

Youth contributions to changing demographic regimes in industrializing Montreal, 1840-1900

Using a variety of sources (parish registers, census data, tax rolls, etc), the poster aims at describing the demographic regimes that prevailed in industrializing Montreal (Canada) in the second half of the 19th century. More specifically, we seek to address the culturally differentiated nature of these regimes and to unveil the specific role of youth in giving an impetus to the changes. These findings and the multifaceted approach that leads to them can fruitfully be contrasted with more contemporary work on the differentiated role of youth in regions of the developing world.

Two distinct demographic regimes were operating in Montreal during the second half of the nineteenth century: a high pressure regime in which early marriage and strong marital fertility were offset by high levels of infant and child mortality and a low pressure regime in which marriage was delayed, child spacing somewhat longer with more infants and children surviving to replace their parents. These two regimes most clearly conform to major cultural divisions within Montreal defined on the basis of language and religion: the high pressure regime was characteristic of French Canadians (all Catholic), the low wastage regime of the English-speaking community, with variations in age at marriage and childhood mortality existing between the Irish Catholic and Protestant community (English Scots and Irish). Cultural differences in infant mortality cannot be explained by different socio-economic status or to a major extent by different habitats although French Canadians were increasingly concentrated in more crowded dwellings, in more densely populated streets and neighbourhoods and Protestants dominated the wealthy classes. Instead variations have more to do with attitudes and values and with power relations both actual and perceived, and how these intersected with other aspects of the demographic system. There were significant changes in these regimes during the second half of the nineteenth century and these changes were most pronounced among youth making crucial decisions about whether to stay in school, where to work and whether and when to marry or move out. The two graphs below serve to illustrate what are some of these changes and how they will be addressed in the proposed poster.

We recognize five status changes associated with the passage to adulthood – leaving school, entering the workforce, departing from the family of origin, marriage and establishing an independent household. Figure 2 shows the age at which 10, 50 and 90 percent of the population had completed each change of status in 1881. While there are strong similarities in the timing, sequencing, and prevalence of each event, there are some crucial differences. French Canadian women stand out as making each transition, but especially the last three much earlier than other females as well as males. Work started early, and marriage on average occurred two to three years earlier than for Irish and Protestant women, and almost contemporaneously with leaving home and establishing an independent household. Irish Catholic women were much more likely to be in the workforce and to spend longer working than either of the other two groups, delaying leaving home and getting married the longest. Leaving home started as early as 14 (for FC girls and IC men) and continued for all groups until at least age 30. Irish Catholic men tended to remain longest in the parental home 8.7 years on average (compared to 7.8 for AP and 6.6 for FC) and hence probably contributed the longest to the household income, while Irish catholic women spent the longest period single living outside the parental home presumably

living relatively independent of their parental family (4.2 years, compares to 3.7 for Protestants, and only 2.4 years for FC).

Categorizing the trajectories of young women help to further understand how family formation was affected by these differentials in socio-demographic trajectories (Figure 1). In Montreal, French Canadian and Anglo Catholic women aged 15-19 were in a very similar situation in 1901: most of them were living with their family and about half of them had a remunerated occupation, whose wages, though smaller than their brothers', must have contributed in an important way to the family economy. At the same age, Anglo-Protestant women were more often in a position to benefit from their family situation rather than having to contribute financially to the family economy. Having to earn a living was even more common for single women aged 20-24, particularly for the Irish Catholics: more than one half of Irish catholic women in this age group were single and in waged employment compared to 39% of French Canadian and Protestant women. By contrast, almost 40% of French Canadian women were already married at this age compared to much smaller percentages for Anglo Protestants (21%) and Irish Catholics (11%). Between the ages 25 to 30, the modal trajectories also differed quite significantly from one group to another. Almost two-thirds of French Canadian women were married and most of them had children. Anglo Protestant women of the same age were almost equally distributed between single and married and almost three fifths of Anglo Catholic women were single, most of them with an occupation declared: this is 50% higher than among Anglo Protestant and more than twice the percentage observed for French Canadian women. Without any doubt, work and marriage occupied a very different place in the lifetime trajectories of young women belonging to the three Montreal cultural groups.

Figure 1
Female family and work typology
by age and cultural group in 1901

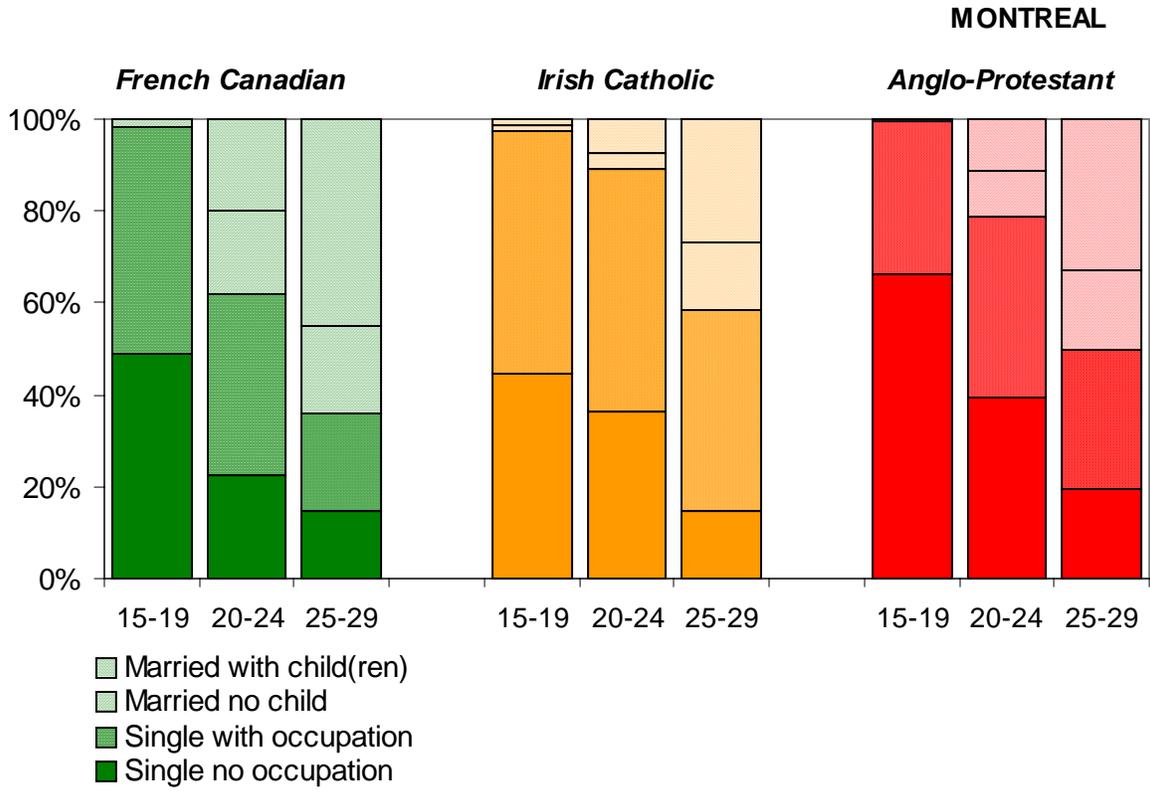


Figure 2

Transitions to Adulthood, Montreal 1881

