

# The implementation of policies for welcoming migrants in Montreal neighbourhoods: the study of the *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative

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By

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## Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon with multiple causes and effects felt in the social and associational fabric of cities. The *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative (VNQ), led by the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI) and Centraide (United Way) of Greater Montreal, aims to contribute to the creation of inclusive and welcoming neighbourhoods for refugees and immigrants by pooling best practices for inclusion. The initiative supports those working in a context of ethnocultural diversity through training and the development of communities of practice. It brings together a group of community, university, and government experts. This group monitors the challenges and conditions of integration in Montreal and plays an advisory role by sharing promising practices in these different sectors.

The data presented in this article emerges from an action research project entitled: “Documenter l’initiative *Vivons nos quartiers*: vers des quartiers inclusifs et accueillants pour les personnes réfugiées et immigrantes<sup>1</sup>”. The objective of the research is to document the deployment of *Vivons nos quartiers* by mobilizing the concept of resilience for the analysis of the strategies adopted by individuals, communities, and public and community institutions to adapt to issues related to immigration. Using the concept of “social resilience” in the meaning given by Hall and Lamont (2013), the authors move away from the study of the characteristics of individuals facilitating resilience to various types of trauma and emphasize rather the analysis of the social and cultural frameworks which underlie this resilience. This dynamic approach to resilience implies changes at the level of the individual, community, and institutions and not simply a return to the initial pre-crisis state (Hall and Lamont, 2013).

This research documents the implementation of policies promoting the welcoming and inclusion of refugees and immigrants, and more specifically policies for creating “welcoming communities” at the level of the neighbourhoods of a metropolis such as Montreal.

The term “welcoming communities” first appeared in Canada in the 1990s in studies on the management of diversity (Belkhdja, 2009; Essex et al., 2012; FCM, 2016). The concept returned to the forefront in federal and provincial politics, first in 2010-2012 in the federal initiative for the development of welcoming communities (Citizenship and Immigration Canada-CIC, 2010) and then in the objectives of the Quebec policy “Ensemble, nous sommes le Québec” in 2015 (Quebec, 2015a). This concept is based on the idea that the integration of newcomers is a dynamic process characterized by a responsibility which is said to be shared between immigrants and the host society (Biles et al., 2008). The application of this concept is evaluated based on indicators identified by Essex et al. (2010). In this article our analysis mobilizes indicators relating to the presence of organizations serving newcomers in the geographical area and to collaboration between the main actors in the immigration sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Project funded through the partnership “Building Migrant Resilience in Cities: Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain” (BMRC-IRMU, SSHRC 2016-2021).

This article describes the initiative *Vivons nos quartiers*, an example of the implementation of policies for immigrant integration through the creation of “welcoming communities” in the neighbourhoods of Montreal. This project highlights the community and citizen dimensions of public action. Through an analysis of interactions observed during training, meetings and collaboration of front-line actors in the neighbourhoods, the authors explore the effects of the perceived “migration crisis” in Quebec between 2016 and 2018 on the implementation of migrant welcoming policies and on the realities of the actors in the neighbourhoods faced with the necessity of welcoming the newcomers on a daily basis. In this context, what are the means used which promote the creation of “welcoming communities”? What place is occupied by *Vivons nos quartiers* in the efforts for the resilience of welcoming environments and newcomers?

After putting the Quebec “crisis” in context, the authors develop the theoretical framework of resilience and the framework of migration policies for newcomer welcoming and integration in terms of “welcoming communities”. The methodological approach is then explained to situate the discussion of the data. The authors demonstrate how the “migration crisis” perceived in Quebec provoked a reaction of fear and mistrust among stakeholders. This reaction is compared with the mobilizing discourse of the trainers of *Vivons nos quartiers* and of the consultative bodies which support it. The article concludes with a comparison of the resilience efforts of the welcoming environments and the indicators of “welcoming communities”.

## The Context

The *Vivons nos quartiers* project began in 2016, a time when forced displacements around the world were reaching new highs (UNHCR, 2019): displacements related to the civil war in Syria, the worsening of the conflict in Libya and the persecution of populations in several regions of the world, for example. This context also affected Quebec and Canada, whose systems for reception and settlement were tested by the arrival of large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

Although far from the realities of countries such as Turkey, Pakistan or Lebanon, which received respectively 2.8 million, 1.6 million and 1.1 million refugees (UNHCR, 2019), and also far from the realities of the countries of the European Union, Quebec and Canada were nonetheless confronted with new realities. Between 2015 and 2016, 7,583 Syrian refugees were received in Quebec<sup>2</sup>. Another 4,000 arrived in 2017. In November, a hostile climate towards asylum seekers accompanied the election of Donald Trump. Thousands of refugees, fearing that they would not be treated fairly in the United States, crossed the border into Canada. To circumvent the Safe Third Country Agreement, which stipulates that the refugee claim has to be made in the first country in which they set foot, thousands of refugees crossed the Canada-US border irregularly, mainly in Quebec and Manitoba. Roxham Road became an internationally famous crossing point and July and August 2017 saw a record number of daily arrivals. In 2017, almost 50,000 applications for asylum were made in Canada, including around 25,000 in Quebec, a

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fr/divers/Statistiques\\_Refugies\\_Syriens.pdf](https://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fr/divers/Statistiques_Refugies_Syriens.pdf). Page accessed December 7, 2018.

significant increase for the province<sup>3</sup>. By way of comparison, less than 24,000 refugee claims were made in Canada in the previous year, including 5,525 in Quebec<sup>4</sup>. At the peak of arrivals, temporary shelters were put up at the border, the receiving organizations were forced to work beyond their capacity and the processing time for applications at the Immigration and Refugee Board, normally set at 60 days, exceeded 18 months.

The political discourse and media coverage contributed to the perception of the extent of the “crisis” in Quebec. In November 2015, Justin Trudeau, recently elected prime minister of Canada, announced the arrival of 25,000 Syrian refugees (government-assisted or privately sponsored<sup>5</sup>) to be resettled by the end of the year. Right in the middle of the “Syrian crisis”, in January 2017, he sent out a tweet presenting Canada as welcoming refugee claimants crossing irregularly at the Canada-US border: *“To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada<sup>6</sup>”*. It was then the turn of the mayor of Montreal, Denis Coderre, to raise the stakes even higher: *“Montreal proud ‘Sanctuary city’ Newcomers & refugees are welcome. Diversity is our strength and part of our DNA<sup>7</sup>”*. The media coverage of the summer of 2017 presents, on the contrary, a “hostile public discourse” (Vertovec, 2017) on immigration: “Hundreds of illegal migrants come in through Quebec<sup>8</sup>”, “‘Unprecedented’ numbers. More than 8,000 migrants intercepted in Quebec since June<sup>9</sup>”, “New massive wave of migrants into Quebec<sup>10</sup>”.

In Montreal, this “wave of migration” is essentially characterized by the arrival of new categories of migrants, with various profiles and national origins, notably many families, single women with children and a higher number of people with mental health issues. The status of “asylum seeker” gives few rights to services while the application is being processed by the authorities. Pending approval, these people are lodged temporarily, until they receive their first financial assistance cheque of last resort and must then find more durable lodging. The Regional Program for the Settlement and Integration of Asylum Seekers (PRAIDA) offers support for administrative and psychosocial procedures. In 2017 and 2018, the personnel of this service increased by 50% to handle the greater demand. Support was restricted to the minimum (summary psychosocial and medical assessment). The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) covers basic health care costs. It remained limited: since it was outside the general coverage network, few clinics and practitioners were registered in it. As for support from community organizations, only the search for housing was subsidized (and only by 14 organizations). Moreover, over the past years, between budget cuts and heavy mobilizations for the arrival of Syrian refugees, human resources have been exhausted and the social community services sector has become disorganized. Also, the newcomers settle in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/fr/immigration-refugies-citoyennete/services/refugies/demandes-asile/demande-asile.html>. Page accessed July 30, 2018.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00001-fra.htm>. Page accessed July 30, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Published January 28, 2017, on the Twitter account [@JustinTrudeau](#) (page accessed July 30, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Published January 31, 2017, on the Twitter account [@DenisCoderre](#) (page accessed July 30, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> *Journal de Montréal*, August 2, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Soleil Quebec*, August 18, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> *24 Heures Montréal*, April 4, 2018.

neighbourhoods which received few migrants in the past and ask for services from all sectors-family, employment, women's centres, etc.- which find themselves on the front lines. Facing the newcomers and without the funds to provide the needed services, workers are daily up against the "crisis" and express the need to maximize the few resources at their disposal. Public discourse, however, amplifies the perception of "crisis" and polarized reactions: the one provokes fear, the other stimulates solidarity.

### **Social resilience and host institutions at the city level**

Over the last decade, the concept of "resilience" has been widely used, both by academics and in public discourse. But until now it has rarely been discussed in relation to migration (Akbar and Preston, 2019; Goudet, 2019). The articles linking migration and resilience are especially in psychology or social work and focus analysis on the resilience of the individual, in a context of vulnerability. The system is taken into account to consider its actors-for example community organizations (Kanouté et al., 2014)- as potential "resilience tutors" (Vatz Laaroussi, 2009).

Social resilience is defined by Hall and Lamont as: *"the capacity of groups of people bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community or nation to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it"* (2013:2). Resilience is here understood in a three-stage formula: first, the presence and evaluation of a stress, a disturbance; followed by a process of adaptation and then of change over time. This transformation allows the system to progress towards a situation which differs from its initial situation. In other words, a system that is termed resilient will take advantage of a situation of stress to initiate a change which will be beneficial to it.

This concept has come under some criticism. At the ethical level, resilience, in the sense of adaptation, implies a transition from "fighting against" to "living with" (Quenault, 2017) social inequalities, for example. According to several writers, this concept grows out of neoliberalism (Felli, 2014; Illouz, 2016) in that it promotes "positive thinking", which redefines catastrophe as "creative destruction" (Paddeu, 2012). The increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers is identified as a "stress" on the ecosystem for welcoming newcomers to Montreal between 2016 and 2018. The mobilization of the concept of "social resilience" allows us to analyze its impact. But to avoid analytic traps, we associate it with its first French translation, "resistance" (Tisseron, 2017) so as to avoid resignation. We also pay special critical attention to the idea of a migratory "crisis". In fact, we focus less on studying the "crisis" itself and look rather at the effects that this crisis, whether simply perceived as such, or real, has on front-line actors in the reception of newcomers.

Finally, starting from the idea of Vatz Laaroussi (2009) that territory is a site of the actualization of the resilience of persons, thanks to the resources it provides and the constraints it imposes, we bring our analysis to bear on the resilience of the territories themselves, in this case the neighbourhoods, by the observation of the institutions and community organizations of which they are constituted. We put forward the hypothesis that the mobilization of actors and organizations to make their environment

welcoming for the newcomers-territory resilience-ultimately contributes to the resilience of the newcomers<sup>11</sup>

## Policies for the welcoming and integration of newcomers

The notion of “welcoming communities” emerged from diversity management policies in Canada in the 1990s. Taken up by government, consultants, and researchers and actors in the domain of immigration (Belkhdja, 2009; Essex et al., 2010), it attracted new interest from 2010 on. Citizenship and Immigration Canada made it into an effort of modernization with the aim of evaluating the relation between the services offered to immigrants and their impact on society as a whole<sup>12</sup>. The concept was also included in the 2015 policy of the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion (MIDI) as an objective in these terms: “the building of more inclusive communities in partnership with municipalities and actors in the living environment” (Quebec, 2015a: 42). The “actors in the living environment” are, according to the Strategic Plan 2016-2021, “community organizations which for many years have shown dynamism and leadership to create inclusive environments” and “philanthropic organizations with their expertise and networks of partnerships” (Quebec, 2015b: 47). *Vivons nos quartiers* is precisely based on a partnership between a community organization and a network for philanthropic redistribution and aims to better equip front-line community actors.

We note two notions underlying the concept of “welcoming communities”. First, the idea of *place*. The spatial dimension of the concept refers to a physical space in which people, in this case immigrants, feel valued and involved. Then, the idea of *collective effort* refers to the responsibility of the welcoming environment (Biles et al., 2008) to facilitate contacts and exchanges between people to create and maintain this welcoming place (Essex et al., 2020; Belkhdja, 2009). At the crossroads of *place* and *collective effort* is found inclusive local action, which aims to concretize welcoming communities by involving all members, immigrants, governments, public institutions, organizations, etc. Essex et al. (2010) propose a procedure for the evaluation and measurement of inclusion in communities based on a set of 17 characteristics. The *Vivons nos quartiers* initiative implicitly aims to act on the following of these characteristics: 1) a positive attitude towards cultural diversity and the presence of newcomers; 2) the presence of immigrant-serving organizations able to effectively respond to their needs; 3) ties between the actors working in favour of welcoming communities; and, finally, 4) the promotion of social capital<sup>13</sup>. In our research, we analyze the effects produced by *Vivons nos quartiers* on these characteristics as forms of resilience in the context of the “migration crisis” and “hostile public discourse” experienced by Quebec (Vertovec, 2017).

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Veronis and Huot (2017) on the role of community spaces in the integration of immigrants. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/francais/ressources/recherche/documents/pdf/r12-2015-integration-experience-fra.pdf>. Page accessed July 29, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See also Local Immigration Partnerships (LIP) and Réseaux en immigration francophone (RIF) in the rest of Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Here, *social capital* means the links inside social networks and between them and emphasizes the usefulness of social relations and contacts (Essex et al., 2010: 26)

## **The *Vivons nos quartiers* training**

*Vivons nos quartiers*, supported by the TCRI and Centraide, arose from a private donation at the time of the arrival of Syrian refugees in Quebec. Among the various components of the initiative, training has occupied the largest place until now because of its popularity among the participants. These one-day sessions involve three formulas. “Immigration 101” provides basic knowledge on the different immigration statuses and associated rights and services. “Itinerary of an asylum seeker” (ItDA) outlines more specifically the sociolegal framework of the path taken by these people in Quebec. “Intercultural approach” focuses on the different facets of intervention in an intercultural context. The content of these is produced in collaboration with outside consultants who are very close to realities on the ground through their profession (lawyers, social workers, cultural mediators), their engagement and their activism. The training sessions deal with theoretical aspects and propose simulations and group discussions. There is a convivial atmosphere, with the sharing of a meal and the great availability of trainers.

A training session is organized in a neighbourhood on the initiative of a “pivot” organization which has the task of bringing together the actors – community and institutional intervenors – of the neighbourhood. Participation is free. In all, 17 neighbourhoods of Greater Montreal have benefited from one or several training sessions. The program of support for communities of practice was growing rapidly as of the writing of this article.

## **Methodology**

The research team documented, by ethnographic methods of direct and participant observation, over 180 hours of training (12 days), working committees (32 meetings) and citizen activities in thirteen neighbourhoods of Montreal between 2017 and 2018. While supporting the project team, the researchers also analyzed the data of a survey to evaluate the mid-term impact of the training on the work of the intervenors. This survey, carried out on the platform SurveyMonkey, was sent in June 2018 to each of the participants who had taken training with VNQ between June 2017 and June 2018 (28 people responded, n=28). The questions, forced choice or multiple choice, invited qualitative comments. They concerned what was learned in the training, the sharing of knowledge with colleagues or even their intentions to form partnerships in their neighbourhoods. While exploratory at first, the relation which was established between the researchers and the project leader changed into guidance and support for the evaluation of VNQ based on the action research model. A relation of reciprocity developed within this collaboration. The researchers provided support which was sometimes practical (notetaking during meetings), sometimes theoretical (reviews of literature) as well as an outside point of view which may have contributed to decisions on the development of actions in the neighbourhoods.

Participant observation (Davies, 1999) – in this case, observation complemented by occasional participation in discussions at training and committee meetings built a special relationship between researchers, trainers, and intervenors. This bond of trust, acquired over time, allowed the researchers to reach a kind of closeness with the participants. They were able to observe variations between discourse,

action, and activities, and between the various actors and neighbourhoods, giving them an “interpretative understanding” (Max Weber in Rodgers, 2018) of the dynamics at work on the ground.

The stance of the researchers always remained external to the project and independent in its nature. However, the close collaboration with the project leader influenced the data collected. In fact, the researchers remained dependent on the access networks, the actors consulted, and the initiatives put in place. They were unable to observe activities and meetings outside of VNQ which might have brought out other situations and interpretations. The observation notes were coded using the qualitative analysis software *Dedoose*. The coding tree was first developed on an inductive and exploratory basis so as to identify the concerns raised during the observation. It was then revised according to the measurement indicators grid of Essex et al. (2010). We paid particular attention to indications of change and adaptation in the discourse and practices of the participants. These indications allowed for better understanding of their daily application of policies, the obstacles encountered and their resilience. The following discussion is based on findings compiled at the end of a year of ethnographic fieldwork during the deployment of *Vivons nos quartiers*.

### *Confusion and fears*

What stands out in our early observations is first the lack of knowledge among the front-line intervenors of the different immigration statuses and the associated rights and services and also of the arrival of asylum seekers, their numbers, their rights, their life histories. At the same time, we were surprised by the interest and motivation of these same intervenors and the availability and encouragement granted by their home organizations so that they could devote a whole day to the training. And therein lies a bias of our study: the interactions observed are of intervenors who make the effort to sensitize themselves to the problem. This bias is both encouraging, given the number of intervenors reached by these training sessions<sup>14</sup> and their popularity, but also alarming by the extent of their lack of knowledge.

The confusion of the intervenors is mainly fuelled by the media, which spread a “hostile public discourse” (Vertovec, 2017) full of disinformation on the “asylum seeker crisis”. By way of illustration, when the trainers asked in a questionnaire at the beginning of the day what was the proportion of refugees and asylum seekers in the total number of newcomers each year, almost all the participants suggested 8% or 15%, while the actual figure is 4%.

This confusion can also be explained by the changes in migration policies and the associated administrative processes, which try to adapt to this “crisis”. The transfer to front-line actors was not carried out systematically enough to keep them informed of the changes in real time. An intersectoral committee was put in place by the TCRI to this end and its meetings were documented by the research team. Among the policy changes, the one around subsidized daycare access for asylum seeker families is eloquent. Although the children of asylum seekers were vaguely accepted in subsidized daycare centres at first, the Quebec government stipulated in 2018 that they could not have access until they were

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<sup>14</sup> As of April 30, 2019, 512 people from 323 organizations.



accepted as refugees. Apparently, some who were already registered were allowed to stay. However, in our observation several months after the directive we noted that there was still confusion on this matter. These frequent policy changes, which also concerned conditions for asylum seekers to obtain work permits and their length, or the procedures for registering minor asylum seekers in school, combined with the lack of knowledge of the intervenors, had a direct impact on the newcomers, who found themselves even more confused and misguided. Moreover, the heavy turnover in front-line intervenors as well as the mass hiring provoked by the ‘crisis’, especially in the main organization in Montreal, PRAIDA, contributed to a disruption in the personalized and direct information chains and hence to the collective confusion.

This confusion may also have created fears, sometimes very personal, among the front-line actors, fears for their health and safety and those of their families. These fears are also stoked by media discourse, as illustrated by the following observation notes:

An intervenor in a school environment is worried that the children are not undergoing a medical examination. She says she is worried about her own health. When she shakes their hands, she knows that they have gone through eleven countries. She thinks that they may have diseases. She is also worried about the health of the other children and thinks they have to be protected. (Field notes, committee meeting, Bordeaux-Cartierville)

The implementation of immigration policies is not isolated from social policies relating to employment and the economy, for example. The budget cuts of the years preceding the “crisis” increased the overcrowding of front-line services, for intervenors and for their clients. This overcrowding is, however, often hastily imputed to the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers.

An intervenor relates that the arrival of the Syrian refugees caused problems in the line-ups at the food banks, which were already having difficulty finding providers. The vulnerable, long-time users see, on the one hand, their bag of groceries shrink, and on the other hand, people coming from elsewhere in the line. The intervenors have to regularly manage conflicts. The Syrians are seen not just as “stealing jobs” but now also as “stealing food”. There are physical fights in the line-ups. The providers give less and those receiving food say: “If I am getting less, it’s because of you!” (Field notes, Immigration 101 training, Laval).

These fears and misconceptions provide a fertile terrain for the inhibition of the capacities of the front-line actors, who are already feeling overwhelmed and helpless in the face of the number of people received in their offices and particular cases often far removed from their normal practices of intervention.

The VNQ training contributes to the lessening of these fears by offering a space to express them but also to obtain the information necessary to better understand the needs of the newcomers. In opposing the “hostile discourse”, the trainers themselves use discursive trickery to reassure the intervenors. For example, knowingly omitting the much larger number of arrivals in Quebec, they present only the figures for the whole of Canada and place them over a period of twenty years and on the current international scene, all this to minimize the current “crisis”. This trickery seems to go unnoticed and works to reassure

the intervenors: the majority consider that their expectations have been met by the training. In the mid-term evaluation survey almost three quarters of the participants (72%, n=18) identified concrete benefits from the training. Among these was the ability to give better recommendations towards adequate resources as well as the adaptation of their interventions thanks to a deeper knowledge of the history of the newcomers.

#### *Alternative discourse, resilience, and mobilization*

Besides the paralyzing tendency, the feeling of “crisis” also had a mobilizing effect for many front-line actors. The very existence of *Vivons nos quartiers*, from the private donation to the popularity of the training, is part of this second trend.

Over the course of training, by presenting the few resources available for asylum seekers, the trainers encourage the participants to develop innovative solutions for their reception and support. One trainer explains for example that creativity is necessary to circumvent the many challenges. He cites the example of the organization for which he works, which gives francization courses. When some intervenors observed that several parents among the asylum seekers were not attending regularly due to the lack of daycare services, they established a partnership with a neighbourhood family services organization and created places in a drop-in daycare for them. The trainers also approach the problem by harshly criticizing the new directive and inviting the participants to start a petition and to pursue legal recourse. By attacking the problem in this way, the trainers move away from *resilience* as adaptation to the situation and towards the idea of *resistance* as action on the situation at hand.

The idea is to implement in a different way policies unequally welcoming towards newcomers. One of the ways proposed and facilitated by the *Vivons nos quartiers* training is consultation between intervenors and organizations to put in place new mechanisms at the neighbourhood level. This format provides a physical space for neighbourhood actors to come together and create personal ties and have opportunities for collective and intersectoral mobilization. During our observation, we witnessed on several occasions the consolidation of partnerships between intervenors or the addition of new members.

A participant takes the floor to explain the creation of a partnership to assist asylum seekers who have settled in the neighbourhood in their search for employment. She took the initiative to contact other organizations in the borough to learn about their services. She saw that many of them had also received asylum seekers over the same period. They worked together to set up an employment service at the library. When she heard about this project, another intervenor joined it. (Field note, ItDA training, Lachine)

This sharing has a ripple effect and increases empowerment among many participants: “An intervenor declares that the training made her realize that everyone can pitch in. Several of her colleagues are mobilized in neighbourhood initiatives. She adds that this promotes networking” (Field note, ItDA training, TCRI). Moreover, according to the survey, almost 90% (n=25) of participants declared that they had shared some of what they learned in the training. Although access to neighbourhood resources can be achieved

in other ways, the mobilization of a network of people active in the neighbourhood remains the most reliable and quickest way to disseminate up-to-date information on the welcoming of newcomers, especially those for whom there are few services.

However, we observed unequal levels of consultation between neighbourhoods. While in certain environments the participants already had solid knowledge of the actors and resources available before their training, in other neighbourhoods particular problems and long-standing friction limited the possibilities of consultation. In the Côte-du-Fleuve neighbourhood<sup>15</sup>, for example, consultation on immigration was new but dynamic. Backed by a historic organization for welcoming immigrants, a committee for rapprochement was set up in 2018. While the mobilization of the members of this committee was sometimes difficult, their collective participation in an “Immigration 101” training session meant that they supported the work of the coordinator by informing and sensitizing the least convinced among the members: “What struck me was people’s will to go through all those stages. It really raised their awareness!” (Field notes, committee meeting, Côte-du-Fleuve). Several members also learned on this occasion about the whole range of services offered by the organization.

This impetus for the mobilization and resilience of the front-line actors is especially possible because it is brought to another level by a tradition of consultation which is typical of Quebec. The VNQ initiative is orchestrated by the TCRI, an organization with 40 years of concerted community action since its creation in the context of the arrival of the boat people from South-East Asia between 1979 and 1981. The project leader of the TCRI also coordinates the intersectoral committee, which brings together actors from practice environments and from governmental, ministerial, and municipal bodies who provide concrete support to the field initiatives for more welcoming communities. In the face of “hostile public discourse” (Vertovec, 2017), the tide can be turned, and hostility can be transformed thanks to hospitable practices coming from a different “scene of hospitality”, “supported by the society of individuals, collectives and non-governmental associations and within the framework of a benevolent Republic” (Le Blanc and Brugère, 2017: 32-33). In the current day-to-day reality of Quebec, these “hospitable practices” of welcoming, which we call forms of resilience, are in fact present in significant numbers, as we have shown throughout this article. However, they are temporary and activated in the context of “crisis”.

Hence, by relying on activism for the defence of rights and social justice, and by mobilizing actors from all sectors, the discourse adopted by *Vivons nos quartiers* remains particularly accessible and close to the daily realities of the intervenors. It runs the risk, however, of slipping into a register which is quasi-manipulative or, at least, far removed from the discourse conveyed in certain media.

## Conclusion

The data collected in this ethnographic research project concerns an initiative promoting the welcoming of refugees and asylum seekers in a context which is hostile, both in terms of the discourse circulating

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<sup>15</sup> A fictitious name.

regarding them and the services to which they have a right. This data led us to analyze the implementation of reception policies and the lived realities in the neighbourhoods through the perception of a migrant “crisis”, whose contradictory effect leads on the one hand, to fear, and on the other, to the mobilization of the actors. The theoretical frameworks of resilience and of inclusion policies, including indicators of welcoming at the level of the community, were mobilized.

The need for simple and up-to-date information encounters administrative requirements coming from a more and more complex and ever-changing immigration system. The lack of knowledge leads to fear and a feeling of being overwhelmed and powerless among the intervenors in the neighbourhoods. Both in the scientific literature and in the empirical observation of the environments, we note that a better knowledge of the migration histories of the asylum seekers and of their legal and administrative difficulties facilitates the work of the front-line actors. A better understanding of the issues involved also reduces their fears and promotes a more positive attitude towards the newcomers, one of the characteristics of “welcoming communities” according to Essex et al. (2010).

We also emphasize the importance of the creation of social capital through the strengthening of networks among actors of the same neighbourhood. *Vivons nos quartiers* encourages local actors to think of innovative alternatives to circumvent the daily obstacles encountered in intervention and promote best practices for the inclusion of immigrants. As Essex et al. suggest (2010), beyond their simple presence in Montreal neighbourhoods, community organizations must especially be able to efficiently respond to the needs of newcomers. Maintaining active, local, and personalized networks allows for the building of bridges between overworked actors, who also face new cohorts of migrants with extremely varied histories and needs.

The consultation between various sectors (governments, institutions, communities, and universities) generated by *Vivons nos quartiers* promotes the exchange of information and best practices in real time: it creates “scenes of hospitality” (Le Blanc and Brugère, 2017). This ethnographic research lent itself to intersectoral consultation. By observing the implementation of such a project, in an action research approach, the stakeholders obtain frequent feedback which is beneficial for each environment, and which creates another space for direct contact contributing to research and scientific knowledge as well as practices and policies.

Nevertheless, these scenes of hospitality remain in the domain of “urgent”, temporary, and fragile welcoming, as they depend solely on the initiative of engaged actors. A second stage going beyond hospitality is necessary to institutionalize these procedures and establish “welcoming communities” which are sustainable and impervious to political change. This stage of “belonging” (Le Blanc, 2018) emerges in certain neighbourhoods where actors have taken on the mission of *Vivons nos quartiers* by setting up committees for intercultural rapprochement, for example. However, other indicators of “welcoming communities” identified by Essex et al. (2010) have not been discussed here and are not addressed directly by *Vivons nos quartiers*; but they remain crucial for attaining this objective. These dimensions involve other elements: for example, the presence of affordable and adequate housing, accessible health care or even positive relations with the police and the judicial system.

On its scale, *Vivons nos quartiers* represents an attempt to respond to the gap between political discourse and realities on the ground by producing another narrative. This narrative aims for an alternative implementation of policies as part of a tradition of activism and public action in the community relying on vital forces on the ground. In this way, it reduces paralyzing fears among intervenors, supports them in the development of welcoming environments and, ultimately, provides them with the tools to become resilient in the face of a real or perceived “crisis”.

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