

Revealing a Vacancy: The Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal from 2015-2020

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Royal Victoria Hospital, fondly known as the "Royal Vic," was built in 1893 on the flank of Mount Royal in Montreal, Canada. Founded by Scottish immigrants, the hospital intended to open its doors to everyone, a promise that it kept for the following 120 years. During this time, the Royal Vic served the Montreal population, accumulating status and buildings along the way. However, in 2015, the hospital facilities were vacated and moved to the new superhospital conglomerate elsewhere in Montreal. In 2018, the Québec government announced that it would grant McGill University \$37 million to develop a masterplan for the future of the site, guided by the Société Québécoise des Infrastructures (SQI). Aside from this, public knowledge about the happenings and conversations regarding the old Royal Vic site has been fragmented. This thesis looks to reveal and organize some of the conversations that make sense of the site. I specifically focus on revealing the planning, or lack thereof, that contributes to the vacancy, the temporary uses that occurred since 2015, and the public debates surrounding the historic site. I aim to answer these research inquiries through a vast document analysis method, surveying news articles, public documents and website material to fill the unknown space that the old hospital left in 2015.

*“... Everything related to the question of abandoned buildings seems to be marked top secret, or, at the very least, evokes discomfort. Nothing is clear on the matter of vacant property. The opinions expressed with regard to this question go from one extreme to the other.”*

- Adam, 1986.

## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

Poised on the mountain like a grande dame, overlooking the city, stands the beloved Royal Victoria Hospital. Known by many Montrealers as the “Royal Vic”, the former hospital complex sits on the flank of Mount Royal in downtown Montreal, Canada. It is situated to the north of McGill University’s downtown campus, resting in between first year residential buildings and the public trails that bring citizens and visitors alike up and down the cherished Mount Royal. With its impressive grandeur and remarkable history, the Royal Vic oozes mystery for the casual passerby. It becomes even more intriguing when one takes note of its apparent emptiness and abandonment. In the Fall of 2017, as I walked to class from my dorm, I had my first, distant interactions with the dark and beautiful Royal Vic. I was always struck by the coldness that emanated from the buildings. Why does this incredible building look neglected? Where is everyone? Why is no one talking about this? I was filled with a mixture of emotions; both huge admiration for the building, but also tender pity for its seemingly unloved condition. The closer I approached the buildings, the more haunted they seemed to be. After all, it is an abandoned hospital to the naked eye. It earned its haunted effect. However, the more I learned about the place, the more I wanted to see it succeed.

### **1.1 Brief History and Context**

The Royal Vic has a long history, but for the sake of remaining within the thematic confines of this thesis, I will keep it brief. Envisioned and funded in the late 19th century by two Scottish immigrants George Stephen and Donald Smith, the Royal Vic was opened for the “reception and treatment of sick and injured persons of all races and creeds, without distinction” in 1893 (Terry, 1994). It was intended as a charitable, public hospital to serve the poor populations of Montreal (Adams, 2008). The location of the hospital was both symbolically and physically significant at the time of its opening. Sitting on southern slope of Mount Royal, the hospital was raised above the streets and buildings of the city, giving it a remarkable view of Montreal, but also distance from the noise and pollution (Adams, 2008). The main building, with a central administration block and two narrow wings on each side was designed by British architect Henry Saxon Snell. The H- shaped layout, as seen in *Image 1.1*, was inspired by the ideas of Florence Nightingale,



who promoted the pavilion style hospital design because it would limit the spread of infection between patients (Adams, 2008). Such a design, coupled with adequate ventilation would isolate infectious patients and keep staff safe. A frontal view of Royal Vic shows the turrets and ornate porches that are the characteristic elements of the Scottish Baronial style which Snell modelled

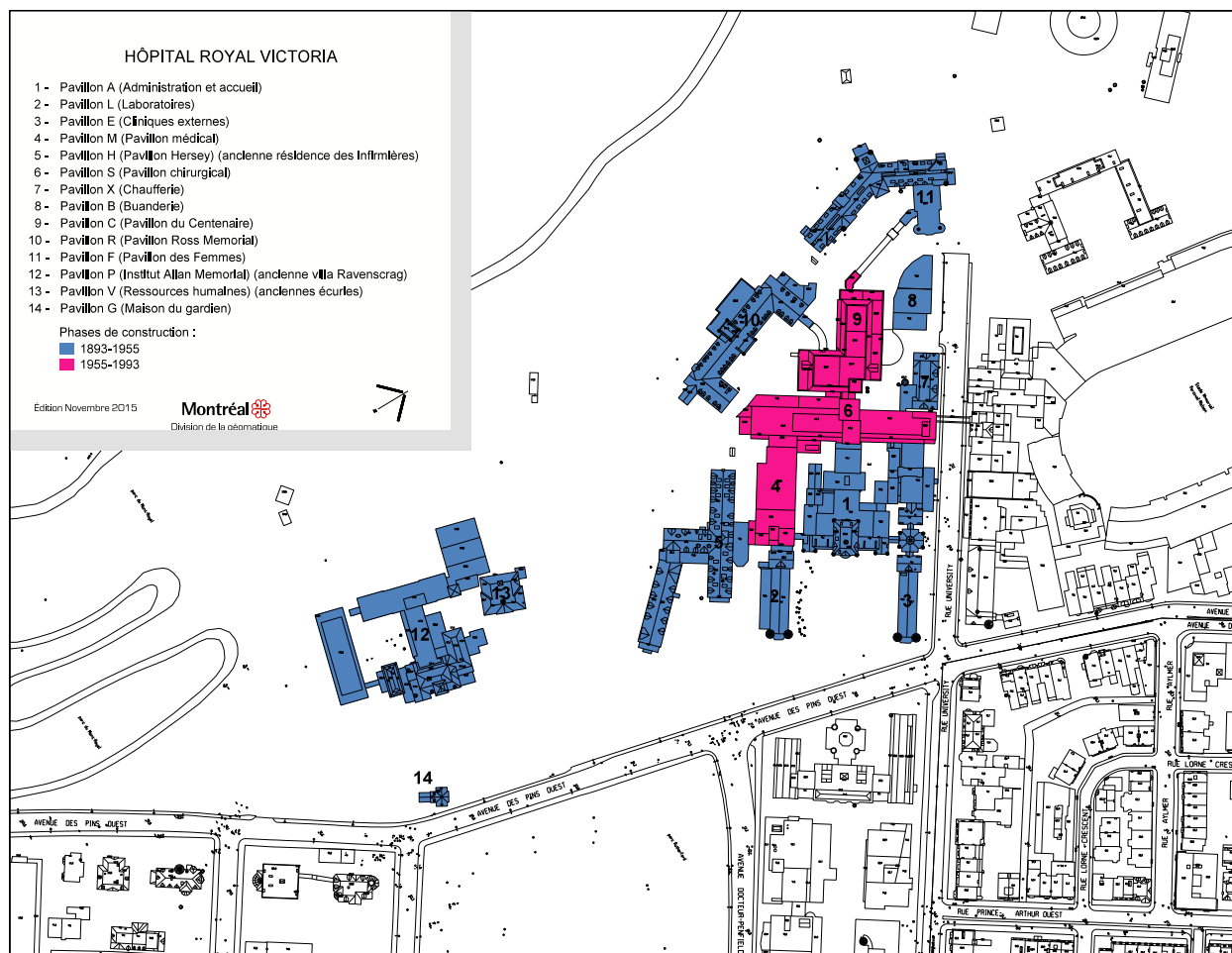


*Image 1.1: The Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, QC, 1925. (McCord Museum)*

after Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary (Adams, 1994). The cast-iron porches were arranged to "catch the southern exposure and the magnificent views of the city" as well as the St Laurent river and even Vermont on especially clear days (Adams, 2008: 2). Since the construction of the administration building, more pavilions have been added to evolve with the medical and technological needs of society. Most notable are the Hersey Pavilion, the Ross Memorial Pavilion and the maternity Pavilion that was added in the early 20th century (Adams, 2010). The Hersey Pavilion was one of the first buildings in Canada that provided learning facilities and accommodation for nurses, reflecting the growing profession at a time when women were just beginning to take up more space in the field (Canada's Historic Places, n.d.: online). To

commemorate this valuable contribution to society, the Hersey Pavilion was designated a national historic site of Canada in 1997 (Canada's Historic Places, n.d.: online).

The Royal Vic site is also framed by the Neurological Institute and Hospital towards the east, and the Allan Memorial Institute towards the west, all of which are connected through underground tunnels and bridges (Adams, 2010). After the Second World War, and following trends in international modernism, the site added two large medical and surgical buildings, creating a bland backdrop behind the embellished, historical, original hospital. In 1994, the Centennial pavilion was added, which included an emergency department, an intensive care unit and a birthing center (Adams, 2010).



*Image 1.2: The Royal Victoria Hospital complex, location plan. ("Official site of Mont-Royal" by the City of Montreal, 2015)*

In 1997, the Royal Vic site merged with several other hospitals in the city and became part of the McGill University Healthcare Center (MUHC) (Adams, 2010). The MUHC is affiliated with McGill University's Faculty of Medicine and is recognized as one of the most

prestigious university teaching hospitals in the world (MUHC, n.d.). On the morning of April 26, 2015, the old Royal Vic was officially vacated of all the health facilities and transferred to the new Glen campus on Decarie Boulevard, west of the downtown core. With this, the Royal Vic became one of the many vacant hospital sites in Montreal, following a trend of “changing demographics, transformations to social policies and programs, technological advances [and] financial and regulatory considerations” (Memento, n.d.: online). Other nearby hospitals such as the Montreal Chest Hospital, the Montreal Children’s Hospital and the Montreal General Hospital are all part of this network of hospitals that faced vacancy as all their services were moved to the centralized Glen site between the months of February and June of 2015 (MUHC, 2015). This move marked the largest hospital move ever carried out in Canadian history (MUHC, 2015). The MUHC is now spread across four hospital sites in Montreal: The Glen site, the Lachine site, the Montreal Neurological Hospital and the Montreal General Hospital, making it one of the largest, academic health centres in North America (MUHC, n.d.).

In 2018, the government of Québec announced that it would grant McGill University \$37 million to aid in the Royal Vic’s transformation (Québec to give McGill the old Royal Vic site, 2018). In addition to this, the Société Québécoise des Infrastructures (SQI) was given \$5 million to develop a masterplan for the site in collaboration with McGill and the City of Montreal (Québec to give McGill, 2018). In the spring of 2019, McGill released a master-plan for the revitalization of both its downtown and Macdonald campuses that included broad plans for repurposing the old Royal Vic. The document proposed an interdisciplinary hub dedicated to the schools of Sustainability Systems and Public Policy, as well as open up more space for classrooms, research, food venues and convocation (McGill University Masterplan, 2019).

Thus, for the time since the move in 2015, there grew a period of vacancy that was not supposed to occur. What happened between the time that the Royal Vic’s health facilities were moved, and McGill started to envision a redevelopment? Was I correct to assume that it was abandoned in my first year at McGill? Who is in charge of the space while I write this paper? The Royal Vic was public from its inception, declared as a place to treat people of “all races and creeds.” Albeit occasional news articles about the Royal Vic holding temporary users, and the release of the New Vic masterplan by McGill, the public has been mostly blindsided about its plans for the future. It should be noted that this sense of uncertainty regarding the future redevelopment began well before my chosen interval. Expert of the Royal Vic site, Professor

Annmarie Adams at McGill University expressed in 1998 that she was “baffled by the decisions surrounding the MUHC, frustrated at the lack of public debate, and extremely worried about McGill and Montreal” in regards to the impending repurposing of the site (Adams, 1998: C4). As a vacant, public, site with heritage value situated in a large metropolis, the problem of the Royal Vic is something of a public controversy. The location of the Royal Vic in the fabric of Montreal, between the mountain and the University, enclosed by several other well-known healthcare buildings makes our problem more compelling. It is not simply a forgotten site, it was an epicenter of healing in one of the largest cities in Canada. Here stands a legendary, public building that has faced years of vacancy. Here stands a center of healing that gracefully delivered its services, accruing status and value for over a century, but that physically and figuratively shut its doors to the public.

## **1.2 Research Aim and Questions**

I wish to bring light to the public mystery of the Royal Vic since its move in 2015. Therefore, my overall research aim is to investigate the hospital’s post-move vacancy. I look to weave together the multiple stories that are part of the Royal Vic’s recent history, and illuminate the ones that are not as common in the narrative of the site. Thus, the following questions seek to guide the trajectory of the research into the vacant hospital site:

- Why was the Royal Vic left vacant for so long?
- What kinds of uses and activities took place on the site during the vacancy?
- How are the local communities in Montreal reacting?

## **1.3 Outline**

In the following chapter, I develop a conceptual framework for understanding vacant buildings by expanding on the major concepts that will contribute to the understanding of the Royal Vic. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology that I employed for the investigation into the site. I discuss the difficulties of finding a method for observing and listening to the many stories that go into

the telling of this greater story. I also include a description of the objectives of my methodology and a section on my positionality. Chapter 4 is where I discuss the key findings of my research. The information I discovered did not come neatly packaged to answer my research questions, so to better deliver my findings, I will organize them around the participants involved. I will begin with an examination of the temporary users of the site during the vacancy, leading into a discussion of the responses and reactions from Montrealers regarding the absence of use and the site's future redevelopment. I round up the chapter with an exploration of the potential contributing factors towards the prolonged vacancy. In Chapter 5, I aggregate my findings and discuss the implications of my research for the Royal Vic. I conclude by discussing the limitations that I encountered along the way and suggesting further research for the management of future vacant buildings with heritage value in Montreal.

## CHAPTER 2: Conceptual Framework

The problem we have is a unique one. It is not a *new* phenomenon, as the nature of civilizations leave spaces derelict and vacant all the time. Paradoxically, it is a common problem made unique through its location and heritage value. The goal here is to look deeply into the five years (and counting) interval of vacancy at the Royal Vic. By approaching this as a design problem, we must situate this in the gap left in the literature and the discipline. To help fill this absence of knowledge, what are the disciplines of geography, urban studies and sociology saying about vacant spaces? Even more so, what are they saying about vacancies of heritage buildings in an urban setting? Throughout my research, there were several key terms that emerged regarding the ideas, processes, and factors surrounding vacant spaces. These key terms will structure a framework that works to set the stage for understanding our unique problem. I will draw upon four main phenomena: vacancy, transition, governance and mobilization that will build a scaffolding to support my point of entry into the investigation of the Royal Vic.

<b>Vacancy</b>	<b>Transitional Spaces</b>	<b>Covert Governance</b>	<b>Community Mobilization</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Dependence on surrounding processes</li><li>→ Heritage conservation</li><li>→ Repurposing vacant hospital sites</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Differential spaces</li><li>→ Informal and temporary use of space</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Regulations</li><li>→ Ambiguous accountability and ownership</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Community involvement in heritage conservation</li><li>→ Community engagement models</li></ul>

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework Diagram

### 2.1 Vacancy

Firstly, and most evident, is the concept of vacancy. Since I will be referring to this term all throughout this paper, it is of great importance to understand it, know how it operates in a city

and what it means for stakeholders. Starting from the bare bones of the word, Merriam-Webster defines vacant as “being without occupant” or “not lived in” in the context of a building. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.: online). This is how most of us think about this term: a void. However, as with any other keywords, vacant or vacancy has the capability of having “interlocking, yet sometimes contradictory and commonly contested contemporary meanings” (Keywords Project, 2016: online). To avoid a lengthy discussion of all the various meanings and histories of the word vacant, we will focus on its role in cities, how it specifically operates in cases of heritage buildings and former hospital sites. While there is abundant literature and debate on vacant buildings, the goal of this conceptual framework is to situate the reader in accordance to the layers of significance regarding these sites, and to expose the frustration that goes into witnessing such a project.

Vacancies in cities are not new. As urban centers expand and decline, buildings are destined to be left derelict. Katherine Foo et al. (2014) in their article *The production of urban vacant land: Relational placemaking in Boston, MA*, articulate the term vacancy in cities to be interwoven with the history of a place that sees increasing privatization and polarization across social, political and economic realms (Foo et al., 2014: 176). This multifactorial conceptualization of the term vacancy shows its relationality to other factors, which shows us that its ruination does not happen in vacuum, but that it relies on surrounding processes and decision-making, or lack thereof. David Adams et al. (2002) explores this problem with vacant spaces through reasons for “why so much of it remains vacant or derelict for so long” (Adams et al., 2002: 396). In this investigation of urban land ownership in the UK, a proper understanding of land vacancy cannot be reached without an adequate analysis of local market conditions or development strategies, exemplifying the influence of external factors on the maturation of a vacant space.

Not only is the Royal Vic a vacant building, but it is a vacant building with heritage value, thus, I will examine the literature on vacant, heritage buildings around the world to better understand how this issue is usually dealt with. Being of profound historical and architectural significance, it is of even greater relevance to understand the various factors that lead to such extraordinary structures nearing obsolescence. Firstly, heritage buildings are being demolished at an alarming rate (Hill, 2016). According to Sarah Hill (2016) in her article *Constructive conservation – a model for developing heritage assets*, one of the main reasons for this issue is

that finding a use for the building, while honoring its heritage value, is an incredibly complex endeavor. As per the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, finding a suitable use for a heritage building should honor its historical function, or if that is not possible, it must be “compatible with the heritage value” of the building (Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, 2010: 4). In addition to this come the many financial, functional, legal and cultural assets of heritage buildings that require constant maintenance. Consequently, when buildings are left obsolete, many of their heritage assets crumble past repair, leading to vacancy, loss of value and a cycle of delayed maintenance (Hill, 2016: 37). This perpetual cycle of delayed maintenance becomes more difficult to intercept as time goes on because the decay turns off potential funders, developers and certain stakeholders from investing in the necessary repairs. Breaking this cycle is crucial, and it requires continual adaptation (Hill, 2016). In their article *Heritage values as the base for the development of a monitoring system* in Cuenca, Ecuador, Verónica Heras-Barros et al. (2013) claim that heritage conservation fails when approached as a “curative” or “restorative” treatment, but instead suggest following a monitor-based system that stays up to date on the status of such buildings to prevent a cascade of issues that surfaces when one begins to peel back the layers of time (Heras-Barros et al., 2013: 133). Finding a viable use is critical for the maintenance of the heritage building as it offers the best chance for long-term survival.

Australian scholar Cameron Logan discusses the specific ways old hospital buildings deal with vacancy and the often sought-out repurposing or re-using that ensues. Following the “institutional mergers” and “amalgamation” of hospitals in North America, many of the former sites face futures riddled with vacancy or complicated redevelopments (Logan, 2011: 46). Finding suitable uses for former hospital sites has its own set of problems as “hazardous materials” are common, and many twentieth century hospital buildings have “added substantial costs” (Logan, 2011: 46). The construction of large elevator shafts in hospitals and very specific designs for the operation rooms, nurses stations and other various wards pose difficult barriers for architects to find new uses for these spaces. Consequently, preservation or adaptive reuse of twentieth century hospital buildings are always met with limitations and compromises, and often live on as landmarks reminding us of the defining innovations of medicine and the social goals that guided the original construction of the building years before (Logan, 2011).



## 2.2 Transitional Spaces

Vacant spaces are often associated with demolition and neglect. However, these derelict spaces are often sought out by groups looking to embrace these existing structures and follow sustainable development strategies. They are commonly sites for alternate ideas regarding spaces and places that are formed through a collaborative effort. Examining other cases of using vacant buildings for transitional purposes will give the reader a basic knowledge of the kinds of occupations that can take place in buildings that are absent of official use.

Despite the negative consequences of leaving buildings vacant for long periods of time, these neglected areas can offer social support and bolster community strength in a variety of ways. Gianna Piazza (2018) explains that large, empty buildings in many parts of the world have been used as liberated spaces where squatters protest political structures (Piazza, 2018). The squatters search for a space to collect, collaborate and disrupt the system. From students protesting the privatization of the education system to lower income groups fighting for affordable housing, vacant buildings hold the informal, but necessary space for people to organize (Piazza, 2018). These spaces can also serve non-political benefits as well. Mark S. Rosenbaum (2019) explains that when situated in disadvantaged areas, using large spaces for a range of activities can strengthen community ties which improves individual health (Rosenbaum, 2019).

Temporary uses of vacant spaces in cities have not been embedded in conventional or governmental urban planning agendas, and usually stem from bottom-up efforts that take the shape of several services and activities (Wesener, 2015). After the earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 demolished hundreds of buildings in Christchurch, New Zealand, temporary uses emerged in these spaces as community gardens, event venues, eateries and cafes and others. Andreas Wesener (2015) conceptualizes these spaces as ‘transitional community-initiated open spaces,’ with the key word ‘transitional’ used to describe the in-between phase between response and recovery after a natural disaster (Wesener, 2015: 411). Meanwhile, Lauren Andres (2013) defines these spaces as ‘differential’ as they allow for a multitude of uses along a longer path of transformation (Andres, 2013: 762). She adopts this term ‘differential’ from Lefebvre’s (1991) *Production of Space*, to connote an informal use of space, or those that are “opposed to an orderly vision of the city and relate to the right to be different” (Andres, 2013: 762). Since they

allow various uses, these spaces are subject to continuous and transformative trajectories. Meanwhile, she critiques the collaborative planning approach that aims at creating these differential spaces because it is based on ‘weak planning’ that is situated in a series of issues, such as poor market conditions, planning restrictions or the insurmountable disagreements between stakeholders (Andres, 2013: 763). Transitional or differential, it is clear that the transformation of these temporary spaces is based on a decentralized organization of power, which, according to Andres (2013) implies a “lack of clarity” because it is “not ordered by a planning strategy” and thus may not be as productive as a master plan approach (Andres, 2013: 762).

In Berlin, Germany, however, vacant spaces left by the falling of the Wall, that have been occupied by various temporary uses, have been picked up through several official economic and urban development policies, proving that transitional spaces have the potential to fit within the paradigm of governmental regulation (Colomb, 2012). This is noted as unusual, as scholars attribute this freedom and tolerance to the redevelopment of such spaces to the new ways of “cultural and social expression” that policy-makers and real-estate investors see as important for strengthening the ‘creative city’ agenda set forth by Richard Florida (Colomb, 2012: 133). Temporary and vacant spaces as areas of work for creative entrepreneurs, consumers, and tourist attractions, found their belonging in Berlin. Strategies were developed out of this new wave of urbanism that encouraged public intervention through affordable workspaces, start-up centers and places to facilitate network connections in the music and design sectors, contributing to Berlin’s UNESCO designation in the “Creative Cities Network” in 2005 (Colomb, 2012: 139).

## **2.3 Covert Governance**

In the case of the Royal Vic, there also appears to be a vacancy of control. Control in the sense of formal, authoritative management. One of my research questions looks for answers to this supposed vacancy of governance. What usually happens when heritage buildings are left with no formal function? Who is supposed to be in charge of ensuring the maintenance of such spaces? Who is held accountable? Heritage buildings are usually bound within a convergence of regulations that include an “internationally-recognized set of ideas and charter, as well as federal, provincial and municipal policies,” posing a complex set of problems (Bridgman and Bridgman,

2000: 25). In other words, a building like the Royal Vic can come to represent the “negotiated sum of many regulation-informed decisions,” between the stakeholders (Bridgman and Bridgman, 2000: 26). ‘Regulations’ emerges as a key-word in this pillar of the conceptual framework as it is the written set of rules that declare what happens to a building. What role do regulations play in the neglect of buildings? Regulations can persuade and buy time, however they only work in a “sympathetic” environment of laws, taxes, media coverage and the general public (Bridgman and Bridgman, 2000: 28).

Lack of accountability and covert ownership also perpetuate the uncertainty of governance. In order to properly and fairly weave together the complex web of relationships among different stakeholders regarding the redevelopment of a site, David C. Perry and Wim Weiwei (2005) claim that reciprocity and transparency must be upheld (Perry et al., 2005). In the case of a university holding the power as developer, the distribution of authority and decision-making is complex and often leans toward ambiguity. Public universities hold unique authority because people expect that the administration will take the interests of the general public into account, however, even with “strong democratic traditions,” the overpowering size and authority that universities wield makes it difficult for different stakeholders to “fully submit themselves” to make themselves heard (Perry et al., 2005: 288).

## **2.4 Community Mobilization**

The question regarding the reaction from the community requires an understanding of who the community is, and what their role is in problems similar to ours. For the purpose of this conceptual framework, I am referring to the surrounding communities as organizations and people from the neighboring area, borough, city, or region and who collectively have power as a stakeholder in public projects. Teresa Cunha Ferreira (2018) suggests that one of the key strategies for maintaining a heritage building, and thus avoiding uncontrollable deterioration, is to involve the community and users. She reaches this conclusion through the case studies of churches, monasteries, bridges and castles in Portugal, discovering that despite its general intangibility, the community plays an important role in maintaining heritage buildings because through raised awareness, they will have ownership of the development process and consequently, better control of its maintenance (Ferreira, 2018). Understanding this is essential

to our case with the Royal Vic that has mobilized and activated the voices and actions of the community who are looking to get involved in the redevelopment of the site.

What does it mean to involve the community in a project like the Royal Vic? Ivis Garcia (2018) recognizes that there is no singular framework for a community-engagement model in the preservation and restoration of a historic building, posing both challenges and opportunities for planning endeavors (Garcia, 2018). As Jane Jacobs famously claimed, a community perspective in urban planning simply seeks to understand such spaces as a “complex, living organisms” that recognizes its state of “constant and unending change.” (Garcia, 2018: 522). This allows us to conceptualize vacant spaces according to a variety of stakeholders over a range of time, however a multitude of voices is common around such issues, and tends to allow some to speak louder than others. At this point, entering into this issue of public mobilization of the Royal Vic, it is helpful again to understand the “multifunctionality” of vacant land as it highlights its “agency of a range of people” that contributes to creating meaning in urban space (Foo et al., 2014). There are many users who want access to vacant land, the objective is to cooperate in some way. Foo et al. (2014) proposes that to apprehend the role of the community in urban vacant land, a dynamic, or “relational” place-making point of view allows us to “study places as they change over time, in accordance or conflict with the priorities of actors at multiple scales.” (Foo et al., 2014: 177).

Understanding the key terms that encompass cases of vacant, public buildings will guide this thesis on the case of the Royal Vic. As mentioned, this is not a new phenomenon, but it still touches many people who are involved in the site, or the site’s memory. It is important to grasp the magnitude of this vacancy, both because of the building’s geographical and historical significance but also because of the fragility that characterizes the conservation of heritage buildings. The case of the Royal Vic demands a conceptual background on the transitory uses of vacant spaces that take place through informal and formal processes. It also requires an understanding that repurposing vacant hospital sites has its own set of problems, and therefore architects and conservationists must be well-aware of the specific limitations that these historical sites carry with them. It is also crucial to be briefed on the role that regulations, governmental bodies or powerful developers have in the maintenance of spaces. At the same time, the role that communities have in the redevelopment of vacant spaces highlight the variety of ways that bottom-up approaches work to create meaning in seemingly empty sites.

## **CHAPTER 3: Methodology**

Deriving from the concepts presented in the previous chapter, I will narrow my field of vision to the case of the Royal Vic. The focus of this section is on the methodology employed for my research. I will begin by explaining the qualitative method I used, based on the article “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method” by Glenn Bowen (2009). Next, I will bring the reader through the process through which I selected the data, a brief overview of the coding process, my positionality, and how it ultimately shaped the outcome of my project.

By confining my research focus to the five-year interval of vacancy, I have chosen to collect material from that timespan. To answer my inquiries surrounding the duration of the vacancy, the temporary occupations on the site and the reactions from the public, I will be searching for a diversity of opinions: from public or private groups, verified or opinionated, singular or representing a collective. Essentially, this project calls for a variety of participants that were involved in one way or another. This implies the use of qualitative methods, and while I would normally propose interviewing, it became clear that casting a new set of interviews would not cover as much ground as embarking on a vast and deep web search of existing material. Since my focus is on an interval of five or so years, it is more productive to employ those restrictions on a document or internet search than to inquire a personal story. Conducting interviews in the way that I had initially planned would have made for the tone of this paper to stem from major stakeholders on the site, because due to the physical distancing protocols in place to restrict the spread of the coronavirus, I would only be able to speak with those who are digitally available and literate. This way, I had greater control over the distribution of sources and thus the emergence of certain voices. Furthermore, the case of the Royal Vic is an ongoing issue, new discussions are being held every week regarding the redevelopment. People have a lot to say on the matter, making a rich body of work that is readily available for anyone with access to the internet. My role in all of this is to set up a methodology that works to organize this raw material into a digestible thesis.

### **3.1 Document analysis**

I will be drawing extensively from Bowen's (2009) article that discusses finding, selecting and synthesizing information from various documents. This can include newspapers, websites, meeting minutes, reports, public documents, and posters that are investigated like data in order to elicit a greater understanding on the topic (Research Methodology in Education, n.d.: online). Using document analysis in research is to provide data on the context within which participants operate. While I am not integrating real time participants in my research, this aspect of document analysis helps to understand the historical roots and to contextualize the information found in the existing documents and interviews that I am analyzing for this research. Document analysis also leads to finding situations that beg observation as well as suggest certain questions that must be asked. During my process of gathering and synthesizing documents, my readings led towards other aspects about the Royal Vic that I had not yet considered. Analyzing multiple documents also provides a way to track change or development. For example, during my research process, I found the recorded minutes from an organization's meetings that would meet to discuss the Coalition Save the Five Hospitals. Comparing the minutes between consecutive meetings allowed me to detect how their cause had developed, if and how the organization was able to accomplish their goal. Although straightforward, the method ultimately aided in my overall search for understanding the way that Montrealers are reacting to the Royal Vic's vacancy and redevelopment. Lastly, document analysis is valuable for corroborating evidence from other sources, which aims to reduce bias. Combining multiple types of documents has the purpose of reducing the bias that may be more likely to arise if the research findings were extracted only from a few interviews, or one type of document (Research Methodology in Education, n.d.). The stability that this methodology provides to research is an advantage in that the researcher's presence does not alter what is being studied, reducing risk of obtrusiveness and reactivity. As public documents are always readily accessible, the researcher can view these documents multiple times, allowing a thorough reading between the lines. (Bowen, 2009).

### **3.2 Data selection**

Critical for the researcher is the capacity to select data pertinent to the inquiry (Bowen, 2009). Ultimately, I began with a vast and wide search, and then I narrowed down once I had a clearer idea of what I wanted to convey with my research questions. Through this, there are two

processes being carried out in my research: the search and the selection. Here is where the importance of careful and rigorous selection takes place. How do I choose which documents to examine? I must remind the reader that I am not looking to answer the question of *why* the hospital was moved. I am investigating the reasons for why this seemingly unplanned vacancy lasted for five years and counting; therefore, the answer will likely require a synthesis from a large amount of material. One such way that I kept a relevant selection was in my deep dive into the recent Montreal Gazette archives. I set a time interval between 2014 to 2020, along with the keywords ‘Royal Vic Hospital,’ ‘RVH’ or ‘Royal Victoria Hospital’ to produce the news articles that were written within my scope of work. This enabled me to select articles that are pertinent to my study, but still remain open enough to avoid narrow selectivity. The dynamic processes of searching and selecting worked together in opening new questions and ideas along the way.

Answering my first research question revealed nuance, as there is a range of possible factors contributing to the duration of vacancy. I began with a close reading of Montreal’s Heritage Policy to better understand the process of finding a suitable use for a heritage building. This led to an investigation of other municipal and national guidelines for heritage sites. Websites and official government documents outlining the necessary processes for requalifying the site were also illuminating for the prolonged interval of vacancy. Corroborating information between these documents and peripheral materials was an iterative process, bringing to light more information with each read. To answer my question regarding the temporary occupations of the site, I investigated mainly news articles that covered these short term uses, drawing from local media sources such as the Montreal Gazette, La Presse, CBC News, CTV News and others. Information pertaining to my third question that searched for reactions from the surrounding public was often found in documents written by organizations that are situated near the Royal Vic. For example, Les Amis de la Montagne is a local non-profit organization that seeks to promote the protection of Mount Royal who have made public comments on the redevelopment of the Royal Vic through their annual reports and website. Composed of Montrealers and other community members, I noted this group as one of the many voices in the ongoing debate.

### **3.3 Coding for keywords**

As explained by Meghan Cope (2010), coding is a process through which the researcher ‘makes sense’ of the data, categorizes it, reduces it and builds theories from it. It also succeeds in its ability to open “new and unexpected connections” that often generate the most interesting discoveries (Cope, 2010: 283). There are several ways that the researcher may choose to go about this. I employ a simple coding that works to reflect words or patterns within documents (Cope, 2010; Bowen, 2009). The type of content analysis that I employ starts with an observation of keywords in the articles I examine before and during the analysis, and when “clustered together according to similarity and regularity (a pattern), they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections” (Saldaña, 2013: 8). My focus on keywords draws from the Keywords Project modelled after the book by Raymond Williams that works to study the manifold and contextual meanings of keywords. The project is a collaborative research initiative that explores key words that are “prominently used but also contested in social debates in English,” ultimately aiding our understanding of the processes involved in “public conversation” (Keywords Project, n.d.: online). Just as it was important to define the key concepts for this thesis, it is important to look for, listen, and unlock the meanings of the words that circulate the public discussion of the Royal Vic, as keywords form the basis of a cultural understanding that can be “presumed, relied on, or challenged” (Keyword Project, n.d.: online). As will be elaborated upon in the Findings section, analyzing the articles that I examined within the interval revealed recurring words such as “McGill” and “public” elucidating themes surrounding the public conceptualization of the Royal Vic. I coded this by using an online word counter program that scanned each article and generated a list of words and the frequency by which they were used in the article (WordCounter, n.d.). Once I had scanned each article, I organized the frequency data into a spreadsheet to reveal the most commonly recurring words across the articles pertaining to the Royal Vic. These words are made clear in a word cloud diagram in the subsequent Findings chapter.

Codes are also in place from the beginning as they are part of the research questions. Research questions are the primary guiding mechanisms of conducting research, therefore the themes underpinning these inquiries, such as vacancy, temporary uses and reactions from the general public is reflected in the Findings section developed in the thesis. Cope (2010) explains that being social beings in this world, we are already categorizing, sorting, prioritizing and



interpreting data constantly, and that coding qualitative data is simply a formalization of this process used to convey our interpretation to others.

### **3.4 Positionality**

Because of my background in the disciplines of Urban Studies and Geography, I am more inclined to approach this problem through these lenses. My positionality is legible in the orientation of my research questions. Since the Royal Vic touches on many issues, it would also be possible to conduct an historical analysis, an environmental impact assessment, or perhaps an economic evaluation of its maintenance. This story can be told from a variety of perspectives and shed light on just as many issues. Since I am completing a thesis in the department of Geography at McGill University, I am approaching this problem in a specific way which influences its final dissemination. Ultimately, my positionality is important because I am attempting to expose and situate certain positions on this matter. As with any controversy, I must acknowledge that some will agree with me and some will not. Furthermore, my position as a researcher completing her thesis from 2020 to 2021 is not immune to the compromises brought forth by the global pandemic, as the way in which I came around to it was influenced by the physical distancing guidelines during this time. I do not wish to convey any complaints, as I am infinitely grateful for the opportunity and help received in order to complete this thesis. Instead, I want to shed light on the fact that completing an undergraduate thesis during a pandemic lends to a specific environment where the effects of the isolation are felt, nonetheless.

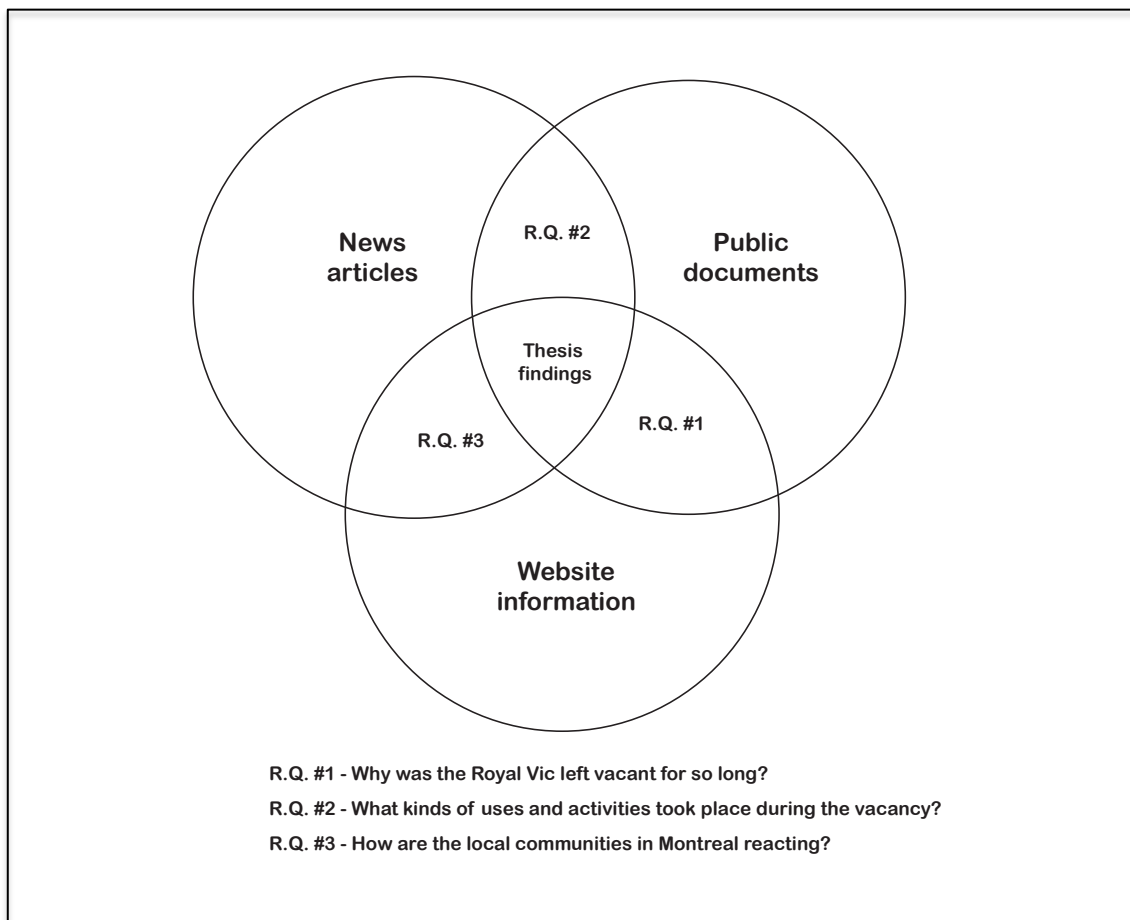
## **CHAPTER 4: Findings**

As I launched my investigation, equipped with the methodology adapted to the study, I was surprised at the abundance and diversity of material that I could gather from online documents and the wide participation in the ongoing debate surrounding the vacancy and the future vocations of the site. Before I dive into the objective findings of my research, I develop two diagrams to help conceptualize the transition between the methodology and the outcome of my research. In other words, how did I get from the research process to the results? This chapter discusses my answers to my research questions that looked for the reasons as to why the Royal Vic's vacancy was stretched for years, who has had access to the site during this time, and what the general public of Montreal is saying about it. Thus, while I found many answers, the research process had to flex its iterative muscle as I found myself having to adapt my scope of inquiries and methods to accommodate for the additional issues I found along the way.

### **4.1 A transition between materials and findings**

#### *4.1.1. The materials*

I was able to tap into materials from primarily three kinds of existing documents: news articles, public documents and information gathered from organization websites. Each type of document produced a yield, however they did not apply equally to each research question. As seen in *Figure 4.1* below, different documents were most often relevant for different questions. As we already know, the news articles were pulled from local media companies discussing the stories of the Royal Vic within the determined time interval. The public documents entailed reports that were issued by an authority or government body, such as provincial budgets or The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada. Information gleaned from websites were usually found on the “About” or “Mission” pages of organizations, or on pages pertaining directly to the Royal Vic. In terms of pertinence for specific research questions, public documents addressed the question of prolonged vacancy and the temporary users of the hospital. Meanwhile, news articles were often productive in echoing stories of resistance to the redevelopment and those of the temporary uses of the site. In this way, the diagram in *Figure 4.1*



*Figure 4.1: Diagram representing the transition between the methodology and findings*

helps to show the way that the news articles and the public documents worked to stabilize each other and produce findings to my second research question. Corroborating raw material between the news and the websites was successful in highlighting the voices of the general public, and thus was able to guide me in my answer to my third research question. This was partly because the websites of local citizen groups often cited news articles that were in line with their mission concerning the future of the Royal Vic. Overall, it is clear that the document analysis I employed for this research requires synthesis from an overwhelming number of documents, and the monitoring of a conversation that is constantly evolving.

#### *4.1.2. The players*

During the months of my research, the conversation surrounding the Royal Vic also revealed more participants and players than I initially anticipated. There were more temporary users, more groups who became stakeholders along the way and more actors contributing to the prolonged vacancy. Thus, a conceptual synthesis is necessary for the wide array of participants that I discovered along this research. *Figure 4.2* shows these participants along an axis of temporality and approach. I chose to organize the participants along these gradients because it makes clear the variety of points of entry for participants in the issue of vacancy. McGill envisions a long-term, if not, permanent use for a portion of the Royal Vic site. At the same time, the university acts as a top-down participant because of its authority and governmental aid. The homeless shelters are situated in the top-down and short-term space because its temporary use of the site was facilitated with the help of the government. The non-profit organizations occupy the bottom-up area of the axis, while nearing the center of the temporal poles. This is because they envision portions of the Royal Vic site to be used as short-term occupations, through long-term, collective ownership.

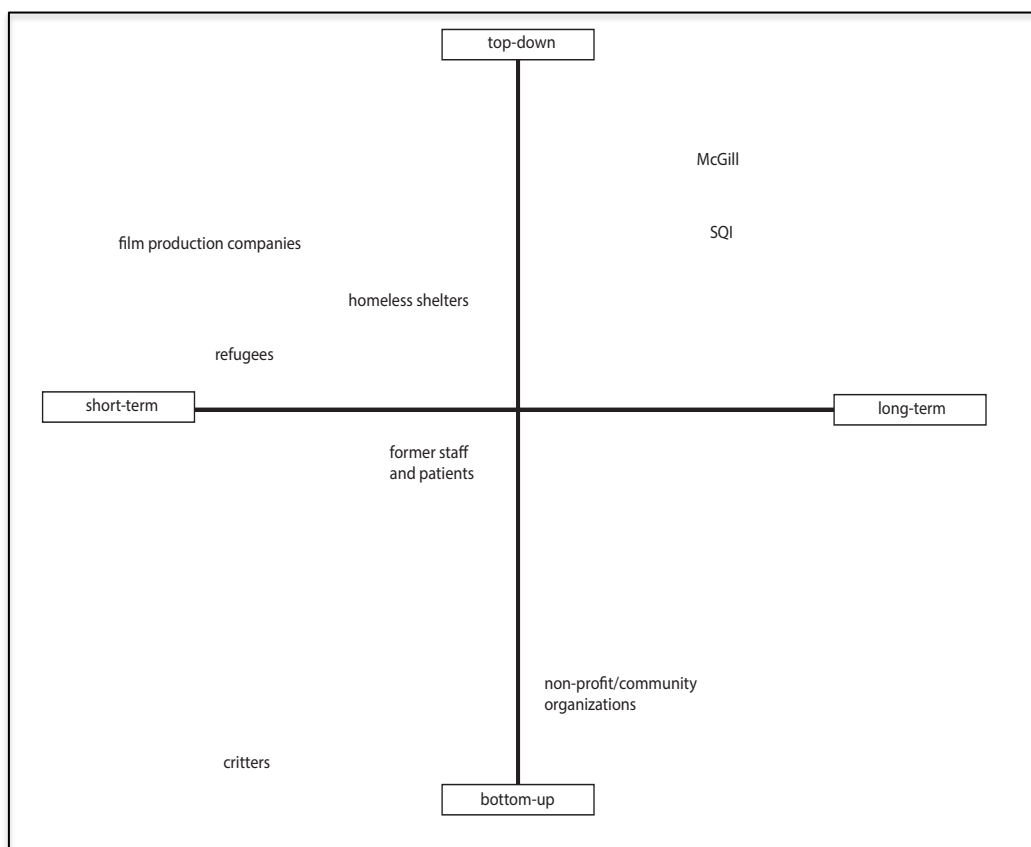


Figure 4.2: Diagram representing the players involved in the Royal Vic case

It is clear that the materials brought up abundant information regarding the uses and users. The many players and participants have emerged throughout the research in ways that I did not foresee. Thus, in the remainder of this Findings chapter, I will be reorganizing the order in which I answer my research questions in accordance to how abundantly I was able to answer them. Since my richest lode was generated through my second research question, I will be addressing this first: *what kinds of uses and activities took place on the site during the vacancy?* This is to show what *did* happen during the interval – to make the reader aware that the site served multiple concrete functions, before moving into the many ways that the Royal Vic was, and still is being conceptualized through the opinions being formed and confronted. After answering my third research: *how are the communities in Montreal are reacting?*, I will end with what was originally my first question. After all the research, there are still silences relating to the prolonged vacancy. This reordering of the questions leads the reader through the concrete and end with the ominous, essentially getting a nuanced answer to the overarching question of: *Throughout the 5 or so years of vacancy at the Royal Vic, what are Montrealers saying about it?*

## 4.2 Temporary uses

Analyzing news articles and public documents revealed groups of temporary users such as international refugees, homeless individuals from the local area, and artistic and cultural enterprises that occupied spaces at the Royal Vic during its vacancy. I emphasize groups here, as looking for a cohort of people is much more legible in the various documents than the occasional small animal or squatter. Realistically, not all temporary visitors embody the human form or are affiliated with an organization. As we have seen in the Conceptual Framework chapter, vacant buildings can be used for many purposes ranging from political structures to music venues. However, it is likely that the building has also been visited by ants, squirrels or the raccoons that are known to frequent Mount Royal. While my document analysis sheds light on the groups of people that used the space, the reader must not assume that all temporary users are positive in the eyes of the overall public. It only means that the following findings are those most commonly found in public material, and that the confines of this thesis refrain me from indulging in every detail.

Additionally, since we are looking at an interval of vacancy, it is necessary to note that the start of this time period, that of the fateful morning in April 2015, did not leave the entire Royal Vic site as vacant. While most of the health facilities moved to the Glen site, the MUHC's Reproductive Centre remained on the sixth floor of the Women's Pavilion until October 2016 (Shivji, 2016). The decision to eventually move the Centre was made in order to improve accessibility as its location would be closer to public transportation options, and also because the new site was already adapted for health services and could therefore avoid "unnecessarily spending more public money" (Buckett, 2016). The following section discusses the temporary uses and users that occupied the Royal Vic site over the years of vacancy.

### *4.2.1. Temporary health and housing services*

In 2015, thousands of refugees from war-torn Syria arrived at the Montreal-Pierre Elliot Trudeau International Airport. After going through rigorous immigration and welcome processes, the refugees were directed to the former emergency room at the Royal Vic for medical evaluations

(Step-by-step guide to the refugee welcoming process, 2015). Before the vacancy, the emergency clinic used to be held in the east wing of the main building of the Royal Vic, directly visible from the intersection at University street and Pine Avenue. When the refugees arrived at the clinic, the space was temporarily repurposed to administer immunizations, prescriptions and other treatment for minor illnesses. Program administrator Julie Boutin expressed that the refugees were “happy to be here” as they were receiving their health check-ups (Syrian refugees get medical care at old Royal Vic site, 2015: online). However, health experts warned of more serious psychological concerns such as post-traumatic stress disorder due to the intense immigration process of leaving their homes (Syrian refugees, 2015).

One of the better-known services that the Royal Vic site offered over the years since the move was a temporary shelter for homeless populations in the Montreal area. Starting in 2018, the old Royal Vic was temporarily converted into housing for those seeking shelter. There was an announcement by the regional health board that the Ross Memorial Pavilion would be used as an overflow space when all other shelters were full (Olson, 2018). The endeavor emerged when the temperatures were exceedingly low, and when the Mayor of Montreal Valerie Plante claimed that it was “imperative for [the city] to quickly meet with all [their] partners to find solutions” (Olson, 2018: online). According to Samuel Watts, the CEO of the Welcome Hall Mission, one of the local homeless shelters that collaborated on the project at the Royal Vic, this was the first time that homeless shelters did not experience overflow in Montreal (Sucar, 2019). Watts expressed that the success was attributed to the unity and collaboration between project partners, giving them the “capacity to enact real change” in the city, as it would not have been possible if they had “done it on their own” (Sucar, 2019: online). What began as an experiment in the winter of 2018, resulted in a success due to the triumph of collaboration between Montreal's four largest local homeless shelters, the local health and social services centers, the Red Cross and the SPCA (Olson, 2019). The same initiative took place the following winter, when the hospital opened its doors to men, women, trans-people and even pets (Sucar, 2019).

Once the coronavirus pandemic made its way to Montreal in early 2020, shelters took on a more serious endeavor with housing the homeless population. Not only did people need to find shelter, but they were severely at risk for contracting the viral disease since they did not have space to physically distance from others. Since early July of that year, more space was opened up at the Royal Vic, in addition to the Complexe Guy-Favreau and the YMCA in Hochelaga, to help

support homeless persons during a time that required isolating at home (COVID-19: transition plan, 2020). Mayor Plante commented that the collaboration between the “urban agglomeration of Montréal, the healthcare system and community organizations” helped to prevent the health crisis from becoming a “humanitarian” crisis through the temporary housing and food services offered (COVID-19: transition plan, 2020: online). The initiative set up at the Royal Vic was a reflection of this “mutual commitment” according to Samuel Watts of the Welcome Hall Mission (COVID-19: transition plan, 2020: online). Due to the rise and fall of the severity of infection rates, many other temporary shelter sites such as arenas and venues would gradually resume their traditional services, which would consequently leave shelter-seekers without the necessary resources (COVID-19: transition plan, 2020). Thus, the Royal Vic offers a unique space during the pandemic as the stability that arises from the vacancy allows for long term use. Furthermore, a local, student-led organization known as Meals for Milton Parc works with volunteers and neighbors to donate food and clothing to the Royal Vic where homeless people who test positive for the coronavirus can quarantine safely. They coordinate over Instagram pages and Facebook groups and are able to significantly help other local shelters who are experiencing overflow and lack of resources during the pandemic (Ranaldi, 2021).

Intended to start in January 2021, the Ross Memorial Pavilion at the Royal Vic would have been the first alcohol treatment center for homeless individuals in Montreal. Funded by city and provincial investments, this initiative is coming from years of planning and advocacy, as well as collaboration between partnerships and authorities (Montreal will open its first alcohol treatment program for homeless people this winter, 2020). This project is unique in the city, as most other shelters prohibit substance use and require people to sober up before entering (Montreal will open, 2020). However, due to the second wave of coronavirus cases in the city, the project is on hold in order to allocate enough spaces at the hospital for infected individuals (Laframboise, 2021).

#### *4.2.2. Artistic purposes*

The foreboding and mysterious atmosphere of the vacant Royal Vic drew in several temporary participants over the years looking to make use of the characteristic elements of the space. A few months after the move in 2015, the vacant nurses’ lounge in the Royal Vic served as a stage set



for Allyson Grant's play *Progress!*. Inspired by the many stories tied to the hospital, Grant wanted to pay homage to the Royal Vic caught in its own moment of change (Kelly, 2015). The play invited the live audience members to watch within the nurses' lounge, becoming immersed in the creaks, groans and smell of the space in order to feel closer to the character's experience as a patient at the old Royal Vic (Kelly, 2015). In an interview with CBC News, Grant expresses her gratitude for the MUHC that had supported the initiative from the start, revealing the importance of collaboration for successful temporary use of the space (Kelly, 2015).

In 2017, the Montreal Gazette published an article about how the RBC Art and Heritage Centre invited eleven Montreal photographers to tour and capture images of several rooms throughout the vacant hospital (Schwartz, 2017). Each one of the photographers approached the space differently, entering into the many rooms and hallways. Collectively, they portrayed the hospital's state of vacancy and void of use. At the time, the hospital was "in between vocations," with little known about the future developments of the space. The photographs were later displayed in the atrium at the new Glen site to create a "healing environment" for people waiting and in need of an artistic and archival distraction (Schwartz, 2017). The capturing of this in-betweenness is resemblant of the work of American artist Anna Schuleit who creates public art installations in former hospitals to "commemorate the life and history of buildings – and the people who worked in and had been patients in them – at times of transition in their histories" (Bell, 2011: 314).

The theater style operating room was especially popular because of its outdated design. In the beginning of the 19th century the operating room was a public space that allowed spectators to watch the surgeons operate, but with the rise of germ theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, came new designs for smaller, and more hygienic operating rooms, and thus the Royal Vic offered a unique window into an age preceding modern medicine (Rego-Barry, 2015). In an article by CBC News, several "big blockbuster" productions were claimed to have made use of this room, which contributed towards offsetting the maintenance costs for the MUHC (Shivji, 2016). The heating, lighting and security costs at that time added up to about \$500,000 each month, thus renting out the space for large movie productions was a mutually beneficial project for both the MUHC and the film production companies. To accommodate for this, the MUHC kept several rooms in the hospital intact, preserving all the equipment and furnishings so as to appear to be still in use for the production of a movie (Shivji, 2016).

Between 2016 to 2018, the MUHC raised \$2.6 million for renting out their sites to film production companies (Marin, 2019). The Royal Vic in particular has become one of the most “frequently filmed locations” in Montreal, hosting movies such as *Jack Ryan*, *Death Wish* and *Pieces of a Woman* (Marin, 2019: online).

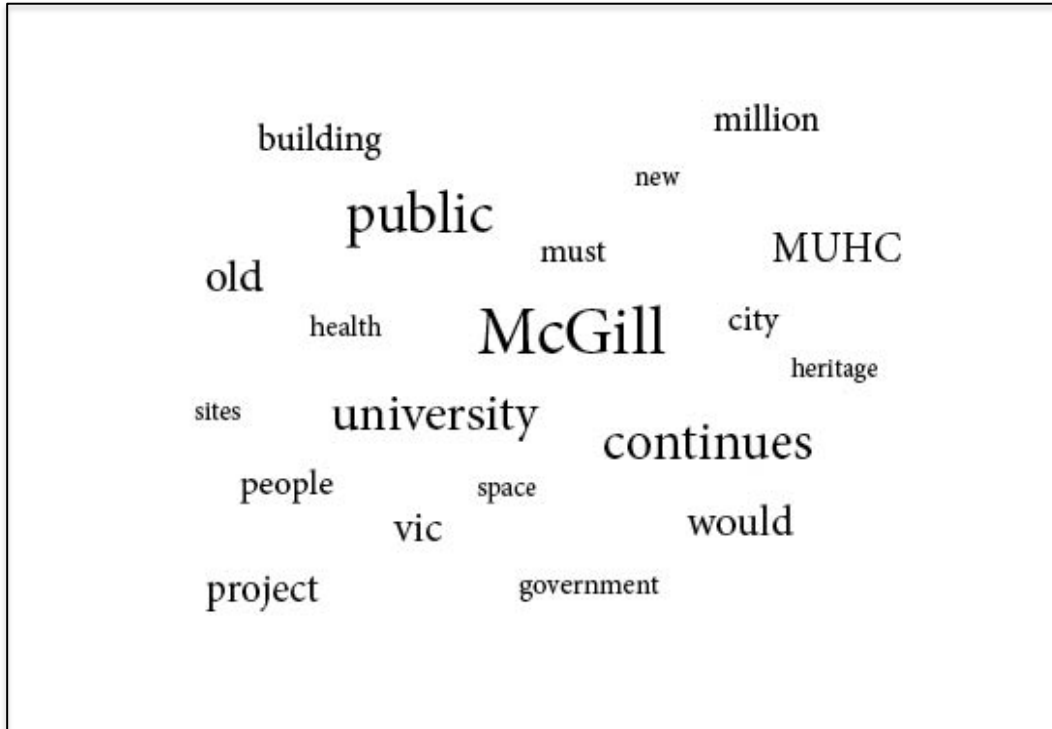
### **4.3 Reactions from the surrounding communities**

After discussing the abundant findings on temporary uses, I will be highlighting the collection of voices from local community groups. I want to know what the general public is saying about the site, partly to selfishly corroborate the concerns I had as a first-year student, but also because the multitude of voices should be legible in the narrative of a public site undergoing a transition. I am talking about the local voices: those that arise from Montreal’s neighbourhoods and citizen groups, but also the individuals that have personal experiences tied to the old hospital. This investigation must be differentiated from the previous section on the temporary users who conceptualized the spaces in the Royal Vic as short-term occupancies, made possible through governmental and organizational collaboration. Unsurprisingly, not all are able to get access to the site in the way that they want. This is an important aspect of writing a thesis in the discipline of human geography and urban studies because it makes legible the locatedness and heterogeneity of such an issue. A site has neighbours, and neighbours always have something to say.

I begin with a word cloud diagram that emerged through the coding of keywords in news articles. The diagram represents the possible words associated with the Royal Vic in the media, indicating how the media may shape the perception of the Royal Vic in Montreal. Next, I illuminate the voices of those that were nostalgic about the hospital closing down at the start of our interval. Finally, I explore the several local citizen groups that have spoken up against the potential privatization of the Royal Vic site with McGill’s plans for redevelopment. Whether this is through the organization’s websites, reports, articles, meeting minutes or protests, this will highlight the most direct reactions over the years.

#### *4.3.1. Keywords in the media*

As mentioned in the methodology section, one of the components of my document analysis was the process of analytic coding. I employed this method to get a broad understanding of how the issue of the Royal Vic was being talked about in the local news. As seen in *Figure 4.3*, the



*Figure 4.3: Word cloud representing keywords analysis*

frequency by which words appeared in my analysis of the articles are in relation to the size of which they appear in the diagram. After removing the words “royal” “victoria” and “hospital,” the words in the diagram are the top twenty words that appeared most often in articles pertaining to the Royal Vic. Out of the thousands of words, “McGill,” “university,” “public” and “continues” were most common in the large selection of articles that I examined. How does the word cloud diagram highlight anything about the reactions from the surrounding communities? We must pay attention to the words that emerged more so than others. Putting a discussion of bias aside, one could argue that news companies have a strong influence on how citizens perceive events that are occurring around them. Recalling the Keywords Project founded by Raymond Williams, keywords often form the basis of the cultural understanding of something, therefore the analysis of key words in the news may indicate the ways that the news shapes the understanding of the Royal Vic (Keyword Project, n.d.: online). This analysis is an important part of the endeavor of capturing the reactions from the surrounding communities because it

works to point out how the opinions on the site are being confronted, crystallized, manifested and responded to. With the words “McGill” and “public” appearing frequently in these articles, Montrealers are likely associating the site with these two players, highlighting the role of McGill and the ongoing discussion for public ownership of the site. The words “government” and “heritage” were also in the topmost frequently used words, which is particularly intriguing as it imitates the concepts introduced in my Conceptual Framework chapter. This circularity is also reflected in the word “people” as it indicates the relationship between the Royal Vic and its wide audience.

While the keyword coding process is generous, it gives us a better idea for how the story of the Royal Vic is being talked about. We are hearing and reading about McGill, the government and the heritage value of the site. We are hearing about the people and the public. But we must also cup our ears to the silences. I was surprised not to find the word vacancy at the top of the coding process. It appears that the media looks towards the future of the Royal Vic, but does not recognize the current vacancy of the site. Perhaps this would have been different if my time interval was wider or focused on an alternate period.

#### *4.3.2. Lost traditions and nostalgia*

The vacancy of the Royal Vic sparked several commemorative events to remember the experiences of those who worked, lived and died at the hospital. Marches, tea parties, and as we have already seen, theatrical performances were held in the months leading up to and following the closing of the hospital, articulating a nostalgic voice from the throats of Montrealers. On the morning of the move, the Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment “paid tribute to the Royal Victoria and its years of service” as the hospital was built by Scottish immigrants (Royal Victoria patients moved into MUHC superhospital, 2015: online). Dressed in traditional attire and playing the bagpipes, the Black Watch marched out of the Royal Vic parking lot as a final farewell. Additionally, since the time that the hospital opened in 1893, it has been a daily tradition for head nurses to gather for tea to discuss the latest cases and patients (Curran, 2015). While this gradually became reserved for a Christmas occasion, the event was always highly anticipated, and the final gathering before shutting down services in 2015 “served nostalgia” in addition to tea and cucumber sandwiches (Curran, 2015: online). The closing of the Royal Vic was not only felt amongst staff, but also resonated in those patients who had experienced life

altering moments in the space. Bill Tierney for the Montreal Gazette articulated this sentiment as he describes hospitals, and specifically the Royal Vic as “supercharged in the popular imagination with the lingering dramas of the suffering and the lives and deaths that take place in them” (Tierney, 2015: online). His capturing of nostalgia is also resonated in the work of Anna Schuleit in that it commemorates the history of former hospital buildings, and the lives of those who passed through them, especially at the moment of transition from one use to another (Bell, 2011). Two banners were placed in the halls of the old Royal Vic for people to write their farewells in 2015, many expressing that they are “nostalgic” about its closing, and that this was where they felt “joy, pain and anxiety,” reflecting the nuanced sentiment surrounding hospitals observed by Tierney and Schuleit (Seidman, 2015: online). Other quotes from the banner included: “born here, worked here, trained here,” with another expressing “thank you very much for your care, attention and good medical guidance” as well as “there is so much history here, so many advances in healthcare,” revealing the meaningful presence of the hospital in the city (Seidman, 2015).

#### *4.3.3. Resistance from citizen groups*

Resistance and critical responses to the plans to repurpose the Royal Vic started well before the hospital facilities moved from the site in 2015. In 1998, Annmarie Adams was right on the heels of consultants who recommended the demolition and the construction of luxury condominiums on the site, claiming that “the idea of turning prime public architecture into private space” was completely and profoundly “objectionable” (Adams, 1998: C4). However, since I have chosen to investigate the mobilization since 2015, I will focus on the reactions from groups within this time-frame, those of which have only gained in support and traction over the years.

The Milton Parc Citizens Committee (MPCC) is a local, not-for-profit and nonpartisan organization that ultimately looks to encourage “grassroots democracy and collective autonomy” in the Milton Parc neighborhood of downtown Montreal (MPCC, n.d.: online). One of their major and ongoing initiatives is supporting The Royal Vic for the Public Coalition that works to resist the privatization of the old hospital site that is possible through its redevelopment, along with four other founding organizations known as the Peter McGill Community Council, the Students’ Society of McGill University, the Yellow Door and the Communauté Milton Parc. The Coalition is a collaborative effort grounded in an open letter that calls on the Québec government

to “engage in a true dialogue with the public, and develop a socially acceptable project that serves the common good” (Open Letter of the Royal Vic for the Public Coalition, n.d.: online). This letter is an online, public document that is accessible by anyone and that boasts a long list of local organizations that have signed on to support this plea for public consultation on any development of the site. The creators and signees of the letter demand an “accessible governance” where either the site remains in the public domain through the hands of the provincial or municipal government, or, alternatively, a communal ownership system (Open Letter, n.d.). They also propose the possibility of a long-term lease, modeled after the Hotel-Dieu hospital in Paris. The letter refers to the founder’s intention of the Royal Vic as a site that is open to all people regardless of “races and creeds,” claiming that the future vocation of the site should have healthcare or housing at the forefront of the decision for redevelopment (MPCC, n.d.: online).

Analysis of past meeting minutes showed that the MPCC has been discussing a coalition for the Royal Vic since 2014, along with the four other hospitals that had been vacated recently due to the construction of the MUHC. Following this mass centralization of hospitals, the Coalition Save the Five Hospital Sites was formed to speak out against the potential privatization or demolition of these soon to be vacant spaces (Michaud and Kowaluk, 2014). Similar to the MPCC, this coalition of local Montrealers demanded that the Québec government keep the future vocations of the hospitals public through transparent and participatory processes so that these sites of value can continue contributing to the identity of Montreal (Michaud and Kowaluk, 2014). They wished to see the hospital sites used for community needs such as social housing, recreation, culture, employment and healthcare purposes.

Six years later, dozens of Montrealers protested outside the hospital for that same purpose: to plead against the privatization of the Royal Vic. Several organizations participated in this march in September 2020, such as the Community Council of Peter McGill, the Communauté de St-Urbain and the MPCC as a network of resistance against the potential privatization of the site. Their mobilization reflects the shared frustration with privatization “pricing people out of their own neighborhood” while there are myriad possibilities to better serve the local community (Gilmour and Ross, 2020: online). One person who attended the

protest envisioned a “senior citizens home” or an “eco village that provided housing while taking advantage of its home on the side of Mount Royal” (Gilmour and Ross, 2020: online).

Les Amis de la Montagne is another local, non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the sustainability and the protection of Mount Royal, and who has spoken out about the Royal Vic as the redevelopment would directly impact the mountain. In their yearly report from 2014-2015, the organization showed their continued pressure on the Québec government to ensure that there will be an appropriate vocation for the Royal Vic. They demanded full transparency and cooperation with the Montreal community in the future redevelopment, hoping to disrupt the government inertia that is likely to ensue (Les Amis de La Montagne Annual Report 2014-2015). Analysis of the annual report from 2017-2018, however, showed their participation in the co-design workshops facilitated by McGill that were included in the Opportunity Study submitted to the Québec government for the University’s plans for expansion (Les Amis de La Montagne Annual Report 2017-2018). Les Amis de La Montagne also mobilized and contributed to the SQI’s invitation to participate in the requalification process by hosting an information and discussion session with the community. This was to make sure that the many community-oriented visions for the site were brought up, including “ensuring the integrity of the Mount Royal Heritage Site, the rehabilitation choices that serve the community, improved access to the mountain, as well as the protection and enhancement of its natural environments” (Les Amis de La Montagne Impact Report 2019-2020: online).

Resistance to full privatization was also echoed in the vision for transitional use of the Royal Vic promoted by the organization Entremise that works towards turning vacant or underutilized spaces into collective uses for communities (Entremise, 2020). In July of 2020, an interview was hosted by Table de Cartier Peter-McGill with Mallory Wilson, the general director and co-founder of Entremise, who envisions the Royal Vic as a “transitional space” that would ultimately enable a collectively governed area (Table de Cartier Peter-McGill, 2020). Since the government of Québec is already financially investing in the space through maintenance, heating and security, Wilson argues that transitional or temporary uses could easily take place in the unused buildings of the Royal Vic. Moreover, the government could collect revenue from organizations leasing the space for a variety of spontaneous and temporary uses that would benefit the community, rather than leaving the space vacant. Through a process that puts

collective governance at the forefront of the initiative, as echoed in the Open Letter of the Royal Vic for the Public Coalition, the Royal Vic is envisioned as a space to hold an active environment for residents to become engaged in the planning process of a site (Table de Cartier Peter-McGill, 2020).

In November 2019, the SQI hosted a Forum about the future of the Royal Vic in the Hersey Pavilion of the old hospital, where over 100 people from a variety of backgrounds could participate in information sessions and workshops as well as listen to interviews from experts on the site (Rapport Forum Avenir Royal-Victoria, 2020). Examination of this Forum is important for exploring the community reactions and mobilization. A report outlining the forum and its outcome reflected three main goals in the collective vision of the Royal Vic: to think big, to consider the integrity of the whole site and to create a plan based on its heritage legacy (Rapport Forum Avenir Royal-Victoria, 2020: 16). The participants wanted to see a redevelopment project that would put Montreal on the map, given the scale and location of the site. They also spoke out about a future that would uphold the architectural, landscaping and functional integrity of the site. The most commonly brought up theme was the continuation of the legacy of the site. Participants were concerned about what the hospital stands for and if this would change should the community take partial ownership of the site (Rapport Forum Avenir Royal-Victoria, 2020). There was also a general consensus among the participants that using the site should not be used for residential functions, whether it was for students or other demographic groups (MPCC, 2020).

#### **4.4 Schedule of decisions**

Finally, I return to my question regarding the contributors to the prolonged vacancy of the site. Planning for any project requires decision making. Making any decision entails myriad factors that include multiple groups, assessments, evaluations, discussions, goals, costs and impacts. In our case, the Royal Vic is no exception to such complexities. While it appears to be stuck in a vacuum of financial, bureaucratic and other administrative inertia, there is a structured and careful decision-making process that is taking place away from the public eye. At the same time, this decision-making in a conceptual backroom may come to demonstrate an uncomfortable, “top



secret” conversation that feels inaccessible by many, as articulated by Richard Adams (1986) at the beginning of this thesis. Examining the existing documents surrounding these issues revealed the slow and complex schedule of decisions that we are told the Royal Vic site must endure before it finds a permanent use. However, I have also come to realize that the complete answer to this question lies beyond this thesis alone.

#### *4.4.1 Evaluative processes*

Since the move in 2015, several processes have been carried out and are still being planned as preparation for redeveloping the site. As explained in the Introduction chapter, The New Vic Project is McGill’s comprehensive vision for redeveloping a portion of the site into a state-of-the-art research, teaching and learning center for sustainability and public policy (The New Vic, 2021). The website created for the New Vic Project explains that the government initially approached the neighbouring university in 2012, so when the facilities moved in 2015, McGill had “already expressed interest” (The New Vic Project, 2021: online). Thus, a year-long feasibility study was launched in early 2015, partly funded by the Québec government and partly by McGill in order to examine the University’s proposal for redeveloping the site. This entailed a task force who organized “a series of consultations and workshops to craft an academic vision for the project” which would push McGill’s mission as a public university and as a solution to the space deficit (The New Vic Project, 2021: online).

In June 2018, the Québec government authorized the Société Québécoise des Infrastructures (SQI) to develop an Opportunity Study for a portion of the Royal Vic site. Alongside this, the SQI helped to develop a master plan for the requalification of the entire site, in close collaboration with McGill and the City of Montreal. Their goal is to assess the buildings so as to ensure long-term physical and functional integrity. The SQI must uphold certain guiding principles in their evaluation of the site, including an obligation towards recognizing heritage values, protecting green spaces to connect with Mount Royal, considering a multiplicity of uses, contributing to the economic development of Québec and engaging multiple stakeholders at various stages of the masterplan (SQI, n.d.). Consequently, the Forum regarding the future of the Royal Vic site was mandated as part of the overall goal of the SQI to involve many key stakeholders and institutional partners to “reflect on the challenges and opportunities of the

future of the site” (Hill and Knowlton Strategies, 2019). Starting in 2020, the SQI began to engage the general public through online consultations and meetings. In June, Sophie Mayes, the general director for the requalification of the Royal Vic, presented the SQI’s work over Zoom, the popular online platform for holding teleconferences, where there were conversations held about the need for spaces to hold “social housing, social economy, community needs... and for an ecological project with greening and urban farming” (Royal Vic for the Public, 2020: online). Shortly after, the SQI held a similar information session with the Table de Quartier Peter-McGill about the future of the Royal Vic site. This was accompanied by an interview with Mallory Wilson of Entremise who proposed the organization’s method for implementing “transitional spaces” onto the site (Royal Vic for the Public, 2020: online).

In 2019, and continuing the timeline set for McGill redeveloping their portion of the site, the Internal User Groups worked with the architects to build a document that includes the program of required spaces, adjacencies, equipment needs and the technical requirements that are part of the Opportunity Study (The New Vic, 2021). The same year witnessed the selection of the architects, engineers, and consultant firms for the redevelopment. Suzanne Fortier, McGill’s Principle also hosted four Town Hall Events for the McGill Community (The New Vic, 2021). The following year, the Design Advisory Team was formed, which is a group of internal academic and administrative stakeholders and experts that work closely with the architects and Project Team on the design for the new space (The New Vic, 2021). This is also when McGill’s Opportunity Study was submitted to the government for review.

At the time of writing this thesis, the SQI’s Master Plan and McGill’s Opportunity Study are recently submitted to the city and the public consultation period begins. The New Vic Project timeline projects the following seven years for development and construction, with a prospective completion date in 2028, however, this is likely to be prolonged.

#### *4.4.2. Financial reasons*

Many debates regarding large redevelopment decisions involve money. Without focusing too closely on the specific amounts, exploring reasons to explain the longevity of the Royal Vic’s vacancy led to issues around funding. Part of the difficulty in planning for the redevelopment of a large site is coming to an agreement on its economic value. How does one make sense of such

a hunk of capital? In 2014, a report into the site, led by a committee headed by Université de Montréal urbanism professor Marie Lessard, warned that transforming the property would be a “complex endeavor” with many risks involved (Siedman, 2014). Before the move, it was already clear that there could be “hidden costs” that could “raise the price tag” for redeveloping the site (Siedman, 2014). Preliminary plans were being made to assess the site and its costs, which was coupled with the uncertainty of funding, as McGill was unclear as to whether they would receive both federal and provincial contributions for the project. Unsurprisingly, a project at the scale of redeveloping a portion of the Royal Vic site would have extensive costs. In 2014, the committee foresaw an early cost of \$850 million, which was projected to balloon immensely, and which was expected to be primarily funded by government entities (Siedman, 2014). Meanwhile, the MUHC was expected to pay to keep the Royal Vic in good condition for only six months after the move in April 2015 (Lacoursiere, 2015). At this time, there was concern that if McGill became the new owners of the site, the MUHC would not receive the \$177 million that was expected in order to help construct the new MUHC. However, as the uncertainty continued, the MUHC had no choice but to continue heating, maintaining and preserving the hospital, draining the hospital conglomeration of \$5 million annually (Lacoursiere, 2015).

A close reading of the Québec Public Infrastructure Plans revealed a seemingly inactive period surrounding the funding for the Royal Vic site. Since the move in 2015, the phase of study in the yearly budgets has remained the same, and is considered as “under study” in the Higher Education and Research sector until the 2020-2030 plan, where it was cited under the “in study” phase (2017-2027 Québec Infrastructure Plan (2017): 40), (2020-2030 Québec Infrastructure Plan (2020): 61). In order for a project to leave the under study stage, an opportunity case must be developed that assesses the project’s relevance and determines the best long-term option. In 2016, the plan stated that McGill University is “carrying out studies to evaluate the possibility of developing the premises and infrastructure on the vacant Royal Victoria Hospital site” (Quebec Public Infrastructure Plan, 2016: 14). Essentially, time is needed. The enduring under study stage is due to the fact that the government does not provide full funds to the project until they move into subsequent planning phases, pointing towards the schedule of decision-making which the government follows for repurposing the Royal Vic.

#### *4.4.3. Heritage conservation*

My investigation into the potential contributors to the prolonged vacancy of the Royal Vic led me to exploring its heritage value and the regulations surrounding it. While only the Hersey Pavilion has federal heritage designation, the entire Royal Vic is situated within the heritage protection area of Mount Royal. My investigation began with an analysis of Montreal's Heritage Policy, whose goal is to establish a system for heritage related actions and to ensure that the city serves as a model owner and administrator (Heritage Policy, 2005). Born out of the Montreal Summit in 2002, the heritage policy is to exemplify Montreal as a leader in promoting a vision of development and transforming it into a collective effort where the active involvement of all Montreal residents is needed (Heritage Policy, 2005). While the one-hundred page long document was written outside my five year interval, it is helpful to brief because it describes what a city-wide heritage system would look like, outlining the potential partnerships between organizations, institutions and members of the general public (Heritage Policy, 2005). One of the goals in the policy was to develop a "heritage watch" that would assist in collecting information on heritage sites throughout the city and to speed up the "decision-making in critical situations" (Heritage Policy, 2005: 45). Consequently, Heritage Montreal developed Memento, a platform that works to raise awareness about endangered sites throughout the city, while also offering a way for citizens to mobilize in response to concerns about heritage (Memento, 2021). This site boasts an interactive map that citizens can contribute to through guided processes of reporting a site and mobilizing for its protection. The Royal Vic is archived as a site on this map, complete with a description of the space and updates concerning its requalification. The interactive website is virtually the only portal that provides Montrealers with information that allows them to collectively develop a database for vacant spaces in the city (Entremise, 2021). Thus, Montreal's heritage policy appears to have improved the process by which heritage sites are recognized and paid attention to by authorities and citizens. However, the lack of accessibility and public data on vacant sites in Montreal still persists and has serious implications for the Royal Vic because it compromises the potential of collaboration between stakeholders (Entremise, 2017).

According to the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, understanding the site is essential for the conservation and ongoing use of a heritage site, and is not complete without a statement of significance that identifies the heritage value and lists the character-defining elements (Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic

Places in Canada, 2010). In a document prepared by the heritage division of the Ville-Marie borough of Montreal, the Royal Vic's heritage interest is due primarily to its contribution to the landscape identity of Mount Royal, its historical testimony to Montreal's Victorian past, and the quality of its architecture (Énoncé De L'intérêt Patrimonial, 2013). The heritage values of the hospital site span across landscape, historical, architectural, artistic and social attributes. As we know, conserving the heritage value of the old hospital is one of the most important guiding principles in the requalification process carried out by the SQI. It is also steering McGill's New Vic Project in their vision to build a center for continuing the original vocation as a place for healing, in their plan for sustainability and public policy towards tackling climate change (The New Vic, 2021). Whether tangible or intangible heritage value, finding a suitable reuse for a legacy site like the Royal Vic is complex, and according to Canada's Standards and Guidelines, it is also a lengthy process. Understanding the conditions of the site, the historical value and the importance to the community will be information that will be used throughout the entire redevelopment process and must remain accessible according to the nationally recognized Standards and Guidelines for conserving heritage.

Gaining an understanding of the contributing factors to the prolonged vacancy of the site reveals that yes, time is needed in order for the site to emerge out of its perceived neglect. However, the issue is far more complex, and hinges on broader systems in place, such as the role that the city plays in infrastructure projects, or the immense cost that such projects require. It is impossible to adequately represent and investigate the many ongoing arrangements that lead to the way the Royal Vic appeared vacant within this thesis.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Now that we have seen the ways that the Royal Vic is subject to a variety of temporary users, as a conceptual space for various opinions and emotions surrounding the transformation of the site, and the various evaluative processes, it is important to interpret the meaning of these findings, put them into context and to understand why they matter. The further I ventured along the path of research; the more doors opened up for other opportunities to investigate. In any case, the findings generated through this thesis are to fill the uncertain space of knowledge that is left when many voices speak at the same time. I hope that this thesis is helpful for organizing the different stories and to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the apparent vacancy.

### 5.1 What kinds of uses and activities took place on the site during the vacancy?

The stories of the temporary uses of the Royal Vic revealed the array of groups that had access to the site over the years of vacancy. News articles generated stories of temporary housing for homeless, health services for refugees, and the use of the old hospital for 19th century period films. As mentioned in the Findings section, animals, critters and the occasional break-in are likely, but the regulated, publicly known uses show us what was allowed to happen at the Royal Vic. These activities can be conceptualized as embodying the differential spaces proposed by Andres (2013) that advocated for several uses of vacant spaces over a longer path of transformation. In this way, the temporary housing during the cold winters offers help to homeless populations in need, while not posing any barriers to the broader program of redeveloping the site for permanent use.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Royal Vic adapted accordingly. As articulated in many news articles, the short-term use of the space as temporary isolation spaces was facilitated and made possible through the effective collaboration across municipal agencies and local organizations. The previous year saw a team of various organizations including Montreal's four largest local homeless shelters, the local health and social services centers, the Red Cross and the SPCA joined forces to make possible the humanitarian mission of the temporary shelter for the homeless. In the case of the play *Progress!*, the initiative was supported by the MUHC from the beginning, showing the kinds of occupations that are allowed to take up space in the site. Using

the Royal Vic during the vacancy proved to be a way for the current owners of the site to make a financial gain, exemplifying the incentive for “transitional spaces” advocated by Entremise that proposed a mutually beneficial relationship through the temporary leasing of the site. Consequently, collaborating and allowing for a variety of different uses creates a dynamic portrait of the Royal Vic that is subject to many different transformative trajectories.

## **5.2 How are the local communities in Montreal reacting?**

Examining the overwhelming participation from the surrounding community was a journey on its own. My coding process revealed some of the key words that emerged through the document analysis, calling attention to the commonly found terms associated with the discussion of the Royal Vic over the years of our interval. Accounting for the several non-profit organizations in the surrounding Montreal area, it became clear that an alternative vision of the Royal Vic was being developed as one that holds space for partial community ownership. While McGill is developing their plans for permanent use for a portion of the site, the MPCC, the Community Council of Peter McGill, the Communauté de St-Urbain, the Royal Vic for the Public Coalition and others are speaking out to claim their share of the site through a democratic yet decentralized planning process. Thus, my research findings fortified again the role of a community perspective in planning that conceptualizes spaces as complex and experiencing continuous change, as articulated by Jane Jacobs (Garcia, 2018: 522). As a collectively governed site, the Royal Vic would fit into a dynamic model that allows for creating spaces that change over time according to the developing priorities of multiple actors (Foo et al., 2014: ). However, this model of development is not always the golden standard, as made legible by Andres (2013) who claimed that decentralized power often leads to weak planning and a lack of clarity. This negative perspective on community ownership was brought up in the Forum hosted by the SQI about the future Royal Vic that voiced concern for proper continuation of the legacy if the future of the site fell solely in the hands of the community.

## **5.3 Why was the Royal Vic vacant for so long?**

Finally, seeking answers to the stretching of a time interval of vacancy proved to be bureaucratic yet necessary. My first research question should be read instead as why the Royal Vic site *appeared* to be vacant of official use for so long, as we have seen that an empty building does not imply neglect, as I had originally thought. A site like the Royal Vic can certainly come to represent a “negotiated sum of many regulation-informed decisions” (Bridgman and Bridgman, 2000: 26). This is clear in the evaluative processes carried out by McGill and the SQI for the requalification of a site. The regimented timelines for these two administrative bodies reveal slow, but intentional methodologies for ensuring that the site is completely understood and accounted for before moving in with a plan. After the Québec government appointed the SQI for the requalification of the site, there was a sentiment of praise for the work being done with the city, because it solidified future plans for the site after years of ominous vacancy. Dinu Bumbaru, policy director for Heritage Montreal said that this meant that “the future of the site was now secure” (CBC News, 2018: online). Furthermore, my brief look into financial influences on the vacancy validated these bureaucratic processes, indicating that funding cannot be allocated to projects until they have left the “under study” stage according to the governmental budget plans. While the stagnation of the Royal Vic is caught in this web of financial and developmental regulations perpetuating the cycle of delayed decision-making, this period of vacancy also points to the necessary assessments that must take place before redevelopment of any site. Thus, spectators to the requalification of a vacant, heritage site require an instillment of trust in the process. Observing the Royal Vic without an official use is confusing, but my research shows that lending trust to the experts on this requalification may be helpful.

The heritage legacy of the site only densifies and lengthens the time it would take to establish a permanent occupation. Finding a suitable and compatible use for the site is a long process because of the requirements outlined by the national standards and guidelines, but also because the local communities have a strong emotional respect for the legacy of the building. The many nostalgic sentiments to the closing of the Royal Vic further exemplifies the emotional investment in the landmark site, making it a more sensitive issue. This deep admiration for heritage sites is reflected in the development of the interactive website by Heritage Montreal, the Forum hosted by the SQI, and even the Montreal Summit of 2002 that echoed a plea for public access and involvement in the preservation and decision-making around heritage buildings. As it was made clear in the Forum, and the various outcries from the Montreal communities over the



years, there is a widely held advocacy for continuing the objective of the Royal Vic as a site that is open to all people regardless of “races and creeds.” Whether it takes the form of community housing or an interdisciplinary university center, the culture for preserving the Royal Vic’s legacy is the same. Clearly, heritage conservation and community involvement are closely associated with one another, solidifying the notion proposed by Ferreira (2018) that suggests that the community plays an important role in conserving heritage buildings because raised awareness develops a sense of ownership of the development process and therefore a better control of its maintenance. While trust is needed in witnessing the vacant Royal Vic, there is also a necessity for reciprocity and transparency on the part of the developer, as Perry et al. (2005) explain that the distribution of power and decision-making is often complex and ambiguous, making it difficult for community participants to make themselves heard in the public debate surrounding the Royal Vic.

#### **5.4 Limitations and further research**

Reflexive and rigorous research calls for a reflection on the limitations and shortcomings of my study. As my subject of research is located in the province of Québec, many of the materials that I stumbled upon, especially those generated by local organizations, are written in French. While I speak French as a second language, I noticed I was less likely to select documents written in the language, and less confident in my extraction and reading of information from them. Despite the easy way to translate documents these days, my thesis might inherently represent the views of anglophone Montrealers more than that of the francophones for this reason. In hindsight, reduction of this language-based bias could have been examined through comparison of French and English press, pulling out potentially different angles and discussing the implications of this.

Furthermore, while document analysis has its advantages, and works well for an undergraduate thesis of this subject matter and approach, there are limitations within the methodology that I encountered along the way. Although I am drawing from a wide variety of sources to best mitigate bias, there is still inherent biased selectivity, as I am pulling from certain organizations whose documents are likely aligned with their agendas and policies (Bowen, 2009). Inherent bias is also evident from the mere fact that I am depending on written work on the issue. There are certainly ongoing conversations happening away from the eye of the media,

community groups and authoritative bodies that are not included in the materials that I used. These may occur in groups that are excluded from the process due to power structures, organization or even age. Analyzing documents also reaches a barrier in qualitative research because of the lack of sufficient details found in documents. Oftentimes, the documents that researchers attempt to inspect are made for purposes outside of research and thus lack the amount of detail needed to answer a complex research question (Bowen, 2009).

To conclude, I must remind the reader that the vacancy of the Royal Vic is not novel. As discussed in the Conceptual Framework Chapter, cities often leave buildings, sites and lots vacant. Such occurrences are wrapped up in social, economic and political processes that carry on without a chance for the integrity of mighty buildings to catch up. We also briefly saw the trend of centralization of hospitals in Montreal that swept up the Royal Vic in the construction of the MUHC, along with a handful of other local hospital sites. The Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice on St-Denis street in downtown Montreal is another example of a heritage building caught between authorities that perpetuate neglect and degradation of the structure of the building. Multiple actors have expressed their frustrations with watching the space reaching dereliction, but no new vocations or plans have been announced by the government agency in charge of the space (Pilon-Larose, 2021). Does this debate sound familiar? Despite organizations and efforts made to improve this process, there still seems to be ample space to improve. The municipal Heritage Policy, related agencies, and Entremise, are steps in the right direction towards a more proactive approach to dealing with vacant sites, however I wish that I knew of these resources and how to mobilize when I walked by the site so many times in 2017. It seems that there are a set of players that are involved in the site's future, but any group or person outside of this network is virtually in the dark about it. Even after researching and writing a thesis on the matter, I still believe there are more aspects to the Royal Vic vacancy buried beneath layers of dense regulations and governance. Further research should focus on the accessibility and democratization of transforming major sites that does not solely rely upon community groups approaching from the outside. Part of this can be an integration into academia, where students from all faculties are exposed to the causes, effects and solutions for vacancy, as we have seen that the issue is very much characterized by its interdisciplinarity. If young people are educated and encouraged to mobilize for these issues, the city will experience fresh perspectives on what sustainability means for a wider variety of citizens.

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