International Observatory of Mayors
Living Together

THEMATIC PAPER

Urban safety and the Global city : Some Montréal perspectives

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Urban safety and the global city

Our intention in this document is to suggests some areas of reflection on the theme of safety, without pretending to be exhaustive. However, based on Montréal's experience, we would like to attract readers' attention to some major issues in global cities to support scientific and citizen debate.

The definition of safety proposed by Québec's Ministère de la Sécurité Publique is inspired by the approach of international institutions and highlights all aspects of human life, from its biological to its spatial conception. There is danger, risk management and control to preserve a favourable state for populations and bringing together the conditions for balance between individuals, community, different social groups and the configuration of physical objects. It's what we can call living together. This approach, developed in the post-Cold War era, is part of the paradigm of human safety and reorients traditional safety concerns of the Nation-State (protecting its territory, civil protection, public order) versus those of the general population in its everyday experience (health, well-being, living together).

The notion of safety is fundamentally linked to the notions of danger, threat and risk. Ulrich Beck defines risk as a "particular intermediary state between safety and destruction, in which the perception of threatening risks determines thought and action. (Beck 1992, 213, our translation)." Using this definition, Beck establishes that safety depends not only on subjective analysis based on personal experience, but also on a set of socially and historically constructed perceptions.

In contemporary democratic societies, institutions in charge of safety are responsible for identifying dangers, threats and risks and managing/controlling them. This means that they in charge of several mandates, from prevention and surveillance to sanctions and repression and even eradication in some cases. When we discuss urban safety in the rest of this document, we will refer to intimately subjective production processes and experiences in daily life that help to collectively identify risks and threats in order to manage them.

1. Main issues and challenges

Urban safety includes a set of perceptions that citizens intimately experience and the institutional framework of action built on the basis of these socially and historically located perceptions. In other words, safety, danger and risk are not objective; they are socially and politically constructed. In the context of the Observatory, for example, various stakeholders are united around the threat of radicalization. This term reappeared in public debate in 2001 with a different connotation than it had before. Other threats, such as street gangs, were considered more important.

This thematic analysis offers an historic look at the evolution of threats identified by public stakeholders and the programs in place to manage them. We will show how, despite the evolution of action targets (the risks that have been identified), intervention frameworks change much less quickly. The whole issue of the current action framework based on a systemic risk management approach is how to make the debate less political and more technical. Another major issue is abuse related to the concept of safety in the strict traditional sense (militarization and excessive surveillance).

2. Key initiatives and institutional evolutions in Montréal

Since the 1980s, we have been part of a reorientation of levels of intervention with regards to safety and risk management, as well as increasing accountability to municipal authorities and more sophisticated technical skills. In parallel, these changes have given a more prominent place to private companies offering specialized security services with recourse to consultants and experts (for example, crisis management, such as accommodating refugees). Urban safety issues engage not only provincial and municipal institutions (government, city hall, police, firefighters) but also residents themselves with specific community programs (prevention services, private security services, community organizations). They involve a number of areas: economics, food, health, environment, community, justice and politics.

We must go back to the 1960s to understand recent evolutions in urban safety in Montréal and more broadly, across Québec. In this section, we will look more closely at the areas of public order and civil protection. In 1968, the provincial government enacted the Police Act which created the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) police force. The Act also created the Commission de police du Québec to investigate the actions of different police services. In reality, the SQ has been in operation since 1965 under the Ministère de la Justice du Québec, which was created by combining the functions of prosecutor and solicitor general (Lamalice 2004). While police departments concentrate primarily on crimes, offences and maintaining order, the Service des Incendies de Montréal (SIM) intervenes in emergencies. The SIM's training centre opened in 1963 and the first squadron of firefighter/investigators was created. During this period, public safety concerns were mainly in the political domain with the Front de Libération du Québec's demands for independence. The federal government's War Measures Act, enacted at the request of local and provincial authorities during the October 1970 crisis, remains an important episode in Québec's modern history.

Between 1970 and 1980, the road safety variable became greater, with increased traffic and more generalized access to individual vehicles. This period marked a turning point in terms of the intervention framework with a restructuring of services for small municipalities, reduction of staff and decreased recruitment (Lamalice 2004). In 1986, the Ministère du Solliciteur Général was created to oversee the police, police corps, public safety, criminality and provincial correctional institutions. In 1988, it became the   Ministère de la

Sécurité Publique and the SQ was placed under its juridiction. As for Montréal, the Service de Police de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal, which later became the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM), opened in 1972, uniting the island's police forces within one organization. Also in 1982, following an increase in household robberies, the first community-based prevention programs were created with Opération Tandem. During this period, there were biker clashes, mafia crime and the emergence of street gangs. In general, crime organizations and activities were being restructured internationally. To respond to this threat, police departments created special squads to manage and control crime organizations and their specific activities and phenomena.

In the 1990, the SQ had to rethink its response model due to the difficult economic context and a number of controversies (the Oka Crisis, the Matticks Affaire). The Commissaire à la déontologie policière and Comité de déontologie policière succeeded the Commission de police du Québec. The concept of community policing was developed in Montréal with the implementation of neighbourhood stations. Services were diversified and the police also became specialized in lifesaving and emergency response for the Services de sécurité incendie de Montréal.
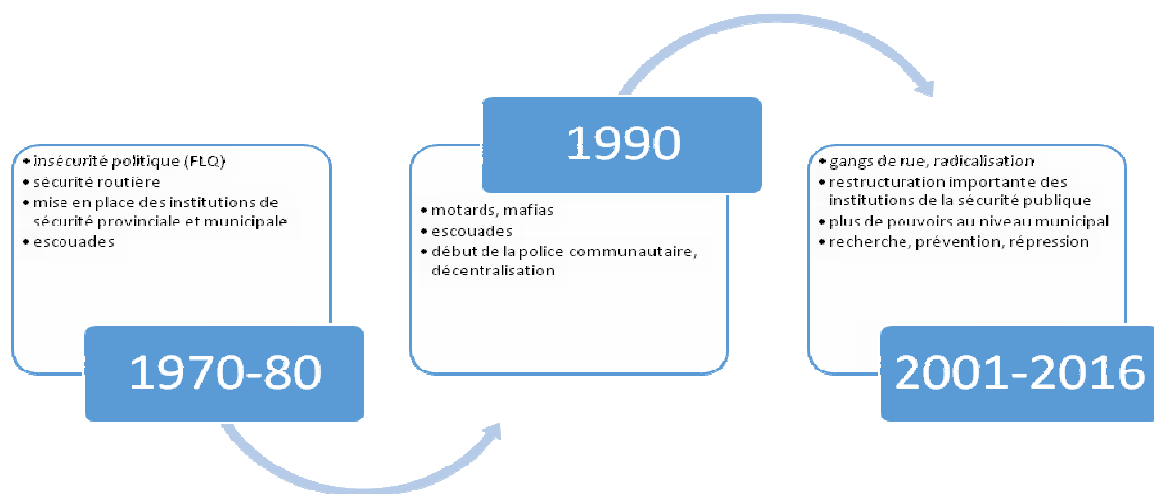
The 2000s market a turning point with major changes to the judicial framework and the implementation of specialized professional training: the new Police Act was voted in, the Fire Safety Act; the École Nationale des Pompiers du Québec and the École Nationale de Police du Québec which replaced the Institut de police du Québec; the Civil Protection Act in 2001; and the Act Respecting the Québec Correctional Systen in 2002 (Lamalice 2004). All municipal and provincial sectors of public safety were affected and restructured. These changes shook up traditional response frameworks that had been in place since the 1960s and began a new phase of professionalization of services for managing public order and civil protection. For example, the Police Act increased surveillance of SPVM activites and required its chiefs to inform the Ministre de la Sécurité Publique without delay of any allegation of criminal conduct from a police officer (Wood 2015, 113). The SPVM underwent several reorganizations during this period related to the tension between a desire to decentralize services into neighbourhoods and the need for coordination. The SPVM is supervised by several municipal political organizations, including a group of elected officials, the Commission de la Sécurité Publique, which is also responsible for approving its annual budget and strategic orientations (Ibid., 112). Simultaneously, Tandem, Montréal's program to support residents' urban safety initatives, was consolidated to include all initiatives in Montréal.

Following September 11, 2001, Canada distanced itself from the centralized U.S. model and the Department of Homeland Security, instead founding its public safety organization based on The Canadian Security and Intelligence Community as a flexible system of cooperation between different organizations in charge of public safety in Canada (Deschênes et Lamalice 2004). This structure was fourfold: police services; civil protection and fire safety; correctional services; and national security. In Québec, the Centre National de Veille de la Sécurité Publique was created in 2002 following the Sept. 11 attacks, as well as the 1996 floods and 1998 ice storm (Castegan 2004). It later became the Centre des Opérations Gouvernementales in 2006, whose mission was monitoring (surveillance

and alert), anticipation and coordination of actions. Provincial public safety followed the decentralization trend of the federal government. However, Montréal faced some unique issues (crime, terrorism and environment) because of its special role as a hub for economic activities, skills and attractiveness within the province. This status gave it a greater role in urban safety issues and forced it to take more local responsibility. During this period, government response programs to street gangs for 2007-2010 and 2011-2014 were developed in addition to specialized squads already in force such as ECLIPSE.

A number of urban safety elements came out of Montréal's and Québec's approaches since the first changes in the 1960s: emphasizing prevention, multisectoral approaches, joint action, coordination and valuing neighbourhoods. However, it would be relevant to extend the issue to the fields of health and social protection to consider this historical perspective in more depth. We will also see how the emergence of new phenomena, such as radicalization, or new trends, such as preventing youth delinquency or preventing the sexual exploitation of young girls, cause tensions and urban safety issues to increase in global cities.

1970-80
- insécurité politique (FLQ)
- sécurité routière
- mise en place des institutions de sécurité provinciale et municipale
- escouades

1990
- motards, mafias
- escouades
- début de la police communautaire, décentralisation

2001-2016
- gangs de rue, radicalisation
- restructuration importante des institutions de la sécurité publique
- plus de pouvoirs au niveau municipal
- recherche, prévention, répression

3. Limits and reflection

The current response framework is based on what criminologists have named "new penology," which was developed intensively in the 1990s. In this framework, criminals are not considered "immoral" -- instead, they are an aggregate of statistics. Crime is seen as a statistical probability to be managed, a consequence of a number of risk factors in an area or for a type of individual. The primary objective of the penal system, from this perspective, is to neutralize danger by regulating a risk system instead of punishing or rehabilitating the criminal. The individual is seen as the consequence of risks that are statistically attributed to his or her social group or neighbourhood. It is from this perspective that stigmatizing practices such as racial profiling or institutional identification of "difficult" or "at-risk" neighbourhoods has arisen.

One of the main consequences of the risk factor perspective is presenting delinquency as a technical rather than a political problem. The individual cannot be considered without the system and the "at-risk" individual cannot be detached from his or her environment. This has consequences on the relationship that the state has with its "at-risk" citizens, which is based on control, surveillance and producing data about individuals, stacks of intertwining data that are used to create racial and social profiles. These profiles cannot convey a person's individuality. (Boudreau 2013).

As well, this perspective fosters a "results culture" characterized by performance, efficiency and deresponsibilization, in the tension between defining action targets, structuring response frameworks and the emergence of new phenomena and trends (Mucchielli 2008). It can be seen in the debate on radicalization with a trend towards individual responsibility for those who commit criminal and terrorist acts and less collective responsibility for the conditions that cause such phenomena to appear (Amiraux et Araya-Moreno 2014).

The response framework can also be affected by the privatization of security services in their relationship between the different municipal and provincial levels. On one hand, this trend will have an impact on the response philosophy and practices in various institutions by making them more vulnerable to fraud, plots, abuses of trust and corruption, particularly when they are directed by the injunctions of "results culture." We saw this in Québec with the Charbonneau Commission and the Canadian Bureau of Investigations and Adjustments. On the other hand, there is a trend towards militarizing security services, with permanent low-grade harassment practices, "sub-lethal" weapons and small, specialized units (Rigouste 2012; Wood 2015). This trend can promote acts of brutality, blunders or crimes within the heavily loaded response framework of urban safety, in a world that has been redefined by mass media and social media. Until very recently, investigations of SPVM officers in a death were conducted internally because of the close ties between the SPVM, the SQ and the Ministère de la Sécurité du Québec. As stated by Wood (2015, 112), unlike the police departments of *Toronto, New York and Washington, the SPVM is not overseen by an official civil organization."* Since June 2015, the Bureau des Enquêtes Indépendantes (BEI) is the independent governmental organization in charge *"of an investigation by the minister in any case where a person other than a police officer on duty dies, is seriously injured, or is injured by a firearm used by a police officer during a police intervention or while being detained by a police force."* (BEI Web site). More broadly, the BEI can investigate criminal infractions involving a police officer when it is directed to do so by the Ministère de la Sécurité Publique.

Coming back to the dominant paradigm of human safety, in this era of the U.S.-initiated war on terror that emerged after the cold war and is part of the reorientation of the Nixon administration's war on drugs in the 1970s, it is important that we move forward based on the idea that danger, risk and threats to safety are socially and politically constructed. We must question the intrinsic contribution of new measures that are being developed in ways that are ever more sophisticated, as well as their direct influence on the same dangers, risks and threats. In reference to the principle of prevention, Peretti-Watel and Moatti (2009) caution us against *"the mad rush to non-death, the ghost of total deprivation, the*

tyranny of expertise, the existence of counter-productive effects and deleterious moralization."

To cite an example close to home, it would be worthwhile to conduct an in-depth analysis of the existing similarities between governmental response plans to street gangs and the new 2015-2018 action plan on the radicalization of Québec 2015-2018. Promoting living together must not overlook current and contemporary changes in the life paths of residents and city dwellers, as well as the complexity of socio-cultural perspectives working within their everyday experiences. This is why the Observatory, which unites researchers, decision-makers and social stakeholders, is important.

4. Improvements

In conclusion, we suggest the following improvements:

- Close collaboration between neighbourhood action, university research and governmental decision making, particularly at the municipal level. Street gang interventions and prevention of radicalization must be a major focus of research and collaboration, as this is a crucial path to pursue.

- Start a public discussion on the definition of risks and threats to avoid de-politicizing the debate and making it more technical. Threats and risks are not absolute and result from a social and political construction process. For example, instead of presenting radicalization as an objective threat, it is worthwhile to open a debate about radicalization and outline the threats and their causes.

- In the same vein, people and areas considered at risk must have a voice in this debate instead of being considered too vulnerable. We must recognize these people and areas in their wholeness and complexity, not just as a potential threat. That means opening a discussion.

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Ville de Montréal (http://ville.montreal.qc.ca)

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