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33 actions for an anti-ableist Montréal
33 actions pour que Montréal devienne anti-capacitiste

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The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire. [...] The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. How best then to exercise that right?

—David Harvey (2012, p. 4)

Abstract:

This article stems from my doctoral thesis entitled “Rouler/Wheeling Montréal: Moving through, Resisting and Belonging in an Ableist City” (Parent, 2018). My thesis examined fifteen disabled Montrealers’ everyday mobilities and two different dimensions of participants’ sense of belonging: their belonging in Montréal disability communities and their belonging in the city. Participants’ stories show that their right to the city and their capacity to move through it are severely compromised because ableism is embedded in Montréal’s built environment and culture. This article explores three issues and 33 actions for an an anti-ableist Montréal. The first issue is presented as a question: How can we build an anti-ableist city? The second issue concerns disabled Montrealers’ mobilities in the face of climate change and the third explores the representations of disabled Montrealers in the media and civic and political life.

Résumé :

Cet article découle de ma thèse de doctorat intitulée « *Rouler/Wheeling Montréal: Moving through, Resisting and Belonging in an Ableist City* » (Parent, 2018) et qui présentait la mobilité quotidienne de quinze Montréalaises et Montréalais handicapé·es ainsi que deux dimensions différentes du sentiment d’appartenance des participants : leur appartenance aux communautés de personnes handicapées de Montréal et leur appartenance à la ville. Les récits des participants montrent que leur droit à la ville et leur capacité à s’y déplacer sont gravement compromis parce que le capacitisme est ancré dans l’environnement bâti et la culture de Montréal. Cet article explore trois enjeux et 33

actions pour que Montréal devienne anti-capacitiste. Le premier enjeu se présente sous la forme d'une question : Comment construire une ville anti-capacitiste? Le deuxième porte sur la mobilité des Montréalaises et Montréalais handicapé·es face aux changements climatiques et le troisième explore les représentations des Montréalaises et Montréalais handicapé·es dans les médias et la vie civique et politique.

Introduction

In 2009, a year after I was introduced to the world of Critical Disability Studies, I wrote an article titled "Is this city my city?" for a Masters class. I was back in Montreal for the summer after spending a year in Toronto. I felt the need to find an answer to my own question. Is this city my city? As I left Toronto, I left behind me: greater spontaneity, a more accessible transit system, and a circle of wonderful friends working on disability issues. Coming back to Montréal, for the first time in my life, I questioned my belonging to Montréal. It was with this difficult question in mind, that I started my doctoral studies. In my thesis, I examined participants' everyday mobilities and two different dimensions of participants' sense of belonging: their belonging in Montréal disability communities and their belonging in the city.

As I was finishing writing my doctoral thesis in 2018, I thought a lot about how my work could contribute to breaking down barriers. I also contemplated how my research could echo Montréal disability communities as well as reverberate amongst different actors that play important roles in shaping the city. Inspired by participants' stories told during wheeling interviews¹ (Parent, 2016), my own experiences as a disabled researcher

¹ Despite the growing literature on walking practices, mobile methods, differential mobilities and mobility justice, little is known about what it means to move through cities using a wheelchair. While other mobilities researchers engage with wheeling – for example, those studying cycling – I offer a new perspective on a type of wheeling that has been historically ignored and devalued. As a researcher using a motorized wheelchair, I explored what it means to conduct wheeling interviews, instead of “traditional” walking interviews, with 15 disabled Montrealers. The interviews were recorded on a GoPro camera, mounted on my wheelchair and theirs – for interviewees who had one. The mobile methodology developed in this research builds on Arseli Dokumaci's (2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) research on disability as a method and the

and activist, and the work of critical disability studies and mobilities research scholars, I chose to conclude my thesis by reflecting on five issues raised by my thesis and to propose 50 actions to address these issues—and, I must admit, to reinvent Montréal after my heart’s desire. In this article, I am presenting three issues and 33 actions. The first issue is presented as a question: How can we build an anti-ableist city? The second issue concerns disabled Montrealers’ mobilities in the face of climate change and the third explores the representations of disabled Montrealers in the media and civic and political life. The proposed actions aim to reduce the obstacles disabled Montrealers face on their paths to belong in disability communities, in the city and in their neighbourhoods. “Academics can change the world—if they stop talking only to their peers,” claims Savo Heleta (2016). This is why most of the actions proposed are intended for people working outside of the academic world. Unsurprisingly, several of them are addressed to the Ville de Montréal, the media industry, and the disability rights movement. However, nearly all proposed actions can be useful to anyone interested in making the city more accessible and learning how to combat ableism in their everyday lives.

Issue 1: How can we build an anti-ableist city?

In the past decade, Montréal’s disability rights movement has succeeded in making the concept of “accessibilité universelle” known to a variety of public actors such as the Ville de Montréal and the Société de transport de Montréal (STM). Both of these organizations have adopted universal accessibility policies, and several boroughs have followed suit. These policies are short—not more than a page long—and provide the main orientations and objectives. The actions required to meet these objectives are detailed in annual action plans. Although universal accessibility policies are quite recent, other tools that aim to guarantee disabled people’s rights in the city, like the *Charte des droits et libertés de la personne* and the *Loi assurant l’exercice des droits des personnes handicapées en vue de leur intégration scolaire, professionnelle et sociale*, have been in place for decades. However, they have had limited success regarding the accessibility of the built environment in particular. The movement for universal accessibility falls within

affordances of the everyday as well as on my own activist research on ableism at the Mobile Media Lab at Concordia University.

this context. Despite the undeniable positive changes that universal accessibility policies are making, numerous critiques have shown that these policies are not a panacea.

The Ville de Montréal's universal accessibility policy, for example, does not include any enforcement mechanisms and has very limited impact on the private sector, which explains why those who would supposedly benefit from this policy have claimed that access to their neighbourhood's shops has not improved that much. For example, businesses such as *Uber* have been operating without a legal requirement to meet any accessibility standards (Houde-Roy, 2015). The lack of enforcement mechanisms and regulations targeting the private sector has forced disabled Montrealers to fight each obstacle case by case, which is far from efficient. Most of them have explained that they very rarely complain when they face barriers because it is such an exhausting process. Moreover, the neoliberal context from which universal accessibility policies have emerged needs to be recognized. These policies stipulate that their implementation depends on the availability of financial resources. Even though this makes sense, it overlooks the fact that prioritizing the issues that deserve funding is a highly political act. To remedy these problems, some activists have been calling for the adoption of stronger legislation.

Two of the main arguments for the implementation of universal accessibility are that it will benefit everyone and it is economically profitable. These arguments, even if they are true in many cases, pose two problems. The claim that universal accessibility is important because it benefits everyone risks minimizing the fact that accessibility is a question of human rights for disabled people, which makes the difference between their inclusion and marginalization. That claim also suggests that some standards can meet the needs of all individuals. Ravi Malhotra and Morgan Rowe (2013) have argued that universal design "seems to inherit from the Enlightenment a rational paradigm of universalism that may not be sufficiently sensitive to the need to accommodate individual differences." (p. 5) Professor and designer Aimi Hamraie (as cited in Persaud, 2018) claims that under the universal design paradigm, "everyone" generally means non-disabled people. Furthermore, selling universal accessibility as being profitable raises the

following question: Does universal accessibility need to be economically profitable in order to be implemented?

Proposed action 1: Amend the Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités to include the City's commitment to eradicate ableism – Action taken in April 2021

As I was completing my thesis, I was particularly concerned to see that the concept of universal accessibility was establishing itself as the only solution for eliminating obstacles encountered by disabled Montrealers in the city. In 2019, the Ville de Montréal launched a public consultation on universal accessibility. The briefing document on the consultation process and the proposed action plan makes no mention of disability discrimination, and it mostly focuses on the built environment. However, thanks to the work of disability activists and politicians believing in the importance of recognizing the existence of a system of oppression based on disability, the Ville de Montréal added the fight against ableism as an objective of the Chantier en accessibilité universelle that was launched by Valérie Plante, Montréal's Mayor, on March 10 2020, just a few days before our lives were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2021, the Ville de Montréal amended the article 16 of the *Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités* to include the City's commitment to eradicate ableism.

Proposed action 2: Recognize that ableism intersects with other systems of oppression

Throughout my thesis, I have demonstrated that ableism and its intersections with other systems of oppression must be addressed if we want to build an inclusive city, since it plays a major role not only in the shaping of urban environments but also of Montrealers' attitudes towards disability. Even though ableism has been added to the *Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités*, alongside other type of discrimination, the City still has a long way to go before approaching disability issues from an intersectional perspective and including a disability perspective when addressing other issues such as racial profiling².

² In the United States, research has shown that disabled African Americans are at greater risk of being victims of police brutality than their white disabled counterparts (Thompson, 2021).

Proposed action 3: Adopt stronger legislation to eliminate obstacles

Two of the main weaknesses of the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* are that it lacks enforcement mechanisms, and it does not apply to the private sector. In short, the law fails to efficiently eliminate obstacles. Most Québec citizens, including disabled people, are not even aware of the existence of this law. Other Canadian provinces and other countries have adopted stronger legislation that aims to eliminate barriers. A growing number of citizens and organizations are pushing for a stronger accessibility law in Québec. For example, Québec Accessible, a grassroots initiative led by disabled Montrealers, has developed a [list of principles](#) that should form the basis for a stronger provincial accessibility law.

Proposed action 4: Strengthen the City's leadership by creating an Office for Accessibility and Disability Rights

The office could be part of the department of *Développement social et diversité*, which has a mandate to foster equality and inclusion across the City. Recognizing that most disabled Montrealers experience multiple types of discrimination, this office would adopt an intersectional approach that fits perfectly within this department, which currently is responsible for expanding annual universal accessibility plans and ensuring the application of the City's universal policy. In addition to continuing the work already being done, this office would have a mandate to combat ableism within the municipal infrastructures and across the City by aligning with its current commitment to combatting racism. This office would strategically advise the Mayor of Montréal as well as the City's multiple departments and services on various disability issues. One of the main advantages of creating such an office is to enhance the visibility and leadership of the City's actions on accessibility and the fight against ableism. The director of the office, who should be a disabled person, would play an active role and be known both within the administration and across the city itself.

Several cities in the United States have a [Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities](#). These departments play important roles in their city administrations and contribute to the vitality of local disability communities.

Office's priorities:

- Research best practices worldwide to build an accessible and anti-ableist city
- Work closely with the provincial government to strengthen accessibility regulations
- Adopt stronger provisions on accessibility into urban planning by-laws
- Build a website where citizens, as well as public and private organizations, can find all the resources and information they need
- Actively promote programs such as Programme d'aide à l'accessibilité des commerces (PAAC) to make businesses accessible

Proposed action 5: Avoid disability simulations. Listen to and believe disabled people instead

Disability simulations, such as navigating the city with a blindfold when you are sighted, are still a fairly common method for raising awareness about accessibility problems. However, many disability rights activists and researchers rightly claim that these simulations do not work (Abreu, 2018; Ladau, 2014; Lavalvani & Broderick, 2013; Nario-Redmond, Gospodinov, & Cobb, 2017; Young, 2014). As Stella Young argues, a disability stimulation fails “to capture the nuance and complexity of living in a disabled body. And it certainly fails to give a deep understanding of systemic discrimination and abuse faced by disabled people.” (Young, 2014)

Proposed action 6: Compensate disabled people for their work

While the City and other organizations regularly consult disabled people on an individual basis, these consultations generally offer little or no pay. The labour of disabled people participating in these consultations should be recognized with appropriate compensation.

Proposed action 7: Create job opportunities in the field of accessibility and disability rights, and prioritize hiring disabled people for these positions

Outside of disability rights organizations, very few jobs are available in the field of accessibility and disability rights, even though much work is required to make the city accessible. Clearly, a need exists to employ more people in the field of accessibility and disability rights. Considering the poor representation of disabled people in employment, even in jobs related to accessibility issues, measures must be taken to ensure that disabled people apply for these positions and are properly accommodated.

Proposed action 8: Use the term “accessibilité universelle” carefully and provide detailed information about the accessibility of events and spaces

This term is being used more frequently to describe events and spaces that only provide specific accessibility features, such as a ramp at the front door of a venue. This is not what “accessibilité universelle” means. A ramp at the front door does not magically eliminate all the obstacles that disabled people encounter. Careless use of the term “accessibilité universelle” erases the complexities of accessibility and risks the further marginalization of disabled people.

Issue 2: Disabled Montrealers’ mobilities in the face of climate change

Conducting wheeling interviews during a summer heat wave gave me an overview of the impact of extreme weather on the mobility of disabled Montrealers. Furthermore, I finished my thesis just a few weeks after the warmest summer in Québec history. Dr. Pierre Gosselin, health coordinator at Ouranos, a Montréal-based consortium on regional climatology and adaptation to climate change, estimates that by 2050 Montréal will have 50 days a year of temperatures higher than 30 °C. This number is three times higher than current averages. During the 2018 heat wave, 54 people died in Montréal (Fleming, Michaelson, Holmes, & Youssef, 2018). Those who lost their lives had a lot in common: they were poor, isolated, and had physical or mental difficulties. Scientists and environmentalists warn that heat will be the next big inequality issue (*Ibid.*). While disabled people are, and will continue to be, particularly affected by the effects of climate change, literature on this phenomenon is scarce (Wolbring, 2009; Wolbring & Leopatra, 2012). To fight climate change, numerous experts have called for

an economic revolution. They argue that global economic growth, as we know it now, is incompatible with the protection of the environment—which includes the survival of humanity—and that de-growth is our only way out (Hickel, 2018). Since disabled people are often the first to be hit by economic upheavals (e.g., austerity measures affecting access to health or budget cuts limiting major investments in accessibility projects) and are poorly represented in high-level decision-making institutions, there is a real risk in moving towards another economic system that would continue our marginalization. Lately, numerous disability communities have been confronted by green initiatives that do not take disabled people into account, such as the movement for the complete elimination of plastic straws from restaurants and bars (Habel-Thurton, 2018; Imgrund, 2018; Szklarski, 2018). In some instances, it has been argued that accessibility and environmental concerns cannot be reconciled.

To fight the irreversible effects of climate change, Montréal is taking measures to create more sustainable urban environments. This initiative inevitably means a walkable and bikeable city with good public transit options that reduce car dependency. Throughout my thesis, I have shown that these infrastructures are still hard to use for many disabled people. Those who get around the city by car have said that they would much prefer to use public transit. Some of my research participants do not even feel included as pedestrians. Others have mentioned that even though they are legally permitted to use bike paths with their mobility aids, they do not always feel welcome or comfortable on bike paths because they have had bad experiences with cyclists' attitudes. These observations raise the following question: Does the movement towards a more sustainable Montréal include disabled people and accessibility issues? Even though the number of projects integrating accessibility principles is on the rise (i.e., inclusive parks, safer pedestrian infrastructures, retrofitted and new métro stations), the projects or new services aiming to create a more sustainable city still frequently overlook disabled people and accessibility issues. In the United States, many experts have expressed their concerns regarding the exclusion of disabled people from the movement for smart cities. Jason Plautz (2018) points out that “a 2016 survey by Smart Cities for All found 60% of the 250 experts interviewed felt smart cities were failing people with disabilities because current technology is not designed to be accessible and inclusive.” James Thurston, vice

president for global strategy and development at G3ict, argues that “cities are transforming the way they do services and businesses but they’re not thinking about the accessibility.” (Plautz, 2018)

MTL Trajet, one of the projects of the Ville de Montréal’s *Smart and Digital City Action Plan*, failed to include disabled people. MTL Trajet, an app developed by Concordia University and Transportation Research for Integrated Planning (TRIP), “records participants’ trips and travel times, no matter what mode of transportation they use.” (Ville de Montréal, 2018a) The objectives of the app are to measure the impact of road construction on users and to better plan public transit network developments. Although the City claims that the app covers all modes of transportation, MTL Trajet does not include Transport adapté. Furthermore, the app does not ask users whether they are disabled or not, which assumes that everyone has the same ability privileges when navigating the city.

In terms of transportation services, there is also a risk of increasing the gap between the options available to disabled and non-disabled Montrealers. Despite the increased accessibility of Montréal’s public transit network, its full accessibility likely will not be achieved for at least another two decades. Moreover, although new transportation alternatives, such as car-sharing services, do not offer accessible services to people using mobility aids, this situation has not yet been identified as an issue at the political level. The movement for Mobility-as-a-Service, which aims to combine different types of transportation services on one user-friendly platform and reduce solo driving, is well underway in many cities, including Montréal (Ferraris, 2018). The urgent call to reduce the catastrophic effects of climate change and the potential of smart cities to eliminate the barriers encountered by disabled people should motivate us to do better. The risk of missing this unique opportunity is real if disabled people remain on the margins and are excluded from new transportation services.

Axis 1: Prioritize inclusive and sustainable urbanism to fight sustainable ableism

Proposed action 9: Ensure that strategies and initiatives tackling climate change adopt a disability perspective

Accessibility should be considered an integral part of sustainable urbanism. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals stress the importance of including disabled people and eliminating barriers for safe and sustainable cities (United Nations, 2015). According to disability studies scholar Erik Leipoldt (2006), an emphasis on interdependence stemming from a disability perspective is the way forward. “The disability perspective of interdependence is a practical guide from the margins for making new choices that may lead to a just and sustainable world—a concept that reduces the distance between each other and our environment,” (as cited in Wolbring, 2009) he writes.

Proposed action 10: Clearly indicate how initiatives tackling climate change include disabled people and take into account accessibility

Measures to reduce automobile traffic in Montréal are a good example of this kind of action. Still, there is a tendency to put in place measures without providing information about accessibility for disabled people.

Proposed action 11: Invest in research on inclusive and sustainable urbanism

Creating inclusive and sustainable spaces can be a challenge. More research is needed to identify the best practices around the world and to develop innovations that meet our local needs. In its brief on the future of Parc Jean-Drapeau, the Ordre des architectes du Québec (2018) has suggested that the park could become a space to apply best practices or a location for a research centre dedicated to projects advancing knowledge on inclusive and sustainable urbanism.

Proposed action 12: Take advantage of the movement for smart cities to eliminate obstacles and discrimination

Existing tools such as the app Montréal-Services aux citoyens—which enables citizens to report obstacles like potholes, graffiti, and broken street lights—could also be used for reporting accessibility barriers. Other tools specifically dedicated to accessibility that are generally developed in other countries should be tested and promoted to increase their

use by Montrealers; for example, [StreetCo](#) is a collaborative pedestrian GPS app created in France with accessible itineraries for disabled people.

Axis 2: Take action to remove the obstacles and eliminate the discrimination disabled people encounter on sidewalks and bike paths

Proposed action 13: Improve the accessibility of sidewalks

Broken sidewalks are among the most common obstacles encountered by disabled people. Major investments are needed, and some areas of the city are particularly problematic. In terms of design, the document [Aménagements piétons universellement accessibles: Guide d'aménagement durable des rues de Montréal](#) produced by the Ville de Montréal contains best practices to build accessible and walkable paths.

Proposed action 14: Ensure the accessibility and safety of temporary construction detours and signage

The rules and regulations regarding pedestrian paths near construction sites need to be revised to include accessibility provisions. Construction companies should be forced to integrate accessibility into the temporary pedestrian paths they build. Furthermore, construction signs on sidewalks are a safety hazard for blind people. In addition to often being placed on pedestrian paths, these signs also have sharp edges and are difficult to detect with a white cane. Research could be done to find a safer construction sign material.

Proposed action 15: Promote the use of bike paths by mobility aid users

Since June 1, 2015, motorized mobility aid users have the right to use bike paths all across Québec. However, in Montréal, this right remains unknown to other users of the City's bike paths. The Ville de Montréal should include mobility aid users in its promotion of cycling and inform mobility aid users of their right to use bike paths.

Proposed action 16: Include disabled people in initiatives aiming to promote active transportation

Disabled people are rarely represented in initiatives aiming to promote active transportation in the city. Since the objective of such initiatives is to change people's perceptions of urban mobility, these initiatives are the perfect occasion to change people's perceptions of disability.

Proposed action 17: Improve accessibility during winter

How are other winter cities that are transit and pedestrian oriented enabling disabled citizens' mobility during the cold season? What are the best practices to make winter more liveable for these citizens? These are important questions that are still overlooked. Furthermore, the City's snow removal policy needs to be revised to strengthen its accessibility norms. For example, while the policy currently gives priority to bus stops, it does not clearly address the accessibility of Transport adapté pick-up and drop-off points. Therefore, many of these locations are not prioritized for clearing even though they are critical points for the mobility of Transport adapté users. Moreover, boroughs could follow the example of the Plateau Mont-Royal, which implemented a program that provides assistance to disabled residents who are not physically able to clear snow from the entrances of their homes. It should be noted that the efficiency of this programme lies on improvements of snow removal at the city scale since their destinations must also be accessible.

Axis 3: Develop more transportation options based on the model of Mobility-as-Service and eliminate obstacles in the existing infrastructures and services

Proposed action 18: Improve the accessibility of the métro and bus systems

In its [Plan de développement d'accessibilité universelle 2016–2020](#), the Société de Transport de Montréal (STM) (2017) has already identified several actions and projects to make its network accessible. Long-term significant investments will be needed to make the métro fully accessible. The costs are expected to rise as the technical complexities needed to make the stations accessible increase.

In addition to the actions announced in the STM plan, I propose the following:

- Develop a continuous training program for employees providing customer services (i.e., bus drivers, métro operators) to enable them to identify and prevent ableist attitudes and behaviours. Disabled people should be hired to give this training. Trainings that focus solely on universal accessibility while ignoring the existence of ableism are incomplete.
- Survey best accessibility practices of public transit agencies where the ridership of disabled people is higher. This should include touring some of these networks to experience their services and learn from their best initiatives.

Proposed action 20: Recognize Transport adapté as an integral part of Montréal's public transit system

There is still work to do in ensuring that Transport adapté is systematically included in all City initiatives relating to public transit. The absence of Transport adapté as an option in the MTL Trajet app and from the pilot project restricting car traffic on the Camillien-Houde/Remembrance axis are good examples of Transport adapté's exclusion. A Mayor's Office for Accessibility and Disability Issues could prevent Transport adapté from being left aside.

Proposed action 21: Invest in Transport adapté so that it can offer efficient service

While the demand for Transport adapté grows every year, funding from the Ministère des Transports du Québec has stagnated. This means that Québec is not contributing as much funding for Transport adapté as it did in the past. Even though the government announced a budget increase in 2018, it was not enough to absorb the increase in demand.

Technological improvements were implemented in 2019 to reduce waiting time for TA users and provide them with more accurate information about the arrival of their rides (Société de transport de Montréal, 2018). Even though these improvements have certainly ameliorated the experience of TA users, they are not enough to provide a service as flexible and efficient as the service offered to non-disabled clientele. The Government of Québec needs to increase its investment in Transport adapté to meet the growing demand and to support the development of technological innovations to make the service more efficient for its users.

Proposed action 22: Develop a service that combines the use of Transport adapté and the métro and bus systems

Transport adapté users need to be able to use the métro and bus systems as much as possible. In order to make this possible, they must be able to book a Transport adapté trip to a métro station or a bus without booking in advance and dealing with the TA's usual unpredictability. Such a service would benefit users as well as transit agencies. For example: Marie-Josée would like to use the métro more often. However, the métro station near her home is not accessible. She needs to use Transport adapté to get to the closest accessible station without booking in advance and enduring the frequent TA delays. The Toronto Transit Commission has a service called [Family of Services](#) that facilitates the use of Wheeltrans (Toronto's adapted transit) and the subway and bus systems.

Proposed action 23: Implement free reserved parking spaces near accessible métro stations

If disabled people who currently use their cars due to the métro's lack of accessibility could park near accessible stations, using the métro would become an interesting option. Parking spaces reserved for disabled métro users could be implemented around these stations.

Proposed action 24: Offer shared adapted bikes

The City could develop an adaptive bike rental program to make biking more accessible for disabled people. The BIXI fleet currently does not offer adaptive bikes. [Portland, Oregon](#), launched such a program in 2017; [Victoriaville, Québec](#), offers three types of adaptive bikes.

Proposed action 25: Make the taxi fleet more accessible

Finding a wheelchair-accessible taxi without having to book a day in advance is still particularly difficult in Montréal. Montréal needs to work with the taxi industry, the disability community, and the Government of Québec to significantly increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis. The experiences of cities such as Vancouver,

London, and [New York](#), where the proportion of wheelchair-accessible taxis is much higher, need to be studied.

Proposed action 26: Include adapted vehicles in car-sharing services

Renting an accessible van is very expensive and out of reach for many disabled people. As car-sharing services gain popularity in Montréal and offer an alternative to car ownership, it is time to provide options for disabled Montrealers as well. The Australia-based car-sharing company [Go-Get](#) has included a wheelchair-accessible vehicle in its fleet. In France, an entrepreneur who uses a wheelchair launched [Wheeliz](#), a peer-to-peer wheelchair-accessible car rental program.

Proposed action 27: Ensure that measures aiming to reduce solo driving do not unfairly penalize disabled people

Measures taken to reduce solo driving need to consider the fact that some disabled people do not have the same mobility options as non-disabled people and rely on cars to get around. For many disabled people, Transport adapté, as it is now, is not flexible and efficient enough to be an alternative to driving. Furthermore, Transport adapté also has to circulate on residential streets, since some people need door-to-door transportation. Here is a good example: in 2020, downtown Oslo, Norway, will be free of most cars. However, access to cars transporting disabled people will be maintained (Deshayes, 2018).

Issue 3: Representations of disabled Montrealers in the media and civic and political life

While Montréal often prides itself on its diversity and openness to differences, when it comes to better representation in the media, as well as civic and political life, disability has yet to find its place alongside gender, race, and sexual orientation. For example, the lack of representation of disabled people in the celebrations of Montréal's 375th anniversary is rooted in the cultural context of Québec in which disability is left to the margins and seldom visible in the media. As Jacynthe states: "Le handicap, c'est dans l'angle mort de la diversité au Québec." I argue that this phenomenon makes it harder for disabled Montrealers to proudly identify as disabled because they do not see positive

representations of themselves. “Media not only matter, in their pervasiveness and power; they play an important role in the power relations and shaping of disability,” write Katie Ellis and Gerard Goggin (2015). The negative impacts of the scarcity of media representations of disabled people are exacerbated by the fact that non-disabled people produce the vast majority of the representations that do exist. This means that more often than not, these representations reproduce stereotypes and prejudices. “It’s not that disability is erased from mainstream culture. It’s that disabled voices, representations, perspectives, narratives are erased from mainstream culture,” argues critical disability studies scholar Sara Acevedo (California Institute of Integral Studies, 2018). In addition to poor media representation, the participants and I have observed differences between Anglophone and Francophone media coverage of disability issues in Montréal. The Francophone coverage is less abundant, and it tends to use more ableist language and to depoliticize disability issues. When *La Presse* launched a scholarship to support emerging journalists from marginalized groups in spring 2018, it failed to include disabled people as a marginalized community.

At the civic and political levels, the situation is no better. In Montréal, only one self-identified disabled candidate was elected in the 2017 municipal elections.³ Following the elections, the City organized a roundtable on diversity. One of the objectives was to address the issue of representation within political life (Cambron-Goulet, 2018), since “organizations and decision-makers regularly make better and more comprehensive decisions when a diversity of voices is included” (Ellison, 2018). One disabled person was nominated to the 15-person board. On October 19, 2018, the Ville de Montréal announced that, in order to fill vacant positions on municipal and para-municipal boards of directors and committees, it would recruit people from a candidate pool representing Montréal’s diversity (Ville de Montréal–Cabinet de la mairesse et du comité exécutif, 2018). The pool developed by Concertation Montréal, a partner of the City, includes

³ Disabled people are disproportionately underrepresented in Canadian politics. “Out of a possible 2,084 candidates over the last three elections in each province, 20 of them had a disability according to the survey respondents—roughly 0.01 per cent,” explains Mario Lévesque (Thomson, 2014).

women, people under 40, visible minorities, immigrants, and First Nations people (Concertation Montréal, 2018). Disabled people are not identified as a group that falls under the umbrella of diversity, even though this population is underrepresented in political roles and the job market. It should also be highlighted that the disability rights movement and other social movements promoting diversity in Montréal have not yet managed to create strong solidarities and relationships. On the one hand, other social movements often organize events without paying attention to accessibility issues; on the other hand, the disability rights movement often overlooks the realities of disabled people living at the intersections of different systems of oppression.

Finally, some participants have explained that they face obstacles when trying to participate in various public consultations, which highlights the fact that disabled people's participation in civic life cannot be taken for granted. They have reported lack of accessibility, in addition to consultations that simply ignored disability issues altogether. In short, disabled people's right to participate in decision-making processes, a major component of one's right to the city, is regularly restricted. Considering that many of the issues raised in my thesis necessitate political actions and, in some instances, legislative changes, the poor representation of disabled people in political life is alarming.

Proposed action 28: Amend the Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités to promote the representation of disabled people within consultative and decision-making bodies

Article 16 of the *Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités* stipulates that the Ville de Montréal is committed to “promoting representation by women of all origins, Aboriginals, visible minorities and members of ethnic and cultural communities and young people within consultative and decision-making forums.” This article needs to be amended to include disabled people. This would help to reverse the long history of underrepresentation of disabled people within the City's consultative and decision-making bodies.

Proposed action 29: Increase the representation of disabled people on municipal and para-municipal boards of directors and committees

In order to reach this objective, the Ville de Montréal needs to make sure that Concertation Montréal includes disabled people in their candidate pool of individuals representing Montréal's diversity. Disabled people with skills and experience to serve on a board of directors or a committee are not currently allowed to register for the pool that is used by the City to ensure the diversity of these bodies.

Proposed action 30: Examine the structures, practices, and policies of political parties to ensure that they are not discriminatory towards disabled people

Political parties should examine their own structures, practices, and policies to ensure that they are not discriminatory towards disabled people. To attract disabled people within their ranks, political parties must be aware of how they might reproduce ableism without necessarily being aware of it. A disabled expert in accessibility and anti-ableist politics should conduct such work.

Proposed action 31: Recruit disabled people as candidates for elections

Brooke Ellison (2018) argues that “[p]eople with disabilities are often forced by circumstance to adopt the types of leadership, creativity, problem-solving, and resilience skills that excellence in elected office demands.” Political parties should aim to recruit disabled candidates and give them the appropriate support to run their campaigns.

Proposed action 32: Provide appropriate accommodations to disabled politicians

Considering that disabled people encounter multiple obstacles in their everyday lives and that being a politician requires attending multiple events and meetings and facing unforeseen situations, there is no doubt that being a disabled elected official in Montréal is a challenge. To address the absence of disabled elected officials and make a political career possible for them, it is imperative to provide disabled politicians with the accommodations they need.

Proposed action 33: Improve the accessibility of the City's public consultations

In 2018, the Ville de Montréal launched its first public consultation on its action plan for universal accessibility, which included several measures to ensure its accessibility, such

as the presence of LSQ interpreters and attendants on site. Promoting accessibility measures in advance is essential to encourage the participation of disabled people. Furthermore, online consultation surveys should be designed in a way that's easy to understand for as many people as possible. The City's consultation on its action plan for universal accessibility included a 19-page survey with 65 questions; for many people, this is not accessible.

Conclusion

This list of proposed actions is a selection from my thesis. The fourth issue addressed the participation of disabled Montrealers in the City's decision-making processes and disability rights organizations. The fifth issue raised by my thesis was the lack of research and resources on disability issues in French within a Québec context. It is also important to note one limitation of my doctoral research: the people that I wheeled with do not reflect enough the diversity of Montréal disability communities in terms of abilities, age, class, race, and sexual orientation. The lack of diversity among participants means that some important issues have not been explored. For example, wheeling with disabled queer Montrealers would certainly have led to discussions about ableism in the Montreal queer community, which mainly gathers in spaces and neighbourhoods that are not wheelchair-accessible. Attending queer events in Montréal usually means having to leave my motorized wheelchair downstairs or at home, which has a major impact not only on my mobility in the city, but also, more broadly, on my belonging in queer communities and my way of being in the world. Over the years, I have come to avoid these situations as much as I can. I am not alone.

Even though more research is needed, such as on the intersections of disability and queer communities in relation to mobility and urban life, there is also no reason not to act now to implement significant changes in the upcoming years. This requires the city to recognize that ableism is embedded in its DNA. This also requires disabled Montrealers to be a little more angry and a little less disposed to compromises when reimagining the city after their hearts' desire.

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