

THE USE OF PARTNERING IN LARGE-SCALE URBAN PROJECTS

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Abstract

Ville de Montréal wishes to facilitate the planning and execution of large-scale urban projects within the city limits. These projects promote a positive image of the city, increase real estate values and thus increase the city's revenues.

The use of partnering facilitates the planning and execution of urban projects. It has numerous positive impacts as long as a definite set of criteria is respected. It brings all stakeholders together, enables them to develop better communication and to share their interest in the project, unifies them in the quest for a common solution and gains everyone's commitment.

To confirm the hypothesis, a multiple-case study was undertaken with the objective of producing a literal replication. The implementation of partnering in three recently-completed projects in Montreal was examined: Quartier des spectacles, Anjou-sur-le-lac, and Quartier international de Montréal (Project Management Institute's Project of the Year 2005).

The multiple-case study validated the hypothesis and led to draw a set of principles that, if respected, will enable Ville de Montréal to facilitate the planning and execution of urban projects on its territory.

Keywords: Partnering; Urban Project; Montreal; Case Study.

Introduction

Cities are inhabited by groups of people with different sets of values, needs and interests that are not always compatible. The delicate balance between those values, needs and interests is continuously changing. Conflict can arise easily. In order to avoid disorder or even chaos, public authorities exercise control upon urban activity and development by conceiving and implementing plans and policies.

Montreal's municipal council adopted a new master plan in 2002 that is meant to be "the municipal reference document for any action pertaining to urban development within the City" (Ville de Montréal, 2004, unnumbered page). That plan identifies, among other things, large-scale projects that should accelerate the city's development and increase Montrealers' quality of life.

Notwithstanding the broad-based support of the master plan, its implementation can be a source of disagreement, and disagreements can evolve into conflicts (Afzalur, 2001).

Much of the academic literature on conflict focuses on their resolution rather than on their prevention. Yet, prevention of conflicts has many positive impacts as Clay, MacNaughton and Farnan (2004) have shown:

- It facilitates the identification of new opportunities,
- It creates a positive work environment, in which new conflicts are less likely to appear,
- It helps build trust between stakeholders,
- Etc.

Partnering

Partnering is a conflict prevention method conceived by the construction industry (Clay et al., 2004). In its strictest definition, partnering is a formal procedure by which stakeholders with diverse interests and objectives are reunited, a positive and collaborative working environment is created, and stakeholders are lead to pursue common objectives. In a broad sense, partnering can be seen has a work philosophy by which one must work towards the development of a collaborative environment. This definition is produced by combining the most interesting aspects of the definitions put forward by Pinnell (1999), Moore (2005) and Clay et al. (2004).

The underlying objective of the method is clearly stated by Clay et al. (2004, p.44): “to enable stakeholders to complete their project within budgets, on schedule, and without disruption resorting to adversarial dispute resolution.”

Montreal

Ville de Montréal has experienced many difficulties while planning and executing large-scale urban projects. It also faces many hurdles when it comes to attracting and fostering the development of projects which could have a positive effect on urban renewal. This situation is not without its consequences for Ville de Montréal, whether it is in terms of its reputation or in terms of revenues derived from the imposition of the property tax. The multitudes of municipal actors, poor communication and coordination, as well as power plays, are hindering the planning and execution of projects.

Ville de Montréal wants to reduce the number of municipal employees working on the same project, to improve communication between these employees, to improve the coordination of interventions, and to limit the negative side-effects.

The first step taken by Ville de Montréal is to entrust each large-scale urban project requiring municipal intervention to a project manager. This manager has the responsibility of establishing the delicate balance between the needs, interests, and objectives of stakeholders. Achieving this balance resolves a number of conflicts but creates some as well.

The project manager is faced with a choice: managing conflicts once they have arisen in which case many techniques are available or prevent conflict, by using partnering for example.

The city’s project managers are learning to use partnering but some are not convinced of its effectiveness, especially if used in a heavily bureaucratic organization such as Ville de Montréal.

Research methods

To answer the research questions and to validate the hypothesis presented in the box below, a multiple-case study was undertaken. This strategy was deemed the most appropriate because, as Yin (1984, p.23) states it “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within real-life context; when

the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

The interest in this research strategy is threefold. First, it allows the explanation of cause-effect links within real interventions. Second, it offers an opportunity to describe the context of a real-life intervention. Finally, it facilitates the exploration of some aspects for which the effects of partnering are not all that obvious.

Research questions:

- How can Ville de Montréal facilitate the planning and execution of large-scale urban projects within city limits?
- Can project managers use the partnering method to attain this objective?
- How can the method be made operational in order to produce the desired effect?

Research hypothesis:

- The use of partnering facilitates the planning and execution of urban projects. It has numerous positive impacts, as long as a definite set of criteria is respected. It brings all stakeholders together, enables them to develop better communication and to share their interest in the project, unifies them in the quest for a common solution and gains everyone's commitment.

Based on the research hypothesis, it was determined that the research should focus on the following points:

- The impact of bringing together all major stakeholders,
- The state of communication between stakeholders before and after the partnering session,
- The means by which stakeholders are led to look in the same direction in order to identify an advantageous solution for everyone involved,
- The identification of the basic principles of partnering,
- And the formulation of partnering success factors.

Research Objectives:

- To identify a mean, facilitating the work of Ville de Montréal's project managers.
- To determine how to make this mean operational over time.

In order to facilitate the analysis of the research results and the formulation of specific, objective, and rigorous conclusions, a theoretical framework was carefully established. It stated the conditions by which partnering facilitates the planning and execution of urban projects.

Three cases were studied: Quartier des spectacles, Anjou-sur-le-lac, and Quartier international de Montréal. They were selected in the hope of producing a literal replication. All cases present the following characteristics:

- They are urban projects located in Montreal,
- They were successful projects,

- The partnering method was used in each case but to answer different needs,
- The projects took place in a fairly recent past.

Table 1 presents the period of time covered by research work for each of the case.

Table 1. Period of time covered by research work for each case

Project name	Beginning of the time period covered	End of the time period covered
Quartier des spectacles	April 2007	November 2007
Anjou-sur-le-lac	July 1994	December 1999
Quartier international de Montréal	January 2000	October 2004

In each case, data was collected by reviewing documentation produced specifically for the project's partnering session and by interviewing the individuals responsible for the planning, the execution, and the follow-up of the partnering session. In addition, direct observation was undertaken for Quartier des spectacles.

Research results

Theoretical framework

The complexity that characterizes the planning and the execution of urban projects comes, in part, from the number of stakeholders involved. Demers (November 8, 2002; April 9, 2008) identifies four types of stakeholders, to which a fifth one can be added:

- Citizens,
- Municipal elected officials,
- Municipal employees,
- Developers and their sponsors,
- Corporate citizens.

These stakeholders have different interests in the same project. These differences become conflicts when they reach a critical level (Afzalur, 2001). Four sources of differences can be identified namely: facts, objectives, methods, and values (Schmidt and Tannenbaum, 2000).

Although many authors recognize the positive effects of conflict (Amason et Schweiger, 1997; Benabou, 1984; Dolan et Lamoureux, 1990; Myers, 1984), Afzalur (2001) indicates that these effects emerge from cognitive conflict. This type of conflict is functional, because it fosters debate, but only as long as its intensity remains moderate. Therefore, cognitive conflicts must be resolved to reduce their number and their intensity below the level beyond which they become dysfunctional. Affective conflicts must be avoided altogether as they only have negative effects (Afzalur, 2001).

To resolve conflicts, one can resort to legal action or to negotiation. The difference between the two lies in the voluntary nature of negotiation; it can take place only if all stakeholders agree to partake in the process. Besides, legal action should be the last recourse because of the strain it puts on the relations between stakeholders, whereas those relations are critical to the success of an urban project.

The initial stage of negotiation is of the utmost importance because strategic choices are being made (Lewicki et al., 2004) and stakeholders' behaviour is set (Bazerman, Curham, Moore and Valley, 2000).

Four strategies are available to negotiating parties: avoidance, competition, accommodation, and collaboration. They make a choice asking themselves whether the substantive outcome is important or not, and whether the relational outcome is important or not (Lewicki et al., 2004). When it comes to urban projects, both the substantive and the relational outcomes are important. Hence, stakeholders should adopt a collaborative strategy through which they can reach a win-win solution (Bazerman et al, 2004; Lewicki et al., 2004).

Negotiation can use many conflict prevention or resolution techniques. Partnering and mediation are two of them. They present a number of similarities: a confidential procedure, a voluntary and non-binding commitment, and the contribution of a neutral party (C. Demers, November 8, 2002; Mose and Kleiner, 1999). Partnering is used to prevent conflicts while mediation is used to solve them.

Moore (2005), Pinnell (1999) and Clay et al. (2004) all deem partnering to be a reliable method and philosophy when it comes to conflict prevention. Many advantages can be drawn from its use, namely it can:

- Increase teamwork (Clay et al., 2004; Pinnell, 1999),
- Reduce the number of conflicts (Clay et al., 2004; Pinnell, 1999),
- Help to identify new opportunities (Clay et al., 2004),
- Lead to the acceptance of the project by all stakeholders (Clay et al., 2004),
- Transform relationships between stakeholders marked by conflict into positive ones (Clay et al., 2004),
- Bring together individuals and organizations with varied points of view and expertise (Namus, 2006),
- Foster team spirit (Namus, 2006),
- Challenge standard business processes (Namus, 2006),
- Clarify communication channels (Clay et al., 2004),
- Clarify decision making processes (Clay et al., 2004),
- Etc.

Partnering banks on a few simple principles; a group has a greater information processing ability than any individual (P. Ménard's idea reported by C. Demers, November 8, 2002 and November 15, 2007) and the early implication of stakeholders is bound to improve the project (C. Demers, November 15, 2007).

The use of the partnering method is not a warranty of success. Its application must abide by a few rules. First, the decision to use the method must be made early in the project (Clay et al., 2004). Second, the partnering session must take place soon after this decision has been made (C. Demers, April 19, 2007; C. Lehoux, November 15, 2007; M. Maillet, November 28, 2007). Finally, stakeholders must respect and trust each other at the end of the session.

Different ways of using the partnering method exists (Clay et al., 2004; C. Demers, November 15, 2007; C. Lehoux, November 15, 2007) but the application of the method is always built around three periods of time: planning, execution, and follow-up. The logical sequence of the application of the method is presented in figure 1. It is based on the analysis of Clay et al. (2004), a conference of C. Demers (November 15, 2007), an interview of C. Lehoux (November 15, 2007), and direct observation.

One of the most important steps is the selection of a facilitator by the project manager. The facilitator is the person responsible for the planning, the animation, and the follow-up of the partnering session. The facilitator stimulates the exchange of ideas between stakeholders (Auvine et al., 2002; C. Beaulac, September 24, 2007; Büchel et Moss, 2007; Susskind, 2006) but does not get involved in the content of the exchange and does not steer decision making (C. Beaulac, September 24, 2007; C. Demers, Avril 19, 2007; C. Lehoux, November 15, 2007; Susskind, 2006). Ideally, the facilitator must be experienced (Büchel and Moss, 2007; Namus, 2006) and must have knowledge of the industry (Büchel and Moss, 2007; Pinnell, 1999).

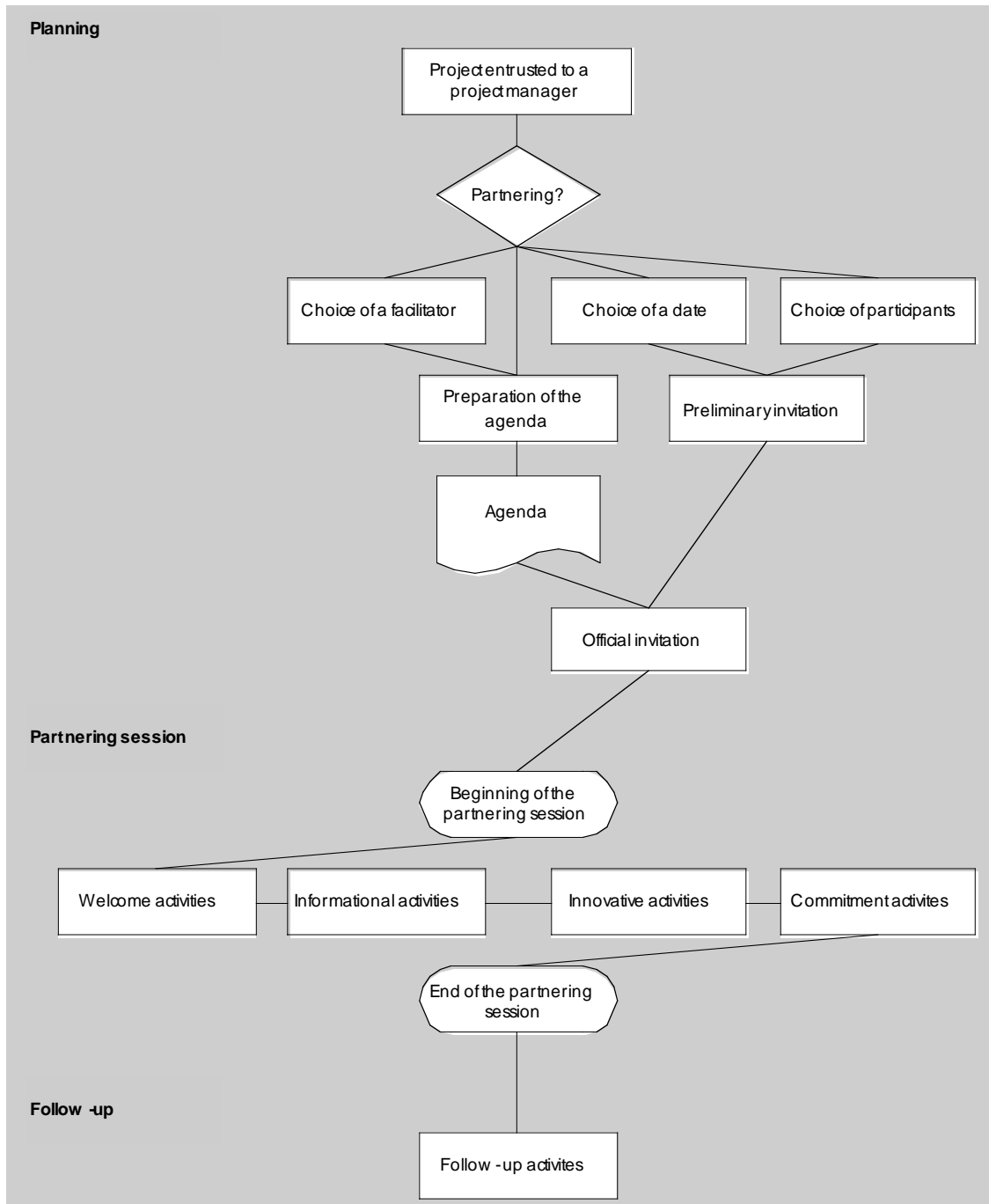


Fig. 1. Logical sequence of the application of the partnering method (Ross, 2008)

The agenda of the session must be planned in such a way that the stakeholders will gradually begin to share some values and objectives. Stakeholders must be represented by a high-ranking individual with the power to commit its own organization.

The theoretical framework has led to the identification of a set of rules and principles that must be respected for the partnering to be successful:

1. The decision to use partnering must be made early in the project and the partnering session must take place soon after this decision as been made,
2. The project manager selects a facilitator that will plan, lead, and make a follow-up,
3. The facilitator must be experienced and have knowledge of the industry,
4. The partnering session must last no less than a day and a half, and no more than a day,
5. The agenda must be crafted in a way that enables stakeholders to gradually share values and objectives,
6. Stakeholders must be represented by a high-ranking employee with the authority to commit its own organization,
7. The planning and the execution of the project must be the object of a close follow-up by the facilitator once the partnering session is over.

Case studies

The partnering method has been used in the context of urban projects taking place in Montreal. It is possible to compare the research hypothesis to these projects.

Quartier des spectacles is a redevelopment project of both public and private property of an area located in Montreal's central business district. The project was launched in 2007. The planning of the works is framed by a special planning program (SPP). The preparation and the adoption of SPPs is regulated by an Act respecting land use planning and development (L.R.Q., A-19.1), a provincial law. A partnering session was held prior to the preparation of the SPP, which was the first step of the project.

Anjour-sur-le-lac is a large-scale real-estate development project that took place on a private property affected by environmental problems. The project was headed towards failure. In hope of transforming the situation, the project was entrusted to another project manager, which opted to use partnering to involve municipal authorities, journalists, citizens, buyers, builders, and the owner of the project (C. Demers, November 15, 2007) and to revise the concept.

Quartier international de Montréal is also a redevelopment project of both public and private property of an area located in Montreal's central business district. This project is now completed. It was a great success both in terms of economical fallouts and of the district's renewal. Project Management Institute named it the 2005 Project of the Year.

Table 2 presents the main characteristics of the use of the partnering method in each of these three projects.

Table 2. The use of partnering in three urban projects

	Quartier des spectacles	Anjou-sur-le-lac	Quartier international de Montréal
State of the project	Launch	Re-launch	Construction
Planning			
Decision to use partnering	End of March 2007	Summer 1994	February 2002
Facilitator	Project manager with the help of a neutral party	Project manager	Independent facilitator
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens - Corporate citizens - Municipal elected officials - Municipal employees - Builders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens - Corporate citizens - Municipal elected officials - Municipal employees - Builders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corporate citizens - Municipal employees - Builders
Partnering session			
Dates	April 19 and 20 2007	October 27 and 28 1994	March 20 and 21 2002
Number of participants	33	17	31
Main activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breakfast - Informational presentation - Fieldtrip - Workshops - Cocktail - Assessment of the session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informational presentation - Fieldtrip - Workshops - Cocktail - Mayor's motivational speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informational presentation - Leadership training exercise - Problems identification - Preparation of an action plan - Preparation of a partnering charter
Follow-up			
Follow-up tools and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnering report - Meetings with stakeholders - Additional partnering session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ad Hoc committee - Information bulletins - Meetings with local journalists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnering report - Additional partnering session - Information bulletins

Discussion and conclusions

Each of the case studies was compared with the seven rules and principles stated above. It was determined that they were respected, although the interpretation of the second and third principles varied from one case to another.

In light of that comparison and of the analysis of each case, a revised list of rules and principles is proposed:

1. The decision to use partnering must be made early in the project and the partnering session must take place soon after this decision as been made,

2. The project manager selects an independent facilitator that will plan, lead, and make a follow-up until the end of the project,
3. The facilitator must be experienced and have knowledge of the industry,
4. The partnering session must last no less than a day and a half and no more than a day,
5. The agenda must be crafted in a way that enables stakeholders to gradually share values and objectives,
6. Stakeholders must be represented by a high-ranking employee with the authority to commit its own organization,
7. The planning and the execution of the project must be the object of a close follow-up periodically by the facilitator once the partnering session is over.

The facilitator can have some links to the project as long as the stakeholders trust him and believe he can remain neutral and impartial during the partnering process.

As for the benefits, they were numerous and varied. In Quartier des spectacles, the use of partnering allowed for:

- The building of mutual trust between stakeholders,
- The unification of the stakeholders in favour of the project,
- The meeting of individuals and stakeholders with different point of views and expertise,
- The testing of ideas,
- The challenge of standard business processes.

In Anjou-sur-le-lac, the following benefits were noticed:

- The identification of new opportunities,
- The building of mutual trust between stakeholders,
- The unification of the stakeholders in favour of the project,
- The relationships, marked by conflicts, were transformed,
- The stakeholders committed to collaboration.

As for Quartier international de Montréal, the main benefits were:

- The reduction of the number of conflicts,
- The identification of new opportunities,
- The lowering of the risk that a simple a misunderstanding transforms itself in a conflict,
- The building of mutual trust between stakeholders,
- The clarification of communication channels,
- The clarification of decision making processes.

In conclusion, Ville de Montréal's project managers can use the partnering method in order to facilitate the planning and execution of large-scale urban projects. When the rules and principles are respected, the method brings all stakeholders together, enables them to develop better communications and to share their interest in the project, unifies them in the quest of a common solution and gains everyone's commitment.

Key Lessons Learned:

- Planning of the partnering session must begin as early as possible.
- The facilitator must have credibility with the stakeholders.
- The follow-ups must take place until the end of the project or there is a risk of losing the benefits of the partnering session.

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