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Fostering the Well-Being of English-Speaking Quebecers Through Community Involvement?

A Statistical Analysis of the Relationship Between Activism and Individual Happiness

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QUESCREN is a collaborative network of researchers, stakeholders, educational and other institutions that improves understanding of Quebec's English-speaking communities and promotes their vitality. It is housed at the School of Community and Public Affairs at Concordia University in Montreal.

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Table of contents

Introduction

Scholars of many disciplines have studied Canadian official language minority communities (OLMCs) such as the English-speaking communities in Quebec. One of the most successful research frameworks draws on the notion of vitality. Studies on vitality, be it construed as group vitality (e.g., Bourhis et al. 2019), subjective vitality (e.g., Landry and Allard 1994) or community vitality (e.g., Floch, Abou-Rjeili, and Durand 2017), have provided detailed empirical portraits of OLMCs.

While scholars working in the latter area have addressed the many symptoms, causes, and consequences of strong and weak vitality, this working paper will provide empirical insights on a less often studied side of the question. Specifically, the extant literature has addressed the issue of vitality by examining aggregate indicators; this working paper will examine solutions that may improve the well-being of OLMCs at the individual level.

Recent policy developments (e.g., the school board reform) have prompted concerns among stakeholders as to the strength of their institutional network, which seems to be weakening. Such concerns, voiced by stakeholders and researchers alike (e.g., Bourhis 2012), have been ongoing in the recent history of Quebec politics. By analyzing whether individuals engaged in community networks and organizations are more likely to be happy, this working paper may result in recommendations that could foster the well-being of members of Quebec's English-speaking communities and provide a way for decision-makers to address these concerns. In a nutshell, the paper will address the following questions:

> *Does being directly involved in the activities of organizations, groups, institutions, and networks in Quebec's English-speaking communities contribute to individual happiness? If so, to what extent? What does that mean in light of the issue of community vitality?*

To answer these questions, first, a literature review of the relationship between participation and happiness is conducted. The review shows that, although many definitions of the two concepts are utilized, participation is generally found to increase happiness. In the second section, the paper tests the hypothesis that participants in Anglophone organizations and networks in Quebec are individually happier as a result. Descriptive statistics and two multivariate regression models are presented along with an interpretation of the findings. A comparison using a similar original data set allows for increased reliability of results by using Franco-Ontarians as a control group. By and large, the evidence corroborates the hypothesis developed in the previous section. The paper concludes that the more individual members of the minority community are offered opportunities to participate in their community, the more they will do so, and—as the evidence in this paper shows—the more they will tend to be happy with their life in Quebec. Implications are discussed and policy recommendations are provided in the last section.

Literature Review: Does Participation Foster Individual Well-Being?

Participation is a broad topic, debated and studied across a variety of research areas in the social sciences. Though the themes in relation to which participation is studied are many, the present literature review will focus exclusively on how it relates to well-being (or happiness).

Researchers have developed different concepts akin to the notion of participation, many of which have yielded evidence of a positive effect on well-being. Among others, Adler (1964) developed the notion of social interest, a "concern with fostering the welfare of others" (Klar and Kasser 2009, 756) and argued that it was a core component of psychological health. Adler's findings were corroborated more recently in a study on college students that concluded that those with a higher degree of social interest had better life satisfaction (Leak and Leak 2006). Other researchers have used Erikson's (1950) notion of generativity—defined as "the desire to care about something bigger than the self and to foster the welfare of future generations" (Klar and Kasser 2009, 756)—and found a similar positive association with life satisfaction (De St. Aubin and McAdams 1995) and psychological well-being (Grossbaum and Bates 2002).

One of the possible embodiments of social interest lies in direct involvement and participation in a community. Indeed, participation may be seen as the outcome of reaching a threshold of social interest that pushes individuals to take action. Such direct participation may take the form of activism, volunteering, or work for community organizations and networks. Research on activism and volunteering has been conducted in different populations. As an example of research on activism, MacDonnell and colleagues (2017, 197) studied racialized immigrant women activists in Canada and found positive impacts ranging "from affirming their relationship with their respective communities, to development of confidence and resilience in speaking out and taking action, communication, facilitation, and leadership skills." The authors concluded that, in keeping with previous findings (e.g., Janzen et al. 2006, MacDonnell et al. 2012, Nelson et al. 2006), "everyday activism" has positive effects on individuals and their communities (MacDonnell et al. 2017). Such a notion of "everyday activism" is echoed in the work of Klar and Kasser (2009), who distinguish between conventional and high-risk activism. Klar and Kasser (2009, 767) found evidence that conventional activism is "associated with higher psychological well-being." An explanation proposed for this relationship is that social movement activity participants develop a sense of meaningfulness; they feel empowered and, as a result, judge that they are able to have an impact on their community, which contributes to their happiness (Mills and Smith 2008). In the case at hand, involvement through volunteering or work for Anglo-Quebecer organizations and networks would indeed seem to be a form of "conventional" or "everyday" activism as described above.

Research conducted specifically on volunteering suggests that it may "benefit well-being because intrinsically motivating activities satisfy important psychology needs prerequisite for healthy functioning (Ryan and Deci 2001, Ryan et al. 1996)" (Klar and Kasser 2009, 756). Longitudinal research supports

this hypothesis. For example, Meier and Stutzer (2008, 39), in a longitudinal study spanning a 14-year period, found "robust evidence that volunteers are more satisfied with their life than non-volunteers." More broadly, researchers in psychology have found that, for the human being, "progress toward intrinsic goals enhances well-being [whereas] progress toward extrinsic goals such as money either does not enhance well-being or does so to a lesser extent" (Ryan and Deci 2001, 154, see also Ryan et al. 1999, Sheldon and Kasser 1998). Likewise, Kasser (2002) showed that "the pursuit of goals such as community feelings (or the desire to benefit the broader world) is often associated with intrinsically motivated behavior" (Klar and Kasser 2009, 756), which favours psychological well-being. A previous literature review found a number of more concrete examples of such positive effects of volunteering on psychological well-being, among which are measures of "life-satisfaction, self-esteem, self-rated health, and [...] educational and occupational achievement, functional ability, and mortality" (Wilson 2000, 215).

Given the considerations discussed above, this paper will conjecture that *Anglo-Quebecers involved in community work and/or volunteering are more likely to be happy than those who are not involved*. The hypothesis formulated above constitutes a reasonable expectation because, as a minority group in Quebec, Anglo-Quebecers are likely to find meaning—and thus intrinsic motivation—in engaging with organizations and networks from their community.[1]

To be more specific, the study relies, as explained further below, on the following survey question: "Are you currently working or volunteering for an Anglophone organization in Quebec?" The question label suggests that the respondents who answered positively are working or volunteering for an organization that they identify as an "Anglophone organization." This implies work with community groups that are specifically targeting the English-speaking community but may or may not operate only in English on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, rates of bilingualism are quite high among Quebec's Anglophone population, so it is likely that some of the activities are taking place in both languages, or even in French only. Evidence from previous research gives credence to such an expectation. For example, a recent survey reports significant variation across Quebec's regions when it comes to the language of volunteering activity. While about 62% of the total sample of English-speaking respondents reported that they had been primarily speaking English during their volunteering activities, some regions such as West Island (73%) and West-Central Montreal (84%) were more prone to such unilingualism, whereas it was lower in other regions such as Estrie–Sherbrooke CHU (43%), Capitale-Nationale (35%), and Lanaudière (27%), which were more inclined to use both languages or even French only (Pocock 2019a, 240).

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1 Important caveat: an additional possibility—which will not be analyzed here since the survey questionnaire did not include a question that would have allowed such an analysis—is that there may be a difference between English speakers participating in community groups operating in English and focused on the English-speaking community, and those participating in community groups operating in English but dedicated to other issue areas. It is possible that, for instance, the former activity (focusing on the needs of the English-speaking communities) leads to more of a sense of purpose, and thus more happiness, than volunteering in English but focusing on other areas.

In light of the decline of the English-speaking communities observed by researchers in recent years, Anglo-Quebecers have many reasons to feel the need to take action for their community. As Sioufi and Bourhis (2018, 139) observe:

> *The application of language laws such as Bill 101 contributed to the decrease in Anglophone community vitality on the institutional support fronts of health care (Bourhis & Montreuil, 2017) and education, including a 60% drop in enrollment of the English school system due to Quebec laws restricting access to English schools (Bourhis & Foucher, 2012). The low birth rate and out-migration of Anglophones to the [rest of Canada] also account for the demographic decline of the [Quebec Anglophone] minority, which dropped from 789,200 (13%) in 1971 to only 647,600 (8%) in 2011. Though the English language is not threatened in Quebec by virtue of its ascendency in North America, the vitality of the [Quebec Anglophone] community is declining demographically and on both the status and institutional support fronts.*

To test the hypothesis developed above, the following section details the results of a survey conducted in 2017 with a total of 12 organizations and Facebook groups identifying with the official language minority communities in Quebec. The non-probabilistic sample created thanks to the 305 anonymous participants does not allow for the generalization of the results with regards to the entire minority population, which constitutes a limitation of the present paper. However, the sample is sufficiently sociodemographically diversified to allow for the testing of hypotheses using control variables as a robustness check. The researcher was also able to verify that the respondents were indeed Anglo-Quebecers; the vast majority of them were located in the province of Quebec when they filled out the survey questionnaire. Another indication of the plausibility of the sample lies in the frequency distribution of activist (35%) and rank-and-file (65%) respondents. This distribution strongly resembles what was reported in the recent survey research, which found that 36% of Anglo-Quebecers "participated in unpaid volunteer work within the past year" and 64% did not (Pocock 2019a, 238). A group comparison with Franco-Ontarians (see the regression models below) further confirms the robustness of results by using a control group—in the present case Franco-Ontarians—to verify whether they apply across OLMCs or are unique to the case studied. Results show that, even when the control group is included in the regression model, evidence supports the hypothesis. The next section will present the results in detail, starting with descriptive statistics and then turning to the multivariate regressions.

Results

Before the results are presented, the structure of each variable used for the analysis should be detailed. This section will thus break down the structure of the two main variables, in addition to the sociodemographic control variables. First, the dependent variable, termed "individual happiness," is rooted in a survey question labelled as follows: "In general, would you say that you are personally [answer] with your life in the province of Quebec?" to which respondents could choose one of five answers ranging from "unhappy" to "happy." Second, the main independent variable, termed "community activism," is rooted in a survey question labelled as follows: "Are you currently working or volunteering for an Anglophone organization in Quebec? (choose 'yes' if you do one, or both, of these)." As for the sociodemographic control variables, Table 1 below details their structure as well.

Table 1. Structure of the Control Variables

Age	*How old are you?*
	Answers: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75 or older
Gender	*What is your gender?*
	Answers: [dummy variable coded as] male=0, female=1
Education	*What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?*
	Answers: [less than high school, high school or college/CEGEP degree = college or less], [bachelor's degree = undergraduate], [master's degree or doctorate = graduate], prefer not to answer (coded as missing)
Area of residence	*Where are you currently living?*
	Answers: an urban area, a suburban area, a rural area (a small town or village), prefer not to answer (coded as missing)

Descriptive Statistics

To start off, Figure 1 below shows the distribution of respondents for the main variable of interest.

Figure 1. Individual Happiness of Anglo-Quebecers

In general, would you say that you are personally [answer] with your life in the province of Québec?
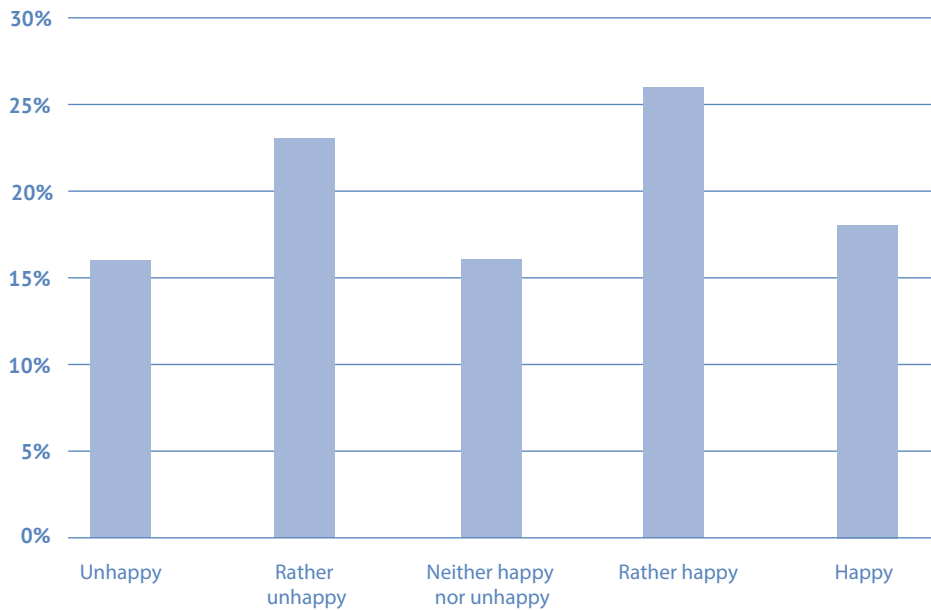
The Anglo-Quebecers surveyed seemed to be quite evenly divided in terms of personal life satisfaction in the province of Quebec. While approximately 39% of the respondents declared being "unhappy" or "rather unhappy," about 44% declared being "happy" or "rather happy." The remaining 16% were in between and declared being "neither happy nor unhappy."

As for the independent variable, it will be sufficient to note that 35% of the sample declared that they were working or volunteering for Anglophone organizations in Quebec at the time they participated in the study. This will effectively allow for statistical testing to be carried out using regression models. But before moving on to this step, a comparison of the distribution of community activists and rank-and-file members in terms of happiness is in order.

In Figure 2 below, a pattern that corroborates the hypothesis developed above emerges. Indeed, some major differences appear when comparing activists with rank-and-file individuals.

Figure 2. Community Activism as a Predictor of Individual Happiness
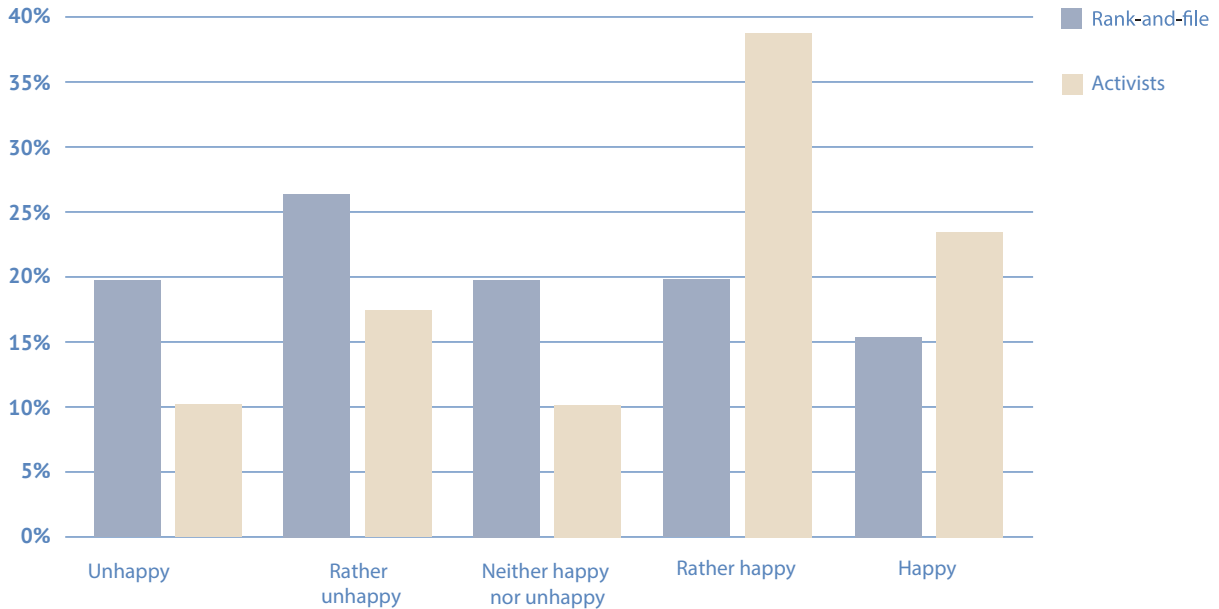
While about 46% of rank-and-file respondents declared being "unhappy" or "rather unhappy," the percentage drops to roughly 28% for activists, a difference of 18%. At the other end of the spectrum, the pattern reverses, with only approximately one out of every three (35%) rank-and-file members declaring being "happy" or "rather happy," whereas nearly two out of three activist (62%) felt as much. Interestingly, only 10% of community activists said they were neither happy nor unhappy with their life in the province of Quebec. This represents about half of the proportion observed among rank-and-file respondents. In sum, the results reviewed so far have shown that, while there is evidence of significant dissatisfaction among the Anglo-Quebecer sample, with nearly four out of every ten respondents being "unhappy" or "rather unhappy," distinguishing between those who are involved in community work or volunteering and those who are not suggests that, as expected, activism does have an impact on individual happiness. The next subsection provides a statistical test to verify whether there is something more substantial to the evidence than the association revealed above.

Multivariate Regression Models

Given that the dependent variable is an ordinal variable, a generalized ordered logit model—**Model 1** below—is appropriate (Long and Freese 2014). **Model 2** introduces the control group of Franco-Ontarians to further assess the robustness of the findings. A Brant test is run on **Model 1** to check whether the underlying proportional odds assumption holds (see Appendix for explanation). Evidence (not shown) favours a partial proportional odds model, justifying the inclusion of an adjusted model—**Model 1b**.

Table 2. Community Activism as a Predictor of Individual Happiness

	Model 1a Proportional odds	Model 2 Proportional odds	Model 1b Partial proportional odds (Odds Ratios)			
	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	RU, N, RH, H vs. U[a]	N, RH, H vs. U, RU	RH, H vs. U, RU, N	H vs. U, RU, N, RH
Community activism	1.935***	1.760***	1.643***	1.936***	2.642***	1.183
Franco- Ontarians (ref.=EngQc)		4.516***				
Age	0.905***	0.927***	0.854**	0.857***	0.955	0.917**
Gender (Female)	1.206*	1.339***	1.933***	0.822*	0.929	2.33***
Education (ref.=collegial)						
Undergraduate	0.875	1.002	0.456***	0.837	1.207*	0.651***
Graduate	1.766***	1.628***	0.703*	1.530***	2.270***	1.663***
Residence area (ref.:=urban)						
Suburban	0.603***	0.599***	0.686**	0.752**	0.619***	0.305***
Rural	1.212*	1.111	0.985	1.438***	1.342**	0.821
Pseudo-R^2	0.0275	0.087	0.0688	(ibid)	(ibid)	(ibid)
Number of observations	264	480	264	264	264	264

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001; a. U = Unhappy, RU = Rather unhappy, N = Neither Happy nor Unhappy, RH = Rather happy, H = Happy; N.B.: guidelines usually applied for the interpretation of the OLS R2 may not be applicable to pseudo-R2 (Smith and McKenna 2013). Use with caution.

Evidence in Table 2 offers strong support for the hypothesis that community activists are more likely to be happy than rank-and-file members. In Model 1a, the generalized ordered logistic regression results show that activists have about 1.94 times higher odds of being happy than rank-and-file members. The effect of community activism withstands the inclusion of sociodemographic control variables in both Model 1a and Model 2. The latter model introduces the control group of Franco-Ontarians, and the effect of the main independent variable once again remains both substantively and statistically significant, with about 1.76 times higher odds for activists of assessing their own life in a positive light across all categories of the ordinal variable. Model 1b reinforces the findings by emphasizing the variability of the effect of activism on happiness across levels of the latter ordinal variable. Holding all control variables constant, activists have 1.64 times higher odds of being rather unhappy, neither/nor, rather happy, or happy than do rank-and-file individuals. Moving one level up (second column), activists have 1.94 times higher odds of being neither/nor, rather happy or happy than do rank-and-file individuals. Moving another level up (third column), activists have 2.64 times higher odds of declaring being rather unhappy, rather happy, or happy than do rank-and-file individuals. Moving up one last level (fourth column), activists have 1.18 times higher odds of being happy than do rank-and-file individuals. The latter odds ratio is the only non-statistically significant result. This means that community activism has a significant effect only when it comes to distinguishing between states of happiness ranging from "unhappy" to ["rather happy" + "happy"]. In other words, being involved in the activities of minority organizations and

networks, either through volunteering or working, seems to increase the likelihood of not being unhappy—or of being at least rather happy, if not simply happy.

To further substantiate the meaning of results and render them more intuitively accessible, **Table** 3 below provides predicted probabilities for each level of the dependent variable.

Table 3. Predicted Probabilities of Happiness, Rank-and-File vs. Activist

	Rank-and-File	Activist	Change (%)
	Predicted Probabilities (%) (95% Conf. Intervals)		
Unhappy	15.68 (14.17–17.19)	8.77 (7.59–9.94)	-6.91
Rather unhappy	26.61 (24.82–28.39)	18.70 (16.97–20.42)	-7.91
Neither happy nor unhappy	17.95 (16.49–19.41)	16.44 (15.04–17.85)	-1.51
Rather happy	25.63 (23.95–27.31)	31.93 (29.95–33.92)	+6.30
Happy	14.13 (12.75–15.52)	24.16 (21.87–26.45)	+10.03

Holding the control variables at their mean values, the results show that activists are about 6.9% less likely to be unhappy, 7.9% less likely to be rather unhappy, 1.5% less likely to be neither happy nor unhappy, 6.3% more likely to be rather happy, and 10.0% more likely to be happy than individuals not volunteering or working for English-speaking community organizations and networks. All results are statistically significant at the $p<0.001$ level. It is to be noted, however, that the confidence intervals for the middle category ("neither happy nor unhappy") are overlapping, meaning that the effect observed is in truth not significant.

Taken together, the evidence presented in the form of descriptive statistics, multivariate regression models, and predicted probabilities supports the hypothesis of this Working Paper. Limitations, implications, and recommendations will now be discussed.

Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

Two limitations of this study are to be noted. First, the paper has not eliminated the possibility that the direction of causality observed be reversed or, in simple terms, that happier people be generally more likely to get involved in community work/volunteerism. This suggests an avenue to be explored in future research. A second limitation also pointing to the need for additional work lies in the distinction between those who work in community groups and those who volunteer. These are two different types of engagement that may theoretically yield different outcomes.

As for implications, it seems appropriate to look at recent developments in Quebec politics. Among the most important was the passing of the *Act to amend mainly the Education Act with regard to school organization and governance* (Bill 40), in reaction to which stakeholders of the linguistic minority community have felt the need to reiterate the importance of institutions. For example, stakeholders such as former MNA Geoffrey Kelly, speaking for the Alliance for the Promotion of Public English-language Education in Québec, an "alliance to promote the continued existence of English school boards" (APPELE-Québec 2020), made the case that one of the problematic aspects of Bill 40 lies in the new distribution of power the legislation proposes, which amounts to centralization in the hands of Quebec's Ministry of Education (CTV News 2020). Indeed, while the service centres replacing the school boards will theoretically still be able to make decisions, section 116 of Bill 40 effectively transfers to the Minister the power to disband, create, and name service centres as well as modify the territories they cover after a simple consultation. Such a modification seems likely to impact the degree of control of Anglo-Quebecers over their institutions in the field of education. It is important to note, as Lamarre (2012, 200) does, that if "post-secondary education in English seems to be well and thriving," the same cannot be said about education at the elementary and secondary levels. And, as research has shown, minority-language institutions at these levels have been in decline in the past decades (e.g., Sioufi and Bourhis 2018, Bourhis and Foucher 2012).

Notwithstanding its limitations, this paper has found evidence that the more Anglophones are offered opportunities to participate in their community, the more they will tend to be happy with their life in Quebec. Institutions are not only crucial for the linguistic minority's autonomy and their ability to exert a degree of control over their own fate; they also constitute hubs for the development of civic participation. Organizations and associations are an integral part of the institutional network of the anglophone minority and as such provide spaces for these communities to interact. A likely positive consequence is that the social fabric of the minority communities gets consolidated and reinforced.

Since evidence has been found that participation in the community's organizations and network increases individual happiness, the government should seek to maintain, if not provide more opportunities for participation in the minority community and its decision-making processes.

One possible solution resides in the renewal of the funding for existing—and granting of funding for new—Anglophone organizations and networks. Initiatives such as the Community Learning Centres (CLCs), designed notably to foster community vitality, seemed to be promising when they launched in 2006 (Lamarre 2012). Many indications of success now support the idea that Community Learning Centres can indeed contribute to community development and community vitality. In fact, the model was deemed so successful that it could potentially be implemented "in a wide range of different contexts in Canada or abroad" (Langevin and Lamarre 2016, 226). As the authors (*ibid*) put it,

> The external evaluation of the CLC Initiative has revealed that schools can indeed become hubs for their communities, places where school-aged students, their families and their communities can come and engage in health-related and social activities, look for new services, and simply pull together in new ways. This community aspect is key to the success and vitality of the English school system, a key institution in Canadian official language minority communities, and sometimes the only remaining Anglophone institution in remote and isolated contexts.

In the context where scholars have found that the presence of linguistic tensions are among the factors that predict the desire to move outside of Quebec to somewhere else in Canada (Sioufi and Bourhis 2018), Community Learning Centres may be useful in other regards as well. CLCs indeed have indeed been found to have a positive impact on majority-minority intergroup relations in the province. CLCs have "built new bridges to Francophone associations and services, as coordinators have become more involved in regional networking" (Langevin and Lamarre 2016, 225).

All things considered, the example of CLCs provides further evidence that policy-making plays an important role with regard to community vitality. By enabling the development of such initiatives, policy incentivizes actors to engage in their community. And volunteerism, which is central to such community work, contributes to the informal economy as well as to building and maintaining social capital and trust within communities (Gosselin and Viens 2006). In a context where the population in many administrative regions is aging (e.g., in the Eastern Townships), consolidating social capital and ensuring harmonious intergroup relations between Francophone and Anglophone communities is likely to improve access to state health and social services for seniors as well as prevent social isolation in remote areas (Gosselin and Viens 2006). Recent research has found the latter issues to be most pressing in rural areas where the territorial concentration of Anglophones is lower (e.g., Pocock 2019b).

In a broader scope, research shows that "public policies can shape political participation and attitudes" (Campbell 2012, 333). Scholars in a field less often cited in the context of studies on minorities, that of policy feedback,[2] have found more specifically that "feedback effects are greater for outcomes related to political participation and engagement" (Larsen 2019, 372). In light of the findings presented in this paper, which highlight the relationship between participation and happiness, it seems that there is considerable potential in public policies designed to foster the participation of Anglophones in their communities. While school boards may not be the only way to achieve such an objective, the major changes brought by Bill 40 have certainly worried many stakeholders. With an aging population that will likely wish to remain active, and considering the benefits of volunteerism and community engagement in general, there seems to be a window of opportunity for policy-makers to signal their commitment to improving the well-being of the English-speaking communities in Quebec. This paper has offered actionable evidence[3] for policy-making by shedding further light on the benefits of participation for one of the many facets of the well-being of Anglophone minority communities in Quebec.

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2   Hacker and Pierson (2019, 8) define policy feedback as "how policies, once enacted, reshape public opinion, governing institutions, and political organizations." Hence the importance of taking into account policy feedback effects.

3   Although, let it be reiterated, further research should attempt to replicate and assess these findings in a more systematic fashion, notably using representative samples and incorporating additional conceptual distinctions.

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APPENDIX I
About the Regression Models

Generalized ordered regression models come with complications associated with their underlying assumption, variably termed the "proportional odds assumption" (Williams 2016), "parallel regression assumption" (Long & Freese 2014, loc. 9715), and "parallel-lines assumption" (Norusis 2005). Williams (2006, 60) defines the proportional odds assumption simply as the "requirement that β's be the same for each value of j," where j stands for the level of the ordinal variable. If the proportional odds assumption is violated, then it should be relaxed, and an adjusted model may be more appropriate. The Brant test is a common method used to make such a verification (Long and Freese 2014), which justified the inclusion of an adjusted model in Table 2. The table is formatted in keeping with Williams' (2016) recommendations.

(Photo credit: Simon Laroche)

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