ArcGIS StoryMaps

"We are everywhere": counter-mapping of Tiohtià:ke/Montréal

In the fall of 2020, a group of 7 Indigenous youth participated in a process to represent and analyze their urban spaces.

With the support of Tryspaces (https://tryspaces.org)
3 juin 2021

Territorial Acknowledgement

We recognize that Montréal is located on unceded Indigenous territory. Tiohtià:ke is its name in Kanien'kéha and the island is called Mooniyang in Anishnabemowin. Thus, the Kanien'kehá:ka and Anishnaabe Nations have important historical and contemporary relationships with this territory. Situated at the heart of a vast network of waterways, but surrounded by rapids extremely difficult to navigate,

Tiohtià:ke / Mooniyang / Montréal is historically an important stopover for the many Nations that pass through the region. It was therefore a place of gathering, exchange and diplomacy, long before its occupation by European settlers. Today we recognize the continued presence of the Kanienkehá:ka Nation in these territories, their role in the history of the region and of the St. Lawrence River, as well as the responsibility they currently assume as guardians of the land and waters on which Montréal is located. We also recognize that a diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, including many young people, as well as Indigenous people from all the Americas (or Abya Yala) and beyond, live in Montréal where they build their own territorialities and participate in the production of urban spaces.

The Process

This Storymap presents the research process carried out with seven Indigenous youth from Montréal. Although this narrative map is punctuated by the participants' words, it is not aiming at presenting the final results of their reflections, but the participatory approach which allowed us to co-create new knowledges about their relations in and with the city. The research work continues and the results will be available in several forms. The participants insisted on the importance of giving back to the community and on the fact that the cartography developed collectively through this process

should serve the Indigenous community of
Tiohtià:ke/Montréal.

A participatory process of territorial (re)claiming

This series of online counter-mapping workshops for
Indigenous youth in Montréal aimed at representing
Indigenous youth's stories, experiences and knowledges in
relation to the urban space. Participatory mapping allows us
to share stories, experiences and knowledges while provoking
collective analysis and the co-creation of new knowledges and
perspectives on the city.

Promotional poster for the workshops

Through the representation of their experiences and knowledges, the youth were able to reflect on how their socio-spatial practices are woven into the urban fabric and how they transgress the colonial structures and representations of the space in Montréal. Indigenous youth were invited to create their own representations of the city, first individually, then collectively.

Change of Amherst Street name to Atatekan Street, meaning "brotherhood and sorority" in Kanien'kehá (2019)

From the beginning, the youth emphasized the importance of creating a tool that would be useful to the Indigenous community of Montréal, in particular to other Indigenous youth who migrate to the city and must find their place in it while facing many issues related to the coloniality of urban space and its violence.
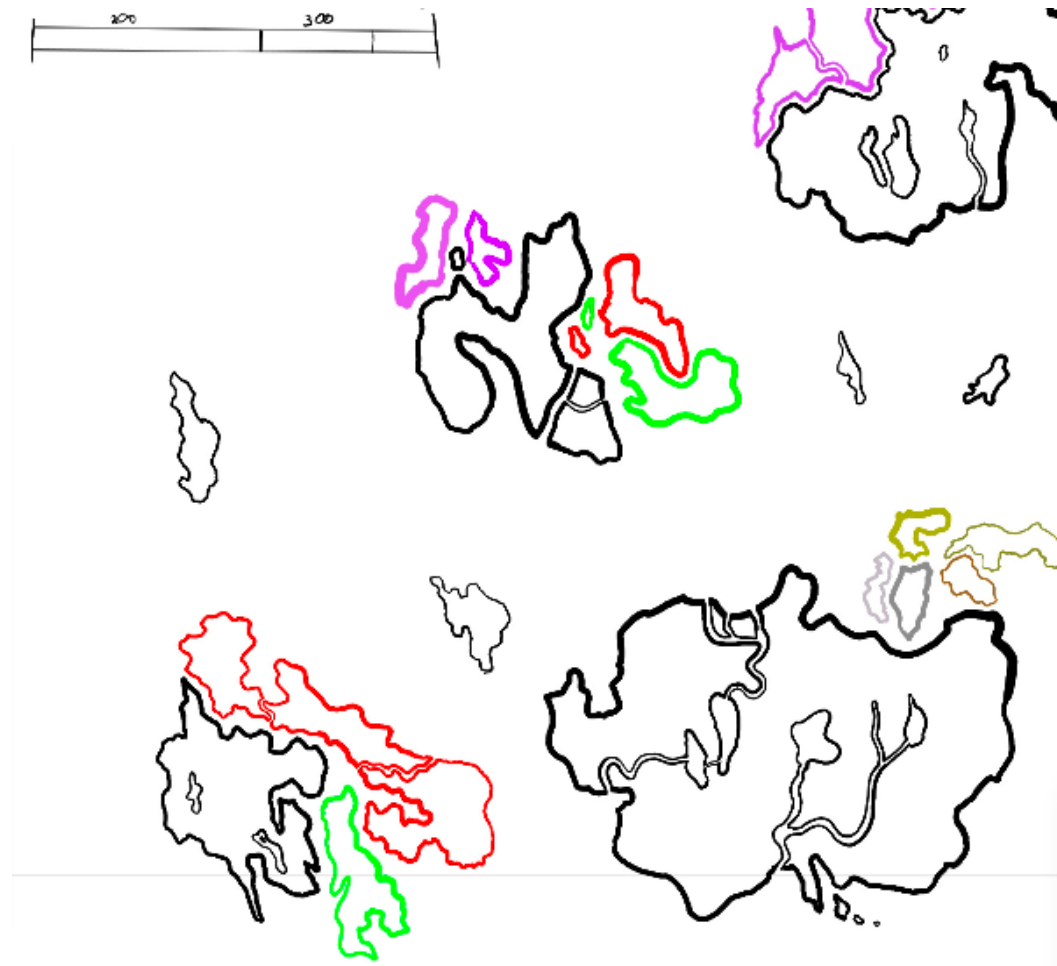
The Steps
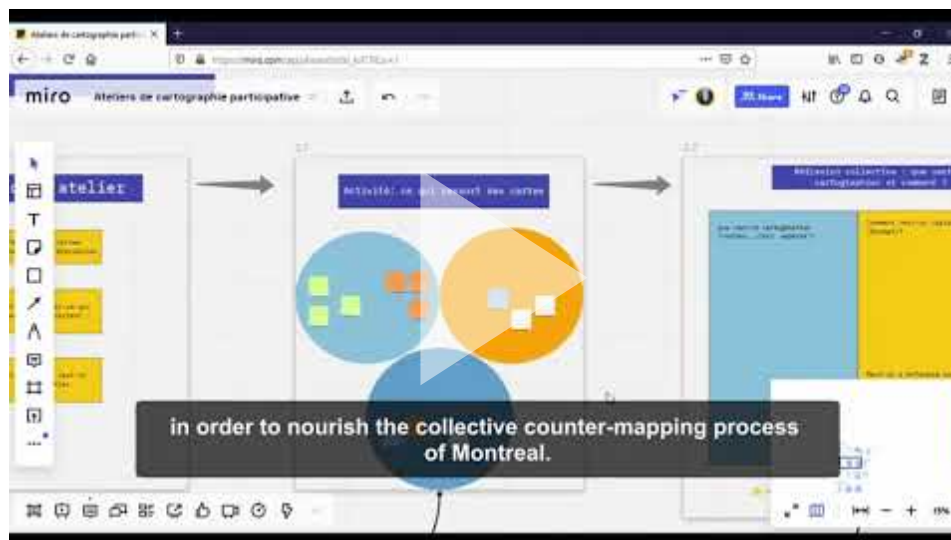
Presentation of the collaborative virtual space "Miro"

Mental maps: individual representations of the city

First, and after a short presentation on counter-mapping and the concept of territoriality, the participants produced individual mental maps of their urban spaces.

The participants sometimes chose to represent emotions linked to experiences lived in Montréal (Emotional map of Montréal, by Alex Apak Cousineau, Inuk from Nunavut).
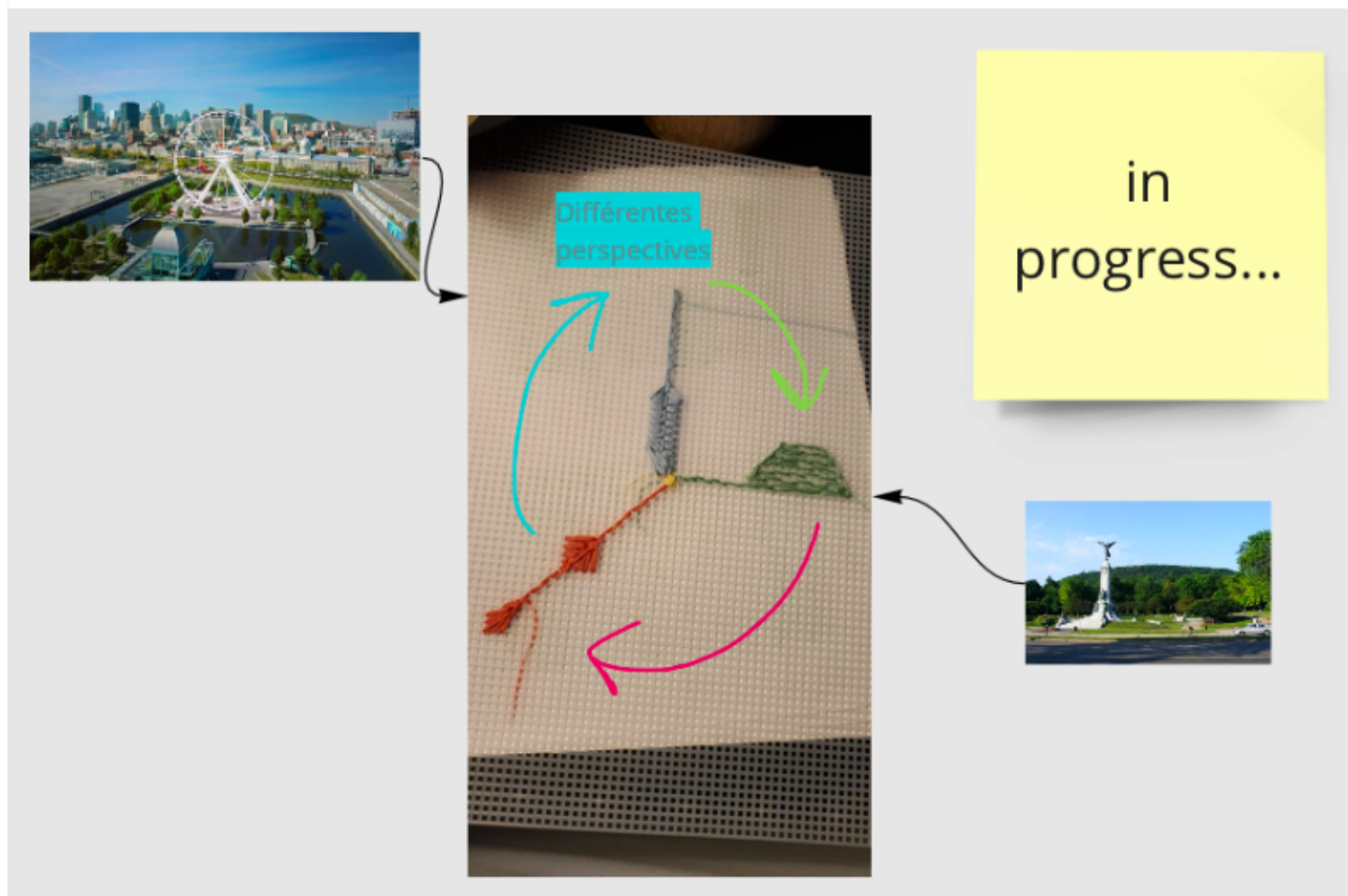
Or some places that are important to them, as well as the relationships between these places.

Others presented their genealogy by relating it to different places in the city and to people associated with their life trajectory. Still others created symbolic mapping of the self in which paths appear linked to dreams, projects and professional life. In another map, the layering of images of places, events, organizations and symbols represented a

participant's journey in their cultural and gender identity affirmation.

This step allowed the participants to deepen their reflection on their relationship to the city, the spaces that are important to them and the relationships woven in these spaces. The sharing of these mental maps pushed our reflection further, taking into consideration the journeys, experiences and perspectives of each other.

From the individual to the collective: what to map and how

Please note: The steps shown below are not the final results of our project, but parts of the reflection process.
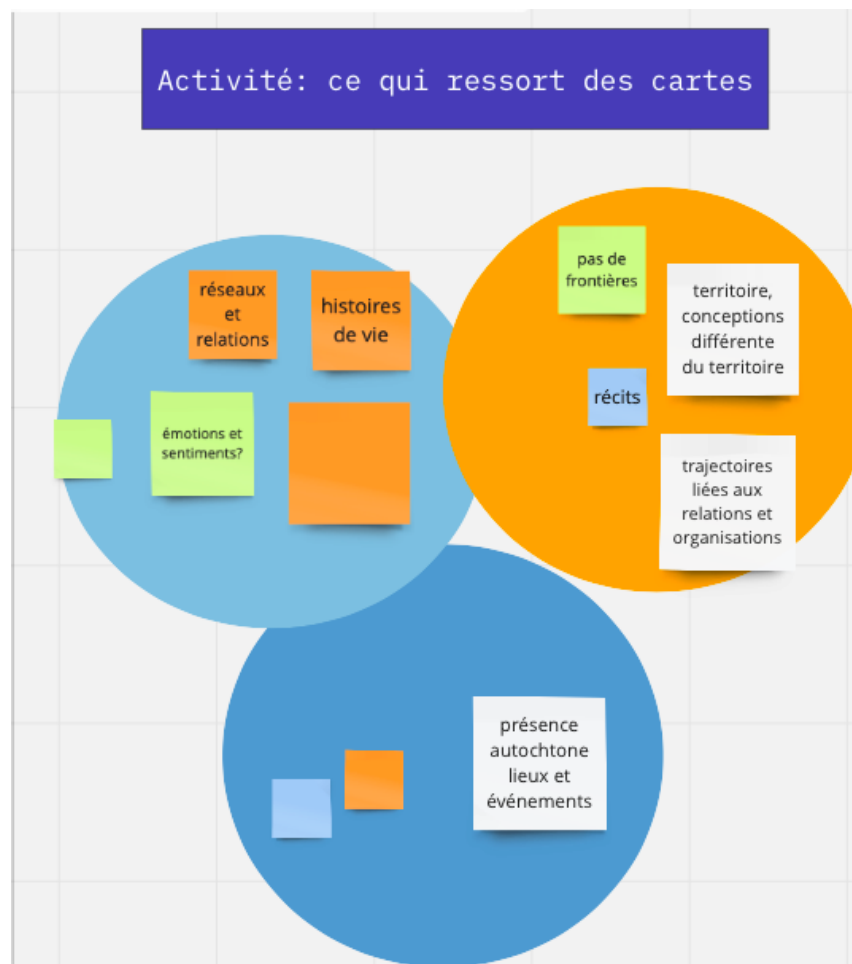
The next step consisted in going from an individual reflection on the territorialities of each participant, towards a collective reflection of what the group wanted to map and how. A first activity made it possible to identify the key elements of the individual maps.
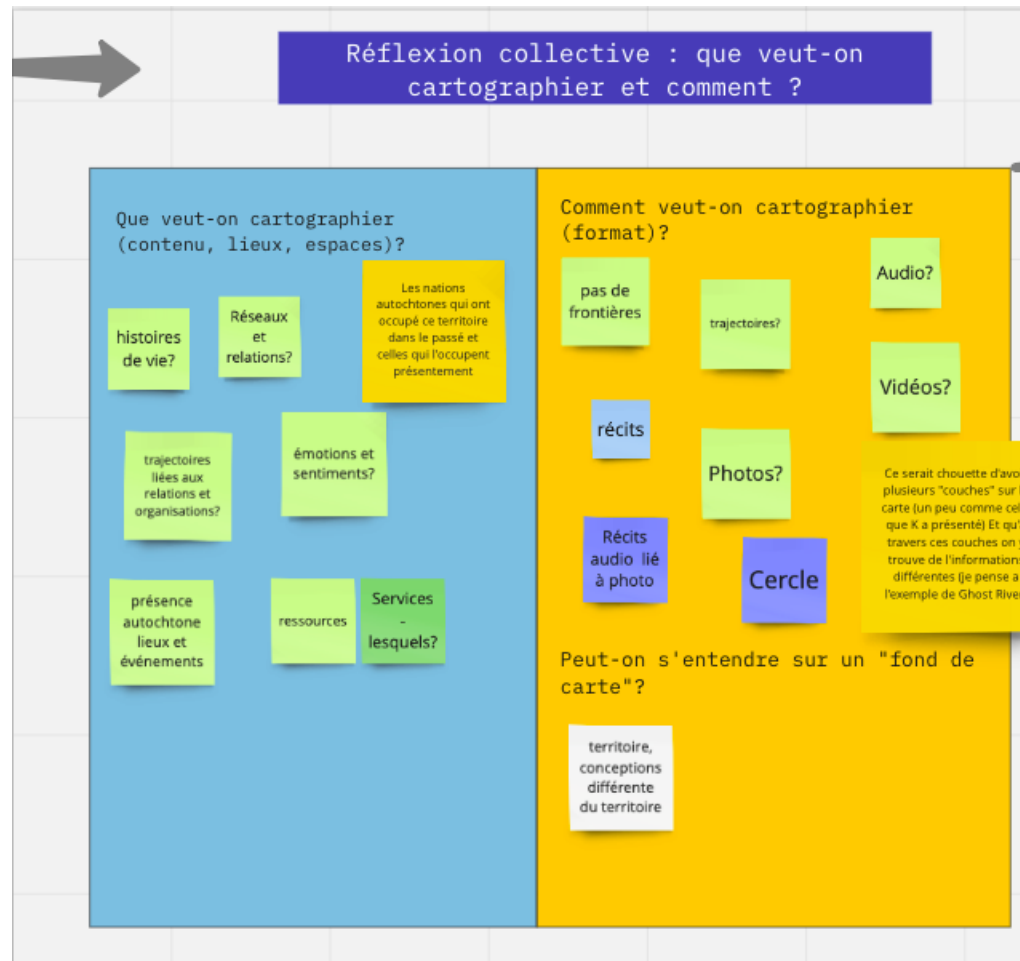
From these elements, a second activity aimed at the collective decision making as to what the participants wanted to represent on the collective map and how they wanted to represent these elements.

Several layers, which can appear or disappear on the map, have been inserted in the collective map. They represent different dimensions of the participants' realities and experiences of the city. Discussions therefore focused on the definition of these layers and the elements that they include.

Towards an interactive map
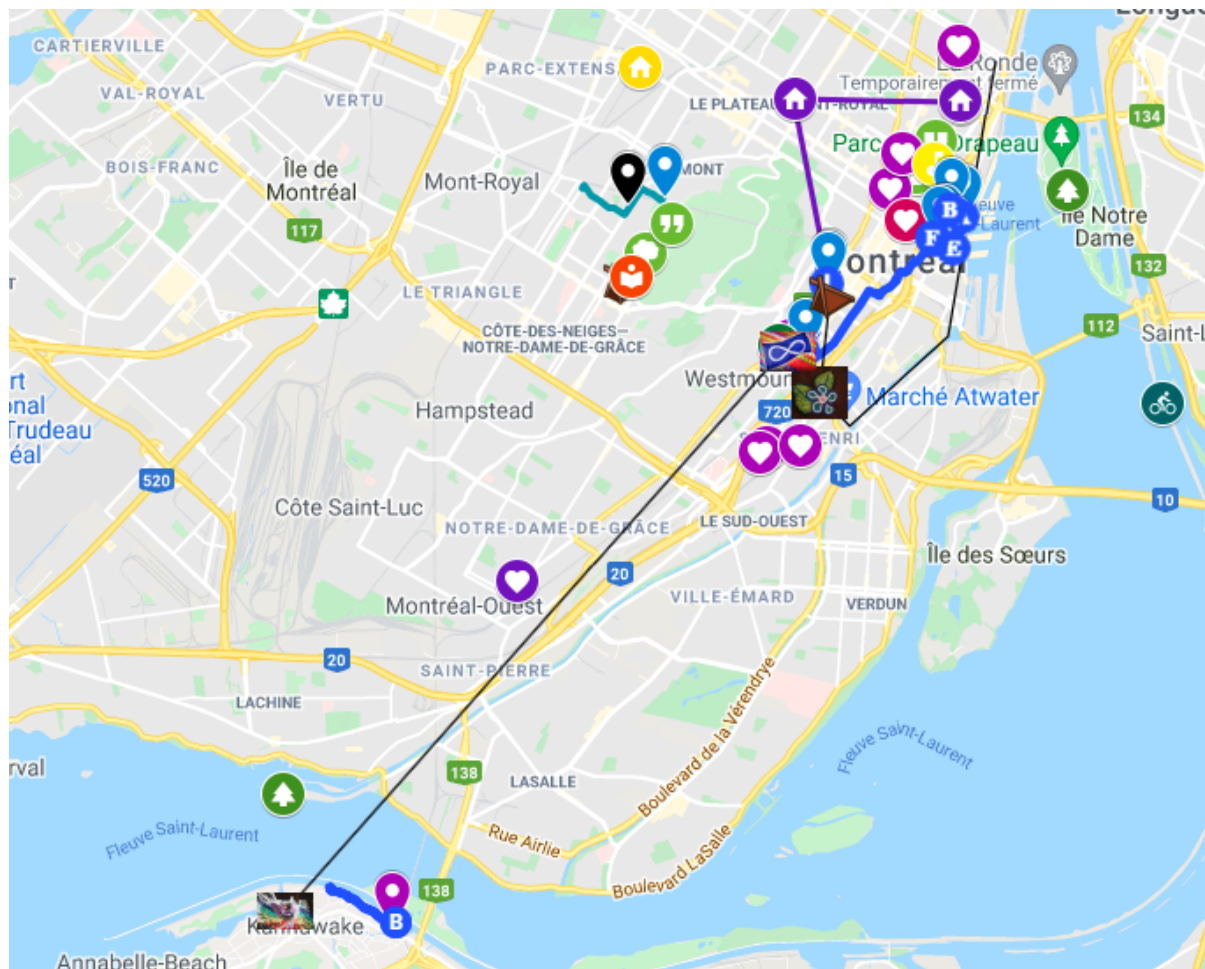
To be able to create this map with different layers, we explored various platforms. We wanted a platform that would allow collaborative work (where everyone could add elements) and where it would be possible to include, for each place or trajectory, images, videos, sound and/or text. Finally, we chose to use MyMaps.

This map and the elements (images, videos, texts) associated with it remain the property of the participants and are not, for

the moment, of public access. The research process continues in other forms in order to gather other stories, experiences and knowledges to enrich our collective analysis. A committee of Indigenous youth will be formed to decide how, where, in what form and with what content the map will be published.

Description :

"Mymap" map based on shared reflections and stories. This image is for reference only; it presents the places, trajectories and icons chosen for all the layers, but without the descriptions, stories, images and videos that are associated with them.

Themes

Portraits of Indigenous personalities by artist Anatole Ste-Onge
at the Salon Uatik of Université de Montréal

Without going into the details of what was shared during the workshops, it is possible to underline some important themes that emerged from the participants' representations of their territoriality's.

Identity journeys
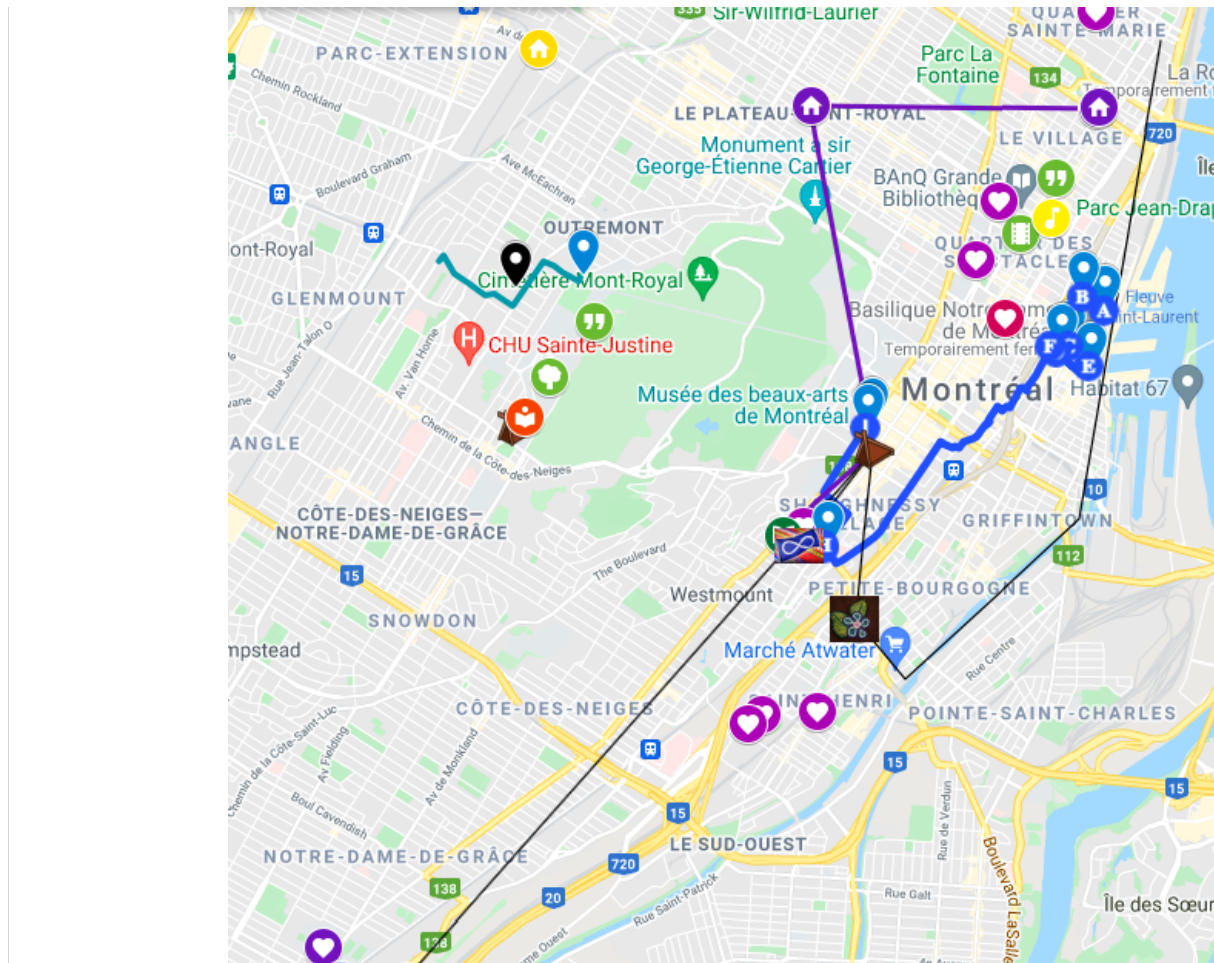
Through stories of different places, the participants addressed some identity issues they had experienced. Some mentioned

their difficulty in living their Indigenous identity in an urban environment, while others claimed to have (re)found their identity(ies) there. In both cases, gathering places were important catalysts for identity (re)appropriation, in addition to providing often crucial community space.

These places and organizations, for example Native Montreal, universities and CEGEPs' associations for Native students, Wapikoni, Mikana, etc. play an important role in the development or support of Indigenous youth's identity in urban areas.

> "We *inhabit* Montréal." - Myriam, W8banaki.

Community

In addition, places, organizations and events that support the affirmation of identity also harbor the feeling of community. The participants underlined the importance of the Indigenous community of Montréal and its crucial role in their respective journeys. Places and events that allow the transmission and sharing of culture also become places to connect with the community and to develop relationships. Political actions, for example for the climate or in solidarity with various Indigenous movements, also help to anchor youth in the community and to affirm their identities. The participants insisted on the importance they place on (re)giving to the

community and on the fact that the cartography developed collectively should serve the community.

> "Even if we are outside our communities, we have this feeling of community and mutual support." - Kijâtai-Alexandra

March for the climate, September 27, 2019 - a feeling of community in
Tiohtià:ke.

Presence

A fundamental theme of the discussions was about the Indigenous presence in Montreal. Participants stressed the importance of being visible, being represented in spaces, and of having reference points in which to recognize oneself, as an Indigenous person. These landmarks can take the form of public art - murals for example - toponymy, events or organizations. This presence can also be manifested when finding an old book written in Atikamekw at a university's library.

> "Indigenous Peoples have always been here, they are still here and will always be here." - Oscar Kistabish (Elder).

In addition to public art, the presence of Indigenous artists in places like a café or a movie theatre is another way of visibilizing the Indigenous experience and imagination in urban space.

> "We are lucky to be able to see these artworks, they remind us that we also belong to the city, that we are present. These murals remind people: we are contemporary, we exist, there are

> realities that are ours. We deserve to be
> celebrated." - Myriam, W8banaki.
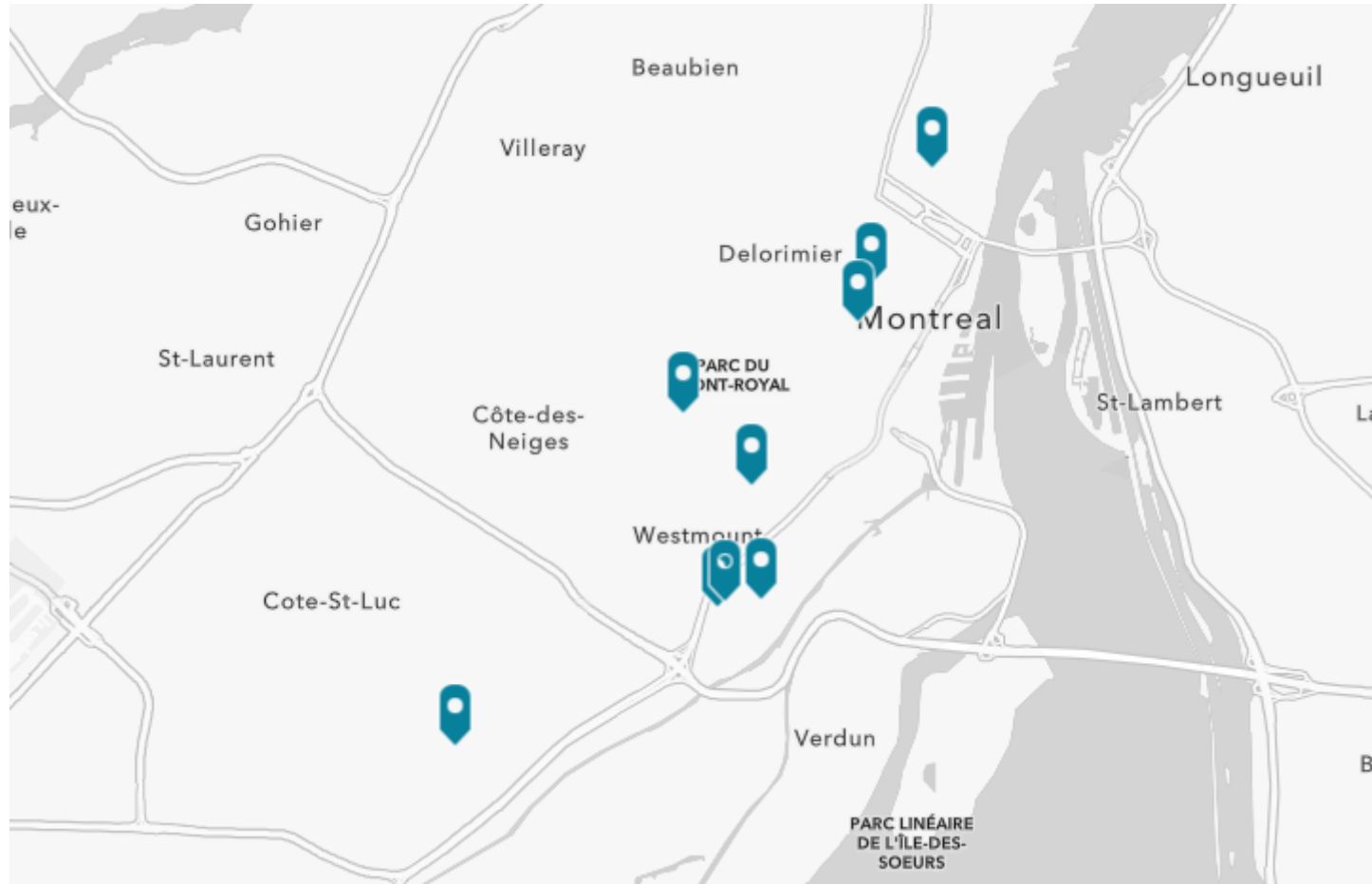
Ville de Montréal, Esri Canada, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechn…   2 km ⊢————————⊣   Powered by Esri

Mohawks Elders Scupture

By Dave McGary, on Conrdia University's Loyola campus

"White Supremacy is Killing Me" Mural

By Jessica Sabogal, in Saint-Henri, Montréal

ELLEN GABRIEL & MARY TWO AXE EARLEY Mural

By Shanna STRAUSS, 2017, in St-Henri

Hoop Dance Mural

By Chief Lady Bird and Aura, 2017

Tribute to Alanis O'bomsawin Mural
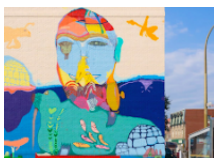
By Meky Ottawa

Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Mural

By Fanny Aishaa, 2014, Saint-Laurent boulevard, Montréal.

Generations Mural

By Gene Pendon, 2014

Youth of Carpe Dorset Mural

Qanuqtuurniq, produced in 2016 by youth from Cape Dorset, Nunavut, in collaboration with professional muralists. Link :...

Faye Mullen + Jade Konwataroni: Dawn into Mourning

The sign featured a new poem by Faye Mullen and Jade Konwataroni every week from December 2020 through March 2021.

Toponymy

In addition to the places marked by representations of the Indigenous presence in the city, the participants underlined the importance of the elements of nature such as the mountain, the river, the rapids, etc. The names of these "monuments" or geosymbols still exist today in Indigenous languages, including in the Anishinabewomin, Kanien'kehá:ka and Neherimowin (Atikamekw) languages.

(1) **Oka**

©MNDNR, C. Iverson
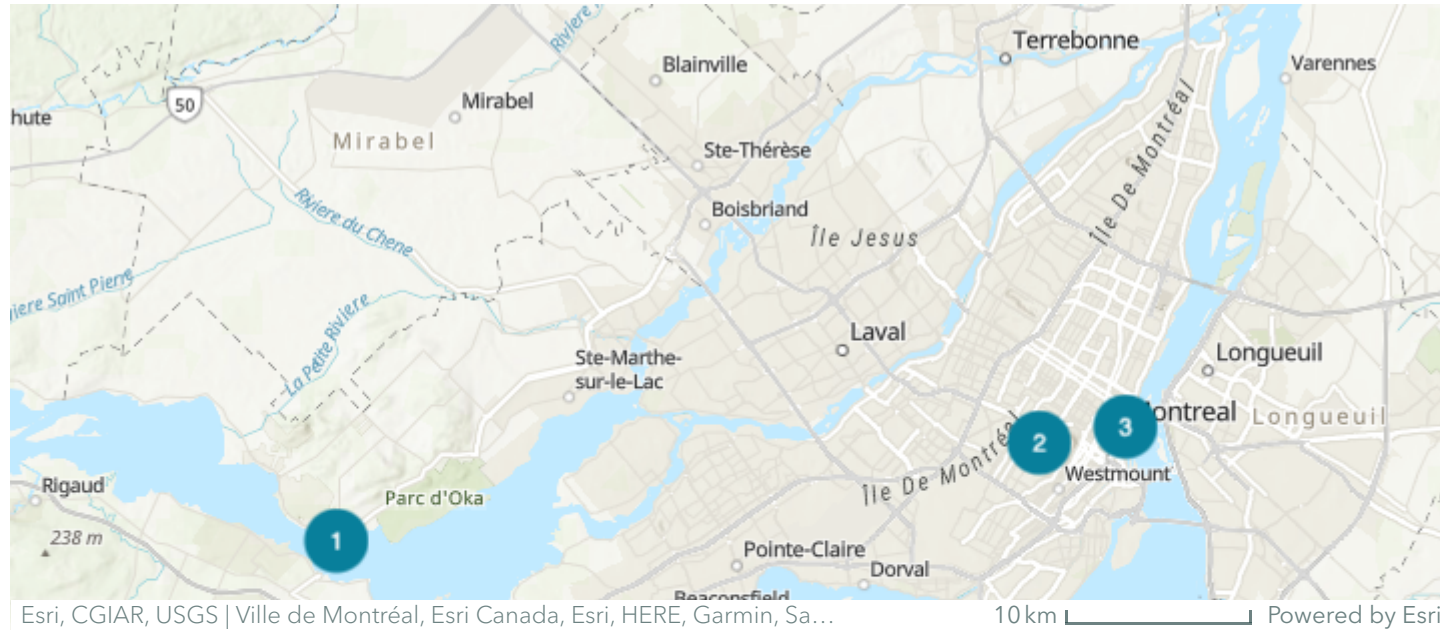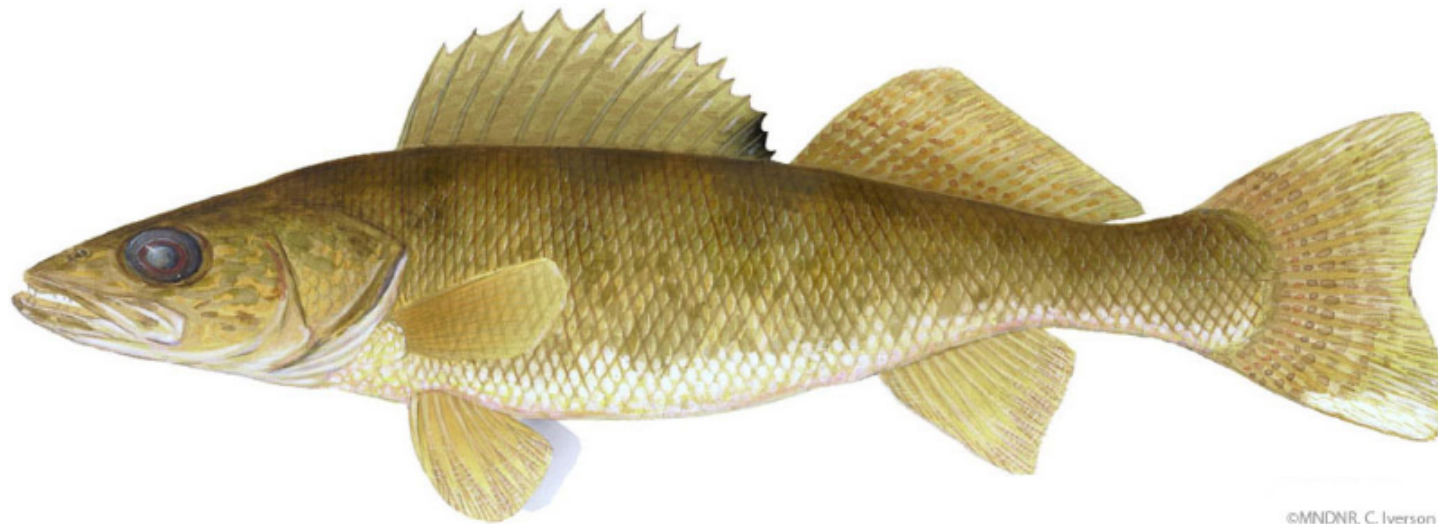
"It's not Oka, it's Ogaa. There was a place in Oka where walleye [Ogaa in Anishnabemowin] spawned. That's why we called the place Ogaa."

note : in Neherimowin «walleye» is Okacic

② Tiohtià:ke Otsira'kéhne Park

The place of the big fire

"Tiohtià: ke Otsira'kéhne Park is located on the summit of Outremont, on the north side of Mount Royal. It can be reached on foot by the belt path behind the University of Montreal or by Boulevard Mont-Royal. It has an area of 23 hectares" (montreal.ca)

Image: http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?
_pageid=7377,95273611&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&id=23299&na=&ret=/
pls/portal/url/page/grands_parcs_fr/rep_utilitaires/rep_actualites/coll_actualite
s

③ Atateken

"Atateken" (pronounced "a-da-dé-gan") means "brotherhood/sisterhood", or a "group of people or Nations with whom we share common values"

Celebrations

More and more events celebrate Indigenous cultures in Montréal. Whether it is the Présence Autochtone international festival, the Montréal Pow wow or the thematic weeks organized in certain universities, these are highlights that allow the community to experience cultures and share them with the public.
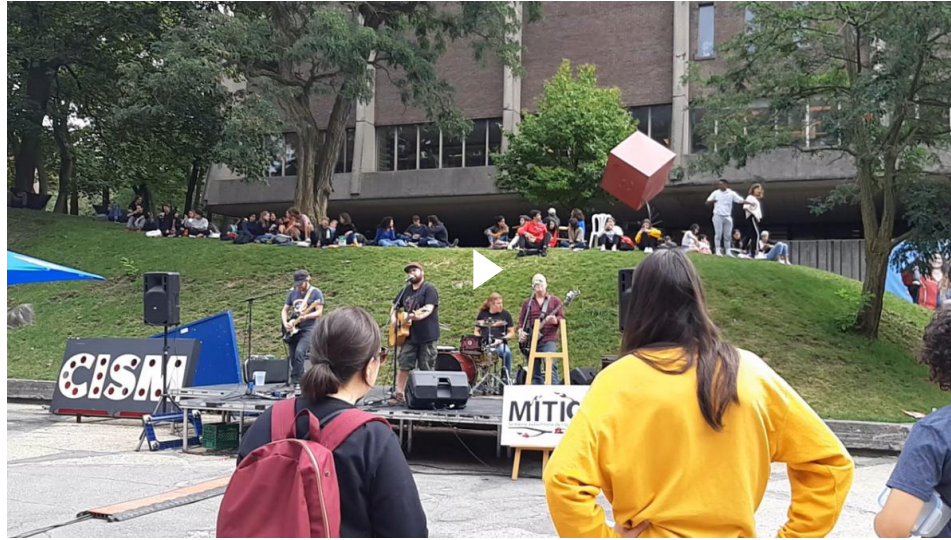
Matiu, Innu artist during the Mitig week of Université de Montréal, 2019

The challenges of being Indigenous in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal

Although several positive elements emerged from this mapping process, the fact remains that "living who we are, our culture" can be difficult in the city. Some participants mentioned the lack of natural spaces and the difficulty of carrying out land-based activities.

> "I go to the limits of Montreal all the time, it feels like it's more breathable. In the sense that it is less suffocated by buildings or apartment blocks. Leaving a small village of 1,000 people with infinite space, for a space where there are so

> many people, is a sometimes difficult contrast.
> With time I manage, but I will always miss home" -
> Janie Bellefleur-Kaltush

Others mentioned negative or even racist comments or stereotypes heard in various places. Some also highlighted their experience of a disconnection from their culture, a reality that often happened over multiple generations.

> "Before a class, I heard someone talking about
> my community really negatively, it shocked me" -
> C

Colonial history of Montréal

The first time I saw this sculpture, I felt a sense of astonishment and revolt. These are the representations that people in general have of Indigenous communities even today. People think we belong to the past, even if we are really here. It reminds me of a time in elementary school, a good friend of mine told me that it was impossible for me to be Indigenous, because according to him Native Americans no longer existed. - C

The Elder, during our last meeting, referring to this Maisonneuve statue:

> "It should be the Indigenous person on top, it's their country. It's Maisonneuve who came into Indigenous world."
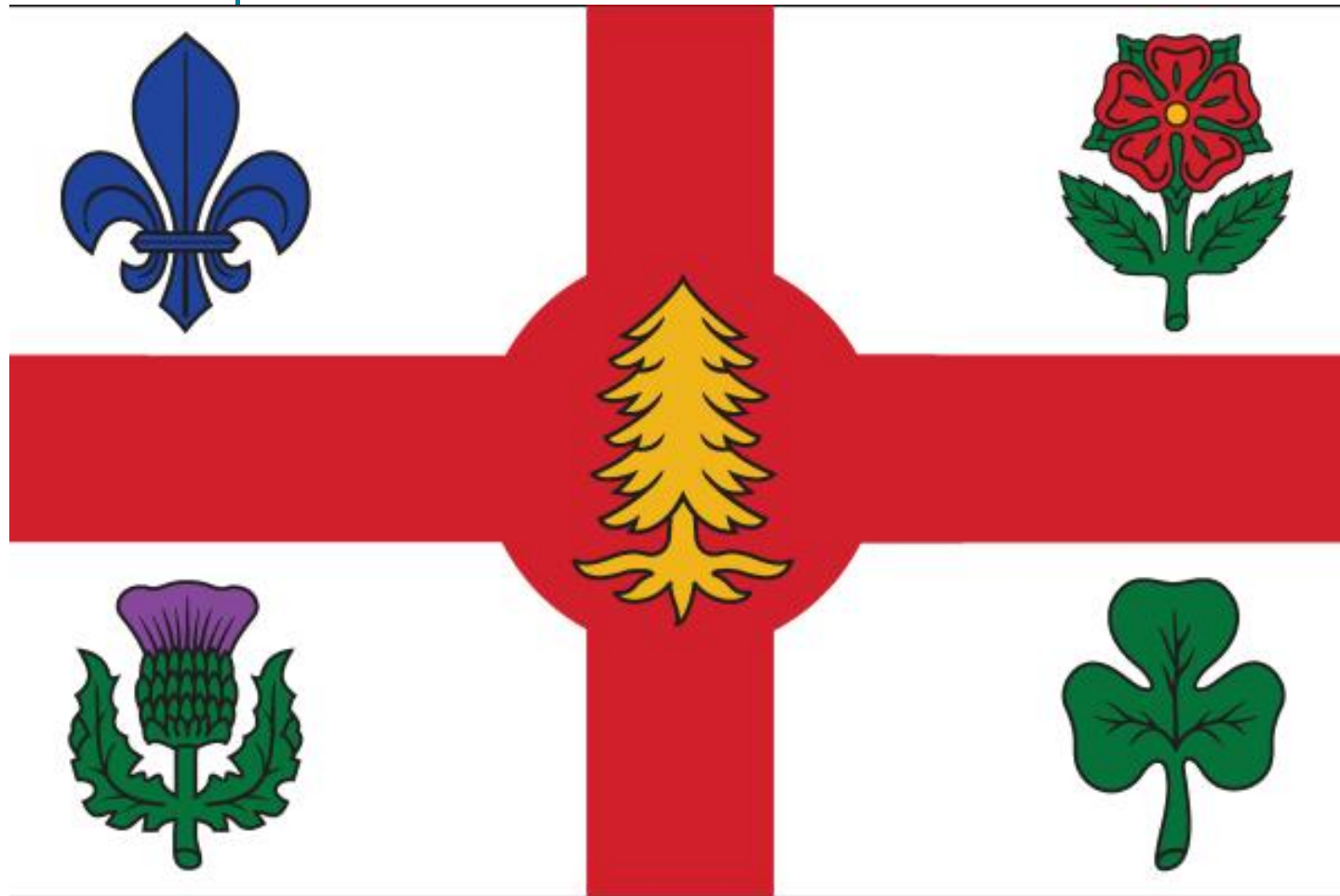
Finally, some participants highlighted the colonial aspect of space in Montréal and the lack of information about

Montréal's colonial history. One participant mentioned that she organized, for students, a tour of places marking colonial relations in Montréal. Another participant attended a conference where a speaker told the story of the dispossession and displacement of the last indigenous community to have inhabited the island, now Kanesatake. In both cases, the participants stressed the importance of knowing these stories and responding to them, precisely, through better visibility of Indigenous stories, experiences and knowledges, in short by enhancing the Indigenous presence in the city.

Principles

In order to respect Indigenous research protocols, we put in place fundamental principles for this knowledge co-creation project.

Participation of an Elder

One of the challenges of research with Indigenous youth, and perhaps even more so when this research takes place virtually in the context of a pandemic, is to create a space that is culturally safe. To do this, we invited an Elder, Oscar Kistabish, to participate in the workshops. He was the one who opened the process and the results were presented to him at the end. He was thus able to listen and support the participants, in addition to nourishing our collective reflections.

As a young Indigenous person in the city, it is quite rare for me to experience my spirituality with other people. These rare occasions offered to us are healing for the soul, especially in these times when loneliness begins to weigh on us. The Elder's prayers and listening to him as a group, in my opinion, brought a certain sense of peace to all of us.

The Anishnabe Elder lived in Montréal in his youth, so he understood well the reality of being a young Indigenous

person in Montréal. He offered an opening prayer, shared his experience and gave encouragement to the youth. In addition to contributing to a safe space, the presence of the Elder allowed important intergenerational exchanges. The youth presented their maps at the end of the process and the Elder offered them his impressions. He ended with a personalized comment for each participant.

The importance of relations and relationality

Relationality was at the centre of the process. In addition to the safe space and intergenerational relations, the process was built in relation with the youth and between the youth, creating a group dynamic through regular meetings centered on exchanges and sharing. We took the time to ask each other about their week and their general wellness, we had informal conversations concerning certain realities or current events. This was necessary to create a warm atmosphere allowing the sharing of experiences and knowledges. The moments of laughter and support were frequent.

"As a participant, the friendly atmosphere made it easier for me to speak up and reveal more personal information. We all felt comfortable sharing a bit of our story with the other participants, listening to each other. Several laughs and jokes occurred during our few meetings. It was almost therapeutic in these times of confinement!"

Sharing

The establishment of a safe space based on relationships created an ambience conducive to sharing. Taking the time to share experiences and stories is a fundamental part of the

process. Thus, the sharing of individual creations brought in-depth collective reflections, which in turn nourished the personal reflections and analyzes of the participants. The individual process enriched the collective one, and vice versa.

The notion of sharing is also central to the idea of creating an interactive collective map accessible online. The youth mentioned the importance of being generous, of creating something that would be useful for the Indigenous community of Montréal and more specifically to other Indigenous youth. The Elder also underlined the wealth of experiences and knowledges shared by the youth, as well as the usefulness of this exercise and the importance of sharing it with those who will follow them. He himself remembered his arrival in Montréal and how complicated everything was then, even travelling by bus.

A participatory process

Finally, the principles of cultural safety, relationality and sharing were fundamental for the establishment of a process that is participatory. Decisions about what to map, how and why were made as a group. The participants also collectively defined the objectives of the project: to create a useful and interactive cartography which serves to decolonize urban spaces and to appropriate new territorialities. Some of them continue to be engaged at the level of analysis and decision-making in this ongoing process.

Salon *Uatik*, which means «terrier» in Innu-aimun, Université de Montréal

Testimony

Having had other research experiences, I can assure you that this process was nothing like what I was used to. Each workshop was friendly and we looked forward to meeting each week to discuss. These workshops offered us precious moments of interaction, rare in these extraordinary times. There was time for both reflections and giggles.

During each meeting, we shared snippets of our stories related to different places in the city of Montréal. I was captivated by each participant's journey and amazed that our stories, despite their particularities, also overlap in one way or another. I recognized myself in several experiences of other participants. I was also amazed that many were in touch with, and "experienced", the same places, but in different ways for the most part.

We all worked with the goal that our reflections would not be in vain and that they can be useful to others because, as someone pointed out during one of our discussions: in our cultures, giving back to the community is essential.

The support we received from the Elder was heartwarming for me. His thoughts and the comments he made on our work made us feel more at peace at times. The stories he shared were filled with wisdom and bridged our cultures.

In short, this experience was very positive. The warmth and depth of our discussions became little moments of renewal and reflection every week. I hope that other people can have a similar experience by getting involved in research projects. - C

Thanks

We would like to thank the participants for their commitment to this project and for the generous sharing of their knowledges and time. Without the sharing of their stories, experiences and visions, this project would not have existed. Some chose to be quoted directly for what they shared, others preferred to remain anonymous, we respected everyone's choice. Kice mikwetc to the Elder, Oscar Kistabish, for having accepted our invitation and for having accompanied the youth in the process. He was able to create a warm and reassuring atmosphere for each of us and took the time to share some of his wisdom with us. This research project is part of the Tryspaces network and benefits from its support and resources. It is also supported by a FRQ-SC research grant. Thank you to the entire research team of Professor Stéphane Guimont Marceau from the UCS center of INRS for their constant commitment throughout the project.

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