



# NEWCOMERS TO MONTREAL AND THE ROLE UNIVERSITIES PLAY

ALAN SHEPARD AT THE ITALIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN CANADA  
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*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Most of what I have to say today is about the future.

But I wanted to start by talking about an apple orchard here in Montreal in the nineteenth century.

Because Concordia's early relationship with the Italian community in this city literally has its roots in Giovanni Donegani's apple orchard.

The first Loyola College campus here was built on the site of Donegani's orchard at the intersection of Bleury and Ste-Catherine. The campus was moved west some years later.

Concordia is the offspring of Loyola and our other founding institution, Sir George Williams University.

Sir George, a friend to immigrants, opened its arms to many Italians during a second wave of immigration to Montreal that began in the 1940s.

And that's why, of Concordia's almost 190,000 alumni, many are of Italian heritage.

My own affection for Italy was sealed at age 20. I was backpacking around Tuscany.

I was in love with the art and the architecture, of course, and with the sheer pleasure of being in a place of such beauty and history. It was an adventure.

And then there was also...the gelato — chocolate, lemon — all of them. I practiced great restraint. I vowed to limit myself to only *four* gelati a day.

One for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and one extra when I happened upon it. The joy of the 20-year-old brain and the metabolism of youth.

Today, the experience of an international student, however, is more than just gelato.

The young people from around the globe who flock to Montreal are part of a growing, highly mobile, highly talented work force.

When looking to start a career, graduates in Montreal face a lot of choices. Not simply Montreal or Toronto, as we often hear. It's between Montreal and Shanghai, Tel Aviv and Silicon Valley.

These new graduates are like draft picks for our society, if you will. Recruit them and keep them, and you'll have a great season, maybe even a dynasty.

But if we are drafting from the entire planet, we are also competing against it.

Given our low birth rate, Montreal will increasingly depend on immigration to compete against such rapidly developing countries as China, India and Brazil.

Not so long ago, Canada was also a developing country. The 1.5 million Canadians who are of Italian heritage today — and one out of every seven Montrealers — are the legacy of powerful periods of immigration to support that development.

In today's knowledge economy, what matters more than ever is recruiting a healthy influx of people and the new ideas they bring.

And universities play a key role in attracting people and integrating them into our communities.

As Montreal tries to grow the next Saputo, CGI, Biochem Pharma, and others, then, partnerships with universities become crucial.

Six months ago, at the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, I presented ideas toward a renaissance — *un rinascimento* — of this city.

Today I will offer four proposals on how to attract and keep international student talent.

First, a few quick facts.

Canada has more than a quarter million international students. That's more than double the number in 2001. And the federal government wants to double it again by 2022.

Canada is the seventh most popular host country for international students.

They contribute more than \$8 billion a year to our economy.

And their presence supports 86,000 jobs — more than Canada's aerospace industry.

As for Montreal, it's Canada's top student city, with more than a quarter million post-secondary students.

And more than 10% of those are international students.

Last year, *The Economist* magazine ranked 80 world cities according to their return on investment for international students. Montreal finished first.

So yes, Montreal attracts terrific people to study here.

Yet our city has one of the lowest hiring rates of university graduates in Canada.

For the 18- to 25-year-old crowd, Montreal has a net population gain. Beyond age 25, however, it's a net loss.

So we're effectively educating people for other cities. We need to fix that.

What next steps can we take together to draft a winning team for the next generation for Montreal and Quebec?

Here are four ideas, in the order a newcomer would live them, from first inspiration to move here to making a life here.

First, love in the age of social media.

Back in the Italian Renaissance, the poet Petrarch practically invented romantic love, or at least our modern ideas of it.

Recruiting talent is a kind of courtship. People make life decisions based on what they can find out, yes, but also on...the vibe.

If we want newcomers to fall in love with us, then my **first idea** is that we should do more in concrete ways to make newcomers feel special and welcome. They need to know the information and the vibe.

First, the information piece. Today, our city's biggest draw is our reputation, and our biggest welcome mat is our web presence.

Under Dominique Anglade's leadership, Montréal International has just launched a new visual identity and web platform which is very welcoming to newcomers. A great first step.

Progress has been made with Quebec's immigration websites. And under the leadership of Mayor Coderre, Montreal has already set its sights on becoming a Smart City, providing citizens quicker, more user-friendly information.

But we have to do more. When a potential immigrant visits our websites, it would be great if they felt as if we were reaching out from the computer screen to shake their hand and welcome them.

Around the world, Montreal is at least as well known as Quebec as a tourist and cultural destination.

However, the City of Montreal's website has no direct links to the Government of Quebec's immigration portal.

What's more, within this immigration portal, one must click through several links before reaching the Montreal page. And certain pages are only available in French.

For a more welcoming model, look to New York City.

Their website for newcomers has intuitive links.

You can navigate it in 35 languages.

They engage you on Facebook and Twitter.

And on the ground, their immigration offices serve visitors in more than seven languages.

This is all in the spirit of New York, crystallized in the Statue of Liberty.

New York's own renaissance since 1970 has been driven largely by immigrants.

In the 1970s, 8% of New Yorkers were born abroad. Today, 37%.

If we want people to come to Montreal, we have to be explicit about it.

That is the *vibe* piece of the equation.

Maybe we don't need a Statue of Liberty on Nuns' Island.

What we do need, though, are very public gestures that inspire new arrivals *and* Montrealers.

Because now, there is sometimes a mismatch between our incredibly friendly and helpful citizens and Quebec's official policies.

As a newcomer to Quebec, I've experienced that myself. Our ways of welcoming people should reflect our open nature.

I suggest we extend that consistency to our immigration policies. Montreal receives 85% of the province's immigrants.

Beyond improving our information, it makes sense to allow Montreal some considerations when it comes to immigration.

These should be considered as part of the special status Mayor Coderre is currently seeking from the Government of Quebec.

On to **Idea 2**: Let's create financial incentives for international students to stay here. I suggest a tuition tax rebate, applied over 10 years of residency.

Even if international students pay much higher tuition rates than Quebecers, it is still low compared to what they would pay in other regions — especially for the quality of education.

But imagine how much more attractive Quebec would be if we could bring rates down to our unbeatable in-province tuition.

If these students secure a job in Quebec after graduating, let's offer to knock down the tuition they paid to in-province rates retroactively.

Do you think that goes too far? Well, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick all have such tax relief in place.

To turn these education tourists into citizens, we have to equip them to integrate easily. In Montreal, that means speaking French.

So, my **third idea** is a project I'll call "Discover Quebec."

If you talk to any group of out-of-province students nearing the end of their degree, they are preoccupied with figuring out how to make a living and a life in Montreal.

So many want to stay here. But for recent graduates with neither job experience nor French competency, finding a job can be really tough.

The best way to learn French in Montreal is, of course, to find a Quebecois girlfriend or boyfriend.

But for the rest of us, ordinary language programs can help. And good ones already exist.

At Concordia, we offer excellent French courses through our *Oui Can Help* program.

But as a society, we could go further.

Instead of a maze of options, what if we showed students a well-lighted pathway toward French competency, so that by the time they graduate, they have the tools to stay here.

Students could follow a coherent, well-organized "Discover Québec" program during their entire course of study, not just for a summer, let's say.

It could teach newcomers about Quebec's language, history and culture. And this is crucial — it could also arrange co-op placements in Francophone workplaces.

And it could lead, then, to tangible benefits: residency status, a job offer — a *place* in Quebec society.

Beyond linguistic immersion, there are steps we can *all* take to help newcomers integrate.

So my **fourth idea** is to broaden the responsibility for welcoming immigrants. I have a quick example.

To make finding culture easier for busy students, Concordia is working with *La Vitrine*. This non-profit organization connects Concordians to Montreal's cultural scene.

This year, *La Vitrine* is launching a pilot project to give all new international students across the city a \$50 credit toward any cultural event — music, theatre, fine art, dance and more.

Remember that culture is often the glue that keeps people here.

Perhaps there is something each of *you* could do.

Just as you would shake hands with a new neighbour, you can help in this grand project whatever line of work you're in. A promotional offer, maybe, or sponsoring an event popular with new Montrealers.

Helping newcomers make a life here requires all of us.

So, we've attracted them with information, a welcoming vibe and credits on their tax return.

And we've immersed them in Quebec's language and culture.

Finally, more than ever, we really need to focus on the quality of daily life on the Island.

Green space. Green vegetables. Good daycare. Space to exercise.

Good urban planning improves the quality of life for everyone.

Today's model cities, from Copenhagen to Melbourne to New York, are being planned on a human scale.

Rather than spending your time sitting in traffic or looking for parking, imagine instead taking your kids to the park, enjoying dinner and music with friends, picking up your groceries on your way home — all on foot.

The urban design elements that appeal to youth will keep us all young.

Keeping young professionals on the Island rather than letting them slip away to other cities and provinces, or to the States, is a key factor in Montreal's renaissance.

Clearly, we already do a great deal to attract international students to Montreal.

With most immigrants settling in cities, urban universities like Concordia become key players. In our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, almost 15% of Concordia's student body — some 6,500 students — come from abroad.

But our reach doesn't end there. Among our hundreds of international connections, eight are with Italian institutions, including the world's oldest university, the University of Bologna, a beautiful place.

These links are in fields ranging from nanochemistry to environmental engineering, psychology to cinema.

Such agreements improve our research output and our learning environment, and they are good international advertisements for Concordia and Montreal.

But if we don't help the people we attract and train to integrate into society — if we don't finish the job we've invested so much in — and you've invested in, too, by the way — then international students may just pass through Montreal on their way to somewhere else.

Instead, we should invite them to see themselves as helping build our city and our future.

To recap quickly my four ideas:

1. Step up the courtship of newcomers by providing better information, projecting a warmer vibe, and giving Montreal more control over immigration.
2. Create financial incentives for international students to stay. A rebate on their tuition rates is one model, but surely there are others.
3. Create an integrated program, "Discover Quebec," that teaches out-of-province students more about Quebec's language and culture and prepares them to live here.

And 4. Broaden the responsibility of helping newcomers to integrate to life in Montreal. Good neighbours make good citizens.

Just as next-generation universities will thrive by opening our gates rather than by locking people out, Montreal needs to do everything it can to attract the greatest talent, then nurture it here in Quebec.

Executing the ideas I've presented today is not beyond our reach. We can do it.

One final thought.

Every major city around the globe — our competition — is looking to recruit.

In February, many of you were engaged by the report on Montreal, commissioned by Concordia chancellor Jacques Ménard and BMO, and conducted by Boston Consulting Group.

And this fall, we'll all have a chance to envision a bold future for this city at *Je vois Montréal*, the citizens' summit that follows up on that report.

In the meantime, if you have ideas about how your business or sector could work with Concordia, my door is always open.

If we understand what each other needs and has to offer, we can turn that much sooner from discussion to action.