

## ***Little Burgundy Narratives: una chiesa-caso di studio di riuso, tecnologia, arte e beni comuni civici***

### ***Little Burgundy Narratives: a case study of church repurposing, technology, arts, and civic commons***

*Questo articolo si concentra sullo studio dello specifico caso della Chiesa di St. Joseph, una chiesa parrocchiale situata nel quartiere di Little Burgundy nel quartiere sud-occidentale di Montreal. Ci si rivolge, in primo luogo, all'arco storico che ha portato alla riproposizione della chiesa per poi discutere l'intervento specifico di Little Burgundy Narratives, un ritratto digitale del quartiere che circonda l'ex Chiesa di St. Joseph, nel tentativo di sostenere il suo nuovo ruolo di spazio comunitario, la tecnologia sfruttata ed i mezzi per aumentare il valore della chiesa come un bene civico comune. L'ex Chiesa di St. Joseph è una testimonianza del crescente disuso e ri-vocazione di luoghi di culto ed un caso di studio rilevante per la comprensione del futuro delle chiese in aree urbane.*

*This paper focuses on the specific case study of the Church of St. Joseph, a parish church situated in the neighborhood of Little Burgundy in the South-West borough of Montreal. It addresses first the historical arc that has led to the church's repurposing before discussing the specific intervention of Little Burgundy Narratives, a digital portrait of the neighborhood surrounding the former Church of St. Joseph in an effort to support its new role as a community space, harnessing technology and the arts to enhance the church's value as a civic common. The former Church St. Joseph is a witness of the growing disuse and re-purpose of places of worship and is a relevant case-study for the understanding of the future of churches in urban areas.*

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## I. The present and future of churches in Montreal

A multicultural city with a diverse population, including a majority who identify as French-speaking Catholics, Montreal has an impressive architectural repertoire of disused, repurposed or abandoned churches. Within Canada, contemporary Quebec has the peculiar paradox of being the province with the lowest rate of religious attendance, but the highest rate of religious affiliation, thanks to large numbers of self-declared Catholics – suggesting that Catholicism remains an important marker of secular Quebecois identity, despite the general desertion of the church.<sup>1</sup> As scholar Laurier Turgeon points out: “The Québécois remain very sensitive to their religious heritage, although less than 5% of them actively practice today the Catholic religion.”<sup>2</sup>

This paper will focus on the specific case study of the Church of St. Joseph, a parish church situated in the neighborhood of Little Burgundy in the South-West borough of Montreal. It will address first the historical arc that has led to the church’s repurposing before discussing the specific intervention of Little Burgundy Narratives, a digital portrait of the neighborhood surrounding the former Church of St. Joseph in an effort to support its new role as a community space.

The church long played a vital role in the local community, although its membership of French

Canadian Catholics declined significantly over the second half of the 20th century amid the general secularization of society and the relocation of those members to other neighborhoods. Since 1991, the Church of St. Joseph has been listed as a heritage structure by the City of Montreal for its historic value. It has been a witness of the urban renewal, de-industrialization, demographic change and secularization of Montreal’s urban fabric.

Montreal is a remarkable example to question the future of places of worship, given the architectural diversity of its religious heritage, as well as the plurality of cultures and religions that characterizes its dynamically changing population and urban fabric. It is important to mention that the situation of Montreal differs from the rest of the province of Quebec, particularly for the above-mentioned diversity and multiplicity of religious traditions that the city hosts, and for the number of churches built in its urban area.<sup>3</sup> According to the “Quebec Inventory of Places of Worship” (*Inventaire des lieux de culte du Québec*), a large study conducted by the Québec Council for Religious Heritage in 2003, the number of religious buildings (including churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples of different cults) built in the city of Montreal before 1975 was 470. The inventory includes also new uses for the buildings that have been sold, grouped in the following areas: library, commercial, community, cultural, institutional,

multifunctional, sports, and residential. The Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Urban Heritage at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) has conducted an extensive research project on this topic which helps us situate the current situation of repurposed churches in Montreal. In her paper, “The conversion of churches in Montreal,” Lyne Bernier draws a complete portrait of the current situation, combining the numbers provided by the Inventory and those by the CRC in Urban Heritage, and providing with statistics and data. According to Bernier and the CRC in Urban Heritage study, 240 churches have been sold since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 70 out of which have been destroyed and 170 repurposed together with 35 chapels.<sup>4</sup>

As urban heritage specialist Luc Noppen writes:

An old tradition: in Quebec, churches have been converted since 1925. That was the year in which the Canadian Parliament voted through a law which founded the United Church of Canada, a body encompassing the Methodist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian faiths. The surplus of churches created by the new law meant that a number of them had to be closed and converted. Since then, many of these small Protestant churches have been leading a new life as residential buildings, restaurants, offices and workshops.<sup>5</sup>

If a first wave of churches conversion started

in the early 1920s in Montreal and touched the Protestant architectural heritage, it was especially after 1970 that this process heavily impacted the Catholic Church, whose presence is predominant in Montreal's urban fabric. In 1960-1970 the city of Montreal went through an important phase of modernization that touched many of its neighborhoods. During this time, the key strategy was demolition and reconstruction, and the future of churches became an important issue for the Catholic Church, for public opinion and for political institutions in response to this wave of urban modernization. It is during this time that Montreal witnessed the first conversions and repurposes of churches, a practice that became more common in the following years. As Noppen recalls:

The scandal caused by the sales accelerated the decline in the number of church-goers to such an extent that, in the late 1980s, the religious authorities decreed that at all costs, such demolitions must be avoided. At the same time, an increasing awareness of the importance of heritage meant that these great monuments entered the collective imagination. A slogan suddenly appeared all over the province, proclaiming: "Our churches are our castles!"<sup>6</sup>

Since then, not only the Catholic Church but also politicians became aware of the architectural, heritage and community-building value of

such structures, and discouraged any attempt to destroy them, or sell them to private investors for commercial or residential uses. The *Heritage Policy* adopted by the City of Montreal in 2005 (*Politique du patrimoine de la Ville de Montréal*) correspondingly encourages to: "Privilege public and collective vocations in cases of repurposing of places of worship."<sup>7</sup> As an example, among others, in 2011 the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts converted the Erskine and American United Church adjacent to the museum into a Canadian Art pavilion, or the former Saint Barnabé-Apôtre Church was converted in 2002 into an affordable cafeteria: the Chic Resto Pop in the east of the island. Only very recently other functions were accepted, such as sport and wellbeing centers. The Saint-Jude church in the central and gentrified Plateau Mont-Royal district became a spa in 2013, winning a design excellence award from Canadian Architect magazine. Other functions such as residential and commercial are less encouraged in Quebec than in the rest of Canada: "disaffected churches cannot be converted into bars or discotheques, which is commonly the case in Ontario and the rest of North America."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in Montreal 60% of churches of any religion have been sold to other religious congregations.<sup>9</sup> The future of churches in Montreal is at stake, and will be even more in the coming years, when, according to Noppen, "over a thousand churches will be up for conversion: do we need

all these spaces and do we have the resources necessary to carry out so many projects?"<sup>10</sup> In this paper we will examine the former Saint-Joseph church as a specific and exemplary case study, looking at its multifunctional repurposing, which include a plan with private and public uses as well as a transfer to a different religious tradition through our virtual reality project: Little Burgundy Narratives. The church is a witness of the growing disuse and re-purpose of places of worship and is a relevant case-study for understanding the future of churches in urban areas.

This attempt at limiting the use of converted churches in Montreal to public roles dovetails with an emergent trend gaining popularity among NGOs, municipalities and a growing interest of academia in the commons. the conceptualization of churches as "civic assets" or as part of a "civic commons", falls into a larger category encompassing public buildings such as post offices, libraries, community centres, hospitals, and so on: buildings that have housed institutions with a civic purpose, connected to their community and non-commercial, but which often have fallen into disuse.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of this conceptualization is "to make the case for a reimagined civic commons which will be so compelling that city leaders will embrace it"<sup>12</sup> as a countermeasure to the decline of these spaces of community interaction, where neighbourhood identity is produced. Notions of the civic commons,

focused on built assets, are closely linked to a wider concern with the “urban commons” that encompasses other goods and services that is emerging now in scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

## II. Historical context and community framework

The St. Joseph church was built in 1861-1862 in the neo-gothic style for the Sulpician order by architect Victor Bourgeau at a time when the city’s early industrial suburbs were rapidly expanding to house workers in the burgeoning industrial economy (Fig. 1). Sainte-Cunégonde, as the district of Little Burgundy was called at that time, extended eastward along both the city’s main railway line and the Lachine canal, which connects the navigable portions of the St. Lawrence River. The church formed part of the Notre-Dame parish, serving the faithful who lived too far away from the heart of the old city and its Notre-Dame Basilica, the interior of which was also decorated by Bourgeau. From 1878 to 1910 the structure of the Church of St. Joseph was slowly brought to completion; the bell tower was constructed in 1878; the sacristy and transepts were later added, and interior decoration and frescoes were finished by 1910.<sup>14</sup> With the rapidly growing population, due to new industrial sectors related to the railroad, shipping and mills, the Sulpicians started a series of education and recreation activities. The first school for girls was opened in 1838, followed by the boys’

school in 1858.<sup>15</sup>

The St. Joseph church became the center for the French-speaking catholic community living in Sainte-Cunégonde. With the continued growth of the industrial sector at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the middle class left the area, while the working class increased in number. In these years the neighborhood’s population of Black Canadians, stemming both from former American slaves as well as economic migrants from the Caribbean, moved to the neighbourhood to take jobs on the railway, where despite widespread racism black men could find a reliable source of low-wage work. Although the neighbourhood has played host to a diversity of ethnic communities, today it is perhaps best known as the historical heart of the English-speaking Black Canadian community in Montreal, the birthplace of jazz musicians Oliver Jones and Oscar Peterson, and the home of the Union United Church and the former social club, the Negro Community Centre (NCC). The economic crisis of 1930 heavily affected the industrial sector and the living conditions of the working class. After the World War 2 new industries were settled in other parts of the island, particularly on the east side. Out-migration of Sainte-Cunégonde’s Québécois and Italian families, mostly Catholics, to newer suburbs with better living standards and economic prospects reduced the area’s population to 1,200 families by 1962, down

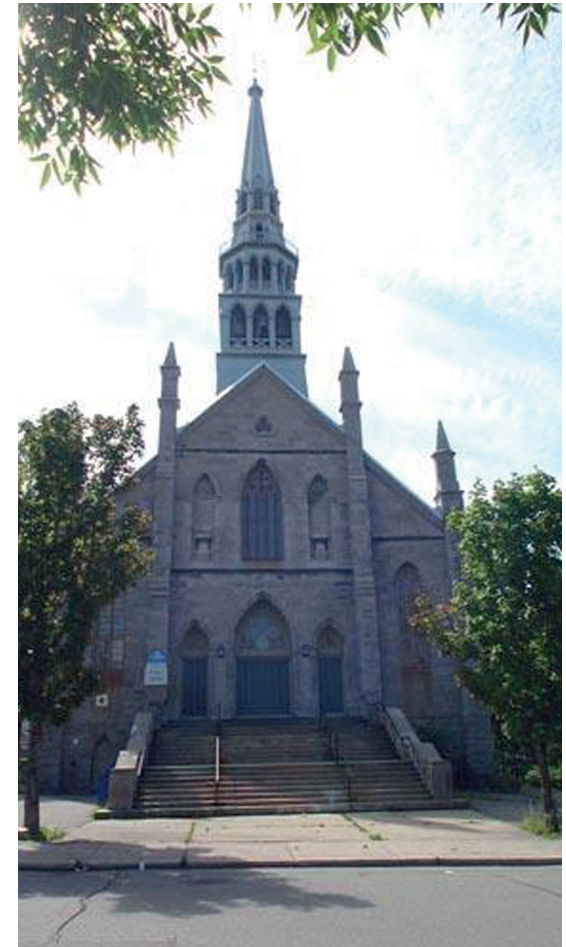


Fig. 1 Église Saint-Joseph. Credits: Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2003



from over 5,000 at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Many of those who remained in Sainte-Cunégonde were Anglophone Black Canadians, whose community institutions in Montreal were built almost exclusively in the area. This population transfer reduced the importance of the St. Joseph church, a process that would be compounded by the vast changes that occurred in Quebec society in the subsequent decade.

In the late 1960s, province-wide socio-political and economic developments combined with sweeping new modernist urban strategies radically transformed Sainte-Cunégonde (Fig.2). First, the province of Québec went through a period called the “Quiet Revolution”, initiating a rapid process of secularization, causing a collapse in rates of church attendance and the subsequent abandonment of religious structures. The “Quiet Revolution” in Québécois society embraced progressive and individualistic morals in contrast to those of the Catholic Church, and the appropriation by the growing secular provincial government of the formerly Catholic realms of education and health care provision. Concurrent to Quebec’s socio-political modernization, changing economic currents and a government-led drive to make Montreal a modern and global metropolis transformed the urban fabric in many areas, perhaps most of all in Sainte-Cunégonde. While World War 2 had provided a respite in the area’s economic decline, post-



Fig. 2 Église Saint-Joseph, interior. Credits: Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, 2003

war development with its decentralized urban growth pattern was not favorable to Sainte-Cunégonde. Industries re-located to areas outside Montreal's urban core that were more accessible by road, while the development of the Saint Lawrence Seaway rendered the Lachine canal obsolete. The attendant decline of freight traffic and the decline of passenger rail in favor of road traffic eliminated the neighborhood's industrial vocation, and with it the abundant low-skill jobs that had been its *raison-d'être*. Finally, the municipal and federal governments adopted a modernist vision for Montreal's urban development, with the construction of skyscrapers, a metro system, and a network of limited-access urban highways which cut through its urban fabric. One of these highways was built in 1970 along the northern portion of Sainte-Cunégonde, destroying all the structures in its path. Much of the rest of the neighbourhood, composed of cheap working-class apartments built in the local vernacular style, had been declared insalubrious, and was destroyed to make way for modernist social-housing estates that were meant to provide better living conditions for Sainte-Cunégonde's low-income residents. The plans for the area even promoted a new name, "Little Burgundy," which became its moniker for both residents and outsiders alike. The church of St. Joseph, however, was spared in the urban renewal process and remained a witness of the transformation (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Aerial photo of Little Burgundy, 1960. Credits: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Portail données ouvertes



Little Burgundy in the 1970s became a collection of vacant brownfield sites and new social housing complexes, mostly deserted by its former Catholic population, while the Black Canadian community remained in significant numbers. The construction of the highway had destroyed several jazz clubs that had been important incubators of local musical talent and which had attracted international stars, while the Union United Church and the Negro Cultural Centre (NCC), the religious and secular social pillars of the Black community hung on. Despite the flight of most of its attendants, the Church of St. Joseph continued to fulfill religious and community functions for the area's dwindling number of mostly-white Catholics.

City-led urban development policies in the 1980s continued to build social housing complexes on Little Burgundy's abundant empty plots of land, mostly attracting low-income Black Canadian tenants, while also attempting with some success to develop a local tax base by constructing suburban-style houses to attract higher-income families. Having lost its former economic vocation, Little Burgundy became a principally residential neighbourhood. Continued poverty in the social housing projects and the rise of gang violence related to drug trafficking led to the establishment of a wide array of community organizations to address these problems. As the city of Montreal began to take measures

to preserve its remaining built heritage after the end of the destructive 1960s modernist *zeitgeist*, the St. Joseph's church was listed in 1991 for its historic value. While it continued to offer Catholic services on Sunday, in the 1990s it was often rented out to non-Catholic congregations. In the early 2000s, the conversion of the derelict Lachine Canal into a linear park with a popular bike path led to the development of condominium complexes along its length, attracting new and wealthier residents to the neighbourhood. Today, Little Burgundy is home to large numbers of low-income citizens, immigrants, and the largest concentration of social housing units in Canada. With the ongoing construction of condominium buildings along its southern border with the adjacent borough of Griffintown, and a new reputation for safety, new high-end businesses have opened on Notre-Dame Street, Little Burgundy's old commercial artery. A concurrent community-led effort spanning non-profit organizations located in the social housing projects, local residents, the municipal social-housing administration, and the police force helped to significantly reduce the crime rate. This both opened the door to further new investment in building middle and upper-middle class housing, and rendered the social-housing units more desirable to low-income immigrants from South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa with the subsequent diversification of

cultures and cults than its former predominant catholic vocation. While the Catholic clergy had long hoped for a religious revival in Montreal, practical concerns dictated the de-consecration of St. Joseph's church in 2003, after having witnessed five decades of decline amid tumultuous change in the neighbourhood.

### III. From the Church of St. Joseph to Le Salon 1861: sacred to civic use

Following the cessation of its Catholic religious functions, the church has exclusively been used to host other religious communities, including the neighborhood's growing and diverse Muslim population, many of whom live in social housing. In 2007, the Sulpicians sold the building to a team of private investors led by the Quo Vadis, a property management firm and social enterprise dedicated to real-estate development with a multi-stakeholder approach, which established Le Salon 1861 there in 2015. The plans for repurposing the St. Joseph church went through a long and contested process of public consultations with private and public stakeholders, the local community and associations. As mentioned above, selling, buying, and proposing new uses of churches in Montreal, and more generally in Quebec, is not an easy affair: "All new owners are obliged to find an appropriate use for them, both from the viewpoint of the functionality and capacity of the buildings, and from that of

a relatively sensitive symbolic point of view.”<sup>17</sup> Quebec identity is still very deeply connected with its Catholic component, and in particular with its architectural heritage: “churches form part of Quebec’s spatial identity, they are perceived as fundamental places for its collective investment.”<sup>18</sup> As the *Heritage Policy* of the City of Montreal states: “Montreal boroughs’ identity is forged and structured also by its rich, diverse and important religious heritage.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, any attempt to alter these symbols becomes a collective concern. The long process of public consultations that led to the approval of the plans to transform the St. Joseph church into Le Salon 1861 include the new owner’s commitment to respect the collective vocation of the place, and to foster links between the new project and the community.<sup>20</sup> Once the plan was adopted, major portions of the interior frescoes of the church were whitewashed, and much of the other religious decoration and furniture was dismantled. Whether the church’s role as anchor point for the community and their heritage value is commonly and publicly recognized, their sacred vocation is however often not taken into account by new plans, and this is particularly evident in the St. Joseph church repurposing process. As Noppen points out:

there is a willingness to negotiate heritage immunity vis-à-vis the needs of a community or cultural project. It is as if the new use entirely

effaced all vestiges of an ecclesiastical past. In this regard, the silence of the Church, the initial owner, finds an echo in the total absence of any recognition of the buildings’ sacred character, considered of little consequence compared to its role as a servant of community interests.<sup>21</sup> The new use of the former St. Joseph church is listed in the Quebec Inventory of Places of Worship as “multifunctional” and includes:

- a space for exhibitions, events, social and cultural happenings on the main-floor;
- a co-working space in the basement for private and public sectors, including universities, designed to bring together local residents with academic researchers and entrepreneurs;
- a restaurant.

Moreover, a room in the basement, which maintain a separate entrance from Le Salon, is rented out to the Muslim community and hosts the Imani Community Center, bearing witness to the changing population and worship traditions of Little Burgundy residents. The project for repurposing the St. Joseph church includes many aspects that touch the future of churches today: public and private use, community involvement, symbolic attachment, heritage and sacred value, and the reuse of churches by other religious traditions in a gentrifying and rapidly changing area.

#### IV. Little Burgundy Narratives (LBN)

Our lab, the Facility for Architectural Research in Media and Mediation at McGill University

(FARMM), has had a unique opportunity to actively intervene in a context of church repurposing and to make an impact on the local community. Having a place in the co-working space of Le Salon, we were motivated primarily by a desire to render this space a more effective new community place. As an architectural research unit, we opted to target our efforts at the level of place, memory, technology and design.

As a point of departure, we decided to symbolically re-connect the deconsecrated church building with its neighborhood by creating a digital portrait, “Little Burgundy Narratives” (LBN), that will be hosted in the former Church of St. Joseph, thus metaphorically bringing the current-day community into this space which previously had little contact with them. In so doing, we are attempting to the affective connection between a structure such as a church and its community, but in a multicultural, civic context rather than a parochial and religious one. In this we are trying to make the former Church of St. Joseph a better part of Little Burgundy’s civic commons by encouraging an affective attachment, familiarity, and even appropriation of the structure by local residents and by enhancing its collective memory, heritage, and historical value. To create the portrait, Little Burgundy Narratives operates with a strategy of community engagement and digital representation.



Little Burgundy Narratives (LBN) is a “deep map” of Little Burgundy that harnesses the power of new digital media techniques to combine modern and historical geospatial information, socio-demographic data, participatory mapping data, a 3D model of the entire neighbourhood, and virtual-reality (VR) vignettes about key community spaces (Fig.4). In the words of spatial humanities scholar David J. Bodenhammer:

A deep map is a fine detailed, multimedia depiction of a place and the people, animals, and objects that exist within it and are thus inseparable from the contours and rhythms of everyday life. Deep maps are not confined to the tangible or material, but include the discursive and ideological dimensions of place, the dreams, hopes and fears of residents—they are, in short, positioned between matter and meaning.<sup>22</sup>

Deep maps offer a unique advantage in representing spatially-defined communities such as neighborhoods—they can assemble an unlimited variety of data as layers into a common map interface that addresses those core concepts in human geography—the human elements of place in addition to the normal descriptions of geographic space.<sup>23</sup> Together, these layers create a digital, spatialized document of local life that investigates the socio-geographic relationship between human place and physical space in this evolving neighbourhood context. As the



Fig. 4 Aerial photo of Little Burgundy, 1970. Credits: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Portail données ouvertes

most important layer of the deep map, we see the VR episodes as a tool to improve the quality of the portrait by providing immersive portals into the neighbourhood.

In addition to being presented at the former Church of St. Joseph, LBN will be hosted online at [littleburgundynarratives.com](http://littleburgundynarratives.com) as an interactive 3-dimensional map with layers and embedded virtual reality content, to be created and released as episodes viewable on VR viewers such as Google Cardboard and Oculus Rift, as well as in Youtube's 360-degree video player for desktop and mobile.

The project began with archival research in the municipal archive of the city, where we collected newspapers, public documents and visual material about Little Burgundy and the Church of St. Joseph. We then proceeded with a process of sensitive engagement with community members, utilizing a "gatekeeper approach" by which we first contacted knowledgeable community leaders from the nonprofit sector who are widely trusted by neighbourhood residents, and who have extended social networks within Little Burgundy.

This has led to interviews with many local citizens, with the local police detachment, at two different Black Canadian churches, at the offices of the public housing authority, at a local food store, at a McDonald's franchise, in parks and alleyways, and in a local mosque, where we started the formal process of

community documentation with a 360-degree virtual-reality camera. The interviews will be included in the 3D map, together with public and personal archival images in order to have a 360 degrees temporal and historical experience of the progressive urban changes in Little Burgundy, and in particular of the repurposing of the Saint Joseph church.

Little Burgundy Narratives is conducted by FARMM with support from Canada's federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) under the overarching title of Arts and Ideas in Motion, which proposes an experimental methodology of 'knowing through making' that integrates interdisciplinary methods of fabricative inquiry including multimedia arts, installations, and performance-based modes. In addition to the digital project detailed below, other aspects of Little Burgundy narratives, encompassing installation and performance works based on the research findings of our project, will be conducted by the Topological Media Lab (TML) of Concordia University under the Arts and Ideas in Motion research program.

## V. Learning from Residents

In LBN's first episode, we visited the Imani Community Centre, the mosque located in the basement of the presbytery of the former St. Joseph's Church, which shares a wall with Salon 1861 but maintains a separate entrance (Fig. 5). This miniscule but highly important

place gathers Little Burgundy's Muslims whose origins span the entire Islamic world, from West Africa to Southeast Asia. A recurring theme that Little Burgundy residents have uniformly expressed is the social cohesion of the neighbourhood. This came as a surprise to us as researchers; as urbanists we had imagined that the legacy of 20th-century modernist low-income housing projects from Naples to Chicago was merely to concentrate and ghettoize the poor, creating swathes of low opportunity and oppressive architecture, sweeping away the fine-grained vernacular fabric of working-class neighborhoods and replacing it with carbon-copy Corbusian typologies that, among other problems, destroy any sense of place.

On the contrary, residents of Little Burgundy's housing projects appear to have a powerful sense of ownership and belonging toward the territory they inhabit; a notion that seems to transcend ethnic and religious boundaries, immigrants and born Canadians.

This was clearly expressed in several ways: first, a widely reported sense of solidarity with neighbours, and a reciprocated willingness to lend one's resources and time to help others in need; second, the existence of local social networks that extend to dozens of people immediately around one's own residence; and third, a pride in addressing the challenges of poverty, social integration, education, nutrition, and crime as a community.



We realized over the course of the initial research stages that this sense of solidarity was worthy of investigation in its own right, especially as it countered a narrative popularized by Jane Jacobs of the failings of public housing to address the needs of the urban poor. These findings are being recorded in VR video documentation and in the digital deep map portions of Little Burgundy Narratives and will constitute an essential part of the final product of LBN.

## VI. VR Technologies and the future of churches

Virtual reality refers to any technology that provides “a computer-generated digital environment that can be experienced and interacted with as if that environment were real”<sup>24</sup> and a recent wave of new consumer products that connect to one’s computer or smartphone have drastically increased access to these types of technologies.

Little Burgundy Narratives uses the Samsung Gear VR viewer, which uses a smartphone to provide its visual array, and a 360°-degree camera which is capable of filming nearly an entire sphere. In comparison to 2-dimensional video, 360° video not only offers a far wider field of view, but when displayed via a VR viewer, puts the viewing subject in the camera’s position and allows her to turn her head and view a different part of the scene, mimicking real-life observation. Audio further

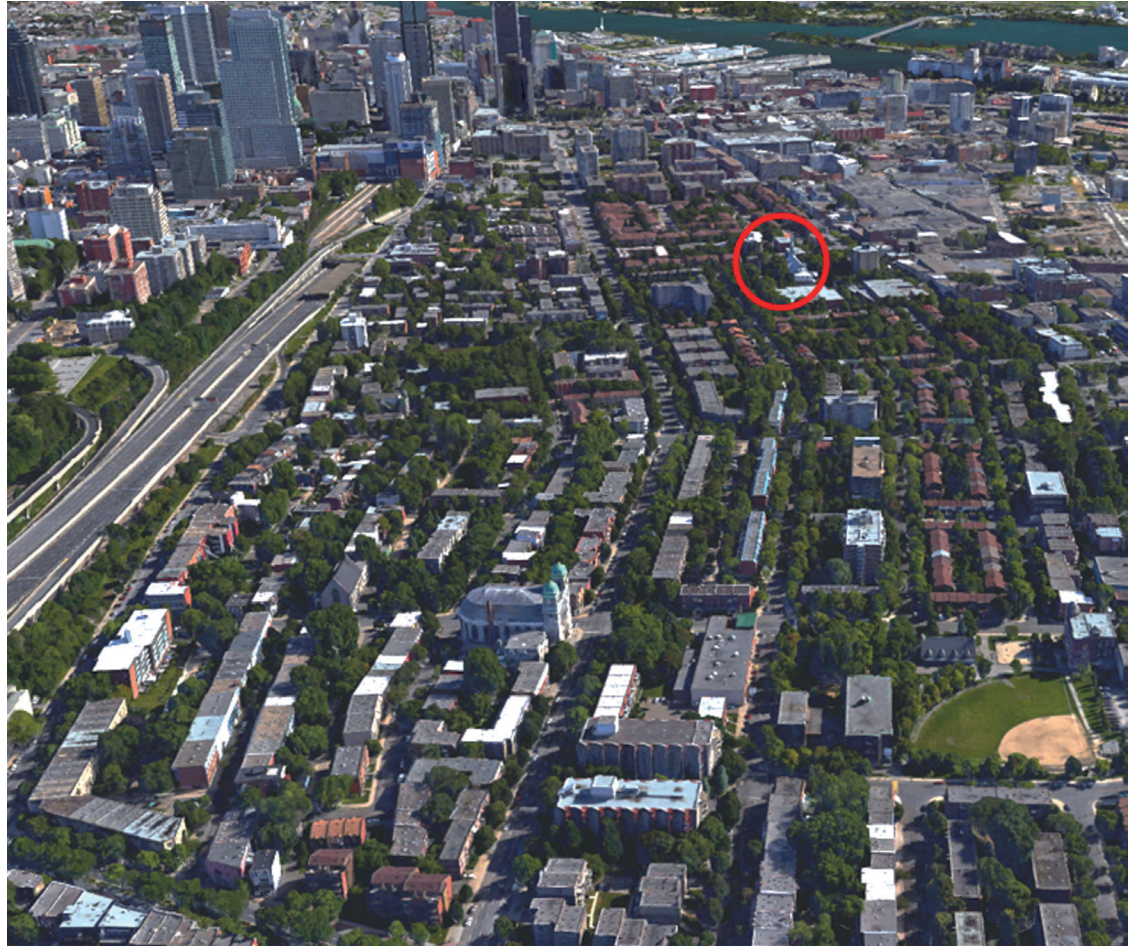


Fig. 5 Aerial photo of Little Burgundy, today. Credits: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Portail données ouvertes



enhances this illusion.

These effects, while entirely illusory, offer a more potent form of immersion than 2-dimensional video, and allow a better sense of depth of field and scale than non-interactive video. As such, it is uniquely well-suited to conveying an experience of place and of architecture, an ability that is just beginning to be explored by projects such as Little Burgundy Narratives.

For the future of churches, VR technology offers the ability to mediate relationships between people and places in a way that ignores both time and space. VR could be used to show what deconsecrated churches looked like in their past vocations as places of worship or imagine innumerable future uses for them; it could equally be used to 'attend' a church service from a remote location.

Little Burgundy Narratives thus seeks to leverage the narrative of the re-purposing of St. Joseph's church to catalyze a community self-imaging exercise that is supported and co-created by our research-creators. By creating an online deep map of the entire neighbourhood which is in turn accessible through dedicated computers in the basement of Le Salon 1861, we are metaphorically creating a 'home' for Little Burgundy within the space of the church. In so doing, we hope to also help re-appropriate a space for all of the neighbourhood's residents; who, due to ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences,

would not have had much contact with St. Joseph's church.

As we had hoped, in the process of constructing this community portrait and speaking to Little Burgundy residents, we have been exposed to discourses that challenge our beliefs as urbanists, scholars, and architects. Furthermore, the co-creation of a sense of community solidarity and mutual aid among the neighbourhood's many low-income residents is a key feature of the neighbourhood, and one we are keen to expose through Little Burgundy Narratives. By celebrating this solidarity in Little Burgundy and the pride local residents feel in their neighbourhood within the walls of the former Church of St. Joseph, we hope to enrich the building's new civic role in the community, using this community engagement strategy and the unique ability of virtual reality to explore the connection between people and place.

*Notes:*

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2. Laurier Turgeon (ed.), *Le patrimoine religieux du Québec: entre le cultuel et le culturel*, Presses de l'Université Laval, Québec, 2005, p. 17
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4. Lyne Bernier, "La conversion des églises à Montréal: état de la question," in *JSSAC / JSÉAC*, 2011, 36 (1), p. 46
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