



# People's History of English-Speaking Quebec

A Community-Based History Project for the  
Vitality of an Official Language Minority

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Working paper series

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The word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag to the right.



The logo for Concordia University, featuring a stylized red and white shield icon to the left of the word "Concordia" in a serif font.

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If English Quebec wishes its history to be understood, with its place in the province accepted, then the onus is on English Quebecers to explain it.

*Brendan O'Donnell, "Searching for English Quebec History: A 40-Year Odyssey" (2021, 473)*

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

English-speaking Quebec, a Canadian official language minority community, has experienced declining vitality over the last decades. Well-documented causes include demographic and institutional decline (Bourhis 2019; Bourhis et al. 2019). Less known is the factor of “simplistic and limited” historical representations of the minority in Quebec’s official history program; this leads English speakers to feel excluded and negatively affects their vitality (Zanazanian 2017, 110). The Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN) at Concordia University in Montreal addresses this declining vitality issue. It does so by promoting the understanding of English-speaking Quebec through research, knowledge mobilization, and other activities.

How can QUESCREN’s staff historians—Dr. Patrick Donovan and I—contribute as historians to this mission? One way we aim to do so is through our history and heritage research project, now under way, called *People’s History of English-Speaking Quebec* (PHESQ). Its subject is the sociopolitical history of ordinary English-speaking Quebecers working in community organizations. The project captures and shares this in various ways, including through a new resource called the *Community Knowledge Open Library on English-Speaking Quebec*, or CKOL (QUESCREN 2022). The project also adopts best practices associated with community-based and wellbeing initiatives. Through these choices of subject and methods, our intent is for the project to strengthen the vitality of English-speaking Quebec.

The present paper is a report. It starts with a project overview: its history and final plan. Its middle section presents preliminary results of two project activities: reviewing relevant scholarly literature and developing CKOL. Concluding the paper is a working hypothesis guiding the project’s implementation.

1 I acknowledge the government of Quebec, through the *Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d’expression anglaise*, for funding the *People’s History of English-Speaking Quebec* project. Thanks also go to Dr. Patrick Donovan, my QUESCREN colleague and project partner, Ms. Lina Shoumarova, M.A., also of QUESCREN, Dr. Richard Bourhis, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Université de Montréal, who read drafts of this paper, and Ms. Susie Breier, MLIS, of Concordia University Libraries, who helped locate literature for the project. An earlier version of this paper was prepared for a conference, the proceedings of which will be published in French: see O’Donnell 2021a.

# Project Overview

## Project History: Evolving Concepts, Subject, and Structure

We started PHESQ in 2019 out of a wish to develop history narratives that go beyond prevailing clichés reducing English-speaking Quebec to a wealthy, dominant elite (History Experts Committee 2018, 13; Skoufaras 2004). Our first idea was to do so while addressing the *entire* history of English-speaking Quebec’s communities. In year one of the project, we focused on identifying potential partners and planning this ambitious goal. For data collection, we planned to use a community-based, participatory, action research methodology wherein members of community organizations would contribute directions, perspectives, and knowledge of community history. We predicted that this process would generate not just information, but also positive social outcomes for participants and communities. To avoid Montreal-centricity, we planned to gather data in several Quebec regions and to set up an advisory committee with regional representation. We also encountered the work of Dr. Linda Monckton, both at a 2019 conference and in her co-authored publication “Wellbeing and the Historic Environment” (Reilly, Nolan, and Monckton 2018). It shows how improved knowledge of history can increase individual and community wellbeing. Monckton’s work further motivated our goal of positive social outcomes.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from doing planned fieldwork. We advanced project thinking, however, when we learned of Alain Roy’s new vitality of memory concept (Roy 2021).<sup>2</sup> It helped us refine our understanding of how our project might help build community vitality. We also started reading literature on “people’s history” and the history of Quebec’s English-language community organizations; this inspired many choices for the project’s subject and approach.

Prolonged pandemic restrictions during 2021 meant a continued focus on planning and background research, and these led us to make two big decisions. Parallel to PHESQ, we had been working for a few years on CKOL. It is an online platform of “grey literature” like reports and newsletters produced by English-speaking Quebec community organizations. Preparing the 2021 launch of CKOL involved developing the platform and reading scholarly literature about grey literature. Through this, we came to recognize how CKOL provides valuable primary sources on the history of English-speaking Quebec, especially on its community organizations. The first project decision, related to CKOL, was to *concentrate PHESQ specifically on community organizations and the sociopolitical contexts in which they arose and function*. The second was to start considering CKOL as an integral component of the project. I presented this newly integrated project at a December 2021 seminar (L. O’Donnell 2021b).

2 I provided comments on an early version of Roy 2021.

## Final Project Plan

As of mid-2022, here is the plan for PHESQ. Its activities, informed by community-based methodologies, will include: 1) convening an advisory committee of historians and representatives of community organizations; 2) generating, gathering, and researching primary sources (including through interviews and CKOL materials); 3) researching and reviewing secondary sources, including literature on background concepts, “people’s history” approaches, and English-speaking Quebec; and 4) disseminating knowledge. The main project output<sup>3</sup> will be a *People’s History of English-Speaking Quebec* book with one chapter written per year over six years. Additional indirect outputs will include documentation (interview recordings, the CKOL database, and project presentation slide decks and publications) and networks (advisory committee, CKOL partner groups). Additional possibilities for outputs, pending project resources, include: interview transcripts, exhibits, podcasts, and short films. The project’s outcomes<sup>4</sup> will include stronger relationships and collaborations between project stakeholders, accurate understanding of English-speaking Quebec history, and evidence-based decision-making. As mentioned, the planned long-term project outcome is durable community vitality and wellbeing.

# Preliminary Project Results: A Look at Our Sources

PHESQ activities include engaging with primary and secondary historical sources. In our case, the secondary sources are scholarly and policy studies. The primary sources are the raw materials like interview data and archives we need to obtain first-hand knowledge of our subject. This section provides preliminary results of our engagement with both types. It first reviews some relevant scholarly literature. Then, it describes our work with CKOL, the platform for relevant grey literature.

## Literature Review

Below, I briefly review four sets of relevant literature: on “people’s history”; on community organizations; on vitality, wellbeing, and history; and on grey literature. I sketch out the contours of each set, and explain how PHESQ has evolved in light of each. This includes how the literature influences our project planning and implementation, and the light it sheds on our understanding of the project’s subject and potential impact.

3 That is, “measurable, tangible . . . result[s]” (Project Management Institute 2000, 200, as cited in Nogeste and Walker 2005, 57)

4 That is, “intangible” or “invisible” benefits (Nogeste and Walker 2005, 56-57)

## Literature on “People’s History” – Inspiration for Our Project

“People’s history” is an approach to writing about the past. It is pertinent to our project’s subject and its goals of expanding the Quebec history narrative and empowering English speakers.

According to David Frank, the authors of two of the famous “people’s history” publications were A. L. Morton and Howard Zinn (Frank 2003). Their plain language books were about the people’s history of England and the USA, respectively (Morton 1938, 1964 ed.; Zinn 1980). Focusing on interpretation rather than identifying new facts, Morton presented a Leftist analysis of English class conflict and workers’ collective action (Gentry 2013; Swindler 1939). Zinn, likewise, focused on the history of oppression and resistance, and aimed “to awaken a greater consciousness” of unjust practices (2010, Afterword).

A third important practitioner is Raphael Samuel, called the “foremost organiser and publicist” for the “people’s history” genre (Davison 1991, 9). Samuel worked alongside Morton in the Communist Party Historians Group in England (Gentry 2013). In 1967, he organized the History Workshop. First a continuing education project, the Workshop expanded to become a broad movement of amateur historians, as well as professionals, who were empowered through creating “people’s history” (Gentry 2013; Davison 1991). In addition, Samuel theorized about the genre. He wrote that “people’s history” is very diverse in its authors’ political orientations and choice of subjects, which can include “individual subjective experience” (Tilly 1983, 460). He also said that regardless of its diversity, the genre is always “shaped in the crucible of politics” and focused on “the people,” including the poor and the working class (Samuel [1981] 2016, xvi, xx).

These three “people’s history” pioneers have lasting digital legacies. For instance, there is a “History Workshop Online” featuring history articles that “reflect upon present day issues and agitate for change in the world we live in now” (History Workshop 2022). A “Zinn Education Project” website features teaching materials on “the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history” because, as the website points out, “the more clearly we see the past, the more clearly we’ll see the present—and be equipped to improve it” (Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change 2022).

Stanley Ryerson was an early Canadian practitioner of “people’s history” whom Frank identifies as working in the same vein as Morton and Zinn (Frank 2003). Influenced by Morton, he wrote Marxist interpretations of Canadian history (Ryerson 1960, 1968; Kealey 1982). And, like Morton, he was criticized for oversimplifying, and for mainly interpreting, rather than presenting new data (Winks 1961; Kealey 1982). Nonetheless, Ryerson’s work was commended as groundbreaking in its focus on socioeconomic class and Quebec labour history (Kealey 1982). Significantly for our project, he also identified Quebec’s historical upper class as not just capitalist, but Anglophone (Kealey 1982). It should be noted that many scholars since Ryerson have also studied the English-speaking Quebec elite, contributing to a rich historiography on the subject (see, for example, publications on the elite by Fyson 2009; Young 2007; and Rudin 1984).



Another Canadian “people’s history” approach focuses on the “multiple collectivities that comprise multicultural, multinational Canada” (Seixas 2008, 259). An example is the *History of the Canadian Peoples* (Conrad et al. 1993) textbook, identified by Disbrow as “people’s history” (in Lutz et al. 1995, 200). Friesen says this book “reflect[s] the diversity of experience of contemporary Canada by its conscious adoption of a multiple narrative rather than a single national story” and “is explicit in . . . seeking to be inclusive and to treat issues of power without appropriating others’ voices” (Friesen in Lutz et al. 1995, 177).

The “people’s history” scholarship and digital content discussed above has influenced key directions for PHESQ. For one thing, it has helped us refine the project’s topic. Like the above-mentioned “people’s history” pioneers, we have decided to focus PHESQ **on ordinary people and their experiences, especially their empowering collective actions**. Thinking about collective activity has led us to narrow our focus to **community organizers and organizations**.

This, in turn, has led us to ask: which organizers and organizations should we include? Our decision: to focus on **community organizations serving a broad demographic within the English-speaking minority in Quebec, and aiming to bring about positive social changes**. Examples of such organizations include the Quebec Ship Labourers’ Benevolent Society, Alliance Quebec, and the Morin Heights Historical Association. Their corresponding priorities might be identified as improving conditions of labourers, language rights advocacy, and heritage preservation. Not all organizations fit these criteria and, as such, not all of them will be considered for inclusion in PHESQ. For instance, Quebec’s English-speaking elite ran many associations. Some, such as Quebec City’s Garrison Club (see, for example, Bourget 1992), were simply self-serving; we will not cover those in our project. Others, such as the Female Compassionate Society (Donovan 2019) that served the poor, might be included, though not without a critical examination of power relations and social regulation within the organization.

In so doing, our project will touch on the topic of historical relations between ordinary people and the elite within Quebec’s English-speaking population. Addressing topics such as labour and advocacy, PHESQ will also look at ordinary English-speaking Quebecers’ relations with the state. Moreover, we will ask about such relations in our interviews with contemporary community organizers. In these ways, PHESQ will address **power relations in which ordinary English speakers were engaged through their collective actions**. This will enable us to build on and especially add nuance to Ryerson’s insights and the approaches of Morton, Zinn, and other “people’s historians.” That said, in our project we will not use the Marxist historical materialist methodology of those I am calling the “people’s history” pioneers, who have often been accused of oversimplification. We will try to present a well-rounded portrait and draw from a variety of approaches, including feminist and discourse analysis.

In addition to the topics covered by PHESQ, its **methodology and social goals** are in line with those of the classic “people’s history” approaches discussed above. We intend the project’s community-based activities (interviews, participation in the advisory group) to be empowering for those involved, so that voices are shared rather than taken. We will use plain language to appeal

to non-specialists, and, we hope, to provide inspiration for new avenues of positive social change for English-speaking Quebec.

There is another “people’s history” approach found in Canada that is worth mentioning by way of contrast. It is what Seixas calls “people’s history in the sense of mass audience” (2008, 269). He includes in this category the two-volume *Canada: A People’s History* (Gillmor and Turgeon 2000; Gillmor 2001). This work claims to “[give] voice to the people who bobbed like corks in the great seas of history, in control of very little” (Gillmor and Turgeon 2000, x). It is a vision far from the one of powerful collective action shared by Zinn and the other “people’s history” practitioners discussed above. Unsurprisingly, the series has been called “not ‘people’s history’ [but] ‘popular history’” (Frank 2003, 130; see also Friesan 2003). This is a genre characterized elsewhere, somewhat harshly, as “passive nostalgic spectacle” (Wilentz 2001, 38). In the same vein is *A People’s History of Quebec* by Lacoursière and Philpot (2009). It presents, in the words of its back cover, “a lively guide [to] everyday life.” It is related to Lacoursière’s multivolume *Histoire populaire du Québec* (1995-1997). A critic said that the latter portrays “Quebec history [as] a fragmented and largely incomprehensible mass of discrete events” (Fyson 1998, 790, referring to Volume 4). It has, in other words, no overarching analysis of social change through collective action. Despite their titles, therefore, these latter so-called “people’s history” works do not provide inspiration for our approach to PHESQ.

### Literature on Quebec’s English-Speaking Community Organizations: Poverty, Diversity, Wellbeing

Given that PHESQ focuses on English-speaking Quebec community organizations, the literature on this topic is obviously relevant.

A useful entry point to understanding the present-day English-speaking organizational landscape in Quebec is Ravensbergen and Sjollema’s 2013 “In the Know” report. It identifies nearly 800 contemporary English-speaking, ethnocultural, and bilingual community groups in Quebec that “operate in English at some level if not fully” (50). A third of them use other languages (57). They exist across Quebec, can be informal or incorporated, and may rely on volunteers. In short, Ravensbergen and Sjollema reveal that community organizations related to English-speaking Quebec are numerous, diverse, and widespread.

In my opinion, the same characteristics apply to the literature *about* the organizations. The *Bibliography on English-speaking Quebec* (B. O’Donnell 2022) lists 625 publications<sup>5</sup> under the subject heading *associations/clubs/societies*—I will call this “subset 1”—and 66 under *community organizations*,<sup>6</sup> which I will call “subset 2.” Combining the two subsets (and subtracting 20 duplicate publications—that is, ones showing up in both subsets) produces a large corpus of 671 publications. An eventual project activity will be analyzing them in depth to increase our understanding of

5 Note: numbers provided in this section of publications listed in *The Bibliography on English-Speaking Quebec* (B. O’Donnell 2022) are as of December 2021. They are always increasing as the bibliographer adds new ones.

6 In the *Bibliography on English-Speaking Quebec*, “community organization” is a subheading under the “community development/planning” main heading (B. O’Donnell 2022).

our project's subject, historical periods, and themes. Here, I will offer very preliminary insights into the two subsets in turn.

Within subset 1, that is, publications under the *associations/clubs/societies* heading, 25 publications are also classified under the “working class” heading, and 7 under the “labour unions” heading (B. O'Donnell 2022). Some of these focus on histories of ethnocultural subgroups, such as on Italian labour networks (Ramirez 1989), Jewish organizations, and credit and loan associations (Taschereau 2020). A first insight from the corpus that is relevant to PHESQ: ethnocultural group labour organizing is part of the story. We will to attend to this topic in PHESQ.

Relatedly, 70 of the subset 2 publications—those classified by Brendan O'Donnell under the *associations/clubs/societies* heading—also fall under the “migration/immigration/immigrants” subject heading (B. O'Donnell 2022). Eleven are also categorized under “social problems,” including “poverty/unemployment” and “racial discrimination.” These 11 cover ethnocultural subgroups, some from a historical perspective, including Black, Jewish, and Irish communities (see, for example, Williams 2020; Bugard 2015; Donovan 2019). This leads to a second insight about the corpus that is relevant to PHESQ: the history of English-speaking community organizations includes problems facing immigrants. However, it also includes *positive* collective actions in relation to immigration. We know this because in the corpus there are other publications about organizations created, often by immigrants themselves, to assist newcomers (see Leclair 2000; Cohen 2011; Donovan 2016). Interestingly, Fiore (2013) argues that contemporary immigrant networks are a form of social capital. A further insight from these publications relevant to our approach with PHESQ, therefore, is how organizations and organizing contribute to immigrant wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> We will keep these insights in mind in carrying out our project activities.

On another topic, 73 publications from subset 1 (on *associations/clubs/societies*) are also classified under the “politics/government” heading. Brendan O'Donnell breaks this heading down into subheadings like the “Charter of the French Language” and “nationalism” (B. O'Donnell 2022). This is in line with our understanding that English-speaking community organizations conducted political activity. The publications point to the benefits of such activities. For instance, Gosselin states that through “advocacy, lobbying, [and] language protection,” organizations have been able to “craft a space of belonging to Quebec” (2021, 411).

I now turn to subset 2, that smaller group of 66 publications under the *community organizations* heading. It includes several publications that, like we saw for subset 1, are cross-classified under the headings of *working class*, *labour unions*, *migration/immigration/immigrants*, and *politics/government*. One of the latter articles from subset 2 points out the benefits of organizing: Bonin (2020) argues that participation in English-speaking community organizations increases individual happiness and strengthens the collectivity. More benefits are pointed out by Richardson et al.'s piece on community-based participatory

7 In an article not in the corpus under study here, I argue that the English-speaking Quebec tradition of creating immigrant assistance organizations is another social capital resource. Contemporary immigrant assistance organizations draw on the tradition to give meaning and stature to their practices today (L. O'Donnell 2013).

action research (2013). These authors say such research “aim[s] to empower those whose voice is often not heard by placing them at the centre of knowledge production” (Cargo and Mercer 2008, 326, cited in Richardson et al. 2013, 18-19).

Writing by Bonin, Richardson et al., and others have helped us conceive of PHESQ as community-based, not just in its topic, but also in its goals and methods. As such, PHESQ is not just *on the topic of* community empowerment through collective action. PHESQ will actually *put this into practice* through the project’s activities. These include the planned interviews and advisory board discussions. The literature on community organizations has helped us understand and plan so that **PHESQ will go beyond revealing positive social change to helping produce it.**

### Literature on History/Heritage and Vitality/Health/Wellbeing: Relevant Theory and Methods

We are also interested in learning from literature that explores connections between history/heritage and vitality/health/wellbeing. This is relevant, since enhancing vitality is the planned long-term project outcome. The following section looks at vitality and wellbeing literature in turn, and then explores their relevance to PHESQ.

#### **Minority Vitality, History, and Heritage**

Studies on vitality have a long pedigree. In 1977, Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor defined the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations” (308). They argued that vitality depends on *demographic factors* (population numbers and distribution), *institutional support factors* (for instance, through formal and informal entities including education, health care, business, government services, religion, and “pressure groups”) (316), and *status factors* (language status, sociohistorical prestige of communities, and language laws) (1977). The literature on ethnolinguistic vitality has developed in the subsequent decades (Bourhis 2019). For instance, more recent descriptions of institutional support factors specifically mention “associative networks” (Bourhis and Landry 2012, 25), further situating community organizations as a central element of vitality.

In my understanding, the ethnolinguistic vitality concept most relevant to our *People's History* project is sociohistorical status. This refers to how communities promote adherence to the group by using stories of past struggles as “mobilizing symbols” that are either positive or negative, such as “linguistic oppression” (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977, 311). When an ethnolinguistic group creates collective stories and memories of itself, its members may identify with the group more strongly through experiences of “commonality, cohesiveness, belonging, and solidarity” (Bourhis et al. 2019, 418). As such, group self-perceptions on history can contribute to their “sociohistorical capital” (Bourhis et al. 2019, 419; see also L. O'Donnell 2013). Bourhis also refers to communities’ “perceived historical prestige” (2019, 200). Sociohistorical status thus emerges from both minority self-perceptions and majority perceptions of the minorities.

Paul Zanazanian provides an example of historical status as it relates to English-speaking Quebec (2017). He writes that, during the 1960s Quiet Revolution, Quebec's Francophone majority asserted its status by revising the official school history program (2017). The new program and its successors foregrounded Francophone history and "(unwittingly) reinforced a simplistic and limited vision" of how English speakers fit into this narrative, such as by portraying English speakers as "the general antagonist to Quebec's national survival" (2017, 110). Zanazanian argues that this causes English speakers to feel excluded from the national narrative, which negatively affects their vitality (2017).

It is important to note that outside the vitality literature, other scholars make related arguments relevant to Zanazanian's. Regarding the history program, researchers point out limits including little coverage of English-speaking Quebec's Black and immigrant communities, and portraying English-speaking merchants as "rather exploitative 'Anglophones'" (History Experts Committee 2018, 13; Skoufaras 2004). Beyond the history program, Donald Fyson claims that "a large segment of the Quebec population" understands recent Quebec history simply as "perpetual conflict between Quebec and Canada, between francophones and anglophones" (1998, 790). And there is also an international discussion addressing spaces outside of Quebec, by researchers who identify examples of dominant national narratives that minoritize other ones, for instance in India (Brazzoduro 2010; Benbassa 2010).

Returning to the vitality literature, I will now consider Alain Roy's important recent study "From Vitality to Vitality of Memory: Conceptual Foundations of the Role of Memory and Heritage in the Vitality of Official Language Minority Communities" (2021). Roy argues that both vitality literature and vitality policy have neglected history and heritage. To overcome this, he proposes the vitality of memory concept. It "refers to the strength and diversity with which the memory of a community is expressed in a defined real and symbolic space" (2021, 6). Roy writes that the expressions of memory constitute an ecosystem of environmental elements (such as built heritage), cultural institutions (such as archival centres), and cultural and social practices.

This literature on vitality and history/heritage goes beyond theory to practice. Specifically, it addresses what may be needed for strengthening vitality of official language minority communities. Zanazanian, for one, developed a template for use in schools. It would enable English-speaking students to structure their community history knowledge into new narratives that "give meaning to the past for guiding their sense of identity and agency," which will strengthen vitality (2017, 120). Roy has a broader plan. He says we should recognize and expand upon the vitality of memory ecosystems not only to see its "impacts and contributions," but also to lay the groundwork for them to be supported (2021, 38). In my understanding, this should include government support.

In recent decades, the vitality concept has developed within a political context. The Canadian *Official Languages Act*, as modified in 1988, requires the federal government to enhance the vitality of the country's official language minority communities (RSC 1985, c. 31, 4th Supp.). As Roy points out, this necessitated an "operational definition" of vitality on the part of the government (2021, 21), which spurred more research. Significantly, Bill C-13, tabled in March 2022 to

amend the Act, goes a step further. It reaffirms the government's commitment to enhancing official language minority community vitality and adds that this involves "taking into account their uniqueness, diversity and historical and cultural contributions to Canadian society" (Bill C-13, 2022). Whether this will lead to increased support and research on official language minority community vitality of memory and its ecosystem remains to be seen.

For now, we are pleased that PHESQ contributes to the discussion on vitality, given that our project is an ethnolinguistic minority history and heritage project aiming to enhance vitality. As mentioned, our original impetus for the project was to address limits to Quebec's public narrative about English speakers. In effect, then, PHESQ might serve as a case that future researchers will want to look at: as Bourhis et al. note, "how . . . sociohistorical capital of own group vitality is used by minorities and majorities as mobilizing tools for improving objective group vitality . . . is another promising avenue of further research" (2019, 419).

### ***Health and Wellbeing***

There is a growing policy consensus that culture, history, and heritage can support individual and community health and wellbeing. The Canadian government links quality of life and health to culture and, for Indigenous populations, to traditional practices (see, for example, Canada 2013; Canada 2020b; Indigenous Services Canada 2019). The Canadian Index of Wellbeing identifies funding for "museums, galleries, and heritage displays" as a feature of access to culture, which it links to wellbeing (2016, 77). The Council of Europe recognizes "cultural heritage wisely used as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life" (Council of Europe 2005, Preamble) in a Convention that has influenced the policy development of European nations and also of Historic England, a public heritage site preservation body<sup>8</sup> (Reilly, Nolan, and Monckton 2018, unpaginated; Monckton 2022). Historic England, in turn, sees the value of heritage to wellbeing of communities as well as individuals (Monckton 2022).

Beyond policy documents are scholarly studies on the health benefits of history and heritage activities.<sup>9</sup> Scholars have identified some methodological weaknesses that can limit the studies' evidential value (Power and Smyth 2016; Pennington et al. 2019; Barker, Jensen, and Al Battashi 2020). However, generally agreed upon benefits for interacting in heritage activities include "experiences of belonging, engagement, and social wellbeing" (Power and Smyth 2016, 165) and "a wide range [of] beneficial impacts on the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of individuals and communities" (Pennington et al. 2019, 74). Scholars also note that not all groups benefit equally (Pennington et al. 2019, 80; Macdonald, Mitchell, and Nicholls 2022).

8 See [www.historicengland.org.uk](http://www.historicengland.org.uk).

9 Pennington et al. (2019) identified thousands of them in a review project. For more recent research see *Historic England Research 2022*.

### ***Relevance of the Vitality and Wellbeing Literature to Our Project***

The literature on vitality and wellbeing reviewed in this section enriches our *People's History* project planning and thinking. In terms of planning, it has given us ideas we will implement for gathering knowledge. For instance, we will ask interviewees how their work on community history/heritage initiatives may contribute to community health and wellbeing; we will also seek to elicit new narratives by interviewees on English-speaking Quebec history; and we might take the step of evaluating our project for its wellbeing benefits.

Reviewing the vitality and wellbeing literature also advances our project thinking and approaches. In line with Zanazanian (2017), we respect the need of Quebec's majority Francophone population to forge meaningful historical narratives of itself. We will also, however, attend to how such narratives affect English-speaking Quebecers today, and we will assert the need for any narrative purporting to cover *all of Quebec* (rather than ones specific to the majority population) to include the voices of Anglophones in their remarkable diversity. Therefore, this literature shows how our project will engage with the politics of narrative creation.

The literature also affirms the possibility for history and heritage projects such as ours to enhance the vitality, wellbeing, and health of individuals and communities. At the same time, it reminds us to be attentive to communities, possibly including Indigenous communities, who obtain unequal access to these benefits.

And finally, in keeping with Roy's vitality of memory concept, the literature on vitality and wellbeing helps us understand PHESQ and its *Community Knowledge Open Library* component as initiatives contributing to Canada's official language minority community memorial ecosystem (Roy 2021), both as sites of heritage/history activity, and in their "products" (reports, articles, and the online database). We look forward to the possibility of exploring, in initiatives beyond our *People's History* project, how this notion of "wellbeing" relates to the Canadian government concept of vitality in the context of official language minority communities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Scholarship on Grey Literature: Clarity for CKOL**

As mentioned above, we now consider the *Community Knowledge Open Library* (CKOL) to be a component of *PHESQ*. This section reviews some scholarship about grey literature as it relates to CKOL.

Defined in many ways (Adams, Smart, and Huff 2016), grey literature includes "multiple document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business, and organization in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing" (Grey Literature Network Service n.d.). These include printed, audiovisual, web-based, and graphic materials on supports including paper, digital, and film (Coad, Hardicre, and Devitt 2007). It is a vast and complex arena of knowledge capture.

10 In 2022, QUESCREEN staff, possibly in collaboration with scholars from other research institutions, will explore the possibility of working with Dr. Linda Monckton of Historic England to discuss connections between the wellbeing and vitality concepts.

Its heterogeneity is the source of some weaknesses associated with grey literature. These include access challenges. Discovering, listing, storing, preserving, and retrieving the material, as well as describing it bibliographically, are all challenges due to situations such as staff turnover in small organizations and complications with intellectual property; as a result, much grey literature disappears or is inaccessible (Adams, Smart, and Huff 2016; Digital Preservation Coalition 2021). Moreover, since it is generally not produced through recognized research and peer-review systems, errors and overstatements of value or validity may be more likely with grey literature than with peer-reviewed materials (Moffat et al. 2009; Adams, Smart, and Huff 2016).

Yet its heterogeneity is also its strength. Grey literature is recognized as “a key source of evidence, argument, innovation, and understanding” for developing policies (Pisa Declaration 2014) and research (Evans 2015; MacDonald et al. 2020; Moffat et al. 2009).

Moreover, grey literature provides much understanding of non-dominant groups. Flexible in form and relatively easy to create, it is produced *by* communities to capture knowledge *about* communities, including minorities (Moffat et al. 2009). Indeed, “some marginalized minority groups found their form of expression in grey literature” (de Carvalho 2001, 4; see also Rochat 2021 citing Bastian 2003). Such minority expressions may be distinct from majority knowledge production. Women are historically central to the community sector (Kruzynski 2004), and thus grey literature *de facto* captures women’s knowledge. More generally, women turn to the informal grey literature realm for expression, “in a society where women’s voices and women’s writing have been suppressed” (Malina and Nutt 2000, 25).

The short review above clarifies strengths and weaknesses of grey literature as captured in CKOL vis à vis our *People’s History* project. The scholarship suggests that grey literature is a unique and priority source for learning about Quebec’s English-speaking communities and the people, especially women, running their organizations. At the same time, the literature points to a challenge for us. We will need to ensure that CKOL is inclusive of different community organizations’ grey literature output, and that we use it sensitively in our research and writing.

## Community Knowledge Open Library (CKOL)

CKOL is the most advanced component of PHESQ so far. A brief description follows.

CKOL (<https://ckol.quescren.ca/en/lib/>) is an online database. It lists, describes, and stores grey literature produced by Quebec’s English-speaking community organizations. The grey literature is stored in full-text pdf versions. Both the metadata (library descriptions) and the full resource contents in CKOL are fully searchable.

There are 27 partner organizations so far providing this grey literature. Some of the organizations serve the English-speaking community of the whole province; most organizations work in a particular sector such as the arts or employment. Other organizations serve specific regions or ethnocultural subgroups. At the time of this writing in June 2022, CKOL contains over 1,600 grey literature resources that come in 14 types (e.g., briefs,



newsletters, reports). They pertain to 19 geographical areas ranging from all of Canada to Montreal boroughs.

With CKOL, we are building on strengths and avoiding the weaknesses of grey literature outlined in the previous section. CKOL prevents community organization grey literature from being lost or hard to find by preserving and making it accessible online. It recognizes and makes available precious minority community knowledge, including that of the many women associated with English-speaking Quebec organizations.

## Conclusion

Having created a project plan and carried out the literature review and database development activities, we are ready to advance the following hypothesis for our project:

Drawing on primary and secondary sources, including materials collected through the *Community Knowledge Open Library*, the *People's History of English-Speaking Quebec* project will develop a wide range of knowledge on English-speaking Quebec. This comprises knowledge about many ordinary individuals, including populations underrepresented in the historiography (regional populations, ethnocultural groups, workers, and women). It also encompasses knowledge about their work in community organizations including their organizational practices, their culture and identity, their politics, and contextual aspects, including their relations with the state and relations with the majority population. The *People's History* project will reveal how English-speaking community organizations in Quebec have been sites of inclusion, diversity, tension, and debate, and instruments for building and asserting ways for English-speaking Quebecers to belong in and contribute to Quebec and Canada. In its subject matter and in its community-based participatory action research approach, the project will foster community vitality and knowledge of connections between community history, heritage, vitality, and wellbeing.

Our hope is that through this project, we, as historians, can meaningfully promote the understanding and vitality of Quebec's English-language minority communities and thus help achieve QUESCREEN's mission.

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(Courtesy of Norman Smith)

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