

## **Preliminary report and excerpts from the transcript of round table #1 (2022) of the Université de Montréal research site**

*(NB. This translation produced by an automated system may not perfectly reflect the views originally expressed in French by the participants. This translation is provided for information purposes only and does not bind the organizers and participants of this roundtable).*

As part of the SSHRC partnership "Quality in the Built Environment in Canada: Roadmaps to Equity, Social Value and Sustainability", the Université de Montréal research site organized an invitational roundtable on Wednesday, November 16, 2022 from 1:30 to 4:00 pm. This meeting was part of the theme of the research site coordinated by the University of Montreal: "The problem of material innovation in spaces for people with special needs".

The specific issues that were addressed during this 2.5 hour meeting were:

- 1. What are the strengths (orientations, principles) and limitations (assumptions, grey areas, omissions) of accessibility standards and guides in the Quebec context generally and in the municipal context of Montreal?**
- 2. Which documents are most problematic in inclusive design processes?**
- 3. What accessibility reference books do you think are successful in providing an approach to improving quality overall?**

The meeting began with a brief presentation by student researchers (future built environment professionals) on Quebec and Canadian universal design guides (see unofficial translation of Rick Hansen Foundation documents). The meeting was attended by the following people

Researchers:

- Virginie LaSalle (Design)
- Bechara Helal (Architecture)
- Izabel Amaral (Architecture)
- Anne Cormier (Architecture)
- Jean-Pierre Chupin (Architecture)
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Citizen groups :

- Alexis Beauchamp-Chatel (University Institute in Mental Health of Montreal)
- Sarah Huxley (Véro et Louis Foundation)
- Isabelle Cardinal (Société Logique)

City of Montreal :

- Myriam Turcotte (Building Management and Planning Department)
- Christine Deschamps (Building Management and Planning Department)
- Patrick Marmen (Design Office)
- Jeanne Leblanc-Trudeau (Design Office)

Student researchers:

- Catherine Meunier, M.Arch.
- Paloma Castonguay-Rufino, PhD student Arch.
- Victorian Thibault-Malo, Master's Degree in Design Theory
- Jonathan Haxhe, Master of Communication
- Achraf Alaoui Mdaghri, PhD student Arch.
- Shantanu Biswas-Linkon, Ph.

Useful links :

- Logical Company : <https://societelogique.org/publications/#@guides-and-criteres>
- Rick Hansen Foundation: <https://www.rickhansen.com>

## **Main lessons, information and research avenues retained from round table #1**

Strengths and limitations of standards and guides related to accessibility in the Montreal, Quebec and Canadian contexts:

- Building Codes focus on safety
- Universal design seeks equity in the experience of space
- Importance of upstream approaches to inclusive design
- Paradox of the notion of a lower threshold in universal design.
- Paradoxes of inclusiveness in neurodiversity
- New intersectional approaches (ADS+)
- Importance of awareness and exploratory path proposed by Société Logique

Research partnership contributions desired by non-academic partners:

- Expertise developed for Université de Montréal by Société Logique
- The problem of anticipating special needs
- Tensions between generic and special needs
- The Conceptual Reference Guide by Société Logique
- Integration of accessibility issues into awards of excellence
- Importance of lived experiences of place in architectural education and practice

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## Significant excerpts from the transcript of the audio recording

[00:04:51]

Student presentations: analysis of guides, standards and guidance documents from the City of Montreal, Société Logique and translations of guides produced by the Rick Hansen Foundation (BC).

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[00:36:57]

Virginia:

Thank you to our 3 students, I think that kicks off the conversation nicely. As you may have understood from the documentation that has been sent out in the information that is circulating, one of the main objectives of the partnership is to establish a roadmap towards the quality of the built environment with the current values, and one of updating, of improving the guides. This is one of the deliverables we would like to contribute to.

[00:37:14]

Bechara :

... What are the strengths and limitations of accessibility standards and guides in the Quebec context, in general, and in the Montreal municipal context in particular? But what we are trying to see is finally which ones really contribute to an improvement of the quality of the project, which ones take everything into account and which ones are rather limiting? What approaches should we have in the documents, to be able to frame an interesting design process? But already what we did, I think during the work of the students, we noted anyway that there is a presentation that was not made today, it is the building code which is the basic regulation. We have a document that summarizes that, but it is the legal document, it is the only legal document that I understand in relation to accessibility issues, all we saw today were guides that propose avenues of reflection, or that propose solutions that are more adapted.

[00:39:36]

Isabelle:

But this is the answer to the question you asked, what are the limits in the Quebec context? That's the biggest limit right now, it's that we have a building code that is miles and miles away from everything we just saw in terms of guides. Unfortunately, even today, when it is not legal or even voluntary, there are some organizations that have the desire to be inclusive. The city of Montreal has its guide, but it is for the municipal buildings of the city of Montreal, the territory of the city of Montreal is at what percentage built of private buildings? The city's guide does not include these buildings. The STM has its own guide of norms, but we are stuck with an existing built framework that must be transformed. The biggest limitation is the building code. All the aspects that are in the building code, for safety, it is a minimum. In fact the building code, the barrier-free design section, it clearly says, but it's for people who use manual wheelchairs and other types of mobility aids, but it's clearly stated.

[00:41:05]

Bechara:

So, in fact, it only addresses a small part of the problems?

[00:41:12]

Isabelle:

That answers a small part. There is not this notion of accessibility, all the concepts we are talking about. A ramp of 3-4 flaps to go up 2 floors to enter a building is acceptable

according to the building code, but it is not a universal design. So, it's all these differences that we make that are not addressed in the building code.

[00:41:49]

Bechara: It means that the building code actually minimally addresses those issues, but not at all to make it more inclusive. In fact, it's not enough to make it inclusive.

[00:42:04]

Isabelle: No. The building code requires 50% of building entrances to be accessible, including the main entrance. Sometimes we find, for example, a school, we find ourselves with an accessible main entrance, but students who go to play in the backyard.

[00:42:52]

Isabelle: Universal design means that everyone has the same experience at the same time and in the same way.

[00:43:00]

Myriam : I bring a nuance, the RBQ does not say that it makes universal accessibility, it says that it makes barrier-free design.

[00:43:26]

Myriam: It's still funny, it all depends on the context, on the project, in the sense that we have a policy on universal accessibility that makes it mandatory for any administrative unit to follow all the principles of universal accessibility, including the follow-up of the guide, if we take into account the level of the buildings. This guide has been integrated in part into the proprietary requirements that are requested when a project is submitted to the professional. Then we always refer to the guide which is more detailed. But again, the application is based on the policy and this last statement of the policy, I will let you read it because I don't know it by heart, but basically it says: It is applied according to the needs and the resources. Need, it can be financial need. So, it could be a construction budget that is too high, and we decide to cut universal accessibility.

[00:45:30]

Isabelle: At Société Logique, our mission is to promote universal design, so for us the building code is unacceptable. At the base there is universal accessibility, everything that was stated, The city of Montreal, then the guide of Museography, the first 4 there, then the Technical sheets, it is us who wrote them. We have always used the word universal access. The organizations appropriated this concept and we realized that the word universal accessibility was now perceived and used as a pile, an accumulation of small interventions to adapt an existing building and a package of small solutions, but, we do not necessarily have a chain, we do not necessarily have a vision. In English, there is a lot behind the word "universal design", inclusive design in French. We realized that we were really better understood when we spoke of inclusive design or universal design. The designers really follow us more and we are really less in the individual answer, to a sum of needs, but really more in a spirit of conception of a project of architecture and development.

[00 :47 :19]

Bechara: And this notion of inclusive design, is it universal?

[00 :47 :23]

Isabelle: Well, I would say that different national and international organizations share this vision, but the more society evolves, the more organizations get involved. But of course, it's a little bit colored by each person's vision. It's positive that over the last twenty years, we've seen so many initiatives. I'm coming to quality, in architecture or quality in development. We think that a universal design that is planned with the needs of all the people we are talking about in mind, that we aim for a similar experience, and that we integrate it very early in the design process. At the end of the day, you're going to have a much more harmonious and interesting product architecturally, the form.

[00:48:38]

Christine: In the city, I have observed this shift, after that, which is surely influenced by Société Logique, to go more towards a vision of inclusion than just universal accessibility, there is the notion of access, once we have moved away from this restrictive vision. Then even the city in its most recent strategic plan. All that, it goes more in an optics of the inclusion of all.

[00:49:15]

Myriam: As long as people are not educated on this level at the societal level, we will not have results on this level. There is a lot of education to do. I'm talking about professionals, but also at the general public level.

[00:53:38]

Patrick: But actually, I would make a distinction, between objective and method in accessibility. I make a small nuance between the difference between a proactive approach and a mitigation approach. I have the impression that for universal accessibility, at this point, there is an aspect where we will take a project, then we will analyze it, then if we need to correct the entry, it is because there is no integration in the vision of the project.

[00:55:16]

Izabel: I have a question regarding the documents presented and your experiences. Could we name some inclusive design principles that are somewhat clear like the sustainable development principles we talk about with the four pillars, and that we could easily refer to and remember when evaluating our projects on these four pillars?

[00:55:46]

Isabelle: We often thought about this in these criteria, could we make a minimum, a medium, a maximum, and then make a universal bronze design? It's the kind of thinking that we have a lot of trouble saying that we're going to have a minimum, a medium and an optimal, but these are things that we often talk about. It's having universal design levels.

[00:57:00]

Isabelle: We know that all motor deficiencies are fairly well established. Visual impairment, the technical data sheets that you have seen in interior design, that was our laboratory at Société Logique to understand the needs, then to imagine solutions. For years, we worked with the RAM and INMB to understand the needs. To arrive after that to make the guide of the City of Montreal in the background, the ancestors of the guide of the City of Montreal, they are the cards of the visual deficiencies where we learned how to

master its needs there then ideally, it would be necessary to make it with the people who have auditory deficiencies, the disorder spectrum of the autism. But are we really able to translate the needs of people into accommodation solutions?

[00:57:40]

Alexis:

Coming from the psychiatry of the old asylum in addition, there it's actually, we, it was completely the opposite of that is that we were building the, it's a place built to completely exclude people from the rest of society, then within the place itself, there were ways of excluding people from one another for dangerousness or examples of things like that, then in fact I, among others, the people who live there, they start from that context, then we try to reinclude them in society. How far does inclusiveness go because some of our people are completely unable to function by themselves, it's not representative of most autistic people, but I have patients with multiple disabilities who are quadriplegic, it's certain that their experience is different from other people and they will need someone, which is why there is a feeling that they are not capable. I have some people who have aggressive behaviors at the sexual level at the physical level. What is the limit between the constraint for the individual himself, then the architectural constraint? This is a question I was asking myself. At the level of autism, I saw in the guide, which was less represented, it was at the sensory level for the sound, the question of the sound, of the noise, of the taking into account, of the reflections, of the sound there, of the spaces to be deposited, for the people who make (unintelligible) there, who become as hyper stimulated. We are trying to see how the society would be able to include these people, our community partners. Private foundations are trying, but generally, they take a house built, then they will cram 4 to 8 people, often bungalows in the east, because it is those that do not cost too much? Then it gives results that you can imagine.

[01:00:08]

Sarah:

What stands out a lot is that sometimes special needs are contradictory. I know we talk a lot about the building code. I think we could talk about that for a long time. But another one of the things I wanted to bring in is especially for people who want to build. Where to create suitable environments is the notion of financing. Public organizations like the CMHC and the CMHCQ have their own constraints, or demands in terms of accessibility that don't always correspond to the needs of the community, and they don't have this flexibility, it's an adaptability there, so for example, for the foundation, we decided not to have recourse to this financing.

[01:04:38]

Christine:

For me, who works in the city, the guide is a piece in a whole approach, ADS, more diversity and inclusion, so it is certain that there are elements, for example on inclusion, which are in those trainings, but which are not directly in the guide. When we talk about accessibility, inclusion in the city, it is the whole service that will be given, which includes how to get to the library, can the blind person read, so it is seen in a broader approach that is not found in the guide.

[01:06:05]

Pascal: Just for the acronym ADS, plus, it's differential analysis, according to, gender plus and (and intersectional), and it's an analysis grid that we have to pass to all our projects, so that's where it's, not just the application of the guide, but it's, we have to that, it's in the file, as soon as we talk about the policy, it's in the decisional file that are elected officials, there is this ADS+ analysis grid, that applies to all the projects just to explain the, because outside the, city the acronym is not known.

Christine: I would like to take this opportunity to insert a question that I was asking myself, I don't necessarily come from the same field as you when I look at all of this, when we talk about differentiated analysis, all of this, we talk about intersectionality, and I was wondering if for you it was a weakness or if it is an issue that exists precisely? Then with the idea, precisely, of autism, the sprinklers, it's good for one thing, but not for the other, then contradictory measures, is this notion of an intersectionality present in more fields of research or in organizations where? Intersectionality is for example being a black woman in a wheelchair. One can be an autistic person and blind.

[01:08:04]

Isabelle: Identifying these nodes is a good thing, remember, need to find strategies to address them. When we did guides for visual impairment, people with visual impairment told us, you know, motor impairment where you're going to have smooth obstacle free spaces at the corner of the streets, we want to get down, we the less, there are obstacles, the less there is a difference in level, the more we are in danger. It was necessary to find compromises, that's why today, at the corner of the streets, we have a paved boat, there is still a difference in level, it's not 0, which now has the podotactile plates, it's that was worked through the years, it was done through the pilot projects and the experimentations,

[01:11:30]

Alexis: I was wondering about human resources, it's a bit far from design, but, our somewhat concrete way of perceiving also an interior design in our units, is that when the design is not well done, it forces us to hire more people, If there are nooks and crannies, if there are places that are not accessible, we can't see, even if it's only for the surveillance of the, of the security of the employees, that raises the question of, a well done design I find that, that will make us need less people, maybe to guide people through the building.

[01:32:03]

Sarah: For me, that's the weakness of the guide, it's a technique, but before the technique, it's an awareness process that then makes b universal design become a design reflex, then ultimately a lever to be creative. How to use these as architects do the constraint of universal design?

[01:32:36]

Jean-Pierre: So, is the famous Société Logique's experiential courses that could be taught in school, right?

[01:32:42]



Isabelle: Certainly, we do experience the person with visual science, but we get told a lot by people, but you really should have people experience the hearing loss we would really like to experience we're going to get to a place the first time we have to, difficulty with, orientation, we're like how are we going to do this?

[01:33:43]

Jeanne: I did this course, it's very instructive in, design, because it really allows us to put ourselves in the place of the other, another way, it's to go to meet these people, then to put them around the table, in a process of co-creation, so that, to have their, point of view, on the arrangements that we want or the architecture that we want to make also,

[01:34:05]

Patrick: And the visits of the visits visit the high school in Maisonneuve which is specialized? For the people, in the spectrum of the autism, it is, fascinating because there one cannot experiment personally and to see all the installations to speak to the people, to see the constraints, to see that to be, to be told that there is a change of pattern in the floor, then that arrives one day or the child to stop? Then, he wanted to continue that, that marks the spirit, really a lot because we have the experience, we see it, we see all the challenges.

[01:38:17]

Christine: There are aspects of perception, and then there are financial aspects. The guide is recommended because we know that there is an economic game.

[01:41:16]

Virginia: This will be a good time, to go around the table for everyone to weigh in on what you want and how we can help you, through the research partnership, to move forward in the directions, that have been mentioned.

[01:47:14]

Isabelle: We talk about autism, we worked for the University of Montreal, it's a mandate we had in the last year to write the universal design section of the conceptual reference guide of the University of Montreal. It is in the perspective of doing the expansion of the MIL campus. They realized that with the first step, despite the fact that there was a request, respecting the CSAB651 standard, was not simple and there were criticisms on the realized layout. And there they wanted to give more principles and criteria for the continuation of the project. It is to advance knowledge and I think that from the moment we understand well, we are able to find solutions, but as long as we do not even imagine obstacles, we cannot imagine solutions.

[01:48:48]

Alexis: I think that it is a form of exploitation, of exploitation in the positive sense of the potential of these people, sometimes we do not succeed, we do not find a way to make them participate in the society there, that it is a little that participates in the sense of bringing the accessibility for their own group which represents and the people who are very handicapped also because there are people with autism who,

who are very good at the language level who can, make tables, et cetera, but they are not necessarily going to represent either the portion of the population who have an intellectual disability also non-verbal, et cetera. It would be a good thought in the design to include as soon as possible the people who will be served by this accessibility.

[01:49:59]

Jean-Pierre: And that's why we asked ourselves the question in the partnership, should we interact directly with people who are, who are living on the autism spectrum, or should we prohibit, with organizations that are so used to working with them, that they will be able to, in a way, synthesize, generalize.

[01:50:57]

Isabelle: But what we often say is that we translate the needs, that we are expressed in planning solutions.

[01:51:09]

Alexis: I would say both because it is sure that a risk when we take a particular person, it is that we will answer his very particular need also compared to the group which it represents in autism and there are all kinds of people also self-identified as being autistic, whose diagnosis is more or less valid, according to who would have made it, let's say, let's say that in the same way, makes that it is sure that it can lead us on ways which are not necessarily the same there.

[01:51:39]

Virginia: A study that we are doing at the bike house, Véro and Louis on the experience of, of the people who, who live there, who work there and all that and the particular experiences are interesting because we see suddenly certain convergences that are not necessarily what we were looking for as information, but that allow us to better understand the general experience of clientele who have profiles, who are the same, but who live very differently the space.

[01:53:14]

Isabelle: There are several professors at the University of Montreal, maybe not in your particular spheres, but I would tell you that there are many people who are doing research on subjects, and then who are still quite advanced, and we, in any case, it has fueled us a lot to write our *GRC* family, *conceptual reference guide*, where we are not so much in the, the prescriptive and normative with millimeters, not at all, it is really to give the broad outlines of what we are looking for.

[01:53:45]

Jeanne: Can I just follow up on that, part of the answer, well it would be interesting to think about strategies towards inclusive design upstream of a guide. After being informed, for example the ADS+ approach, which we talked about, then that really made me aware of the reality, then we talk a lot about blind spots. Then going out and looking for people who don't necessarily have the habit of participating or people who represent them, who represent them. I'm sorry, I don't know if my sentence made sense, but all that to say, um, it's very instructive in a design process to integrate, yes, either the people or the organizations that represent those people. It costs money, so who can afford universal design, so that would be having a form of social contract, a commitment, then

after that, yes can be a stamp, yes bravo your building, your design to some, to all [inaudible]. Many principles of universal design, in any case to be thought about, because the code is what, avoid dangers, fire, accidents, after that the guide, well it's the good practices, it's the technique, but it's as if it lacked the more, less, um... less concrete element that is the commitment, finally of the stakeholders.

[01:56:31]

Isabelle:

I can talk about the order of architects. At Société Logique, I presented to you that we had a mission, that's why, for years, we had been saying to the order of architects: it takes an award, etc. So, at one point we had the universal accessibility award, it worked for two or three years, as part of the excellence awards. So, at one point we had the universal accessibility award, it worked for two or three years, as part of the awards of excellence. There were architects who submitted their projects for that category, but it was not so popular. Then, as the years went by, it got a bit stale, there were less and less projects, and finally, we had to judge projects for a hospital, a reception center, I put a ramp at the entrance of an existing building. A year ago, we said that it didn't deserve an architecture prize, then at some point it stopped.

[01:57:31]

Jean-Pierre:

Well it's amazing, because the history of environmental awards tells us about the trajectory of a culture change. We agree that awareness is crucial, I think everyone has said so, and that if our *roadmaps* can help, it must also be to raise awareness among students, professionals, and politicians, etc. The prizes contribute to raising awareness. So it is certain that if we give up the prize, we deprive ourselves of a formidable (potential) instrument of change.

[01:59:32]

Anne:

But to come back to the analogy, to sustainable development, it has also become, in our schools, and in practice, a way of working on architectural expression. So, in that sense, when there was a recognition of excellence in architecture that was linked to sustainable development, there was both the performance of the building, to call it that, and the quality of the architectural expression. And I, I'll just digress a little bit about the ramps, there can be some very good projects. Excellent, excellent projects!

[02:00:28]

Jean-Pierre:

Anne says this because her agency did a fairly exemplary one at McGill University.

[02:00:59]

Bechara:

The architectural expression.

[02:01:00]

Isabelle:

But that's exactly what universal design is about.

[02:01:02]

Anne:

And I agree, but one last thing that could be done as well is to find examples of projects that have really achieved architectural excellence in dealing with, through this, this issue of, and here there's a project that comes to mind, an old Stanley Tigerman project that the older among you may have in mind, that well rolled around a lot in schools at one point, I don't know if you can see what it's about, but it was um, at the level of a

disability, in fact it dealt with a visual disability, which was for people who had difficulties, semi-visioned people, blind people, I don't have a very good vocabulary on that side, but I think it could be very interesting for research to go and identify precedents. But the experience of places is also very important, so for doctors, I imagine that when you examine patients, it's much more meaningful than reading the pathologies in a book, all the work you do in your training, and for architects, experiencing things, or experiencing places is essential.