

Incredibly Close Yet Extremely Far

The juxtaposition of utopia and reality in Expo 67 and Montréal

Expo 67 was a powerful cultural symbol that represented a utopic and futuristic view of the civilized community. The event, originally sought as an addition to the centennial celebration for the country, took on a life of its own and changed its host city, Montréal. Exploring the event through period photographs of the site and the city; memoirs of the principal administrators of Expo 67; the official guide to exhibitors; and the souvenir book, this article examines how the ideals of Expo 67 immediately influenced the creation of the site and its layout and compares it to the urban planning philosophy of the wider city in the 1960s. It is proposed that the site and its planning were in complete symbiosis with the ideals and values put forth by the organizers of the event, but in the city of Montréal the integration was more diluted. On the newly created island, organizers could shape the nature and the environment that tourists saw and tailor it to reflect an idealized version of a city. The reverberations of the model on the city were more ambiguous as the built infrastructure and the larger scale of Montréal put up challenges to the transfer of the ideals.

Keywords: Expo 67, Montréal, Canada, Québec, urban history, environmental history, world fair

When Canada turned 150 years old in 2017, Montréal celebrated its own 375th anniversary and Montrealers remembered the 50th anniversary of Expo 67. The event, originally sought as an addition to the centennial celebration for the country, took on a life of its own. It was “the best place to be” (Lownsborough, 2012). It changed Quebecers and Montrealers and it altered Montréal.

In the 1960s, Québec saw an explosion of light after the Great Darkness of the earlier decades. Previously, the province was under the tight, conservative control of Maurice Duplessis and of the Catholic Church. The '60s saw the liberalization of society, culture, and politics, as well as a fast secularization (C. Brown & Linteau, 1990). Québec changed from a backwards society to a modern society, from a



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survival economy to a growth economy (Marsan, 1983). But the lights were sometimes dimmed. The popularization of Québec nationalist ideals was accompanied by the rise of a radical branch seeking independence for Québec in more violent ways (C. Brown & Linteau, 1990). These troubles did not, however, stop Montréal's mayor, Jean Drapeau. He had big ideas and modernized Montréal at an accelerated rhythm (Choko, 2001). Expo 67 would be Drapeau's crowning achievement. It brought the world to Montréal and Montréal onto the world stage (C. Brown & Linteau, 1990).

Materially, the event served as a driving force for the renovation of the city's infrastructure. Culturally, Expo 67 presented values and ideals the organizers hoped would be recognized and followed. So, how did the ideals of Expo 67 influence the creation of the site, its layout, and Montréal in the '60s? For the scope of this article, it will be necessary to limit ourselves to points of convergence between Expo 67 and Montréal while the event was being planned or ongoing, not its influence at large or in time.

The site and its planning were in complete symbiosis with the ideals and values put forth by the organizers of the event, but in the city the integration was more moderated. On the newly created island, organizers could shape the nature and the environment that tourists saw and tailor it to reflect an idealized version of a city (Kenneally & Sloan, 2010). But the reverberations of the model on the city were more ambiguous. It will be necessary to first delve into the history of Expo 67 to understand what it represented so that we can examine how this one-time event shaped a new city utopia.

THE HISTORY OF AN EVENT AND ITS SITE

An international exposition is a transnational event whose goal is to encourage co-operation, innovation, and progress, and to educate the public (Bureau International des Expositions, n.d.-a). After countries present bids to host an exposition, a host country is chosen by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), the international governing body that oversees all international exhibitions (Bureau International des Expositions, n.d.-b). The host country is then responsible for planning the event and invites "other countries, companies, international organizations, the private sector, the civil society and the general public to participate" (Bureau International des Expositions, n.d.-a). The BIE is also responsible for classifying the exhibitions they regulate. Montréal's Expo 67 was classified as a first-category universal and international exhibition. A first-category fair simply means that it must cover "the full range of activities of contemporary man." It was Canada's first hosting experience and North America's debut "first category" fair (Lambert, 2015, para. 2).

Expo 67 was to be held in a year that was special for both Canada and Montréal. The year 1967 was the year of the centenary of Confederation and the 325th anniversary of the city. But the exposition almost didn't happen. The fair was

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originally awarded to Moscow but when the Soviets backed out in 1962, Drapeau swooped in and secured the exhibition for his city.

The Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition was created by the Government of Canada to build and run the exhibit, but the City of Montréal was responsible for finding and preparing the site (Lambert, 2015). With two years of lost time, time was of the essence, yet the mayor decided to create a completely new site, on islands on the St. Lawrence River (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968). Sainte-Hélène Island had existed previously but was enlarged. The river was filled in to incorporate other smaller islands surrounding it. The artificial Notre-Dame Island was completely created for the event, while MacKay Pier, a narrow peninsula created to protect the Port of Montréal from currents in the river, was enlarged to become Cité du Havre (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964; "Cité du Havre—Grand répertoire du patrimoine bâti de Montréal," n.d.). Against all odds, and all skeptics, the city delivered the site on time to the Corporation, which in turn delivered Expo on time to the public (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968; Dupuy, 1972; Legault, 2002).

Figure 1. Sainte-Hélène Island Before Construction. 1962. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Aerial view from the east of Sainte-Hélène Island before enlargement.

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Figure 2. Sainte-Hélène Island Before Construction. 1962. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Aerial view from the west of Sainte-Hélène Island before enlargement.

Figure 3. Expo 67 Site After Construction. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Aerial view from the west of the site while the structures are being erected on each of the three locations. Mackay Pier is in the front, Sainte-Hélène Island in the middle of the river, while Notre-Dame Island delimits the St. Lawrence Seaway and faces the South Shore.

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Figure 4. Expo 67 Site After Construction. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Aerial view from the west of the site, showing the agricultural nature of the South Shore, at the top, and the density of buildings in Montréal. The wave of new mega-buildings preceding and accompanying Expo 67 is visible at the bottom of the picture. Among others, Place Ville-Marie, Place des Arts, Place Bonaventure, the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, and the CIBC tower are visible.

The Corporation broadcasted ideals of civilization and humanity through Expo 67. It was a chance to show to the world and to Canadians that Canada could realize a masterwork. Pierre Dupuy, the Commissioner General of Expo 67, believed that before anything else, world exhibitions were a demonstration of national pride. He considered the Expo a necessary rite of passage, to show that Canada and Montréal could fully and brilliantly participate in international cultural life (Dupuy, 1972).

In the quest to impress the international public, and perhaps distract locals from current events, Expo 67 ended up changing the images of the country, the province, and the city (Marsan, 1983). Hosting an event of this calibre propelled Canada from second-rank status into the upper ranking of nations. Québec no longer seemed backwards and focused on its past. It was a modern, technological society. Montréal, from a provincial big city, became a great, cosmopolitan city (Marsan, 1983).

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According to Dupuy, the principle of a world exhibition was to put the focus on what humankind had achieved since the last exhibition took place (Dupuy, 1972). It was also to explain the world we live in, and the beauty and harmony of the site were the medium to carry the message (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968). Expo 67 marked the triumph of design and the total environment, which is an environment completely designed as one, where the whole of the infrastructure is thought of as one integrated system (Jasmin, 1997; Lownsborough, 2012). The site had style. It was beautiful, dramatic, and efficient. It was the glorified alter ego to the bigger city across the river, a demonstration of what it could become if it followed the new trends in architecture and urban planning (Lortie et al., 2004). The selection of a theme and four sub-themes for the event showed the strong role that planning played in the event.

The framework used to showcase the ideals and values of the exposition was “Man and his World,” a theme organizers believed highlighted the interdependence of humankind, en route to a common civilization. The theme was to convey the same idealist notions as the Saint-Exupéry novel of the same name, a tale of a non-factional and co-operative brotherhood for all humankind (Krölller, 1997). In the context of the centennial celebration, it was also understood as a means of supporting the myth of Canada as a bicultural and bilingual nation (Krölller, 1997). Expo officials wanted humankind to realize that in a world where new technologies made faraway lands your neighbours, what united humanity was stronger than what separated it. They wished to create an all-inclusive event, inviting all religions, the smallest and newest nations, and youth, who also had their own pavilion (Dupuy, 1972).

The main theme had four sub-themes highlighting the ideals. “Man the Explorer” was to explore the environment humankind lived in. “Man the Creator” surveyed the creative genius of humans, the aesthetics they surrounded themselves with. “Man the Producer” explored how humanity studied and refined the raw materials of the world to better use them. And finally “Man and the Community” was to explore the problems posed by population growth in urban centres (Dupuy, 1972, p. 38).

THE CONFRONTATION OF IDEALS ON SITE AND IN THE CITY

In a feat of engineering, the city created 59,120 feet of dykes to shape the islands (Grenier, 1965). Then, 28 million tonnes of earth were moved (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968). The earth came first from dredging the bottom of the river, then from an endless flow of trucks bringing earth to the site from the South Shore and from the digging of the subway. That was still not enough: existing small islands on site were excavated into lakes and lagoons to provide more fill, and then canals were created, saving the city seven million tonnes of fill (Grenier, 1965). The mayor of Montréal describes the islands as “a man-made exhibition site,

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fashioned to order for maximum beauty, interest and functional convenience” (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, “Canada at Home to the World” brochure, “Office of the Mayor of Montreal” page).

The landscaping effort was equally impressive. The original Sainte-Hélène Island was a 135-acre park and was kept as such for Expo, a rest area from the high-culture and permanent activity around the site (Lownsbrough, 2012). Once enlarged, the island took up 330 acres. Notre-Dame Island added 310 acres to the total, and MacKay Pier became a 148-acre site from its original 48 acres (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, Yellow booklet; Grenier, 1965). The lakes, canals, lagoons, and the 27 bridges built to cross them added to the landscape. On this newly fashioned land, nature needed help growing fast for opening day. Sixty-five tonnes of grass were installed in one month. About 186,000 trees and plants were laid out, and 700,000 flowers were planted. All this greenery was then adorned with 58 fountains, 198 outside sculptures, and 6,200 public benches for pedestrians to sit, rest, and admire the scenery (Jasmin, 1997).

Civilization

The choice of creating land in such a vast, underpopulated country as Canada was questioned. Plenty of land was still available to construct such a site, and the city would be in a better position to recuperate it for other purposes (Grenier, 1965; Legault, 2002; Lownsbrough, 2012). For Drapeau and Dupuy, it was a civilizing act. The city was proving it was no longer backwards by proving it could create a new world. It also re-established a link between the city and the city’s waterway, which were blocked off from one another by the port and industrial neighbourhoods (Quintric, 1971).

The St. Lawrence, in Dupuy’s obviously Eurocentric view, was the all-important river through which “la civilisation est arrivée en notre pays”; it was “au coeur de notre histoire” and was still “la grande artère de notre prospérité” (Dupuy, 1972, pp. 24-25). A great focus was put into the capacity of the city to create and modify nature, to make it comply with the needs and expectations of humans. It was a point of pride discussed abundantly, with many statistics included throughout official documentation from the Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition and private memoirs of organizers such as Yves Jasmin and of journalists such as Raymond Grenier.

This demonstration of civilization needed to be easily accessible to all. The road and highway system of the city was improved at an accelerated rate. Links to the United States highways were created, paths of local highways were changed, lanes were added, and roads were converted into highways and expressways. Bridges were created to link the city and the islands, or modified to better serve the site. The new subway system was extended to stop on site (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, Yellow booklet). Vast parking lots were created and

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linked to the site by Expo-Express, a rapid transit system on a continuous loop around the perimeter of the site, designed for external access (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, Yellow booklet; Jasmin, 1997; Lownsborough, 2012).

The newly extended road system in and around Montréal was also a point of pride. It made Montréal modern, a motor city. The premier of Québec, in his letter welcoming exhibitors to Québec, suggested they visit not just Montréal, but also the province and its “fine highways and quaint by ways” (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, “Canada at Home to the World” brochure, “Bienvenue dans la Province de Québec” page).

Figure 5. Map of Expo 67 Site. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. This map showcases the layout of the event and the path of Expo-Express, two parking lots, one west of Victoria Bridge, the other, on the South Shore, and the location of the subway station on Sainte-Hélène Island, west of the wooded area.

The Total Environment

While the islands and the accesses leading to them were built by the city, the federal and provincial governments and the Corporation were responsible for the layout of the site and overseeing building construction. Colonel Edward Churchill was in charge of all construction. He used the latest construction planning techniques, known as the critical path method, to minimize construction delays and problems

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and deliver the finished site on time (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968). The chief architect was Edouard Fiset. He worked to create a major city park and an extension of the city centre (Lortie et al., 2004). One relatively small team not only supervised the construction but also dictated rules and regulations exhibitors had to follow in the design and building of their pavilions. The use of certain materials and shapes, such as the tetrahedron, were recommended. Additionally, the way exhibitors could use the land allotted to them was regulated (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, Purple booklet). For example, 40% of the lot of the pavilion had to be grass (Lownsborough, 2012). Pavilions were dispersed throughout the site to promote circulation and prevent congestion. Permanent buildings were to be set up on the Cité du Havre, to not jeopardize the future of the islands (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968, p. 48). Expo 67 was to be a utopia, but a very pragmatic one (Lortie et al., 2004).

Planning in the city was not as integrated. The city planning department had to deal with more challenges. Their area of supervision was bigger and the built environment was more extensive. They also had to deal with the population. They had to make do with what existed and deal with private investors. While they could regulate to a certain degree, they could not be as dictatorial as the Expo planners were (Vanlaethem, 2008). The city was the real world; the site, a case study.

The goal of the site planning was ultimately to remove irritants, such as congestion, long wait lines, and inadequate services. The islands had their own water, electricity, gas, and communications systems (Jasmin, 1997). The site also had its own fire station and its own treatment plant for waste water (Legault, 2002). Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, Director of Operations (dubbed Mayor of Expo), had at his disposal during the event an operations centre at the leading edge of technology. The centre was equipped with a multitude of screens, maps, and other technology to keep an eye on everything, including keeping the public safe and Expo running smoothly. The men designing and running the site thought of it as a beautiful city, and their city was to be kept not only safe, but spotless. And clean it was: trash cans were installed everywhere (Lownsborough, 2012).

The flow of visitors was to be smooth, therefore, they decided to limit the number of entrances to the site. Deliveries were to take place only at night, and emergency vehicles had isolated access roads (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, Yellow Booklet; Lownsborough, 2012). As for transit, roads, the subway, and Expo-Express moved visitors only from the city to the site. On site, a variety of transit options were available including the mini-rail, the trailer-trains, the sky-ride, hovercrafts, and the canal boats. These were designed primarily as amusement or for sightseeing purposes but were all planned to be fully integrated with one another (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968).

Figure 6. MacKay Pier, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Scale model of Cité du Havre, where the permanent buildings were located. The stadium is located where the Goose Village neighbourhood used to be.

Figure 7. Sainte-Hélène and Notre-Dame Islands, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



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Note. Scale model of the two islands with pavilions. This picture shows the thoughtful layout. Major pavilions, such as the Canadian (inverted pyramid at the tip of Notre-Dame Island), U.S. (the big bubble on the south side of Sainte-Hélène Island), and Soviet (facing the U.S. pavilion, across the pedestrian bridge to Notre-Dame Island), were spread out to facilitate circulation. We can also see the track of the mini-rail, the on-site circulatory system, zig-zagging between buildings, and even entering the U.S. pavilion.

Figure 8. Sainte-Hélène Island, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Scale model of the east-end tip of Sainte-Hélène Island, the amusement area of the site, where the amusement park La Ronde was built, and the marina. The track of the mini-rail is more discernible in this photograph.

Aesthetics

The pedestrian was to be king at Expo. The streets were designed for the walker's benefit. Planners tried to isolate pedestrians as much as possible from mechanized transport systems, and offer them rest areas and beautiful vistas (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1968). As the *Architectural Record* magazine said, Expo 67 was "a brilliantly ordered visual world" (cited in Lownsbrough, 2012, p. 64). The beautiful views were provided in part by the monumental and innovative architecture of the pavilions, showcasing the latest styles, such as the iconic geodesic dome of the United States, designed by Buckminster Fuller; Habitat 67 by Israeli-Canadian architect Moshe Safdie

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(Lownsborough, 2012); and Katimavik, the Canadian pavilion, deemed spectacular enough to be visited by Daredevil and thus reproduced in a comic by Stan Lee (Kenneally & Sloan, 2010).

Pierre Dupuy was particularly proud of his team's ability to manipulate what people thought of nature. He remembered in his memoir that "visitors had no idea they were on an artificial site" (Dupuy, 1972, p. 131). The new urban park created by his team not only re-linked the city to its waterway, but it mirrored the other major park of Montréal, Mount Royal. The parks faced each other and sandwiched downtown between them, offering views of each other, of downtown, and of the water.

Architecture in the city was already oriented towards the modern monumental International style (Lortie et al., 2004; Marsan, 1983). In the 1960s, Montréal was home to the mega structure, constructions of massive scale or a complex of many buildings, and if Expo changed anything, it was the pace of construction in the years leading up to the event (Lortie et al., 2004).

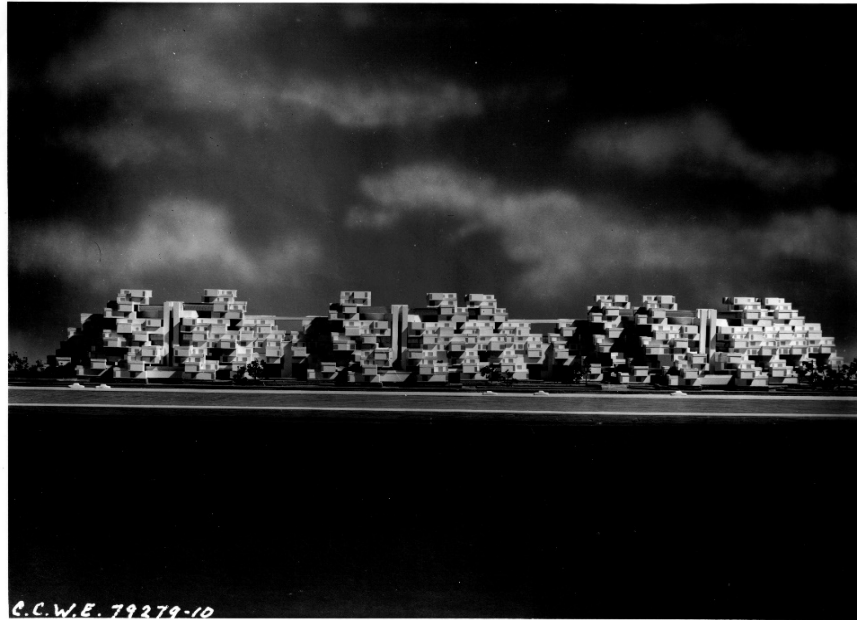
Figure 9. U.S. Pavilion. Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. United States pavilion, a massive dome of 250 feet across and 187 feet high, with the mini-rail track crossing it.

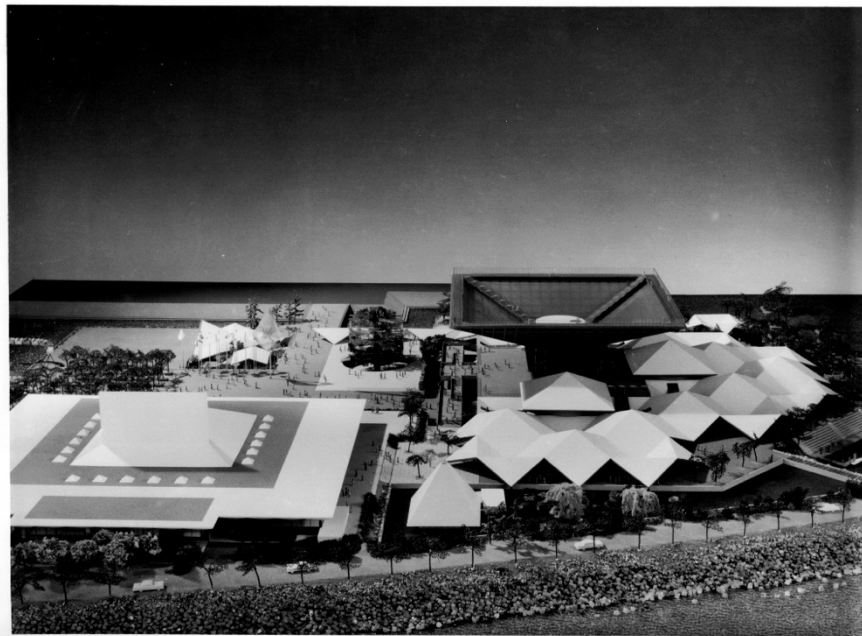
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Figure 10. Habitat 67, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Habitat 67 on Cité du Havre. The pyramidal cluster was an experimentation in low-cost and high-density residential housing.

Figure 11. Canadian Pavilion, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. Katimavik, the Canadian Pavilion, a giant inverted pyramid.

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Figures 12 and 13. Québec Pavilion, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. The Québec Pavilion, giving a new image to the province that was in the process of shedding its traditional image. Day view and night view.

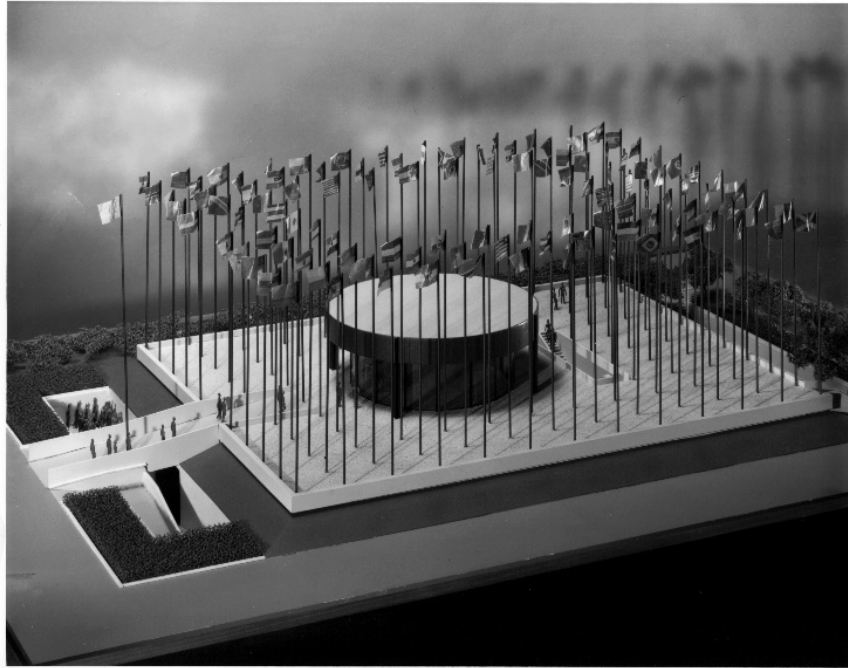
Unity

The Exhibit was located on built islands on the St. Lawrence River, neither in the English part of town, nor in the French neighbourhoods, a good way to avoid a quarrel over prestige between the two populations of the city. It was new ground for a new equal co-operation. The site was isolated from the core of the city but gave a dramatic view of downtown, allowing visitors a moment of reflection on the division of the city (Quintric, 1971). The organizing committee was also made up of both Francophones and Anglophones, presenting an image of inclusion. Pierre Dupuy was Commissioner General, Robert F. Shaw, his Deputy. The General Manager was A.G. Kniewasser. Jean-Claude Delorme was in charge of the Secretariat while Dale Rediker oversaw Finance and Administration. Colonel Edward Churchill was in charge of Installations, while Pierre DeBellefeuille took care of Exhibitors and Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien took over Operations (Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition, 1964, Red booklet). The reality there may have been different from the image, with meetings reportedly held in only one language when unilingual persons were present (Krölller, 1997).

The choice of building a new site in neither Francophone nor Anglophone territory prevented further clashes in the city. It also prevented land speculation (Quintric, 1971). New roads and mass transit allowed for better communications between neighbourhoods, suburbs, and the city. Roads also allowed the development of new communities on the South Shore, now better linked to Montréal. But because of the roads, communities were also divided and relocated, such as the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) neighbourhood when the Décarie expressway was built (Castonguay & Dagenais, 2011). The event also caused communities to be destroyed. The working class neighbourhood of Goose Village, for no other crime than being deemed unsightly, was demolished and the population dispersed (Bednarz, n.d.; [Montréal], n.d.).

The quest of organizers to have the largest possible variety of exhibitors provided a more active example of inclusion, where different groups interacted and co-operated with each other. The goal was to have each religion represented during Expo 67, and while this could not be achieved, many Catholic churches co-operated to help create an ecumenical pavilion. The Canadian Jewish community built the House of Judaism and Thailand built a Buddhist shrine. Co-operation between nations was promoted by the presence of the United Nations and the European Economic Association (Dupuy, 1972; Lambert, 2015).

Figure 14. UN Pavilion, Scale Model. 1966. Private Collection of the Author, Montréal



Note. The United Nations Pavilion included a “Restaurant of All Nations.”

The sense of unity was further provided by the pedestrian nature of the site and the preference of planners for mass transit. Visitors were never truly isolated from one another, like they would have been if they were in cars. They could discuss with one another, exchange, and share on their experiences. On the precepts of the urban park, the site had areas of relaxation and contemplation, as well as amusement. The amusement was found in the pavilions, of course, especially the Youth Pavilion, but even more so in La Ronde, the amusement park built on the edge of Sainte-Hélène Island, and the marina built next to it. It was also found in the events of the World Arts Festival, the Montréal Film Festival, special sporting events, and performances offered throughout the duration of the world fair (Lambert, 2015).

These sportive and cultural events happened not only on the site of Expo 67, but in the city as well. While no venues were created specifically for these events on the main island, the entire population could share in the experiences they provided. Montrealers could tell the tale of when the Bolshoi Opera of Moscow, La Scala of Milan, or The Supremes performed in their town (T. C. Brown, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Expo 67 was a powerful cultural symbol that represented a utopic and futuristic view, designed to alter perceptions of both Canada and Montréal (Kröller, 1997). The key

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concepts of the event were civilization defined by progress and modernity; the total environment shaped by planning and technology; aesthetics, both natural and cultural; and finally unity created by a sense of community between all peoples and the celebration of diversity. They all found an expression in the site. The site showed great control over the environment. The coordination of multiple transit systems was modern and technological, while one team handling all design decisions allowed the establishment of a utopia on site. Nature was shaped to cultural standards, while at the same time, culture was located in nature. All this effort was taken to invite the world to a big party celebrating diversity but highlighting the unifying factors of all.

These ideals were not all transferred to the city. The trend towards modernity and progress was already present, but Expo 67 reinforced it. While the aesthetic revolution towards the modern style of architecture was already ongoing in Montréal prior to the site's design, the total environment of the site was not as feasible on as large a scale as Montréal, with more uncontrollable variables and a large built environment already present. In this case, it would appear the event mirrored the city and not the other way around. The addition of over 640 acres of land on the water helped the city redefine its link to the St. Lawrence.

But the biggest impact was on the community. Even if it irrevocably damaged some communities, such as Goose Village or NDG, the goals of the organizers were achieved: Canada put on a great show, Québec and Montréal were modernized, and an incredible sense of community was created among participants and visitors of the event.

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