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*Au croisement des savoirs*

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## Indigenous Presence in Quebec Cities: Trends, Issues, and Actions

Research Note

Carole Lévesque

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Réseau de recherche et de  
connaissances relatives aux  
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### **Cahiers ODENA. Au croisement des savoirs**

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**L'Alliance de recherche ODENA, à l'avant-garde de l'innovation sociale, offre des avenues alternatives dans la compréhension et la réponse aux défis individuels et sociétaux des Premiers Peuples au sein des villes du Québec. Elle réunit des représentants de la société civile autochtone et des chercheurs universitaires engagés dans une démarche de coconstruction des connaissances afin d'améliorer la qualité de vie des Autochtones des villes et de renouveler les relations entre les Premiers Peuples et les autres citoyens du Québec dans un esprit d'égalité et de respect mutuel.**

ODENA est une initiative conjointe de *DIALOG – Le réseau de recherche et de connaissances relatives aux peuples autochtones* et du *Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec*. ODENA vise à soutenir le développement social, économique, politique et culturel de la population autochtone des villes québécoises et à mettre en valeur l'action collective des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec. Depuis 2014, les travaux d'ODENA se déploient également à l'échelle nationale et internationale. Cette alliance privilégie la recherche de proximité, la transmission et la mobilisation des connaissances, le partage continu des savoirs et leur inscription directe dans les initiatives de reconstruction sociale mises de l'avant par les instances autochtones concernées. ODENA a été mise sur pied en 2009 dans le cadre du Programme des Alliances de recherche universités-communautés du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH). L'Alliance de recherche ODENA souscrit pleinement aux objectifs du réseau DIALOG :

- CONTRIBUTER À LA MISE EN PLACE ET AU MAINTIEN D'UN DIALOGUE CONSTRUCTIF, novateur et durable entre l'université et les instances et communautés autochtones afin de dynamiser et de promouvoir la coproduction des connaissances, la recherche interactive et collaborative de même que l'adhésion aux principes éthiques de la recherche avec les Autochtones.
- DÉVELOPPER UNE MEILLEURE COMPRÉHENSION des réalités historiques, sociales, économiques, culturelles et politiques du monde autochtone, des enjeux contemporains et des relations entre Autochtones et non-Autochtones en misant sur la coconstruction des connaissances et en favorisant la prise en compte des besoins, savoirs, perspectives et approches des Autochtones en matière de recherche et de politiques publiques.
- SOUTENIR LA FORMATION ET L'ENCADREMENT des étudiants universitaires, et plus particulièrement des étudiants autochtones, en les associant aux activités et réalisations du réseau et en mettant à leur disposition des programmes d'aide financière et des bourses d'excellence.
- ACCROÎTRE LA PORTÉE SCIENTIFIQUE ET SOCIALE de la recherche relative aux peuples autochtones en développant de nouveaux outils de connaissance interactifs, participatifs et pédagogiques, et en multipliant les initiatives de diffusion, de partage, de transfert et de mobilisation des connaissances afin de faire connaître et de mettre en valeur ses résultats et ses avancées au Québec, au Canada et à travers le monde.





## | Table of Contents |

<b>Presentation .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Recent transformation in the Indigenous world .....	2
Distinct demographic characteristics .....	2
Living conditions, intergenerational trauma and inequalities .....	2
A detour through colonial history .....	4
From reserve to city .....	4
Building a contemporary urban life .....	5
The citizen, social and community endeavour of the Native Friendship Centres .....	6
The sociological profile of urban Indigenousness in Quebec .....	7
Multiple trajectories .....	8
Hypermobility and alternating residencies .....	10
An Indigenous civil society in movement .....	10
Creating cultural safety to reshape urban service offers and practices .....	12
<b>Conclusion: Avenues that serve as bridges of reconciliation and social justice at the municipal level .....</b>	<b>14</b>





## | Introduction<sup>1</sup> |

For several decades now, the Indigenous presence in Quebec's cities has been a sociological reality that is neither a random event, nor an accident, nor a temporary situation. The pattern has been holding over the long term and, in fact, has grown, developed and changed since the mid-20th century, and even more so since the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup>

This presence is reflected demographically, but also socially, economically, culturally and politically. Although it is difficult to measure the real demographic weight of the urban Indigenous population vis-à-vis the overall Aboriginal population in Quebec, it is estimated that at least 50% live in cities,<sup>3</sup> rather than in land-based communities,<sup>4</sup> for example. Regardless of these numbers, however, it is undeniable that cities are now an integral part of Quebec's Indigenous geopolitical landscape.

The urban experience has, in fact, become a structure-giving vector of modern Indigeneity. Whether to pursue education, secure employment, make their voices heard, defend their rights, affirm their cultural identity, launch a company, engage in public debate, live as a family, make art, receive healthcare or take refuge, First Nations and Inuit members turn to cities as a necessary personal, professional and institutional setting for their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was based on notes for a lecture presented in La Tuque on October 27, 2016, at the first provincial meeting between Quebec mayors and the Native Friendship Centre Movement.

<sup>2</sup> Lévesque Carole and Édith Cloutier. 2013. Les Premiers Peuples dans l'espace urbain au Québec: trajectoires plurielles, in A. Beaulieu, S. Gervais and M. Papillon (Eds.), *Les Autochtones et le Québec. Des premiers contacts au Plan Nord*: 281-296. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

<sup>3</sup> According to recent data, First Nations members living off-reserve in Quebec make up 53.2% of the total First Nations population. Further, when people 15 years old and up are included, this proportion reaches 59.3%. Taken from: First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee (FNILMAC). 2016. *Labour Market Conditions for First Nations and Inuit in Quebec: Current situations and trends*. FNILMAC.

<sup>4</sup> We use the term "Aboriginal land-based community" or "land-based community" to indicate Aboriginal communities on reserve, in order to distinguish them from urban Aboriginal communities.

## Recent transformation of the Indigenous world

Indigenous people in Canada and in Quebec have experienced profound changes since the 1980s and 1990s, and these trends, observed provincially and nationally, transcend borders. An increasingly noted presence of new Indigenous institutional stakeholders is arising both in Indigenous land-based communities and in urban areas: community organizations; women's, youth and Elders' groups; private and social economy companies; service hubs; tourist, artist and environmental associations; business partnerships; citizen networks; and spaces and events for cultural expression and media coverage.

At the same time, new and influential Indigenous leaders are in the public eye: artists, activists, intellectuals, researchers, lawyers, journalists, and political and spiritual leaders. New forms of leadership, gatherings, collaboration and citizenship are emerging and an Indigenous civil society is gaining momentum. These phenomena are not unique to Quebec or Canada; they cover all continents and involve most Indigenous peoples around the world.

## Distinct demographic characteristics

The Indigenous population is experiencing a demographic growth four to five times that of the Canadian and Quebec population.<sup>5</sup> The number of children per family is also three to four times higher and the age of first pregnancy is generally under 18. Multigenerational (up to five or six generations) and extended family arrangements are a demographic characteristic unique to Indigenous peoples. Families of three or more children are much more numerous than elsewhere. The median age among Canada's Indigenous peoples ranges between 23 years (Inuit), 26 years (First Nations) and 31 years (Métis). This gives an average 28 years of age, as compared to 41 years for the greater Canadian population. Moreover, people 65 and over make up less than 6% of the Indigenous population, although they represent 14% of the Canadian population. Inversely, youths ages 15–24 make up more than 18% of the Indigenous population, while they are a little less than 13% of the greater Canadian population.<sup>6</sup>

## Living conditions, intergenerational trauma and inequalities

A major portion of this urban Indigenous population struggles with poor living conditions, which are exacerbated by the major repercussions from colonial assimilationist policies, the Indian residential schools, intergenerational trauma, inadequate policies and programs, and insufficient funding for safe housing and for culturally safe healthcare and education. Life expectancy for Indigenous peoples as a whole is much shorter than for other Canadians or Quebecers. Chronic illness is more prevalent, particularly diabetes, which affects between

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<sup>5</sup> More precisely, from 2006 to 2011, the First Nations and Inuit population in Quebec "[...] has grown six times more rapidly than ... the entire population." Quote taken from FNILMAC 2016. See note 3.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. *Data from the 2011 National Household Survey*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm#a6>

three and five times more First Nations members than Canadians as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Malnutrition and food insecurity are increasingly common.<sup>8</sup> Suicide, violence, bullying, sexual abuse and psychological distress plague many collectivities, both urban and land-based communities, and hit women, adolescents and children particularly hard.<sup>9</sup>

Racism and discrimination colour relationships (of power, of care, of authority, etc.) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Sexism is widespread, both in the land-based communities and in urban areas. Single parenting is twice as frequent. Children 14 years of age and under are seven times more likely to be sent to foster homes.<sup>10</sup> School drop-out rates are very high.<sup>11</sup> Lack of housing, both in urban areas and in the land-based communities, gives rise to a host of psychosocial and economic issues. Unemployment is higher for Indigenous people, regardless of where they live. Similarly, average incomes are lower and poverty among children and families greatly affects everyone's quality of life. The risk of Indigenous children

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<sup>7</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. 2011. *Diabetes in Canada: Facts and figures from a public health perspective*. PHAC, Ottawa. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/publications/diabetes-diabete/facts-figures-faits-chiffres-2011/index-eng.php>

<sup>8</sup> Institut national de la santé publique. 2015. *L'alimentation des Premières Nations et des Inuits au Québec*. INSPQ, Québec.

Statistics Canada. 2011. *Associations between household food insecurity and health outcomes in the Aboriginal population (excluding reserves)*: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2011002/article/11435-eng.pdf>.

Cidro Jaime, Evelyn Peters and Jim Sinclair. 2014. *Defining Food Security for Urban Aboriginal People*. Final report. Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. *Validation of the 10-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) in the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey*. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2016001/article/14307-eng.pdf>

Statistics Canada. 2016. *Lifetime suicidal thoughts among First Nations living off reserve, Métis and Inuit aged 26 to 59: Prevalence and associated characteristics*. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2016008-eng.pdf>

Let us also mention recent declarations by Perry Bellegarde, the national Chief of the AFM, and other Aboriginal leaders, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commission president Murray Sinclair, regarding the obligation to reveal the alarming rates of sexual abuse and incest in Aboriginal communities. The link between this abuse and the number of teen suicides has also been mentioned by these leaders on various occasions:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/Aboriginal/cabinet-ministers-set-to-discuss-sexual-abuse-on-reserve-1.3882127>;

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-child-sexual-abuse-1.3895376>;

<http://www.metronews.ca/news/canada/2016/12/23/much-more-needs-to-be-done-to-confront-abuse-in-Aboriginal-communities-trudeau.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. *Data from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS)*: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>

<sup>11</sup> Lévesque Carole, Geneviève Polèse *et al.* 2015. *Une synthèse de connaissances sur la réussite et la persévérance scolaires des élèves autochtones au Québec et dans les autres provinces canadiennes*. Cahiers DIALOG No. 2015-01. Réseau de recherche et de connaissances relatives aux peuples autochtones (DIALOG) and Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS), Montréal. <http://espace.inrs.ca/2810/>

experiencing poverty is twice as high as that of Canadian children.<sup>12</sup> The incidence of homelessness among the Indigenous population is at least seven times higher than that in the greater Canadian population.<sup>13</sup>

## A detour through colonial history

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Indigenous peoples lived across almost all of the land that would become Quebec. Over generations and centuries, increasingly precise borders delimited the territories of these groups and hunters in particular, who were gradually pushed to the outer limits of the budding colonies and towns. The system of reserves instituted in the 19th century definitively transformed the geography of the territory, limiting the primarily nomadic tribes to geographically bound areas and parcelling their ancestral lands to the whims of the market economy, industrialization and the capitalist economy. The *Indian Act* of 1876 further restricted political and social life on the reserves, while the system of Indian residential schools structured educational and cultural life, reducing it to its simplest form.

Among the obstacles of the initial and subsequent versions of the *Indian Act* were the particularly discriminatory articles against Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men. Among other consequences, they had to leave their band, were automatically stripped of their Indian status and therefore could not pass it on to their children.<sup>14</sup> It was only in the 1980s, as the result of many battles and requests by Indigenous women's groups across the country, that these articles were abolished (at least partially), and women and their children could recover their lost status and obtain legal protection against losing their status in cases of marriage with non-Indigenous partners. However, to this day, the issue of passing down status to children and grandchildren of mixed parentage is a litigious subject between Indigenous authorities and the federal government.

## From reserve to the city

From the end of the 19th century to the World War II, these articles discriminating against Indigenous women were not fully enforced by many of the Indian bands, particularly in rural or isolated areas. Although some women and children no longer held the official status (without necessarily being aware of it), many mixed families continued to frequent the wife's band and take part in its community life. However, things changed with the 1951 amendments to the

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<sup>12</sup> Macdonald David and Daniel Wilson. 2013. *Poverty or Prosperity. Aboriginal Children in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Caryl. 2014. *Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>14</sup> Desbiens Caroline and Carole Lévesque. 2016. From Forced Relocation to Secure Belonging: Women Making Native Space in Quebec's Urban Areas, *Historical Geography* 44: 89-101.

*Indian Act*.<sup>15</sup> The Indian Register was created to record all Indigenous people with the official status or who were bound by one of the treaties then in effect.<sup>16</sup>

In the post-war era, the development of social assistance programs, mandatory schooling and social security pensions motivated the creation of the Register. This framework was a means for the government to better attribute and maintain Indian status, or to withdraw it unilaterally from those seeking post-secondary education (seen as emancipation), control patrilineal transmission and eventually curb government payments. After this, the band councils adopted much stricter measures on their territories and, in most cases, mixed families had to leave their home reserves. This was how many came to settle in the urban centres of various regions of Quebec—Côte-Nord, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Mauricie, Saguenay—looking for a new home and work to support their families.

## Building a contemporary urban life

Little by little over the 1950s and 1960s, many families<sup>17</sup> and also sometimes single people came to start a life in urban areas, which in reality were built on ancestral lands that are unrecognized by the government. These newcomers were often isolated and their access to public services was extremely difficult. On the one hand, the services offered on the reserves were confined to their territories and therefore inaccessible to individuals and families living beyond their borders. On the other hand, urban areas did not know what to do with these Indigenous families who often lived on the outskirts and with whom city dwellers had little affinity.

It was in this way that many urban Indigenous people began coming together to fight isolation, help each other and recognize their cultural specificity. The first institutional gathering of this kind, which gave rise to the Native Friendship Centre Movement, began in 1951 in Toronto.<sup>18</sup> It was quickly followed by other similar organizations, also stemming from populist and community sectors, in Vancouver in 1952 and in Winnipeg in 1959. The first Native Friendship Centre in Quebec was founded in Chibougamau in 1969. This was followed in 1974 by the

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<sup>15</sup> Desbiens Caroline, Carole Lévesque and Ioana Comat. 2016. "Inventing New Places": Urban Aboriginal Visibility and the Reconstruction of Civil Society in Quebec, *City and Society* 28(1): 74-98. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ciso.12074/full>

<sup>16</sup> Treaties No. 1–11. These treaties were signed with the various First Nations between 1871 and 1923. None were signed in Quebec.

<sup>17</sup> Here, we mean mixed families, but this also affected many families with two parents with an official and registered Indian status.

<sup>18</sup> Lobo Susan, Steve Talbot and Traci L. Morris. 2016. *Native American Voices: A Reader*. 3rd edition. London and New York: Routledge.

First Story TO. 2013. *The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT): A brief outline of the NCCT's history*. <https://firststoryblog.wordpress.com/2013/02/21/the-native-canadian-centre-of-toronto-ncct-a-brief-outline-of-the-nccts-history/>

Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre and the Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque and, in 1978, by the Centre d'entraide et d'amitié autochtone de Senneterre.

Given the growth of the urban Aboriginal population and therefore the number of these centres across the country in the 1970s, the National Association of Friendship Centres was founded, as were several provincial associations, to represent the interests of urban Aboriginal people with government and to coordinate initiatives to improve the quality of life of this growing urban population. It was in this wave that the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec was founded in 1976.<sup>19</sup> Seven provinces or territories now have such an umbrella organization for their friendship centres. When it was possible to take action on the national and provincial level, the various affiliated local centres gained considerable momentum, thanks to pooling various resources, sharing knowledge and expertise, working with non-Indigenous municipal authorities and community organizations to renew services and practices, and fostering a unique social and citizen enterprise.

## **The citizen agenda, a social and community endeavour of the Native Friendship Centres**

For more than 60 years, the Native Friendship Centres across Canada have upheld the shared mission of making known and defending urban Indigenous people's rights and interests, improving their living conditions, helping individuals and families strengthen their capacities, encouraging citizen action and involvement in their cities and regions, forging and maintaining bridges and partnerships with Indigenous land-based communities, supporting initiatives for equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and fostering a sense of belonging to the collective venture of community and social solidarity. Initially developed to fill a gap in services and resources dedicated to Indigenous people and compensate for the legal and administrative lack of social programs, the Friendship Centres have since become innovative places of learning and training, social and solidary enterprises,<sup>20</sup> frontline institutional stakeholders in countering systemic racism and sexism, privileged partners to various levels of government, venues for public expression, and vectors of social change and innovation.

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<sup>19</sup> In 2016, Quebec had 13 Native Friendship Centres. Nine centres and one service point for Aboriginal people in Trois-Rivières are now grouped under the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec banner. These are: the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière, the Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque, the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Sept-Îles, Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, Chibougamau Eenu Friendship Centre, the Centre d'entraide et d'amitié autochtone de Senneterre, Native Montreal, the Maniwaki Native Friendship Centre and the Centre d'amitié autochtone du Lac-St-Jean.

<sup>20</sup> We quickly forget that the Native Friendship Centres in Quebec are also social enterprises with a mainly Aboriginal staff. More than 150 people are currently employed by the Friendship Centres and therefore, in many cities, these are the primary Aboriginal employer and the first to employ people who have recently migrated from their land-based community. In these positions, people acquire the social and economic development skills and experiences that serve them well in their personal and professional lives.

The Native Friendship Centres combine outreach and prevention for people of all ages and walks of life, as well as members of all First Nations. They accompany and support people going through difficult times. They provide the tools that favour equitable access to public services, promote culturally safe and respectful care and intervention practices, and apply concrete means to fight poverty, exclusion and intimidation. Their holistic and integrated approach favours concertation over confrontation, transversality over sectorialism, mutual support rather than disengagement, as well as finding innovative solutions in line with Indigenous heritage, culture and contemporary aspirations to justice and equality and the challenges of decolonization and reconciliation.

It is not surprising then that the Native Friendship Centre Movement received attention in the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples consultations in the early 1990s. Their role in welcoming and supporting Indigenous people was highlighted as an example of the Centres' unique contribution to safeguarding Indigenous identity.<sup>21</sup> Already at this time, nearly 45% of the total Indigenous population of Canada was living in urban areas. In response to these observations, the Government of Canada created the Urban Aboriginal Strategy Engagement (UASE) in 1997 to meet the increasingly diversified needs of Indigenous people; favour their social, cultural and economic development; and increase their participation in the economic prosperity of Canadian cities (and, therefore by extension, Quebec cities).

## **The sociological profile of the urban Indigenous population in Quebec**

Since the era when moving to the city resembled forced exile, the modalities of the Indigenous presence in urban areas have significantly changed. Although cities sometimes remain the only option for survival for many people, particularly women and their children, who are escaping a violent or limiting family or community situation, today, the main motivation for this move is higher education, followed by employment and the desire to be closer to family or friends who have already settled in these areas. The city is not an occasional solution or a transitory place; it is a deliberate choice and an end goal.<sup>22</sup> It comes as no surprise then that urban Indigenous people are young, mostly female and more educated than before (the proportion of university degrees is growing) and also more educated than the average Indigenous person living in a land-based community.

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<sup>21</sup> Lévesque Carole. 2016. La Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones: les premiers pas d'une réconciliation annoncée, in *L'état du Québec 2017*: 159-164. Montréal: Institut du Nouveau-Monde and Del Busso.

<sup>22</sup> "First Nations participate at a greater proportion in the labour market when living off reserve, are more employed and are less affected by unemployment. The gaps in these indicators increased from 2006 to 2011. First Nations off reserve have seen their employment and participation rates increase during this period whereas the opposite occurred for First Nations on reserve; unemployment continues to affect twice as many First Nations on reserve (22.9% in 2011) as those off reserve (10.1%)." Taken from: *Labour Market Conditions for First Nations and Inuit in Quebec: Current situations and trends*. FNILMAC.

Nearly a third of First Nations children in Quebec attend primary and secondary school. A second and even third generation of Indigenous people has been growing up in urban areas since the early 2000s.<sup>23</sup> Proud of their past and their heritage, these young people have never known life on-reserve. The city is where they live, grow and experience personal, artistic and professional accomplishment. Although, as we saw above, the demographic growth of the Indigenous population is faster than that of the non-Indigenous Quebec population in general, it is twice as fast in cities as it is in land-based communities.

Today, thousands of Indigenous people live in cities after being put up for adoption (often unbeknownst to their parents) between the early 1960s and the mid-1980s. The 1951 amendments to the *Indian Act* made Indigenous people admissible for provincial social programs, although the provinces did not have the financial means to meet the demand. Among the impacts engendered by these measures (or lack thereof), services for children were greatly affected. Often the communities' only option was to remove or put up Indigenous children for adoption in non-Indigenous families. These children were torn from their families, losing their Indian status and all connection with their parents, grandparents, siblings and culture.

This imposed placement process is known as the "Sixties Scoop" and it was a direct descendent of the preceding assimilation policies. It is estimated that over 30,000 children were adopted by non-Indigenous parents in Canada and abroad during this period.<sup>24</sup> Today, these people make up what is called the "lost generation" and are claiming their rights to their original identity and their ancestral culture and traditions. A group of these individuals in Ontario<sup>25</sup> recently took court action so that the harm and prejudice caused by the respective articles of the *Indian Act* would at least be acknowledged by the government and lead to reparation.

## Multiple trajectories

The population that currently makes up the urban Indigenous community is therefore much more diverse than we might believe. Moreover, benefiting from more recent Supreme Court rulings on the status of women (particularly Bill C-31 in 1985 and the *Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act* of 2010), tens of thousands of people recovered their lost status or gained new status. Most of these First Nations members live in urban areas, even if their renewed membership with their original bands are now in the federal Indian Register.

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<sup>23</sup> Environics Institute. 2010. *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study*. Online. <http://uaps.twg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/UAPS-FULL-REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Kimelman E. C.1985. "No Quiet Place." *Review Committee on Indian and Métis Adoptions and Placements*. Department of Community Services and Corrections. Manitoba Community Services, Winnipeg.

Milloy John. 2008. *Indian Act Colonialism: A Century of Dishonour, 1869–1969*. Research paper for the National Centre for First Nations Governance.

<sup>25</sup> <http://news.nationalpost.com/toronto/class-action-against-60s-scoop-of-16000-Aboriginal-children-placed-in-foster-care-gets-its-day-in-court>

A recent provincial survey of 1,000 Indigenous people (90% of whom are First Nations members) carried out by the ODENA Research Alliance<sup>26</sup> in 10 Quebec cities aptly demonstrates how respondents' life trajectories are anything but linear and clear-cut. They certainly do not always originate from land-based communities. Though 42% of the survey sample claimed to "have lived only in an Indigenous community" between the ages of 0 and 18 years before coming to town, 29% grew up in an urban area only and another 29% spent this period of their lives in both a land-based community and a city. Despite variation between cities (given the particular history, location and somewhat longstanding frequentation by Indigenous people of each urban area), the results of this survey confirm population and sociological trends already being observed in dozens of others cities across Canada.<sup>27</sup>

The spheres of the Indigenous land-based communities and of cities are not mutually exclusive or isolated; they are, in fact, closely interconnected in the quest for modernity and personal and collective growth. The Native Friendship Centres have strong constructive and productive ties with many Atikamekw, Innu, Cree or Anicinape communities, with whom the Centres work daily to offer the best services, practices and accompaniment. These ties greatly demonstrate the principles of collaboration, concertation and sharing inherent to the Friendship Centres.

Geography is also key, since many Indigenous land-based communities are located near cities or urban areas that meet most of their members' needs for goods and services. The communities of the Mohawk Nation close to Montréal are a good example, as is the Huron-Wendat Nation, which is located only a few kilometres from Québec City. Various communities of the Innu, Atikamekw, Anicinape and Cree Nations are also easily accessible by provincial and regional roads, which facilitates and greatly increases movement between places. Cities are also home to private and social businesses that work with the land-based communities and host various artistic or sporting events (exhibits, performances or hockey matches, for example).

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<sup>26</sup> ODENA Research Alliance has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) since its founding in 2008. It gathers actors from Aboriginal civil society and researchers and students from many universities involved in the joint construction and mobilization of knowledge and knowledge systems to improve the quality of life of urban Aboriginal people and renew relations between the First Peoples and other Quebecers in a spirit of equality and mutual respect.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, Alan B. (Ed.). 2013. *Home in the City: Urban Aboriginal Housing and Living Conditions*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Peters, Evelyn J. and Chris Andersen (Eds.). 2013. *Aboriginal in the City. Contemporary Identities and Cultural Innovation*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Peters, Evelyn J. (Ed.). 2011. *Urban Aboriginal Policy Making in Canadian Municipalities*. Kingston and Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

## Hypermobility and alternating residences

Indigenous people from land-based communities have long moved to cities either as their final destination (as we have seen) or as a temporary, permanent or transitory stage in their life trajectories. These movements have increased greatly in the last two or three decades. The Indigenous population is, in fact, documented as Canada's most mobile, all groups combined. This includes residential mobility both within the same city and between cities and land-based communities. The concept of hypermobility was coined to describe the range of movements of the Indigenous population between various locations.<sup>28</sup>

The ODENA Research Alliance's province-wide survey also documented new dynamics of mobility that can be observed in the cities under study. In particular, these include a back-and-forth between cities and land-based communities: people living permanently in town hold jobs in a land-based community while others maintain a home in a land-based community, but work in a city. Some alternate daily or weekly; others, monthly or seasonally. Families may also live in a city for the school year but head back to a territory for the summer. In some cities, up to 25% of respondents have such habits. These lifestyles have been observed in other provinces, but had not yet been studied in Quebec.

Although cities are still destinations for those living in the land-based communities, it also must be acknowledged that urban areas have also become a point of departure toward other places and other life events. Indigenous and government bodies alike have long perceived cities as the negative flip side of the land-based communities. This view fed the idea that Indigenous people's "natural" living environment was the reserve; as soon as someone left, he or she was considered to have automatically renounced his or her identity and assimilated into Quebec or Canadian society. This exclusion and negation continues to underpin many policies or programs for urban Indigenous people. It also can give rise to various forms of (sometimes unconscious) discrimination, as this view colours the actions and behaviours of those interacting with Indigenous individuals.

## An Indigenous civil society in movement

Today, the urban Indigenous population is much more than the sum of individuals of various ages who live in cities. The critical mass and the quality of this presence have slowly led to the emergence of an Indigenous civil society: an intentional grouping ready to face the government, serve as public leaders, and defend political decisions and various interests. Since the rise of neoliberalism, the civil society has become increasingly visible and active in many countries.

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<sup>28</sup> Frideres, James S. and René R. Gadacz. 2008. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Toronto: Pearson Education Canada.

Norris, Mary J. and Stewart Clatworthy. 2003. Aboriginal Mobility and Migration within Urban Canada: Outcomes, Factors, and Implications in D. Newhouse and E. Peters (Ed.), *Not strangers in these parts: Urban Aboriginal peoples*: 55-85. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative.

Indigenous people are no exception.<sup>29</sup> The most persuasive example in recent years is the Idle No More movement (<http://www.idlenomore.ca>).

Well known in Quebec and Canada and attracting abundant media attention the world over, this Indigenous social movement was borne out of an urban context (the city of Saskatoon) and was led by four women (three Indigenous and one non-Indigenous). They took their first stand in November 2012 to denounce former Prime Minister Harper's Administration *Jobs and Growth Act*. With its great impact on the environment and waterways, this Act directly affected many Indigenous ancestral lands, some of which were under treaty with various levels of government. In the face of this threat, which of course came on the heels of 500 years of colonization and the destruction of ancestral lands, and given the government's lack of receptivity to Indigenous leaders' claims, these women simply expressed their frustration and outrage at an obtuse government turning a deaf ear.

The initiative reached well beyond a particular political context, becoming the symbol of a "silent and pacifist Indigenous revolution." Mobilization spread across the country and spurred hundreds of protests, including in Quebec thanks to two young Indigenous women.<sup>30</sup> This movement deeply inspired urban Indigenous people in Canada, but its messages and vision were also adopted in many Indigenous land-based communities. In fact, it was a new mode of taking action that came from the cities that also sought to reach the communities. It reflected a new and modern Indigenous citizenship, the results of which extend well beyond borders.

Given their community-oriented and democratic mission, vision and operations, the Native Friendship Centres were the first drivers of the Indigenous civil society, well before their time. In fact, each centre owes its existence to a local grassroots movement. Therefore, like many other Indigenous organizations, including Quebec Native Women, the Native Friendship Centres endorsed and promoted Idle No More because it was in keeping with actions and claims that were already longstanding.

In Quebec, this sector of Indigenous civil society proposes a new and unique social vision. This social project is not that of the non-Indigenous population, of the Indigenous land-based communities or of newcomer cultural communities, which unfortunately continue to be compared to the Indigenous population. The Friendship Centres' advocacy and community action centres around egalitarian and equitable difference<sup>31</sup>, in other words, the recognition of the unique trajectory of Indigenous peoples, their colonial heritage, their social reconstruction

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<sup>29</sup> Pan-Canadian mobilization against the pipelines is another example, as is Standing Rock, a protest in the United States in the fall of 2016 joined by many Aboriginal people from Quebec and Canada.

<sup>30</sup> Widia Larivière and Mélissa Mollen-Dupuis. <https://www.gazettedesfemmes.ca/6752/autochtones-debout/> (in French).

<sup>31</sup> Lévesque Carole and Édith Cloutier. 2011. Une société civile autochtone au Québec, in C. Lévesque, N. Kermoal and D. Salée (Eds.), *L'activisme autochtone: hier et aujourd'hui*: 16-19. Cahier DIALOG No. 2011-01, conference notes. INRS, Montréal.

and decolonization efforts and, at the same time, acknowledgement of their status as full citizens of Quebec cities. There are indeed many dimensions of the Indigenous exception.

## **A cultural safety process to reshape urban service offers and practices**

Cultural safety<sup>32</sup> is one of the action and intervention strategies Quebec Native Friendship Centres favour in their work to improve Indigenous quality of life and reduce inequality and injustice. It is a proven process of transformation and reconciliation that has been implemented for many years in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This process:

- is couched in social justice, a foundational principle;
- recognizes the legitimacy of Indigenous social and cultural difference;
- considers the lasting effects of colonization and systemic racism;
- aims to create safe and welcoming environments for Indigenous people within the healthcare and educational systems in particular, as well as other sectors; and
- fosters the implementation of services, practices and initiatives that are in keeping with Indigenous accompaniment and social interaction, care, and in accordance with Indigenous worldviews.

Originally developed by the Maori, this process is compatible in many ways with a holistic vision, an eco-systemic approach and the principles of equity, collegiality and reciprocity that the Native Friendship Centres Movement has advocated for decades. Built on the observation of the deep-seated inadequacy of institutional responses to Indigenous needs in general, cultural safety, strictly speaking, can be broken down into four elements: 1) cultural awareness, 2) cultural sensitivity, 3) cultural competency and 4) cultural safety. It is in and of itself a process of learning and mutual respect between Indigenous people and decision-makers, psychosocial workers and professionals whose end goal is to contribute to improving personal and collective well-being and to the population's full expression in all areas of society.

The Indigenous health clinics that have been created in recent years in the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centres (Minowé Clinic) and in the Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque (Clinique Acokan) draw on this collective and inter-institutional process. The foundation of culturally safe environments first and foremost requires constructive and egalitarian partnerships with the government, the structures and the authorities of the Quebec health network, various healthcare and educational institutions, the Native Friendship Centres and other involved Indigenous authorities.

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<sup>32</sup> Health Council of Canada. 2012. *Empathy, Dignity, and Respect: Creating Cultural safety for Aboriginal people in urban healthcare*. HCC.

Allan Billie and Janet Smylie. 2015. *First Peoples, Second Class Treatment. The role of racism in the health and well-being of Aboriginal peoples in Canada*. Toronto: Wellesley Institute.

In addition to the necessity of working collaboratively and cordially, there are two strategic orientations underpinning the process of cultural safety for urban Indigenous people. First is the construction of a new body of social, economic and cultural determinants and indicators that reflect the realities, needs, challenges and objectives of Indigenous people's well-being, regardless of nation.

Contrary to the wide-held perception, the determinants and indicators that make it possible to calibrate interventions with this population, to define the programs to be implemented and to identify social development, health or education targets are not universal. They convey values, principles, social and economic goals and action that is anchored in particular cultures, social endeavours and ways of life. While these values, principles, aims and action may resonate with both Quebec and Indigenous societies, substantial differences do persist in most cases. It is therefore important to combine the implementation of cultural safety with parallel processes of conceptualization and operationalization to shed light on decision-making and institutional transformations.

Second, it is crucial to review, redefine and renew the practices of professionals in Quebec's healthcare and educational networks to transform the way in which they assist and interact with the Indigenous people they serve. Still today, lack of understanding colours relationships, engendering discomfort, disrespect and ultimately disengagement. It is therefore crucial we cast a constructive view on these practices, which should be documented, and implement the means to share, learn and transfer knowledge between the Friendship Centres and public services stakeholders in Quebec .

**In conclusion:**  
**Avenues that serve as bridges of  
reconciliation and social justice at the  
municipal level**

This overview of the realities of urban Indigenous people would go unfinished without identifying a few avenues that could be explored to solidify the connections between municipalities and the Native Friendship Centres on the one hand, and on the other, to work concertedly to improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens. These avenues can operate at different levels, and thus suggest institutional responses (public policy for instance) as well as initiatives to increase visibility and recognition.

- ***Design welcoming policies that foster well-being and solidarity amongst citizens***  
The presence of Indigenous people in urban areas is not a passing trend. Further, this presence will likely grow in coming years. Similarly, circulation between cities and land-based communities will also increase. City authorities would do well to highlight the economic, social, artistic and cultural contributions of their Indigenous residents to the collective and citizen life.
- ***Encourage the creation of policies, action plans and social development strategies based on Indigenous values, knowledge and practices***  
The major differences between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous Quebec or Canadian populations in terms of health, education, employability—as well as the over-representation of Indigenous people among the homeless, which is just one of many possible examples—clearly show that government programs and measures for Indigenous people are inadequate and do not improve their quality of life. Despite substantial investments, these differences have widened in recent years. It is becoming crucial to revisit the references on which these programs and measures are based and to re-anchor them in Indigenous realities, aims and challenges.<sup>33</sup>
- ***Acknowledge Indigenous urban presence, past and present***  
Native Friendship Centres did not develop in Quebec's cities by chance. They are all located on Indigenous ancestral lands and the presence of Indigenous people in these places greatly preceded the very foundation of these cities. Generally, this story is unknown, even to Indigenous people themselves. There are many educational and artistic means of reconstituting this history to highlight and celebrate it for the benefit of all citizens.

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<sup>33</sup> Lévesque, Carole. 2015. Promouvoir la sécurisation culturelle pour améliorer la qualité de vie et les conditions de santé de la population autochtone, *Revue Droits et Libertés* (special issue Decolonization and Aboriginal Rights) 34 (2): 16-19.

- **Name public spaces in honour of Indigenous personalities**  
Parks, buildings, squares and other public places are generally named in honour of important historical figures. The range of possibilities includes Indigenous people who left their mark in each region. The Gabriel-Commanda Walk Against Racial Discrimination, created in the early 2000s by the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, is surely the most persuasive example of a citizen initiative that has since become a city tradition.<sup>34</sup>
- **Implement public symbols and signs of Indigeneity in cities**  
Inscriptions, markers, symbols, and material and artistic representations could bear witness to Indigenous cultural vectors. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism bureaus could meet to define common ventures, as was the case for an exhibition that presented Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in Rouyn-Noranda in June 2015.<sup>35</sup>



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<sup>34</sup> Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre. 2015. *Historique de la Marche Gabriel-Commanda*. VDNFC, Val-d'Or.

<sup>35</sup> *Dialogue Deux: le rapprochement culturel par l'art*:  
<http://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/724329/dialogue-deux-exposition-culture-tourisme-autochtone-rouyn-noranda>







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REGROUPEMENT  
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