Boston Study Tour
November 14 - 16, 2016

Voyage d'études à Boston Study Tour

CITIES FOR PEOPLE

THE J.W. McCONNELL FAMILY FOUNDATION

LA FONDATION DE LA FAMILLE J.W. McCONNELL

Why a study tour to Boston?

Boston is home to cutting-edge initiatives in social entrepreneurship (EforAll, the MassChallenge); neighbourhood revitalization and civic innovation (The Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Roxbury Innovation Center); and youth engagement and social innovation (YouthBuild, DesignX-MIT and Mission Hill School). The city also inspires practitioners who have done extensive research in sustainability, smart cities and inclusion. Boston is not only an innovation hub, it is also one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the United States. From the historic streets of nearby Cambridge to the artistic Victorian town houses of Black Bay, the city suits a variety of lifestyles.

From November 14 to 16, 2016, a group of 28 Canadian innovators met with representatives from 13 Boston changemaking organizations and professors from Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Tufts University to share expertise and feedback on how to build more inclusive, resilient and innovative cities. Believing that agents of city change come from all sectors and walks of life, the itinerary catered to a diverse group of stakeholders involved in city-making: entrepreneurs, researchers, community leaders and members of the private sector. Having a multidisciplinary group allowed us to learn different approaches to tackle similar issues.

What we learned

Social entrepreneurship
- **Cultural translation:** In a diverse city like Boston, different cultural groups have different ways of working. Any entrepreneurship program must seek to understand and translate culture -- as well as language -- between groups, in order to achieve success.

- **Entrepreneurship is more than hi-tech initiatives.** We learned that entrepreneurship is not only for those who work with technologies. Entrepreneurs can be found in all fields where there are social, economic and environmental challenges to be addressed.

- Entrepreneurs work better when they are **connected to their surrounding environment.** Entrepreneurs who understand the needs and patterns in their environments are able to amplify their impact and evolve as those needs change.

Neighbourhood revitalization and civic innovation
- **Failure is a learning opportunity for city agencies.** Failure is part of a testing process to understand how a community reacts to a specific project. Failure leaves room for creativity in the design process, providing a set of data for shared learning.

- **Inclusiveness and multidisciplinarity:** Civic innovation can be scaled up when philanthropic and financial institutions, as well as city leaders, engage in collaborative actions to strengthen the city as a place for sharing.

- Sharing the city involves going **beyond environmental concerns.** To truly share a city, environmental *quality* and human *equality* are key. Everyone should have equal access to a healthy environment that can sustain them.

Youth engagement and social innovation:

- **Respect, empathy and opportunity** can accomplish wonders. Youth – including the most marginalized – have the potential to become changemakers in their communities. But it takes someone who is willing to provide them an opportunity to change their life path.

- **Design innovation is a tool** for residents and students to build bridges between communities and academia. Design innovation helps researchers generate, test and scale new technologies to tackle some of the most pressing urban issues, such as food production, transportation, urban governance.

- **Youth have the potential to become knowledge bearers.** Through university-city partnerships, students gain work experience and become involved in their neighbourhood's planning process.

Boston Study Tour in a nutshell

28
study tour participants

15
partners in Boston

3
days of activities

- How many new connections did you make on this Tour? **14 of 28 responded: between 10 and 15**

- Have you planned a specific action or project in collaboration with someone from our group or with a Boston partner? **14 of 28 responded: Yes**

Why it matters?

The Boston Study Tour helped to build a growing network of Canadian urban innovators. New relationships established have translated into strong interest among the partners to collaborate in building more resilient and innovative communities. Several potential outcomes include:

• Building green spaces to stimulate food security in Montreal

• Strengthening collaboration between placemakers and community groups to develop activities in public spaces that foster inclusion

• Developing a program that helps low-income youth learn construction skills through building affordable housing and other community assets for homeless and low-income people

These examples have been inspired by the cross-pollination of experiences among partners.

What our participants say:

« On a la capacité! On a le pouvoir de changer les choses et si on s'y met ensemble pour réfléchir autrement à la situation, on va trouver des solutions différentes. »
- Rachel Pouliot

"When we go out there and we look at innovation ... you see more of these opportunities and all the pieces coming together. On a trip like this, we actually have a chance to see actual programs working. We got to see how people got from A to B."
- Donald Nicholls

"One thing that came out of the Boston trip is the systemic approach, that you can't just focus on one thing. It's always a multi-factual and multi-dimensional process."
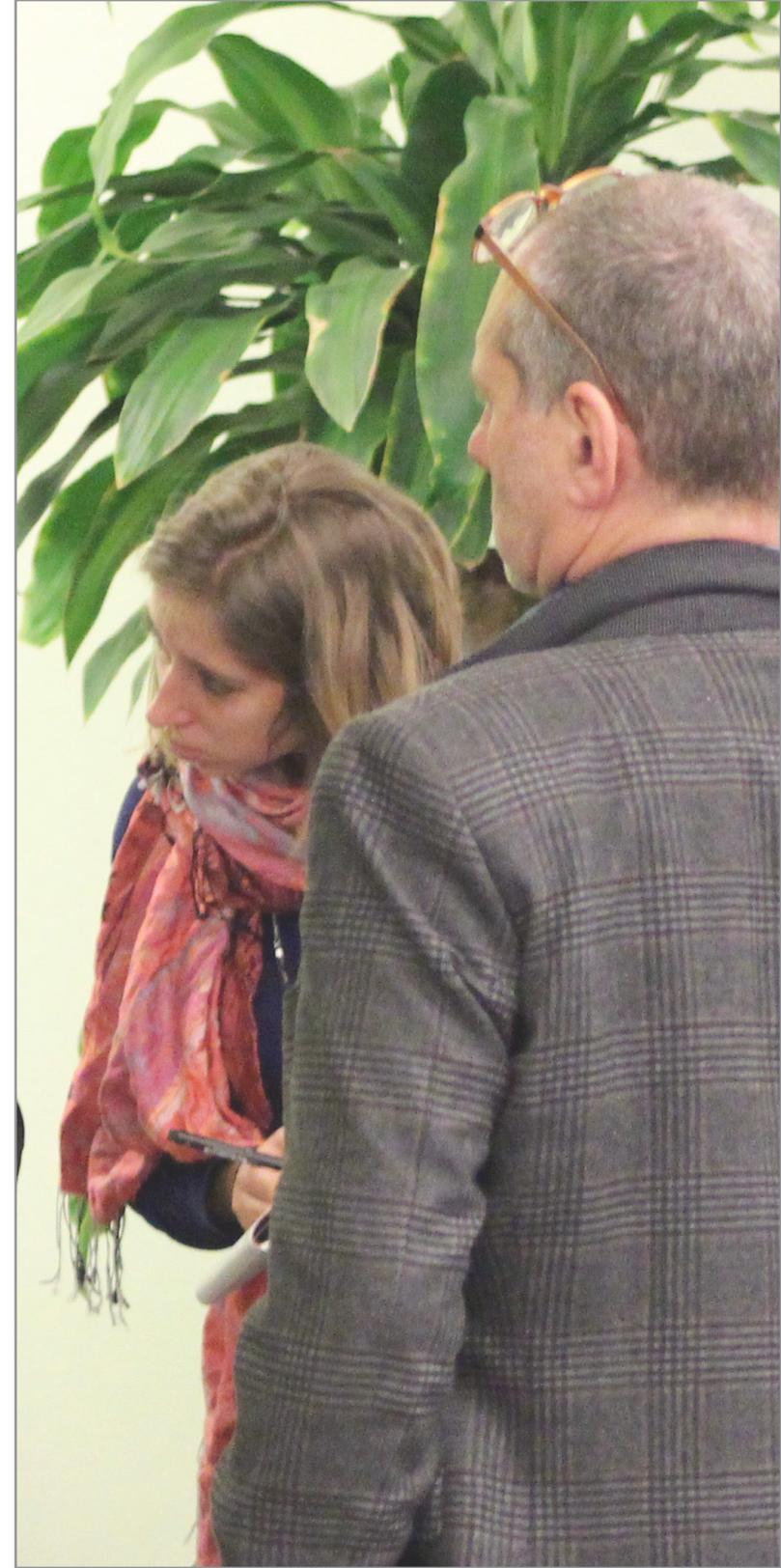*- Vanessa Sykes-Tremblay*

"We have to find ways of creating a context where vocational schooling is seen as a path of success and not of failure."
- George Kalimeris

"As an approach for a foundation to invest in these kind of changes, I think it has paid off. More than if you sent somebody individually—you wouldn't have the same impact. It's being in that group and strategically thinking who is going to come that was, I think, really important."
- Natasha Blanchet-Cohen

Participants from Canada

Cédric Jamet. Percolab
Claude Pinard. The Mirella & Lino Saputo Foundation
Donald Nicholls. Cree Nation of Quebec
Dorothée De Collasson. Exeko
Fabrice Vil. Pour 3 Points
George Kalimeris. The YMCAs of Québec
Gorka Espiau. McGill University, CIRM
Jayne Engle. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Cities for People
Jean-Sébastien Noël. La Ruche Québec and uGene Urban Intelligence
Jérôme Glad. La Pépinière | Collective spaces
Jonathan Lapalme. Les interstices / Entremise
Jorge Garza. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Cities for People
Julie Langlois. Vivre Saint-Michel en santé
Lili-Anna Pereša. Centraide of Greater Montreal
Lyndsay Daudier. Amplifier Montréal
Myriam Bérubé. Centraide of Greater Montreal
Natasha Blanchet-Cohen. Concordia University
Patrick Dubé. Maison de l'innovation sociale
Pawel Swinarski. PME MTL
Rachel Pouliot. Concertation Saint-Léonard
Raphaëlle Rinfret-Pilon. Corporation de développement communautaire (CDC) Centre-Sud
Richard St-Yves. The YMCAs of Québec
Robert Plitt. Evergreen (City Works)
Stéphane Vaillancourt. The YMCAs of Québec
Stephen Huddart. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
Vanessa Sykes. Baobab Familial
Xavier Phaneuf-Jolicoeur. McGill University, CIRM
Yves Bellavance. Coalition montréalaise des Tables de quartier

Boston Area Partners

Ashoka US
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)
Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll)
Greentown Labs
Harvard University, Karen Abrams, Loeb Fellow.
ImpactHub Boston
MassChallenge
Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM)
MIT, DesignX
Peace First
Playworks
Roxbury Innovation Center (RIC)
Smarter in the City
Tufts University, Professor Julian Agyeman
YouthBuild USA

About the Cities For People Initiative

Cities for People is an initiative of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation that aims to foster more inclusive, innovative and resilient cities across Canada. Following an experimental phase, in 2016 we have refocused our efforts on four priorities: 1) Increasing Equality, 2) Strengthening the Civic Commons, 3) Enabling City Labs, and 4) Supporting Urban Innovation Networks.

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