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CITIES AS PLACES OF TRANSFORMATION*

*Please see attached slide deck for slide references

1. City Song Lines

SLIDE: City Song Lines

Has anyone heard of something called 'Songlines' in Aboriginal culture?

Songlines are the long Creation story lines that cross landscapes and put geographical and sacred sites into place in some Aboriginal culture. They are both inspiration and important cultural knowledge.

I'd like to start by reading a 'City Songline' by Leonie Sandercock, from her book *Cosmopolis II*.

"I look into my crystal globe, and I dream of the carnival of the multicultural city…. I don't want a city where everything stays the same and everyone is afraid of change; I don't want a city where young African Americans have to sell drugs to make a living, or Thai women are imprisoned in sweat shops in the garment district where they work sixteen hours a day six days a week. I don't want a city where I am afraid to go out alone at night, or to visit certain neighborhoods even in broad daylight; where pedestrians are immediately suspect, and the homeless always harassed. I don't want a city where the elderly are irrelevant and 'youth' is a problem to be solved by more control.

"I dream of a city of bread *and* festivals, where those who don't have the bread aren't excluded from the carnival. I dream of a city in which action grows out of knowledge and understanding; where *you* haven't got it made until you can help others to get where you are or beyond; where social justice is more prized than a balanced budget; where I have a right to my surroundings, and so do all my fellow citizens; where we don't exist for the city but are seduced by it; where only after consultation with local folks could decisions be made about our neighborhoods; where scarcity does not build a barb-wired fence around carefully guarded inequalities; where no one flaunts their authority and no-one is without authority.

"I want a city where people can cartwheel across pedestrian crossings without being arrested for playfulness; where everyone can paint the sidewalks, and address passers-by without fear of being shot; where there are places of stimulus and places of meditation; where there is music in public squares, and street performers don't have to have a portfolio and a permit, and street vendors co-exist with shopkeepers. I want a city where people take pleasure in shaping and caring for their environment and are encouraged to do so; where neighbors plant bok choy and taro and broad beans in community gardens. I want a city that is run differently from an accounting firm; where planners 'plan' by negotiating desires and fears, mediating memories and hopes, facilitating change and transformation."

This 'love song' as Leonie calls it, is about naming existing narratives and expressing desired ones. I'll come back to the topic of city narratives a little later on. First, I want to share a hypothesis based on the title of this talk -- that is that Cities can be Places of Transformation.

2. City Transformation Hypothesis & Concepts

I have a hypothesis to test with you; I'm articulating it in this way for the first time here. It's based on learning from Cities for People and years of practice and research on cities. Many others have contributed to ideas in it, including some colleagues in this room. **The hypothesis is that possibilities for positive transformation open up to cities that embed values and favour practices in four areas, which are: inclusion, innovation, resilience and reconciliation. But that's not enough. Cities must also harness the energy of collective imagination and enable collective action. And a third, essential ingredient is necessary: that is of narratives - and making manifest our shared values and shared narratives (and also conflicting and contested ones) in the spaces and places and priorities of our cities. My proposition is that, all together, this mix has the power to catalyze transformation in our cities.**

What do I mean by city transformation? And why is it necessary? For most of the last century, in spite of all sorts of interesting, innovative, ecological examples in cities around the world, the overall nature of change in cities has not contributed to the well-being of the vast majority of people nor to the planet. **We need transformation because the dominant paradigm for how cities are built in terms of infrastructure and institutions is continually reproduced if it is not interrupted or jolted in some way.**

In large part, the cities we have were built for the last century, especially in terms of infrastructure and institutions. And society is changing all around us, arguably at a more rapid pace than in the past. In many cases, cities are unable to adequately respond to people's changing needs and aspirations. Here and around the world we're seeing a profound and largely unmet civic appetite for involvement in local and global governance, not least through social movements in recent years: Occupy, Idle No More, the Arab Spring and so on.

In many ways our cities fall short both in addressing environmental imperatives and societal needs and aspirations. **Two concepts that are particularly relevant to thinking about city transformation are: 1) 'a safe and just space for humanity' – which is a new paradigm for sustainable development; and 2) social transformation and certain rights that are associated with positive change.**

SLIDE: Raworth 2012 diagram: The donut: A safe and just space for humanity

Kate Raworth proposes a new visual conceptual framework for sustainable development that addresses the imperatives to ensure human rights, and to situate the economy within environmental limits in the interest of bringing humanity into "a safe and just space". This brings together objectives of poverty eradication and social sustainability with environmental sustainability. Humanity now resides far outside the safe and just space – outside "the doughnut". Extreme inequalities of power, income, education, and gender have millions of people living far below most of the eleven aspects of the social foundation. Simultaneously, we're pushing against safe environmental boundaries of the

planet, and in three of nine environmental measures, we've already crossed the boundaries – climate change, biodiversity loss, and nitrogen use. (Rockström *et al.,* 2009)

A major revelation of this work is the significant difference in the states of stress between the social foundation and the environmental ceiling. On the one hand, planetary-system processes were in a "safe space" before the industrial revolution when significant stress was added by human activity. However, Raworth points out what is most telling here -- that is that **the world's peoples have *never* all been able to live in a "just space" above the social foundation.** Going forward, she argues the aims must be for all of humanity to reach the space above the social foundations, and to move earth systems back to the "safe space".

Useful as it is, this framework has a notable lack: it's silent on cities or urban spatial issues at all or matters of spatial justice. The closest reference is to improve transport technology to provide more efficient cars. However, none of the negative outcomes of such an approach – including that it would have no impact on urban form or reducing sprawl -- are mentioned. It seems to me that we are still not building cities or most settlements in ways that seriously address the very important concerns raised by Raworth's framework in either environmental or social terms.

What the framework does clearly reveal is that transformation is needed in how we live, move, build, work and play, including in cities, where the majority of us now live, move, build, work and play.

One aspect of city transformation that is needed is social transformation, which I'll turn to now. Social transformation is spatially cultivated and is tangibly visible in space, and it involves a public learning process that leads to permanent shifts in institutions and values (Sandercock (2000: 27).

Social transformation requires critical analysis of power dynamics at play in cities, which I suggest doing through the lens of three kinds of rights: the '*right to voice*', '*right to human flourishing*', and the '*right to the city*'. **These rights are central to changing power narratives and enabling agency of people to contribute to structural change.**

The *Right to voice* refers to "a democratic struggle for inclusiveness in democratic procedures, for transparency in government transactions, for accountability of the state to its citizens and, above all, for the right of citizens -- all citizens -- to be heard in matters affecting their interests and concerns at the local level of lifespace and community. It is thus as much about the process and form of engagement of citizens in the making of their world as it is about the ends they seek to achieve" (Douglass and Friedmann, 1998: 2).

The *Right to human flourishing* is based on the principle that "every human being has the right, by nature, to the full development of their innate intellectual, physical and spiritual potentials in the context of wider communities" (Friedmann, 2011: 151). Raworth (2012) recognizes a similar right to human flourishing in the social foundations of her framework.

These rights and notions of agency and structure align closely with Henri Lefebvre's '*right to the city*' which advocates a 'vision of a life fully lived for urban inhabitants'. David Harvey (1973) interpreted the right to the city as a collective right that would further social justice through more democratic management of resources. Right to the city has been applied to discussions about public space, social

exclusion, migration, and housing (Marcuse, 2009; Harvey, 2008; Amin and Thrift, 2002). These three rights can come to life if used as **tool kits for radical change** that enable collective critical analysis, and which would provide possibilities and space for more authentic participation and appropriation.

In sum, social transformation would value local people's voices and aspirations and community well being in changemaking efforts, in ways that would contribute to the right to human flourishing, and to the city, for all. We turn now from concepts to practical action which we carry out in Cities for People.

3. Cities for People: Experimenting and learning along the way, and an epiphany

Cities for People started as a collaborative experiment initiated by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, which is based here in Montreal.

As Jane Jacobs said: **'Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody'**.

Our starting point in Cities for People was an exploration of the question: *How can we enhance social, ecological, and economic well-being and help civic cultures thrive?* We developed a core proposition that cities could be made better by:

1- Creating **Urban Innovation Networks**;
2- Fostering a **culture of experimentation**; and
3- **Contributing to new narratives about what cities can be.**

We created or identified promising prototypes to scale at key moments, we challenged existing relationships of power, and we worked in new ways to foster deeper collaboration and more rapid innovation -- at the scale of systems, as well as the granular scale of places and spaces of everyday community life.

In short, Cities for People is about raising expectations [and creating new narratives] about what cities can be. So, what did we do?

We fostered a Culture of Experimentation. We aimed to shake up the usual way of doing things and open up pathways for systemic change. We carried out dozens of demonstration projects across the country through the network of Curators. Here are some examples:

SLIDES: Transforme ta ville, The Civic Assets Project, Tower Renewal, and We Are Cities [References: ecologieurbaine.net; phase1.citiesforpeople.ca/civic-commons/; cugr.ca/tower-renewal-partnership/; wearecities.ca]

We found a growing appetite for people, particularly young people, to be producers, rather than consumers, of cities. There are new **expectations about what cities can be, and you are all involved in creating new narratives about what is possible.**

In the experimental phase of Cities for People, we learned that some initiatives showed good promise for impact and scaling such as those mentioned. We also learned that while we were surfacing some great examples, it wasn't clear that we were having substantial, transformative impact in particular cities.

SLIDE: The Young Foundation, Gorka Espiau

Enter the Young Foundation.
Part way through we learned about the work of the Young Foundation, and its Director of Places, Gorka Espiau. Gorka was a leader in the peace and transformation social movement in the Basque country of Spain in the 1980s and 90s. Based on his experience in the Basque Country and the transformation of the city of Bilbao, and drawing on the expertise of the Young Foundation on carrying out 'urban ethnography', **Gorka developed a methodology for city transformation movement building that centered on listening to the values and operating narratives of a place, understanding shared aspirational narratives for the city, and then supporting projects and initiatives that would contribute to those 'transformational narratives'.**

I started talking with him and we found that our interests and values resonated with each other, yet we were working in quite different ways. Cities for People was a more diffuse approach of 'urban acupuncture' projects in cities across the country, whereas the Young Foundation was working more deeply in particularly places. I and colleagues thought that Montreal might be ripe for such an approach to city transformation movement building, and so we spent about 15 months convening discussions and workshops with a range of Montrealers, from bank CEOs and city officials, to social, cultural, and community sector participants.

Amplifier exploration

Meanwhile, here in Montreal another guy, Felix-Antoine Joli-Coeur was leading an interesting initiative, called *Je vois Mtl*, which you probably heard of. It was a process carried out in 2014 which culminated in a major event celebrating 181 new collaborative projects made in Montreal. Several months later the Ville de Montréal created the *Je fais Mtl* office to follow those projects, and we engaged Felix-Antoine, along with André Fortin initially, to carry out a 'sounding' process with dozens of Montrealers, and here is some of what they found. *(See slides 13-14.)*

As you'll see from these quotes, on the one hand, there is a sense of momentum in the city, and optimism that we are on the cusp of transformation. It is the eve of the city's 375th anniversary, and there's a myriad of fantastic projects and initiatives (accelerators, co-working spaces, grassroots movements like 100 in 1 Day and *Transforme ta ville*, *Innocité*, the Centraide Collective Impact Project to revitalize marginalized neighbourhoods, to name a few). However, balanced provincial budgets have been achieved at a cost to health care, education and social services; and small businesses are struggling. There is widespread cynicism and mistrust of civic leaders, and we have a serious infrastructure deficit. Overall, the city continues to perform below potential. (As Felix-Antoine says, for decades Québec has focused on its nation-building projects; it is now time to turn attention to our great metropolis.) **Everyone we talked with is interested in breaking across siloes and collaborating**

in new ways in order to advance transformative change, but no one claimed to know how to do it. So, this is what we are embarking on. (*See slide 15)*

Amplifier Montréal aims to foster a more innovative, inclusive and resilient city. It will highlight, connect and strengthen initiatives that foster collaboration among the city's economic, social, cultural sectors and civil society, and give voice to those who are often less heard. Ultimately, an aim is for Montrealers to have renewed pride in a city that they collaboratively create.

As a Foundation established by J. W. McConnell, who was among the great builders of this city, our call to civic leadership is guided by concern for Montreal's vulnerable populations; by the sense that we must play a quiet and collaborative leadership role; and by **recognition that no single organization or sector can bring about transformation of a city**. We have a remarkable opportunity to join with others in contributing to Montreal's social, economic and cultural wellbeing, and to work together to establish its position as a new kind of world city.

The network of collaborating organizations continues to grow. Core partners include other philanthropic foundations in Montreal, the Fondation du Grand Montréal, Centraide, the Ville de Montréal, Montreal's 375th Anniversary Society, le Chantier de l'économie sociale, and, we're very pleased that the McGill-based Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Montreal (CRIEM) is involved – Professor Pascal Brissette and Stéphan Gervais are here today. *(See slide 16.)*

Results of the preliminary design phase from November 2015 through March 2016 are here. We are now in the strategic planning phase through the summer.

Amplifier will encompass three core areas of activity:
1. **Voices**: a listening platform that includes civic engagement and understanding narratives
2. **Accelerators**: incubating businesses and social innovations
3. **CITIES** (Cities in Transformation Inter-city Exchange Strategy): a learning network of cities leading social change

Amplifier-V: VOICES: Listening, Engagement and Narratives of Transformation

To overcome historic divisions among Montrealers, we need to understand people's everyday experience of life in the city, the obstacles they face, their values, and aspirations for change. Listening and constructive civic engagement are central to the work of Amplifier. Small teams of ethnographers, students, analysts, community engagement practitioners, writers and artists will reach a broad range of Montrealers including those least heard, and document the results. An essential outcome of this process is to identify ideas or issues which, if addressed, would serve to renew civic trust and pride, and to produce new ways of acting collectively in our city.

Amplifier-A: ACCELERATORS: Incubating businesses and social innovations

There is an emerging cluster of enterprise incubators and accelerators in Montreal, including Real Ventures for IT start-ups; Notman House, Innocité, Esplanade for social enterprises; *Je fais Mtl*; and District 3 at Concordia. These initiatives, while of value in and of themselves, could collectively

generate greater impact for Montreal. Based on existing initiatives and also research and community engagement work in the Voices section, Amplifier plans to select and support specific projects at three levels: 1) community-led action; 2) small and medium social enterprises; and 3) transformative public-private social innovation initiatives.

Amplifier-C: CITIES (Cities in Transformation Inter-city Exchange Strategy)

During Cities for People 1.0, the Foundation observed that networks and exchanges among urban innovators can quickly catalyze change. To gauge Amplifier's impact and link it to other cities in Canada and internationally, we will participate in evaluation and knowledge sharing. The first steps are to establish methods for evaluating Amplifier itself, and for sharing what we learn with other cities in Canada and elsewhere.

Fundamentally, Amplifier Montréal is about 'rethinking how we see and express ourselves collectively as a city' (Amahl Hazelton) – *see slide 17*.

In January, as part of the co-design process, we led a delegation of 23 Montrealers to London and Bilbao (including the CRIEM). It was meant to create new relationships among participants, and with European organizations, and to inspire and inform our work in Montreal. **Stepping outside of our city, meeting innovators elsewhere and seeing their work, and viewing our city from the perspective of others can transform our way of seeing ourselves.**

My own epiphany following this tour, is that **Montreal is emerging as a new kind of world city**. Three qualities co-mingle here, which is extraordinary. These first two are often mutually exclusive – that is a strong sense of **social solidarity** (and value of accessibility to art and culture); as well as a growing **culture of entrepreneurship**, creativity, and I would say a say of agency, or changemaker culture. Far from being mutually exclusive in Montreal, these qualities are becoming mutually reinforcing. A third quality is **plurilingualism** (as opposed to multilingualism, which most cities are these days). Plurilingual means that most people speak at least two languages. While in some ways these qualities contributed to our weaknesses in the past, they are emerging now as strengths, and possibly even contributing to forging new transformational narratives of the city. We're realizing that the massive out-migration of business from Montreal in the past – in part a result of language laws – has ironically opened up space for a new and highly creative city to emerge with a strong character and sense of place.

4. Transformative Values + Capacities in Practice

We'll return now to the City Transformation hypothesis elements. The first component is the set of transformative values and capacities – which are Inclusion, Innovation, Resilience and Reconciliation. I'll give an example or two of each.

1. City of Inclusion: is about no person being left behind, about supporting a culture of belonging, and about fighting structural inequalities. As one woman said in the Cities for People introductory video, it is a city 'where the agency of all people is taken seriously.' *(See slide 20.)*

2. City of Innovation: means fostering a culture of experimentation and prototyping, and a radical openness to new ways of thinking and working together. And it means piloting projects, like TéoTaxi, a new eco-mobility project here in Montreal, that provides local ecological and social benefits; some consider it an antidote to Uber. (*See slide 21.*)

3. City of Resilience: involves a way of thinking and a set of capacities not only to adapt, but also to transform into new development trajectories when needed. Often crises or disasters open up windows of opportunity for transformative resilience to manifest. Social and cultural as well. (*See slide 22.*)

4. City of Reconciliation: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in this country represents one of the most significant moments in our history, and what we do about it moving forward – particularly in our cities where the majority of Aboriginal people now live – says a great deal about who we are collectively as a people and a country. (*See slide 23.*)

Example: Winnipeg was called the 'Most Racist City' in Canada by Maclean's in 2014, which was just a couple of months after the election of Mayor Brian Bowman, that city's young, dynamic Mayor – and the first ever Mayor of Aboriginal descent. *(See slide 23.)* Mayor Bowman's response was brilliant and demonstrated an understanding of transformative resilience and how crisis can open opportunity space to move to another level. He declared 2016 the Year of Reconciliation, and aspires to make that city a beacon of the world as a City of Reconciliation.

The second aspect of the city transformation hypothesis is about harnessing the power of collective imagination and enabling collective action. This involves our seeing our city in fundamentally new ways.

Charles Montgomery argues in *Happy City*: 'Cites must be regarded as more than engines of wealth; they must be viewed as systems that should be shaped to improve human well-being.'

5. Levers of Transformation: Narratives + Place

How can essential elements of inclusion, innovation, resilience and reconciliation be brought to bear and aligned with city narratives and made visible in place? Placemaking.

Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm, such as parks, streets and outdoor markets and other civic assets, in order to maximize shared value. Placemaking can contribute to transformative change if it harnesses collective energy and enables collective action that draws from individual experiences and understanding of place.

Placemaking has the power to bring narratives of a city to life, making them visible in ways that people can engage with and that contribute to a sense of belonging and place identity.

CEO and President of Artscape, Tim Jones, agrees, "we are missing an opportunity in Canada when it comes to leveraging the power of art, culture, and creativity to act as a catalyst of change, growth,

and transformation of place," (Yonge Street, "Creative Placemaking Changes The Narrative Of Cities").
We are beginning to tap into that power in new ways.
Here are some examples of places where we're learning to leverage that power.

- ❖ Jardins Gamelin and Quartier des Spectacles: ephemeral and continually adapting spaces (Pepinière & Co. + PQDS). *Photo credit: Ulysse Lemerise, Jean-Michael Seminaro*
- ❖ Evergreen Brickworks: memory, adaptive reuse and year-round possibility.
- ❖ Art Hives: a network – movement – of storefronts of unprogrammed art spaces across the country – open to all.
- ❖ Play Streets (see NYC video).
- ❖ Placemaking Lab: see the Placemaking Canada report.

Placemaking can be transformational in personal and collective ways. "We shape our cities, and then our cities shape us." (Adapted from Winston Churchill 'We shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us.')

Placemaking at its best involves co-creation, adaptive learning, and evolutive change over time (Montreal's Quartier des spectacles is a good example.)

A placemaking leader, Lucinda Hartley, said: "The greatest resource we have for creating the cities of the future is citizen-led ideas. This is not in order to address some altruistic notion of 'community', but rather an urgent response to major changes in human settlements. While the scale of individual projects may be small, the impact of engaged, empowered citizens in transforming communities, public spaces and cities is substantial." Lucinda Hartley, CoDesign Studio (a design and placemaking consultancy), Melbourne (from Enabling City 2, p. 112-13)

6. City Narrative Examples

I began the talk with a City Songline – Leonie Sandercock's narrative of a desired city. We'll end here with narratives of some cities – existing and aspirational, the third aspect of the city transformation hypothesis.

A sampling of city narratives, existing and aspirational: *(see slides 35 to 44)*

General: 'Cities as places of violence and inequality'; 'dangerous, dirty, crowded'

Copenhagen: city of Jan Gehl; one of the world's great pedestrian and bike cities

Amsterdam: city for bicycles, and city of illicit pleasures, and exploitation

Belfast: 'conflict city' or 'new capitalist city'

Bilbao: from city of violence to city of peace, from 'stinky, polluted, hole of a city' (said a city councillor) to a world capital of culture and art (Guggenheim), that cleaned its river and gave the waterfront to the city, and that values public life (that narrative is manifest in vast public spaces,

pedestrianized old city following the flood, underground parking required and paid for by developers, etc.); values of solidarity, strong identity: culture, language, history, food, storytelling traditions, etc. **Vancouver**: aspirational/transformational: 'greenest city' operating: 'most livable city', 'totally unaffordable city'

NYC, London, Tokyo: the only three 'Global Cities' in terms of capital flows, according to Saskia Sassen; New Mayor of London in 2000 was positioning this as a transformational narrative

Berlin: poor, but sexy (of course, this is overly simplistic and may or may not resonate with many Berliners)

Montreal??: cosmopolitan and avante-garde, yet laid back; artistic, open; new kind of world city: language laws, cultural traditions, and out-migration of large businesses opened space in recent decades for a new kind of city to emerge

So what next?

A key design question for Amplifier: 'How to establish a common narrative of transformation?'
What are the dominant and less heard narratives of Montreal? Where do these narratives come from, and how are they communicated? How to connect stories and listening to voices from every corner of the city? More broadly, what catalyzes transformation?

As Gorka Espiau says: **'We cannot transform communities with projects; it takes a movement** - a movement which is based on advancing shared values and shared narratives.'

And finally, I'd like to challenge you to take action in your city! Start an initiative, or join someone else's. This cohort of MUSE students is clearly capable of extraordinary city changemaking! I hope that you will be leaders in articulating and making manifest aspirational narratives for our great city.

Thank you.