WHERE ARE THE WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Executive Summary

Reflecting on and acting for public spaces in Parc-Extension; improving the safety of women and girls
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We thank the local organisations who accepted to answer our questions, invited us to their activities, gave us their opinions on the project and the needs assessment, or that simply gave their support to the project: Afrique au Féminin, Arrondissement Villeray – Saint-Michel – Parc-Extension (VSP), Bibliothèque de Parc-Extension, Shield of Athena Family Services, Carrefour de liaison et d’aide Multi-ethnique (CLAM), Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS) de la Montagne, South Asian Women’s Community Centre, Coalition Jeunesse de Parc-Extension, Maison de la culture VSP, Ministère de l’immigration et des communautés culturelles (MICC), Parc-Extension Youth Organisation (PEYO), PACT de rue, Poste de quartier 33 (PDQ33), Table de Concertation Petite Enfance de Parc-Extension, Tandem de la culture VSP, Ville de Montréal and Vrac Environnement. We wish to thank the Table de concertation femmes Parc-Extension for repeatedly inviting us to present the project and the needs assessment. Thanks also go to organisations from other neighbourhoods for sharing their experiences: Prévention Côte-des-Neiges, Centre femmes du monde, Centre Mountain Sights, Poste de quartier 26, Tandem CDN/NDG and Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé. We want to mention the support of our advisory committee, which has supported our process and shared their insight: International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC), Girls Action Foundation, and Équitias Centre international d’éducation aux droits humains, Centre de prévention des agressions de Montréal, Tandem Côte-des-neiges – Notre-dame-de-grâce (CDN/NDG), and Développement communautaire (Ville de Montréal).

Finally, we wish to highlight the support of all those that have answered our questionnaire and have participated in our activities. Without their participation, input, and sharing of experiences in the neighbourhood, we would not have been able to complete this project.

The residents of Parc-Extension were very generous, taking time to answer our questionnaire and participate in our activities, effectively sharing their experiences of the neighbourhood.
This research is part of the development of the project: Where are the Women and girls?, which is in turn part of Travaillons ensemble : engager les collectivités dans l’élimination de la violence faite aux femmes et aux filles, an initiative funded by Status of Women Canada.

While a significant part of violence against women occurs within the household, there exists a less visible structural violence against them in public space through harassment and exclusion. In this regard, Women in Cities International (WICI) considers that there exists a continuum of violence between the private and public spheres, hence the need to work on preventing violence against women in the public space as a complement to initiatives directed at domestic violence. Note that for this project, we do not focus directly on domestic violence, which is already the subject of other projects in the neighbourhood. Our specific goal is reducing and preventing violence perpetrated against women and girls in the public sphere. Women face different types of violence in the public sphere: symbolic violence aimed at excluding women from public spaces, verbal violence such as street harassment, and economic violence as experienced by women living in precarious situations with significant barriers to the job market.

WICI closely links feelings of insecurity and violence in the extent that the fear of being assaulted and rumours about assaults that have occurred cause a feeling of insecurity. Feelings of insecurity constrain women to frequent public spaces in a different way and to develop autonomy-limiting strategies. This project focuses particularly on understanding these feelings of insecurity afflicting women and girls, as well as the factors that generate them, particularly in the Parc-Extension neighbourhood.

For the project, Women in Cities International supports the collaboration between women and community partners from the Parc-Extension neighbourhood to formulate and enact a community strategy against violence directed at women and girls in public spaces. This way, these women should have more opportunities to use and appropriate the neighbourhood’s public spaces for themselves.

We want to insist on three measures that enable to judge the evolution of safety issues for women and girls in public spaces.

- Women have sufficient opportunities and confidence to go out at anytime;
- Measures are taken to heighten public awareness about the issue of violence against women in public spaces;
- Women can identify and report problems related to public equipment.

What is public space?

For this research, the term “public space” is used to designate most places outside of the home: streets, back lanes, sidewalks, parks, community centres, cafés, etc. In general, it refers to all non commercial spaces to which, in principle, everyone has access.
Needs assessment objectives

The needs assessment pursues several specific objectives to establish and describe the state of sexist violence in Parc-Extension:

1. Establish and describe the state of violence in Parc-Extension;
2. Determine the specific needs of women and girls in terms of prevention and reduction of violence;
3. Identify the shortcomings in terms of support and institutional mechanisms for preventing and countering sexist violence;
4. Draw a map of different places: frequently used, favourite, unfriendly/to avoid, that need improvements (maps are on pages 20 and 21).

WICI uses an intersectional analysis to better understand the specifics of the multiethnic situation in the neighbourhood and also to avoid reproducing power relations with the local community. In this way, with its partners, WICI can deal with institutional obstacles and other factors that work against local violence prevention and reduction efforts concerning women and girls.

Methodology

Our results come from the analysis of five data collection methods:

Document analysis: studies done by organisations, annual reports, scientific research, public hearing memoirs, etc.

Semi-structured interviews: statements compiled from meetings with organisations working in the neighbourhood and/or across Montreal.

Questionnaire: 85 questionnaires administered during home visits in the neighbourhood and at our kiosk at the entrance of the William-Hingston francization centre in order to reach a potentially isolated population (57 women and 28 men).

Non-participatory observation: several observation sessions were held in various sectors and areas identified as problematic (Map 6, p.21).

Activities: three exploratory walks organised with Tandem Villeray – Saint-Michel – Parc-Extension (VSP), a mother-daughter cooking workshop organised by Afrique au féminin, two workshops with Barclay school’s girls club and the Girls Action Foundation, and a workshop with Barclay school’s girls club and Coalition Jeunesse.

The final step of the needs assessment process involves the validation of the results by our partners and local organisations. During the spring of 2014, we presented the results of our research to over twenty representatives from the neighbourhood’s organisations and institutions.

More details about our methods, our sources and the project’s context, as well as the complete report, are available at www.femmesetvilles.org
Overview of Parc-Extension

Inhabited by more than a hundred cultural communities, Parc-Extension is known as one of the most densely-populated and diverse neighbourhoods in Montreal. Parc-Extension is enclosed within physical barriers related to rail and road transportation. The neighbourhood has historically been a transitional place for many new immigrants. According to several of the project’s participants, many immigrant families leave when they successfully integrate and improve their socio-economic conditions.

In this context, we notice that the neighbourhood’s women and girls face various obstacles daily that impair their full integration, including linguistic and cultural barriers, important family burdens, as well as psychological and physiological pressures caused by migration. This context also makes them more vulnerable to discrimination, marginalization, poverty, and isolation (Chadi, 2011). Parc-Extension is our zone of intervention, because there seems to be certain risks associated to the existence of structural violence affecting the neighbourhood’s women and girls in particular.

Despite all this, Parc-Extension’s cultural diversity benefits from significant opportunities in terms of developing safer and more inclusive cities. With many local organisations, Parc-Extension comprises a strong social fabric, which is a considerable advantage for setting up and supporting projects aiming to improve the quality of life of its residents. Transformation will mark the near future of Parc-Extension as the new campus of Université de Montréal will be built along its southern border. The neighbourhood will face changes that will affect its urban fabric and social dynamics.

Statistical portrait

Demographics

With 29,285 inhabitants over a 1.67 square kilometre area, Parc-Extension is one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in Montreal. Since 2001, the total population has decreased 7% (Figure 1) and the size of households has been getting smaller.

Residents are relatively young: 31% are 25 years old or less. However, residents 45 years old and above has been increasing since 1991.

The neighbourhood has an imbalance in the man to woman ratio. In several segments of the population, there is a higher proportion of men, such as among 35 to 54 year olds (56% are men), non permanent residents (67% are men), and in the South-Asian community (55% are men).

![Figure 1. Evolution of the population between 1991-2011 (GDS)](image-url)
Since 1991, we note a 5% increase in single-parent families, which is higher among parents with one child (an 18% increase between 1991 and 2011). This situation affects mostly women (85% in 2011).

Over the last decade, there has been minor transformations in marital status among residents: the separated, divorced, and single population is increasing, while the married and widowed population is decreasing. Between 2001 and 2011, there is a 66% increase in common-law unions, which leads us to think the neighbourhood’s couples are opting for marriage less and less.

**Immigration, mobility, religions, and origins**

In 2011, Statistics Canada listed almost 90 different ethnic origins in Parc-Extension. Among all residents, 63% were visible minorities, 87% stated they had a religious affiliation (no particular affiliation is dominant), and 86% were first-, second-, third-generation immigrants or more. First-generation immigrants constituted the largest group, taking up 64% of the total immigrant population in 2011.

At the time of the most recent census, more than three quarters of the immigrant population (78%) had arrived in Canada before 1990. Since 1996, immigration has been decreasing and mobility has been stabilizing.

**Residents of Greek and South-Asian origin** dominate in Parc-Extension, corresponding, respectively to 21% and 37% of the total population. Take note that Asian origins represent nearly half of the recently immigrated population.

In 2011, almost three quarters of the population (72%) was allophone. Besides French and English, more than forty mother tongues are spoken in Parc-Extension. When we compare mother tongues with languages spoken at home, we notice that residents with a mother tongue that is not one of the official languages don’t necessarily use it at home (Figure 2).

Since 1991, the portion of the population that knows neither French nor English has decreased (-14%). In 2011, about one person in ten (11%) was unable to have a conversation in either official language. Although this situation is becoming rarer, it continues to affect more women than men: 14% of female residents mastered neither French nor English in 2011.

**Evolution of the socioeconomic profile**

The residents of Parc-Extension have a homogenous and very modest socioeconomic profile characterized by a low employment rate (36% for women in 2011) and a dependence on government transfers (43,9% pour les femmes en 2011). It is interesting to note that residents of the centre of the neighbourhood generally have lower revenues. In 2011, there were 12,720 low income residents, which represents 43% of the population of Parc-Extension and half of the population 18 years old and under.
Although the unemployment rate has been decreasing over the last few years, the inactive population is growing. We hypothesize that many residents simply stop looking for work, increasing the number of inactive people, and thereby making the unemployment rate decrease. Also, women systematically have more alarming rates of activity, employment, and unemployment than men. This situation particularly affects South-Asian women (Bessa and Marhraoui, 2009).

Since 1996, the population’s education rate has been increasing. Among residents aged 15 and over, fewer have no diploma (33%). This decrease can be explained by a 77% increase in high school graduation in the same period.

According to the Deprivation Index1 (Pampalon and Raymond, 2003), material deprivation in the neighbourhood is high, but the population is not considered to be socially disadvantaged. These findings are explained in part by the composition of the social deprivation index, which doesn’t take into consideration information about the various life situations experienced by the residents. Many local social issues relate to isolation, the lack of a support network, and employment- and housing-related discrimination, which have important repercussions on the population’s everyday quality of life.

| Table 1. Distribution of the low income population By age group in 2010 (GDS) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                | Men  | Women | Total |
| Under 18 years | 51%  | 50%   | 50%   |
| 18 to 64 years | 44%  | 43%   | 43%   |
| Over 65 years  | 32%  | 34%   | 33%   |
| Total population | 44%  | 43%   | 43%   |


Neighbourhood resources

The main commercial road is Jean-Talon Street and there are businesses on Ogilvy Avenue, St-Roch Street, Jarry Street, and Liège Street. Parc-Extension has many ethnocultural services and businesses that are quite specific and reflect well the neighbourhood’s diversity.

Parc-Extension is well served by public transportation with the Montreal - Saint-Jérôme commuter train, two metro stations (Acadie and Parc), and nine bus routes. Residents make extensive use of active and public transportation when travelling within Parc-Extension.

According to some community workers, the decrease in residents moving into new homes is partly due to increasing rents. Many households consider they will not find less expensive housing elsewhere, which is why they stay where they are. The shortage of sufficiently sized good condition affordable housing affects the quality of life of many residents. Also, we are told that the population lacks sufficient knowledge of their rights in respect to housing.

According to many, Parc-Extension is currently going through a gentrification process. In 2011, there was about the same proportion of condominiums (5.62%) as there was social and community housing (5.7%). As a corollary, there was a 17% increase in homeowners between 1991 and 2011. The neighbourhood risks changing even more with the new Outremont Campus. It should be noted that about twenty social housing units are currently being built.

Local organisations reflect the neighbourhood’s demography: diverse and adapting to new waves of immigration. There are more than thirty organisations that work towards the improvement of the population’s living conditions via various issues affecting residents like housing, food, employment, integration, safety, and leisure. Furthermore, organisations involved with issues related to women meet monthly at the Table de concertation femmes de Parc-Extension in order to reflect, coordinate, plan, and develop activities and projects for the neighbourhood’s women.
Issues and interventions related to crime

Crime and denunciation

Parc-Extension is a stigmatized neighbourhood where global safety is an important concern for the population. Contrary to preconceived ideas, the record of infractions shows a decrease in crime over the last few years (2000-2013), and is well below the numbers of surrounding sectors. It must be noted that the predominant crime categories in Parc-Extension affects a greater proportion of women and girls, for instance, property crimes (stolen jewellery and handbags) and crimes against individuals (domestic violence).

Domestic violence and honour-based crimes are major issues in the neighbourhood since the migratory context can create tension. Several obstacles specific to the neighbourhood make denunciation and seeking help for crimes and misdemeanours more difficult. Migratory context and community pressure are examples of the obstacles affecting crimes against individuals like domestic violence.

Many crimes against property are not very serious, yet they are only rarely reported to authorities. These situations nonetheless generate rumours that considerably influence the population’s perception of safety. In addition to under-reported crimes, several gestures and behaviours that lead to insecurity are not declared, like tailing, insistent staring, whistling, or malicious comments.

Perception of safety

According to our questionnaire, participants reveal that they feel less safe in Parc-Extension than in the rest of Montreal. More than half the female residents we met mentioned that the fact of being a woman affects their safety. For many, Parc-Extension is safer than their country of origin:

“I feel comfortable and safe here: I can walk around the neighbourhood much more than in India. I can walk alone.”
(Participant originally from India, 25-34 years old)

“When I compare Montreal to my country of origin, there is less violence here.”
(Participant originally from Sri Lanka, 65-75 years old)
We asked the participants what segments of the population are most at risk of being the victim of an act of violence in Parc-Extension (Figure 3). Many residents said that the neighbourhood is an inclusive one and, as such, there is much less risk than elsewhere for cultural communities and visible minorities. Participants nevertheless consider that young people are most likely to be the victims of violent acts like harassment and assault. However, for many residents we met, young people are the ones that cause insecurity: loitering, drug use, delinquency, and youth crime raise concerns among residents. Taking all age segments into account, about 21% of participants consider there to be a difference between men and women in terms of risk of becoming a victim of an act of violence.

Residents, mostly women, regularly resort to isolation or self-defence strategies to feel safer (Figure 4). It should be noted that the majority of tactics used are seen as self-defence, like being accompanied by a trustworthy person, carrying a means of communication or defence. However, several women and the girls we met say that avoiding going out after sunset is absolutely normal and that it is not an isolation tactic. From a very young age, the neighbourhood’s girls are given a lot of advice on how to be safer. Since they assimilate early on a set of behaviours meant to protect them from danger, they internalise responsibility concerning violent or inappropriate acts, which pushes aside the root of the problem that is sexist violence.

**Interventions**

Tandem VSP and neighbourhood police station 33 are making efforts to prevent, reduce and increase the denunciation of crimes, but also to make rights and available resources known to residents. Shield of Athena Family Services is an organisation that intervenes in cases of domestic violence and is adapted to the context in Parc-Extension. They have innovative ongoing projects, for instance, aimed at combatting honour crimes. The vast majority of the neighbourhood’s institutional and community players associate with Shield of Athena for problems related to domestic violence. Community concertation permits organisations and institutions to react to local issues since committees and projects are frequently set up as a response to problems related to crime and safety, like honour crimes, road safety, or street harassment.

Besides improving women’s feeling of safety in public spaces, there does not seem to be major weaknesses in terms of crime prevention and reduction in Parc-Extension. The participants we met agree that there is a need for intervention to improve women’s and girls’ feeling of safety, and offer them more opportunities to appropriate public spaces for themselves. Thus, we retain this issue as one of our priorities for action in the project.
Issues related to safety

Within the context of this needs assessment, we retain a rather open-ended definition of safety and violence since it is a reflection of what the neighbourhood’s residents told us when we tackled the subject. The two word clouds illustrate the terms used by the participants to define safety (blue) and violence (orange). Let us note that women generally use more terms than men to express their thought.

Through our questionnaire, we asked residents to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 10 seven elements that relate to safe planning of public spaces (Figure 5). Women notably attributed weaker grades, which means they are more sensitive to inadequate facilities.

(1) Signage: knowing where one is and where one is going

Parc-Extension is a simply designed neighbourhood in which it is easy to find one’s bearings, especially considering its orthogonal and homogeneous grid. North-south streets are mostly residential, while east-west streets are mixed-use (residential and commercial). The population appreciates the neighbourhood’s proximity. We have noticed the lack of signage at some intersections, which reduces safety at pedestrian crossings.

(2) Visibility: to see and be seen

Visibility is an important factor of insecurity for women in Parc-Extension. Lighting is poor in many areas of the neighbourhood, especially on residential streets, in parks, at metro stations, and back alleys. At sundown, women’s perception of safety changes. Many of them say they avoid going out at night and, if they must go out to, they choose better-lit itineraries, avoiding particular places, or go out accompanied by someone.

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2. Principles developed by the Women and Cities programme, City of Montreal. WIC added the seventh principle after the completion of the project « Créer des communautés plus sécuritaires pour les femmes marginalisées et pour toute la communauté » (2007-2010). Inclusion turned out to be essential in insuring the safety of all women (Women in Cities International, 2010).
We have noted that the configuration of some streets in the northern part of the neighbourhood is problematic, for example Birnam and Stuart streets, which lead to blind spots and by extension to predictable itineraries.

(3) Affluence: hearing and being heard

(3.1) Atmospheres
Several participants say there is not much visible violence in public spaces and that insecurity factors are not related to public space design and planning, but to dynamics and atmosphere. To mention a few examples, parks, cafes and bars are monopolized by men. This monopolization is sometimes heightened by rude comments and harassing behaviour directed at female passers-by. On top of this, drug and alcohol use, suspicious gatherings, and illicit activities, like the sale of drugs, make up situations that bring on oft-reported insecurity.

Winter seems to be a challenge to public space appropriation as the cold and snow are obstacles to outings. Despite a slight increase in lack of civility or disparaging behaviour in the summer, Parc-Extension clearly remains a pleasant place because of the community spirit, good relations between neighbours, and vegetation.

(3.2) Road safety
Each day, thousands of motorists travel the main roads that cross or surround the neighbourhood, endangering residents and jeopardizing internal local trips. Many residents and participants have expressed the desire that more traffic mitigation measures be implemented, particularly around schools.

Active transportation is central to the local movement of the population. For many female residents, walking is their main physical activity, which also enables them to accomplish their domestic work.

(4) Formal surveillance and access to help: being able to escape and get help

The majority of the people we met (78%) say they communicate with the police or call 911 in cases of harassment or assault. However, there is a general lack of information about helpful community resources like food assistance and defence of rights.

Although the various communities do not mix much, there seems to exist a strong feeling of solidarity. In fact, most participants say they can easily get help from neighbours, passers-by or local merchants, if need be.
(5) Layout and maintenance of public spaces: living together in a clean and hospitable environment

(5.1) Cleanliness and maintenance
Maintenance of public areas turned out to be the most important issue in our questionnaire. The population invoked various problems related to the lack of maintenance (ex. urban installations, removal of snow, condition of the schools, etc.), to the lack of infrastructure (ex. lighting, public toilets, bus shelters, etc) and to city planning (more green spaces, traffic mitigation, etc.).

Areas identified as problematic are streets, back lanes, parks, and metro stations. Graffiti, litter and the lack of maintenance seem to affect residents’ perception of safety and their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

(5.2) Parks and green spaces
Parc-Extension is the Montreal neighbourhood that has the least green spaces in proportion to the number of residents. Participants were very numerous in mentioning Jarry and Howard parks as their favourite places. However, some parks, particularly the smaller ones, do not reflect the needs of the population since the infrastructure is often antiquated, and sports and children’s infrastructures are missing. There is also a lack of surveillance and organised activities in some parks. Note that crime and disrespectful behaviour, which instils a feeling of insecurity, are often linked to public spaces such as parks. (RAMPE, 2011).

(5.3) Sports facilities and community centre
Compared to other neighbourhoods, Parc-Extension offers much less in terms of leisure activities. This is explained in part by the fact there is only one interior space for leisure activities: the Complexe William-Hingston. Although there are other community centres in the neighbourhood, they serve particular communities. Since the Complexe William-Hingston contains the library and most other local community resources, it is a very busy and heavily supervised. Considering this, there are few open and hospitable spaces where women can meet outside of structured activities.

(6) Community participation: acting together

(6.1) Knowing about and participating in activities
For many participants, reducing sexist violence is possible notably by bringing women out of isolation, offering outing opportunities in which women can socialize and become involved in neighbourhood life. We have noticed that residents rarely leave the neighbourhood, except for work or study related reasons. Since female residents have a lower employment rate, they are most at risk of living in isolation. Isolation constitutes a major issue that particularly touches women that have little knowledge of the official
languages or that have significant domestic burdens. It must be noted that girls in the
neighbourhood face various hindrances to their participation in activities, notably
because of family pressure. Furthermore, several activities and services in the
neighbourhood cater to women, but some lack flexibility or impose constraints that
can discourage some girls.

To the question “Which improvements would increase your use the neighbourhood’s
public spaces?” (Figure 6), a majority of women (58%) say they want improved
infrastructure, while this isn’t a priority for men.

(6.2) Involvement of the population
Community participation in the planning and transformation of the neighbourhood
happens more through community groups that represent the interests of the population
with public authorities. Usually, the women and men who get involved in these spaces
for citizen participation only represent a segment of the population.

(7) Inclusion: taking into account particular needs

(7.1) Socioeconomic exclusion of women
Immigrant women have a higher risk of obtaining unstable employment (part time,
atypical hours, inadequate compensation). Generally, such instability leads to
negative impact on their everyday lives, like isolation, food insecurity, and low
participation in sports and leisure activities.

(7.2) Immigration neighbourhood
Parc-Extension turns out to be a neighbourhood well adapted to newly-arrived
immigrants, with resources and businesses that cater to the needs of the
population. For example, the community organisations are sensitive to the realities
of immigration even if this is not part of their mission. However, the fact the
population renews itself because of the high mobility rate means issues related to
recently arrived immigrants are constant: francization, job and housing search, etc.
Seeing as the mobility rate has stabilized over the last few years, this should simplify
the work done by organisations, leading to a feeling of belonging and resident
participation in community life.

64% of participants say they want to live in the neighbourhood in 5 years since
they deem it a pleasant, affordable and well-located neighbourhood, peopled by
established cultural communities. Other participants would consider staying if there
were improvements in the neighbourhood: cleanliness, safety, school, and housing.
Several participants say they would move away if important events occurred, like
major socioeconomic, conjugal or domestic changes.
Current **interventions, needs, challenges and opportunities**

**We deem it important** to mention that several issues treated in the present needs assessment are not exclusive to Parc-Extension and are found in other neighbourhoods and cities. Despite Parc-Extension’s reputation, public spaces are not less safe than elsewhere in Montreal: issues surrounding sexist violence are the same in every area we look at. This is why implementing targeted interventions in Parc-Extension only will not suffice to resolve these structural problems. In order to counter violence directed at women and girls, it seems pertinent to act on several levels against numerous targets.

After having analysed Parc-Extension from the perspective of the seven principles of safe planning, we turn to the issues that are being addressed by various organisations we have either met with or been told about. It must be noted that this is an overview and does not constitute an exhaustive portrait of all local groups and projects. Interventions are centred around four central issues that contribute to a feeling of insecurity in the neighbourhood’s women: (1) atmospheres, planning and maintenance of public spaces; (2) road safety; (3) defence of rights and socioeconomic inclusion; (4) citizen participation and participation to activities.

**(1) Atmospheres, planning and maintenance of public spaces**

Various initiatives led by communities, organisations and institutions favour the occupation of public spaces. These celebrations, festivals and organized events enable residents to appropriate parks for themselves and feel comfortable in them. However, during these activities open to all, we are told that women often remain in the background. What’s more, there seems to be a lack of organized events and exterior programming during the winter months, which already poses several challenges in terms of participation for activities organized by all organisations.

Over the last two years, interventions have been planned or put in place to redevelop public spaces by adding trees, garbage cans, benches, and curb extensions. Since the physical neighbourhood is very dense, space for this is quite limited. Back lanes or private properties seem to represent an opportunity for eventual projects. Seeing that resources and interventions in the area are unequally allocated, it appears important that energy be injected into reaching out to less well-served households in the North and West of the neighbourhood.

As for initiatives aiming to reduce public space monopolisation by men, some have been deployed by local organisations and institutions to limit inappropriate acts. However, they have neither the time nor sufficient resources to work continuously on the empowerment of women and their appropriation of public spaces.
(2) Road safety

Many efforts are being deployed by organisations, public institutions, and community projects to increase safety in mobility, such as establishing school corridors, designating dedicated bicycle paths, improving road planning, and promoting active transportation. Note that these efforts are concentrated in the southern portion of the neighbourhood.

It must be noted that women participate in good numbers in local initiatives related to active transportation and safety around schools. It could be worthwhile to push this theme further and involve neighbourhood women and girls in elaborating solutions to improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

(3) Socioeconomic insertion and defence of rights

Several local actors offer significant resources to help break the cycle of isolation and favour the integration of immigrant persons, even if this is not formally a part of their mandate. The neighbourhood’s institutions and organisations have community workers that do individual follow-ups on various problems touching residents (some of these services are directed specifically at women and mothers).

Housing remains a thorny issue for Parc-Extension. Lack of knowledge of rights, poor maintenance, and the shortage of adequately sized units create situations that undermine the population’s quality of life. Following pressure exerted by several groups, preventive inspections will soon be put together.

Initiatives and interventions related to socioeconomic integration and rights education appear as areas of action that could benefit from additional support to lead a structural transformation of the population in Parc-Extension. In order to act coherently with other organisations in the neighbourhood, it is essential that measures be taken to help immigrant women out of isolation and favour their integration.

(4) Citizen involvement and participation in activities

Many activities are aimed specifically at children, youth, families, and women. Several organisations work towards breaking the cycle of isolation or offer help in alleviating parental obligations. However, leisure and sporting activities for women are limited or do not take into account particular constraints related to family obligations, for instance.

The last few years have seen several opportunities for citizen participation (public consultations, citizen forums, exploratory walks, public assemblies, etc.). However, participation in these activities is not representative of the neighbourhood’s population (few women from cultural communities participate). Non representative participation can lead to actions that do not reflect the needs of the resident population. This is why projects involving collective action could, with time, favour the involvement of women in the transformation of the neighbourhood and create interventions that reflect their needs and preoccupations.
Conclusion

Positioning
Where are the Women and girls?

This needs assessment has enabled us to look at the different issues affecting Parc-Extension and develop a few courses of action that could increase the neighbourhood women’s feeling of safety. Over the course of our research, we were able to determine that road safety, housing issues, and socioeconomic exclusion are recurrent and urgent problems for Parc-Extension as a whole. For many participants, reducing sexist violence is possible as the cycle of isolation is broken by offering these women opportunities to come out of their homes, socialize, and get involved in the life of the neighbourhood. Working on a sense of belonging to the Parc-Extension community has revealed itself as being a pertinent element in giving women and girls more opportunities to better invest themselves in public spaces so as to prevent and reduce violence directed at them. Table 2 presents a list of elements that help reduce sexist violence in the neighbourhood as well as different potential avenues for action.

For the project “Where are the Women and girls?”, we want to rely on local initiatives and strengths, such as the many community resources that are adapted to the neighbourhood’s realities. Several other elements appear as opportunities for articulating our project, such as the central place active transportation has in women and girls’ movement, the confidence and solidarity between neighbours, and appreciation of green spaces when they are well-adapted.

Inspired by the “pirate committee” supported by Femmes du Monde in Côte-des-Neiges, we propose to put together a women’s committee. In time, this committee will define and set up a project based on the issues and solutions identified by the needs assessment. The citizen’s committee’s preparation process offers opportunities for women to meet and share ideas, reinforcing ties promoting mutual assistance. According to our meetings with local players, our strategy must offer practical and concrete tools to the women of Parc-Extension and help them be heard. This visibility and attention should help prevent and reduce the violence they are victims of in different social spheres, in particular in public spaces.

The pilot phase, which involves setting up a citizen’s committee, will be threefold. First, we will work directly with the participating women during activities led by Women in Cities International. We propose an empowerment model that will enable women to choose the issues on which they want to work, while offering support for skill-development. The committee’s work aims to create strong ties between the women, community organisations, and institutions in the neighbourhood. Then, we will work with community groups that are already active with women to help them integrate issues surrounding safety in public spaces with their activities. Finally, we will document our process with the women and create groups within the community that will be interested in continuing to work on the project, ensuring its continuation.
### Table 2. Reported issues and avenues for action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues identified</th>
<th>Potential avenues for action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Lack of safe spaces where women can meet and share, and actively and collectively participate in community life;</td>
<td>Walking club&lt;br&gt;Café-meeting&lt;br&gt;Community kitchen&lt;br&gt;Dance classes&lt;br&gt;Workshops for making jewellery, cards, etc.&lt;br&gt;Family outings&lt;br&gt;Mobile library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Few open activities organized during the winter (ex. festivals, celebrations, etc.);</td>
<td>Neighbourhood daycare&lt;br&gt;Selected activities aiming to open spaces for the whole family&lt;br&gt;Social workers or mobilizers&lt;br&gt;Homework help&lt;br&gt;Souk (public market)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Few activities taking place in the north of the neighbourhood;</td>
<td>Intercultural library&lt;br&gt;Spaces for families&lt;br&gt;Park activities for teenagers&lt;br&gt;Street art&lt;br&gt;Urban agriculture&lt;br&gt;Women’s committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Need to reinforce the link between activities and services offered to women;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E) Persistent need of educational and rights defense activities related to violence and safety;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F) Isolation of women and girls;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>G) Problems related to mobilizing teenaged girls and having them participate;</td>
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<tr>
<td>H) Poor knowledge of the neighbourhood’s institutions, resources, and organisations;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I) Poor citizen participation and involvement of women across the neighbourhood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This initiative aims at reinforcing the feeling of belonging to the community while favouring cultural diversity, a feature of Parc-Extension. Increasing security for women and girls will happen in part through their implication and investment in the life of the community. Besides bringing their project to term, the committee hopes to educate the participants about local politics and how to be heard in various public political spaces so that their needs and realities be known. In the long term, this project should encourage women and girls to participate in activities proposed in the neighbourhood and throughout the city.

To obtain the complete version of the report, please visit www.womenincities.org (in French only)
Map 1. Parc-Extension

Map 2. Places frequently visited by the participants

Map 3. Places considered as welcoming, well-adapted to their needs and safe, according to the participants
Map 4. Places considered as ill-adapted, non inclusive and where safety is threatened, according to the participants

Map 5. Places needing improvements, according to the participants

Map 6. Observed places and itineraries
Bibliography


