



SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH AT CReSP

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How do Neighbourhood Tables in Montreal take action to transform living environments?

A LOOK AT LOCAL INTERSECTORAL ACTION



In Montréal, 32 neighbourhood tables that are mandated by the *Initiative montréalaise de soutien au développement social local* are working to improve living conditions for Montrealers by piloting cross-sector initiatives with a wide range of stakeholders. The creation of a neighbourhood market and the transformation of a railway corridor into a bicycle path are examples of achievements supported by these neighbourhood tables. But what processes do these Tables use to transform neighbourhoods? Conducted from 2011 to 2016 with the partners of the *Initiative montréalaise* and three neighbourhood tables, an initial study produced an inventory of 12 transitional outcomes (see p.3) linking the processes and effects of local intersectoral action.

This fact sheet presents the results of a second study (2017–2021) aimed at validating this inventory. The study of eight projects conducted by two other neighbourhood tables enabled us to validate and deepen the ties between the processes of concerted action and the concrete transformations produced by them in the living environments.

A publication of:



SUMMARY

Intersectoral action is achieved through 12 transitional outcomes (see p.3) that intersectoral networks link together to generate—or not—concrete transformations in living environments. The study added details to this inventory and incorporated four transitional outcomes to mark setbacks encountered during the course of the action.

Two modes of action can be distinguished in local intersectoral action: *DO* and *MAKE IT HAPPEN*, according to the goals defined and the levers available to the networks to achieve them.

Mastering the art of advocacy and influence is at the heart of the action of cross-sectoral networks on living conditions.

An online tool is available to support cross-sector action planning and to assess impact using the inventory of 12 transitional outcomes chairecacis-outilinteractif.org/en

Finding solutions to complex problems in living environments

The relationship between poverty and health and well-being has been well established. In addition, it is known that increasing local access to resources such as housing, mobility, public services, and community networks is essential to reducing social inequalities. In addressing such complex challenges, the World Health Organization recommends intersectoral action, which brings together actors with the capacity to improve access to these resources.

That notwithstanding, local intersectoral action remains a difficult strategy to implement, given the multiplicity of actors (public, associative, private), fields of action (food, mobility, urban planning, etc.), interests at stake, and the specific nature of each territory. To date, few studies have been able to link these collective processes to their effects in living environments.

Validating and expanding the inventory of the transitional outcomes of local intersectoral action

The inventory of the 12 transitional outcomes (see figure 1) is based on the actor–network theory, which focuses on the way in which actions carried out by networks of actors are constructed and operate. According to this theory, finding new solutions to situations considered problematic involves continuously conciliating, arbitrating, and mediating that:

- makes the actors converge towards a common definition of the problems and avenues for action;
- facilitates the negotiation of shared interests;
- supports their engagement in new roles; and
- allows the achievement of common projects.

The work of the neighbourhood tables consists in carrying out these mediations leading to the consolidation or expansion of networks and the production of change, ultimately. Remember that intersectoral action operates through 12 transitional outcomes that the networks link in different ways, depending on the context, to lead or not lead to transformations in the living environment.

These transitional outcomes are produced through various actions undertaken by the intersectoral networks, such as holding consultations with citizens, engaging elected officials in the results, or hiring a dedicated resource for a specific project. Over time, the chain of several transitional outcomes traces the path of action towards effective transformations in the environments.

AVENUES FOR ACTION

These 12 transitional outcomes allow for **relating the course of a project** carried out by an intersectoral network through the unique sequence of its outstanding actions, taking into account the context, network composition, and the objectives pursued. The short version of the creation of a local aid resource in promoting healthy housing (Figure 2) illustrates these chains of transitional outcomes, including the significance of setback transitional outcomes on the outcome of such a project.

The ability of actors to recognize these setbacks when they occur can only improve the management of cross-sectoral projects. Indeed, actions to prevent them can be taken, as much as possible, from the start. Similarly, a better understanding of the external factors resulting in these setbacks can lead to a fresh start, or even avoid repetition in other projects.

These 12 transitional outcomes are grouped under three functions of networks in conducting local intersectoral action (see Figure 1).

■ NETWORK SETUP AND GOVERNANCE

Three transitional outcomes cover the establishment and governance of networks so that actors can work together. In order to develop a shared vision of community needs and propose adapted solutions, the network must overcome diverging points of view that could polarize it.

■ SELF-REPRESENTING AND INFLUENCING OTHERS

Five transitional outcomes aim at establishing the legitimacy and credibility of the networks and to solicit the support of key actors for their objectives. To convey their ideas, the networks produce “intermediaries.” These are strategic mobilization tools (plans, reports, briefs) that the networks send to targeted interlocutors such as elected officials, for example. They also promote themselves and their projects and solicit support and resources.

■ ALIGNING NECESSARY ACTORS AND RESOURCES

Four transitional outcomes concern the involvement of actors outside the networks, which is crucial to the achievement of goals and whose failure (setback transitional outcomes) weakens or even compromises the projects. For the networks, it is a question of rallying key players in order to strengthen their networks, obtain funding, and solicit the commitment of actors who hold the levers of decision and action essential to making the projects a reality.

In the cases studied, the setbacks were related to the withdrawal of strategic actors, which weakened the networks and made it more difficult for them to move forward with their projects. In addition, negative responses to funding requests—and the ensuing loss or lack of competent human and material resources—slow down projects. Lastly, setbacks relate to the disengagement or refusal to commit on the part of decision-makers, both public and private, whose agreement is essential to the projects being carried out.

THESE SETBACK TRANSITIONAL OUTCOMES ARE FEW IN NUMBER, BUT THEY WEIGH HEAVILY ON THE OUTCOME OF PROJECTS.



FIGURE 1 Inventory of transitional outcomes (TO) of local intersectoral action according to network function

In generating chains of critical events, local intersectoral networks transform living environments. These events correspond to 12 generic TRANSITIONAL OUTCOMES which interlink in unique change processes. TRANSITIONAL OUTCOMES fall into three functions of networks in producing change.

NETWORK SETUP AND GOVERNANCE

Internal to the networks

TO 1 Network Construction

Continuous linking of heterogeneous social actors and nonhuman entities (knowledge, reports, policies, technologies, funding), and putting them into motion in collective projects.

TO 2 Adoption of Network Governance Structures and Rules

Adoption of methods for collective functioning within a network to regulate participation, decision-making and coordination of activities.

TO 3 Handling of Controversies

Identification and elaboration of solutions when facing controversies that prevent actors from cooperating and action from progressing.

SELF-REPRESENTING AND INFLUENCING OTHERS

Openness, seeking support and external recognition

TO 4 Production of Intermediaries

Expression of convergent ideas and positions into a network (priorities, projects, solutions) in material forms (plans, reports, briefs).

TO 5 Placement of Intermediaries

Introduction of intermediaries into other networks, to decision-makers, to media, or into other intermediaries (e.g., briefs).

TO 6 Activation of Intermediaries

Promotion and use of intermediaries by actors and networks of interest.

TO 7 Representation by Spokespersons

Action/statements (meeting, letter, manifestation) to communicate positions, generate interest, or influence the position and commitment of other strategic actors or networks.

TO 8 Strengthening of Spokespersons and Intermediaries

Reinforcement of the legitimacy and credibility of spokespersons and the intermediaries they carry, making them better recognized by the populations and groups on whose behalf they speak and taken into greater consideration by strategic actors.

ALIGNING NECESSARY ACTORS AND RESOURCES

Non-/Disengagement of actors and resources needed to achieve the networks goal

TO 9 Alignment of Interests-Movements of Actors

Convergence of positions, commitment of actors to new roles, transformations in power relations that promote the continuation of collective action and its coordination.

TO 9 Misalignment of Interests

Emergence of divergent interests, change in the position of strategic actors who have interests that are contrary to a project's progress and that hinder the implementation of actions.

TO 10 Resource Acquisition

Access to the resources (funding, manpower, expertise, technical support) needed to operate the network and achieve its goals.

TO 10 Loss or Failure to Obtain Resources

Loss of financial, human or material resources or failure to obtain these resources.

TO 11 Expansion and Strengthening of Networks and their Projects

Maintaining mobilization, recruiting new actors, adding of nonhuman entities, strengthening relationships and skills within a network or between networks. Strengthening or expansion of the projects carried by these networks.

TO 11 Weakening and Reduction of Networks and Their Projects

Withdrawal of strategic actors, loss of resources, dissidence of a critical mass of actors that weaken networks and their project so that they struggle to make action progress.

TO 12 Commitment of Decision-Makers in Achieving Change

Commitment of actors holding the decision and action levers essential to the realization of the projects (e.g., licensing, land ownership).

TO 12 Non-engagement/Disengagement of Decision-Makers that Hinders Achieving Change

Non-engagement or disengagement of actors holding the decision and action levers essential to the realization of the projects.

Chains of Significant Events: The course of a Healthy Housing Project

To illustrate, in concrete terms, what a chain of significant events looks like, Figure 2 presents a recounting of an intervention to improve the housing health in the Saint-Michel neighbourhood, which was conducted as a project of the Concertation Habitation of Vivre Saint-Michel en santé.

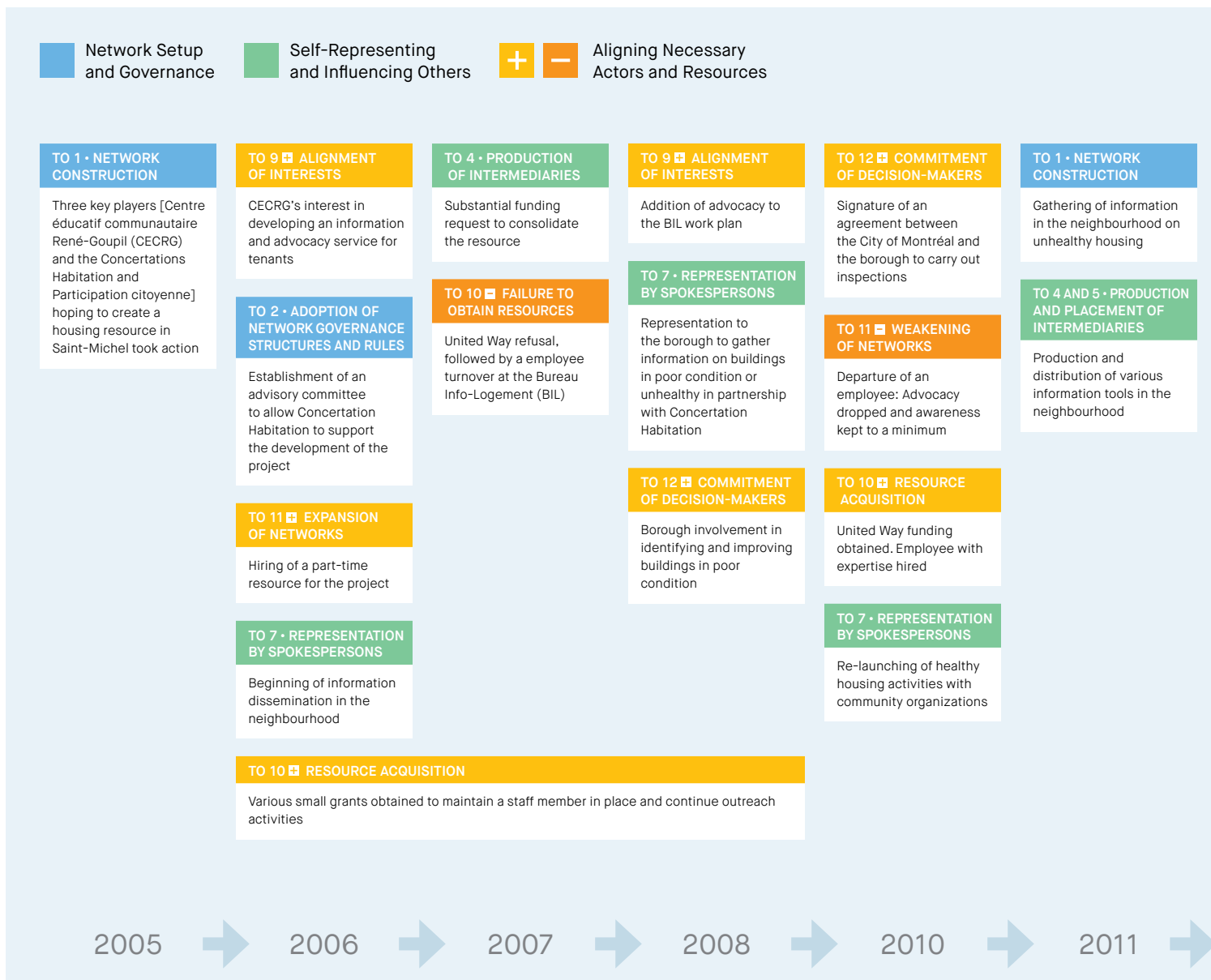
From 2005 to 2017, Concertation activities generated 126 transitional outcomes (TOs). Representation by Spokespersons dominated the process of action (17% of TOs), followed by Resource Capturing (11%), and Production and Placement of Intermediaries (11% and 10%). These 126 transitional outcomes represent the key events in

the chain of action, that is, those recurrently mentioned in the data sources as having generated consequences in the course of action.

In this sequence, 34 transitional outcomes (see Figure 2) were identified as the most critical to the project's progress.

There is a long phase of local structuring, substantial discussion to identify the issues of healthy housing in the neighbourhood, and several funding loops. The project network was strengthened by the addition of dedicated resources and by the expansion of the number of community organizations willing to commit to the

FIGURE 2 Most notable transitional outcomes. Promoting healthy housing

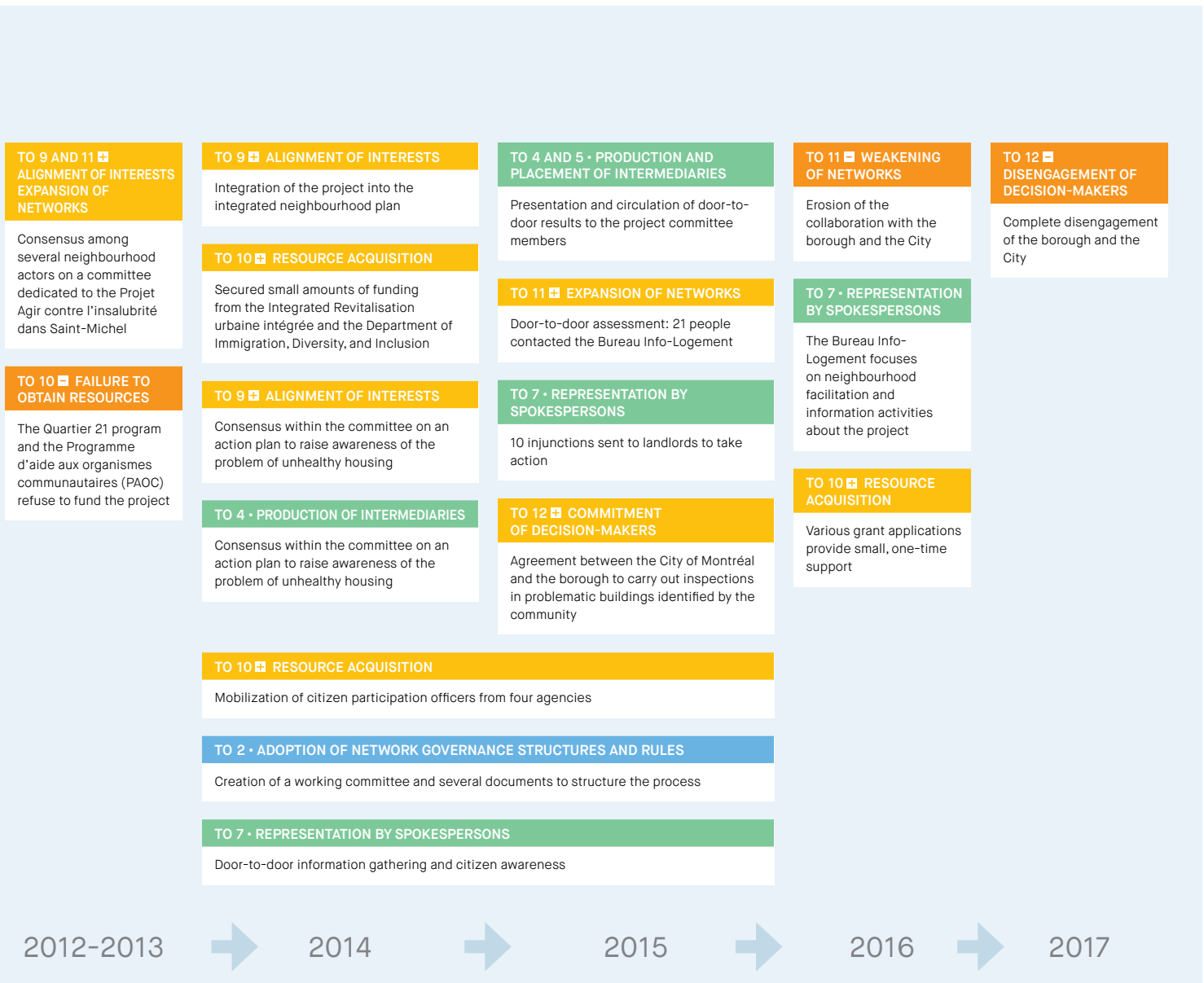


project. Data from tenants of targeted unhealthy buildings collected from community organizations was instrumental in engaging the municipal inspection department in the project.

Nearly three-quarters of residents who received a municipal inspection visit reported that their unsanitary conditions had been resolved. The network was weakened by the departure of the project manager and the end of the collaboration with the municipal inspection services, resulting in project termination. Since 2017, the Bureau Info Logement has continued its outreach

activities and addressing unhealthy housing remains a priority in the Concertation Habitation's action plan.

This project is part of a long history, since it took 10 years of sustained effort to achieve collaboration between the borough and the city according to the priorities identified by the community. As is often the case, securing financial resources—including the contribution of citizen participation agents from existing organizations—was crucial to the project's progress.



Do and Make it happen

The analysis of the eight cases revealed two main types of projects according to the levers of action available to the intersectoral networks to achieve their objectives.

In the projects of *DO* type, the networks held the main levers of decision and action to lead the projects by themselves. For example, in the case of *Urban Agriculture*, the initial network was mobilized around a vegetable garden project with educational objectives. It has meshed with various partners in the neighbourhood to create a local food system (supply, redistribution and processing) and to stimulate employability. The growing network therefore controlled the decisions and levers of action to expand beyond the walls of the school.

In *MAKE IT HAPPEN* projects, the networks held certain levers such as the mobilization of their community and citizen bases, but they also had to convince decision-makers to carry out their projects. They therefore sought to engage public (e.g., the municipal authority) or private (e.g., a landowner) actors who had the decision-making power and leverage to make their projects happen: allocation of resources, by-law amendments, etc. For example, in the case of *Food shops served by public transport*, the network had the means to identify the needs of citizens, to mobilize local organizations, and to make certain representations. The network, however, needed the commitment of the public transit system to consult with the community on the route and to implement the new bus line.

AVENUES FOR ACTION

How do we balance these two types of projects in the action plan of a cross-sectoral action network? Is it possible to **orient the action strategy** according to the type of project to be carried out and the levers available?

Even if all the projects are complex, a "young" concertation might want to start with a *DO*-type project to build a network and gain credibility. In any event, *DO* projects can be relied on to strive for results in the shorter term. Projects of the *MAKE IT HAPPEN* type are of longer duration and call for advanced forms of collaboration, particularly between levels of public action. They deal with the unexpected in the sociopolitical context and tend to progress, especially under more favorable circumstances.

THE *DO* TYPE

- Urban agriculture in a high school
- Collective food purchasing

MAKE IT HAPPEN TYPE

- Social pricing of public transport
- Food shops served by public transport
- Conversion of a church into a cohousing project (mixed-use neighbourhood or cohousing)
- Development of social and community housing
- Rehabilitation of an urban industrial site
- Healthy housing

The Art of Representation and Influence

The centrality of the *Self-Representing and Influencing Others* function is clear from the study of the eight cases, since 53% of the transitional outcomes identified belong to this function. This is particularly true for the *MAKE IT HAPPEN* projects (up to 70%).

Influence was exerted in two ways. Intermediaries were produced and placed with targeted interlocutors who could reuse them, and advocacy activities were carried out by spokespeople.

The intermediaries acted as an "intermediary" between the network and the actors to whom they address themselves. They materialized convergent ideas and projects within the networks through documents (plans, balance sheets, project statements, estimates, etc.) and communication tools (newsletters, Facebook pages, websites, blogs, etc.).

Within the networks, the intermediaries served to build arguments, construct ideas, and concretize consensus for a certain duration. Externally, they were used to circulate knowledge, projects, and positions expressed by citizens during needs studies, for example.

Almost all of the intermediaries produced were placed by the networks with the key players they wished to influence or partner with. A third of them contributed to soliciting resources. The other two-thirds were used:

- to inform, mobilize, or influence the organizations or residents concerned, in particular to equip them in their action;

- to support social movements aimed at putting demands on the political agenda; and
- to lobby decision-makers and during elections and public consultations.

Once placed, at least one-third of the intermediaries were used by their recipients. This indicates that the circulation of intermediaries clearly reinforced the action of the local intersectoral networks.

As for the representations, they were events conducted by the networks' spokespersons with targeted key actors in order to interest them and to solicit their commitment to a position or a project. These representations targeted:

- To municipal and government authorities and elected officials at public consultations or citizen events (43%). Through solicited or invited meetings, advocates sought to support or remove barriers to projects (e.g., zoning changes.). Municipal services may also be required in sensitive cases (e.g., inspections of unhealthy housing).
- To community and citizen bases in neighbourhoods (38%). They might have wanted to promote a service, recruit users, or mobilize the population to support their representations to municipal authorities.
- To public or private actors who held important or definitive decision-making levers in conducting the projects, such as educational, academic or health-care institutions; consulting firms; donors; and the like.

These intermediaries and representations were based on organized and coherent knowledge about problematic situations and solutions. By communicating them in the public space, the networks put their citizen and community base in dialogue with the authorities. This consolidated their links with citizens and gave them the status of a credible spokespersons with the authorities.

This major role of intermediaries and representations in the action of intersectoral networks demonstrates considerable expertise, as messages, recipients and events were constantly changing: the networks had to adjust to the opportunities and target audiences. This further highlights the highly innovative nature of intersectoral action on living conditions.



A tool tailored for local intersectoral action networks

For the partners in this study, these results have the potential to help steer intersectoral action, demonstrate its impact, and make it more visible to funders. That is why, in collaboration with Communagir and the Neighbourhood Round Tables Coalition, the *Tool for Assessing the Effects of Local Intersectoral Action* was created. You can find this free interactive tool online:

chairecacis-outilinteractif.org/en

Consisting of three modules, this tool allows partners in a local intersectoral action to assess the effects of their action in their community. The approach, supported by a facilitation guide, involves:

- constructing a project narrative and identifying the chain of events that led to observable effects in the environment;
- interpreting these events in light of the 12 transitional outcomes, and then diagramming the transitional outcomes chain; and
- drawing on the lessons learned to reinvest them in action.

In short, this customized tool is the result of a long collaboration between practice settings and a research team. In the opinion of all, it offers the networks the possibility of demonstrating and promoting the complexity and richness of intersectoral action in a territory.

AVENUES FOR ACTION

How do we move forward? Which intermediaries are most useful? Which representations are the most strategic?

In all the Neighbourhood Table projects, and especially in the projects of the *MAKE IT HAPPEN* type, action could not move forward without a good deal of intermediaries produced and placed and representations to key stakeholders. A winning transitional outcomes chain is above all adapted to the actors, context, and type of project envisaged.

In this sense, the actors of the intersectoral action tables who wished to transform their living environments had to master, above all, this art of representation and influence.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

OBJECTIVES

- Validate and enrich the inventory of 12 transitional outcomes (from the first research conducted from 2011 to 2016) mapping the production of effects of local intersectoral action to transform living environments.
- Identify regularities in chains of transitional outcomes, regardless of whether they achieved their goals or not.
- Equip practitioners to lead intersectoral action with greater confidence.

METHOD

- **Eight longitudinal and retrospective case studies** highlighting milestones in the processes of action toward goals. These cases are from two neighbourhood tables in Montréal.
- **Documentary analysis** of each case, followed by individual interviews with key players. Each milestone was interpreted according to the inventory of the 12 transitional outcomes.
- **Validation of the results** by group interviews with the concerned actors.
- **Cross-sectional analysis of the eight cases** in order to draw general conclusions.

Ethics certificate of the health research ethics committee of the Université de Montréal (17-130 - CERES-D).

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For more information

- On the process–effect links of local intersectoral action
- On the results of the previous study
- On the eight projects under consideration
- On the Initiative montréalaise de soutien au développement social local
- On the Neighbourhood Round Tables Coalition

Please refer to our resources page.



RESEARCH TEAM

Angèle Bilodeau, full research professor, School of Public Health, University of Montréal

Louise Potvin, full professor, School of Public Health, Université de Montréal; Scientific Director of the Centre for Public Health Research (CRéSP); Holder of the Canada Research Chair in Community Approaches and Health Inequalities (CACIS)

Denis Bourque, professor, Department of Social Work, Université du Québec en Outaouais

Catherine Chabot, research professional and CACIS coordinator, CRéSP

Nadine Martin, research professional, CRéSP

Mélissa Di Sante, postdoctoral fellow, CRéSP

LOCAL PARTNERS

Karine Triollet, Action-Gardien, Corporation de développement de Pointe-Saint-Charles

Vanessa Sykes Tremblay, Vivre Saint-Michel en santé

PARTNERS WITH THE INITIATIVE MONTRÉLAISE



Yves Bellavance
Neighbourhood Round
Tables Coalition



Denis Sauvé
Lina Demnati
Centraide of Greater Montréal

Centre intégré
universitaire de santé
et de services sociaux
du Centre-Sud-
de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Québec

Véronique Duclos
Direction régionale de santé
publique de Montréal

Montréal

Stéphanie Mauro
City of Montréal

SCIENTIFIC DIRECTORS: Angèle Bilodeau, Louise Potvin

COPY AND PRODUCTION COORDINATION : Ginette Boyer

LINGUISTIC REVIEW: Josée Tessier, Centre for Public Health Research (CRéSP)

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In loving memory of our colleague and friend Ginette Boyer (1954-2023), a leading woman and woman of heart. Socially committed throughout her life, this publication will have been her final contribution to community action.