

Formation of the Gay Village in Montreal

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Oppression and Activist Response

Individual rights were routinely infringed upon by the police, leading to the increased need for solidarity and a strong community.

| 1969 | 1976 | 1977 | 1977 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Decriminalization of Homosexual Acts The sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's pushed governments to respond to antiquated legislation. This move empowered those in the LGBTQ+ community and led to increased mobilization. | Olympic Games "Clean-up" Raids against gay and lesbian spaces intensified during this time in an effort to rid Montreal of what the city deemed undesirable businesses. | Truxx Bath House Raid One of the largest mass arrest instances in Canadian history. 146 gay men were arrested under "bawdy house" legislation. Sparked large demonstrations criticizing police and demanding equal rights and protection. | Quebec Amends Charter to Protect From Discrimination This charter initially excluded sexual orientation from protection under its code in 1975. Pressure from the community over the next couple years led to its amendment in 1977 . |

Queer Space and Modern Village Formation

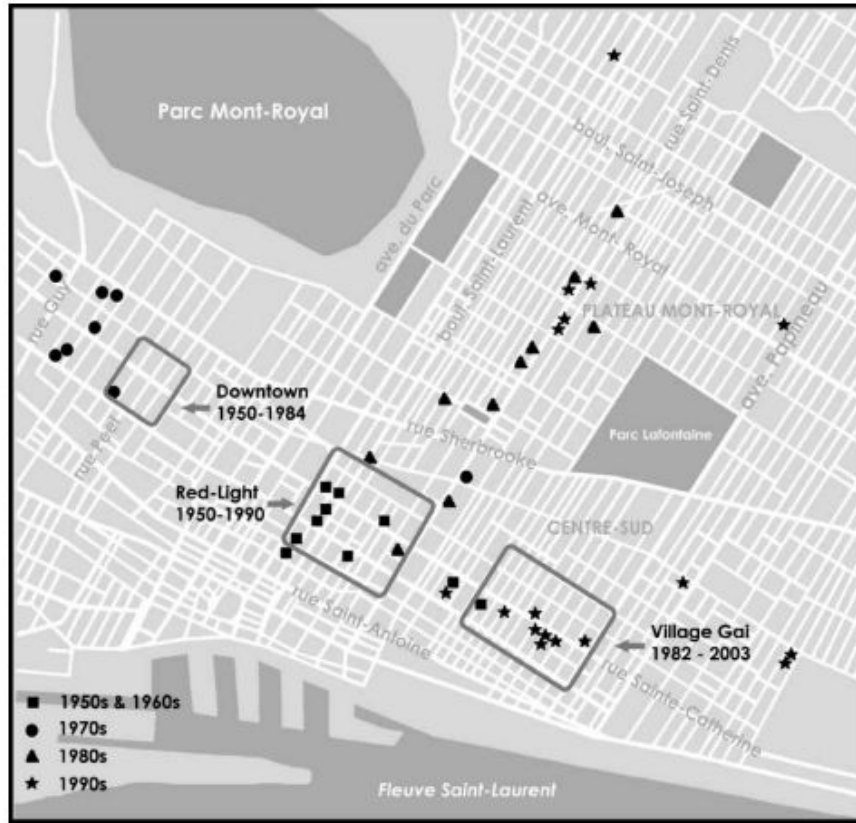
New sense of community beginning to form as a services come to the area and established neighbourhood comes to fruition.

| 1978/1979 | 1980s | 2005 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| OMHM Housing Low rent housing began to be constructed in the neighbourhood providing secure and safe accommodation. | Community Response to AIDS Crisis The threat of the virus led to the creation of new health services in the village including the CLSC and REZO. Clinics that predominantly focused on men's sexual health. | Founding of the SDC Society for the Commercial Development of the Village forms in 2005, providing more formal representation and organizing power for the different stakeholders (businesses and residents) of the area. | Montreal Pride Montreal Pride organization was founded to continue with past pride march traditions. Has been responsible for the organizing of the Montreal Pride Festival since 2007. |

Formation of the Gay Village

- The Village had its beginnings in the 1980s, although documented gay life existed well before this.
- Prior to the establishment of the Village, bars and clubs frequented by lesbians and gay men were located about two km west of the current Village, in close proximity to CBD, reflecting the limited transportation opportunities of the early 20th century (Podmore, 2006).
- Reasons for the move eastward:
 - City action and police raids.
 - Rising rents in the downtown core (old Village).
 - Urban renewal efforts.

“The City officially recognized Montreal's Village in 1999 with a demarcation of 62 urban blocks located at downtown's east end” (Hunt & Zacharias, 2008)



As you can see in this map compiled from Podmore , many queer spaces were located downtown, not far from Concordia itself (2006). As conflict with the government increased men dominated spaces moved further and further east, “Historically queer neighborhoods in Canada’s cities tended to be located in the neighborhoods surrounding the urban core” (Hodge, et. al, 2020)

Figure 1 Lesbian bars and gay districts, Montréal, 1950–2000. Sources: Bourque (1998), Chamberland (1998), *Fugues* (1995–2001), *Gazelle* (1993–1998), *Info lesbo/Lesbo Info* (1990–1993), McLeod (1996), *Project Lavender Bulletin/Bulletin du Projet lavande* (1987–1990), Remiggi (2000).

Police Raids

1976 - Club Baths. In response, Montreal activists formed the Comité Homosexuel Anti-Repression/Gay Coalition Against Repression, and held a rally against the raid. One of the largest demonstrations to be held in Canada at the time (Podmore, 2015).

1977 - Truxx and La Mystique. Military style raid where 50 police carrying machine guns raided the Truxx and La Mystique bars arresting 146 people. Truxx raid “galvanizing the community”. 2000 protestors mobilized and blocked streets in downtown area, clashing with police (Podmore, 2015).

1984 - Bud's Bar. Large demonstration protesting the raid the following night. Demonstrators marched from Stanley to the east. When they reached Saint-Hubert, they shouted: “We’re home!” (Doyle, 1996).



Policing and Safety

“Legislative constraints, police interventions and moral and social disapproval of homosexuality constitute the daily life of these places, their personnel and their public. But the 1980s quickly changed the situation.” (Giraud, 2013)

“It seems clear that the emergence of a spatially concentrated gay village in Montreal has provided gay communities with a political base and a basis from which to articulate a number of demands concerning police relations with gay citizens” (Doyle, 1996)

During this time, it was common for men to have a buddy system when venturing out at night. While things were discreet people other than the police still caused trouble even up to 2003. A neighborhood watch was never set up as one of the main sources of violence would have been the police itself. (Gay and Grey Montreal, 2023)

Community in Crisis

During the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 80s and 90s, efforts were made alongside the community to establish new testing clinics with the CLSC and RÉZO Santé (a community non profit). These clinics still exist today, offering sexual health (among other) services to the community at large.



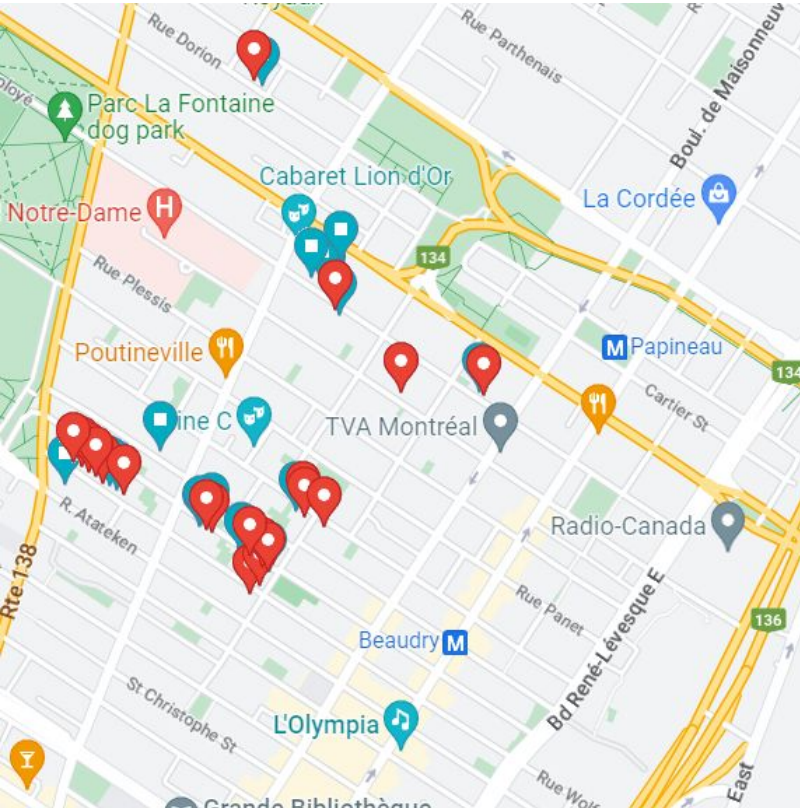
Housing

Rent being raised in the now downtown pushed them further east in search of lower rents

This in addition to homelessness lead to the need of affordable housing being of primary concern. The Village was known for affordable rents thanks to these old buildings as well as stigma keeping gentrification out. The stakeholders of businesses and people dealing with gentrification came together to form a partnership with the City of Montreal through OMHM and SDC later on.



Housing programs



People realized they would need to settle somewhere in the city and came together to petition the OMHM and other local institutions for support, after the raids. OMHM began the plan shortly, acquiring the buildings only 1 year after the Truxx raid took place

OMHM has about ~300 units located in the gay village, most of which began operation in 1978 and the rest in the 90s (OMHM, 2023) Most of which are located on this map, mainly in the west village.

There is also a collection of homeless shelters from Dans La Rue, Refuge des Jeunes de Montréal, and Old Brewery Mission.

Their need for housing

The greatest needs were affordable housing, to this day it isn't uncommon for someone to be disowned for their identity. Citing recent statistics from stats canada "Prior to the pandemic, LGBTQ2+ Canadians (27%) were twice as likely as their non-LGBTQ2+ counterparts (13%) to have experienced some type of homelessness or housing insecurity in their lifetime." (Stats CAN, 2021)

The dire need is even greater even today when you look at trans individuals as "60-80% of homeless trans people experience unsheltered homelessness" (Stats CAN, 2021) Youths less than 20 years old are the group most at risk and the community seeing or experiencing the need firsthand, rallied for La Refuge des Jeunes to set up an operation in the village.



SDC du Village

- Founded in 2005, The Société de développement commercial (SDC) du Village represents around 255 businesses located in the Village
- Works towards improving the commercial and economic viability of the Village's business district by organizing events, promoting the area to potential customers, and advocating for policies and investments that benefit local businesses



- Pedestrianization of Ste. Catherine Street starting in 2008
- Petition for the Village:

“SDC du Village tabled a petition in the National Assembly for the creation of an intergovernmental standing committee on the priority issues that threaten the survival of the Village” (SDC du Village, 2023)



Forum du Village - Réalisons Montréal

- Initiative by the Ville-Marie borough, CDC Centre-Sud, and SDC du Village in the summer 2022.

Participatory approach for the future development of the sector “articulated around a variety of issues: **security, public space, identity, socio-economic vitality, living together and culture**”. (Ville de Montreal, 2023)

- Took place in two stages: Street Forum (le Forum sur rue) and Working Forum (le Forum de travail)

Street Forum: anyone wishing to learn and express themselves on the six major issues of the Village outlined above could do so either online via the Realisons Montreal web platform and/or by visiting one of the two information galleries which were industrial containers, but transformed into an info gallery housing panels presenting the Village’s challenges and proposed solutions

Working Forum: discussion/reflection on the ideas put forward by community citizens and stakeholders.

Community advisory committee

Overall, the participatory approach of the Forum du Village aims to create a sense of ownership and belonging among the LGBTQ+ community in Montreal

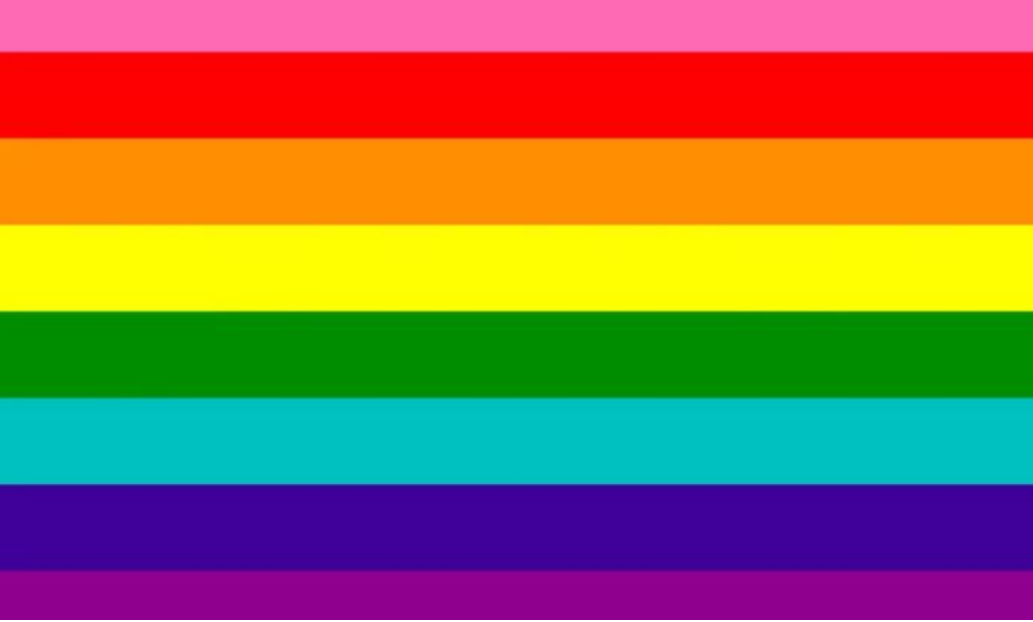


Present Day

‘The Village’ as most people call it now in an effort to be more inclusive, serves as a cultural hub for many queer people but is increasingly gentrified through tourism efforts by the city and further rent hikes. The city recognizes the importance of having a community member be a part of the government process as Serge Sasseville, a city councillor of Ville-Marie, is gay. “One can conclude that in order to avoid this conflict, the planner ought to be part of the community” (Stieglitz, 1999)

Considering participation in the community planning process, Hodge et. Al recognize that many different viewpoints should be heard. The LGBTQ+ community is not homogenous and the needs of individuals within it vary greatly. The inclusion of diverse voices from this community in the planning process may help slow the rate of gentrification occurring in neighbourhoods like Montreal’s Village. **“In general LGBTQ2+residential enclaves serve a number of purposes, not least for their residents being the security and acceptance of a community of others who have experienced discrimination in housing and harassment in public places” (Hodge et al 2020.)**

Conclusion



The Village as it's now known was once home to a thriving community that set up there for their own safety and needs, but its role as a refuge for the queer community is coming to an end through gentrification and general acceptance by the Montreal community at large. Much of what remains is a fight to keep preserved and the issues that were faced in the past relating to housing are still felt by many, even non queer communities.

And while the tradeoff of a safer and nicer neighborhood may be nice for some, the loss of a sense of a supporting community in the neighborhood is felt by many. Queer owned businesses fight to remain in control of their history but are ultimately losing to the city at large as it promotes The Village as a tourist destination, rainbow-washing away their struggles.

Quotes

“Legislative constraints, police interventions and moral and social disapproval of homosexuality constitute the daily life of these places, their personnel and their public. But the 1980s quickly changed the situation.” (Giraud, 2013)

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*see speaker notes for certain sources/quotes