals from the cultural sector (directors, curators, librarians, etc.), teachers or specialised-resources people (technicians, social or psychosocial workers or community organisers).

Cultural mediation is aimed **at all artistic disciplines and social fields**, whether they be related to culture, schools, communities, health, prisons or otherwise. In order to include projects that are remote from the context of arts and culture, it is usually necessary to use tight partnerships with well-established organisations within the sector to form links with the populations.

The city of Montreal supports projects aimed at:

- **young people and schools** to encourage art education, reduce school drop-outs and enrich cultural life within Montreal's schools;
- **livening up districts, neighbourhoods and public spaces** to develop the provision of local culture and to improve the quality of living environments;
- developing **cultural diversity** to support the many forms of expression and to improve inter-cultural exchanges;
- engaging with **community partners** in a 'community art', 'socially engaged art', or anti-social exclusion approach;
- forming bridges with the health sector by promoting artistic encounters in hospitals, nursing homes and mental health organizations;
- experimenting with **mobile technology and digital platforms** to renew the link between culture and urban spaces;
- amongst many others!



© Daphné Cyr, New Cinema Festival

## 4. Impacts

Montreal's work on cultural mediation for several years has brought it in line with the *Agenda 21 for Culture* objectives by forming bridges between creators and populations in compliance with its membership and diversity. The implemented projects promote family (Trois fois passera), intergenerational (Resident artist in the Nursing and Care Homes), inter-community dialogues (Community Life) and recognition and dignity for socially disadvantaged people (The street provides). They showcase the social and cultural diversity of a city, district or neighbourhood, as well as the creativity of its inhabitants. These projects also develop a sensitive approach to the area and greatly contribute towards creating a human-scale living environment.

*The projects showcase the social and cultural diversity of a city, district or neighbourhood, as well as the creativity of its inhabitants. —*

### Study on the Impact of Cultural Mediation

Ever since the implementation of the programs led by Montreal's districts and cultural organisations that support cultural actions, hundreds of projects have been fulfilled by artists, contributors and citizens from all backgrounds throughout the city of Montreal. To get a grasp of the impacts of this type of action, Montreal's Cultural Action and Partnerships team carried out an extensive qualitative study spanning from 2008-2014. This study, which was carried out in close collaboration with researchers and cultural mediation stakeholders, portrays two components of cultural mediation and helps to better understand the issues and challenges that it poses.

In 2008 and 2009, the first phase of research led to the production of a well thought-out list of cultural mediation activities in Montreal, which is available to view on our website. The second phase of research, "The effects of cultural mediation: participation, expression, change", took place between 2009-2014. The objective of this second phase was to analyse the six cultural mediation projects more specifically to understand the real effects of cultural mediation on participants, cultural organisations and partners, as well as the impacts on artists and mediators. This was a partnership study between the Université du Québec à Montréal and Montreal city (Cultural Action and Partner Division), supported within the framework of Montreal's Cultural Development Agreement.

The projects that were analysed involved several partners from civil society, cultural and community stakeholders, institutions, artists and, of course, hundreds of participants from all over the city. You can find them on the study's detailed website:

- **Artistic labyrinth** (a multidisciplinary creation project from the cultural organisation 'Péristyle Nomade' in the South-Central neighbourhood;

- **Fragmented workshops** (a writing and multimedia creativity project carried out by Oboro, a centre for visual and media artists for the elderly, youths and children);
- **On se raconte** (a project from the Saint-Laurent district based on story tales for new arrivals who are going through the Frenchification process);
- **Workshop** (a project that combines dance and visual arts in schools with the young public dance company 'Bouge de Là');
- **Les P'tits Loups** (a day camp, provided by the New Cinema Festival for young people in difficulty, in conjunction with the Dr Julien Foundation, that provides an introduction to cinema and multimedia creations);
- The 'ready-mades' (a project that allows young people and new arrivals to discover visual arts in the Côte-des-Neiges House of Culture).



© Anne-Marie Beaulieu, House of Culture  
Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal City



© Penelope Robitaille, Péristyle nomade

This study underlines the fact that cultural mediation represents a new area of freedom for participants: it stimulates creativity and provides an escape from daily life. Sometimes, a project that has been less successful in terms of artistic fulfilments can still be very rich and satisfying on a relational or community level. There are, therefore, intrinsic advantages to cultural mediation which may not actually be anticipated, but are immediately rewarding for participants: aesthetically pleasing, playful and cognitive qualities of the activities, sociality and openness to new cultural horizons.

Some activities give a sense of personal history to participants, whether they be new immigrants or long-standing citizens of Montreal. Participants are able to discover artistic initiatives through special ties with creators. They encounter different cultures during inter-cultural dialogues and strengthen their sense of belonging to their living environment. The effects these projects have on the citizens demonstrate the way that cultural mediation issues affect many aspects of life in society.

## 5. Relative Information

Montreal's cultural mediation website: <http://montreal.mediationculturelle.org/>

Montreal's Cultural Mediation Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Montr%C3%A9al-M%C3%A9diation-culturelle/166907326672943>

'L'artiste, l'oeuvre, le citoyen' documentary on cultural mediation in Montreal:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kun-Ci8MQzc>

Montreal libraries: <http://bibliomontreal.com/>

Cultural Access Network: <http://www.accessculture.com/>

This information sheet has been put together by Danièle RACINE, Cultural Mediation Commissioner/Montreal's Culture Department, Cultural Action and Partnerships Division.

Contact: danieleracine (at) ville.montreal.qc.ca