



# INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT THE 21ST-CENTURY UNIVERSITY

REMARKS BY CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT ALAN SHEPARD  
TO THE BOARD OF TRADE OF METROPOLITAN MONTREAL

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2013

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The need for a wholesale renewal of Montreal is in the air everywhere.

We've just had a new mayor elected on the theme of the "smart city." Earlier this year, François Cardinal published a collection of essays on the future of our city, *Rêver Montréal*.

And about two weeks ago, in a speech before the Canadian Club, Jacques Ménard, the Chancellor of Concordia University, spoke bluntly about the future of Montreal. He called on all of us — including those of us in this room today — to put the city back together and to put it back on the map as one of the world's great cities.

Today I'd like to further that conversation, and talk about how universities can help.

Hundreds of years ago, universities produced doctors, lawyers and priests. That was about it. Today, universities are central players in the life of any city that is driven by the knowledge economy, as Montreal clearly is.

This afternoon I will offer three proposals to advance Montreal on the world stage in an era of global competition.

Cities, like people, have an amazing capacity to reinvent themselves. It's never too late. I am sure that together we can help Montreal attain its greatest potential. The hour has come for a renaissance.

Across Canada, Quebec is admired for its bold choices. The way in which this province rethinks the world is also its trademark. You only have to think of the Caisse de dépôt, Hydro-Québec, the Cegep system, Bombardier and Cirque du Soleil.

The bold thinking and commitment to the betterment of society goes back to Quebec's early roots. It's worth remembering that Samuel de Champlain was a visionary who worked to create prosperity among the various peoples who were gathering along the St. Lawrence.

That sense of bold adventure is part of Quebec's way of seeing the world — dreaming big, and realizing its dreams. And that is critical to our future.

It's Montreal's, Quebec's — and, yes, Concordia's — history of fresh thinking that drew me and my family here just about a year ago. I chose Quebec with my partner and our two children we adopted in Ontario. As a new Quebecer, I believe it's important to learn French, and I'm working very hard to do so. That said, there's nothing quite so humbling as having your 12-year-old translate your bad French to a shopkeeper.

Growing up on farms in the American midwest, I was hungry to make a difference in the world. I am a good match for Concordia. Like many of our students, I am the first in my family to go to university.

And I have experienced first-hand how education is a powerful tool for change. And in a globalized world, education is a global right. How to deliver education to a vastly greater number of people than ever before is now, for universities, the challenge of our century. And like any sector facing massive change spurred by technology, we are grappling with new paradigms we don't yet understand.

In the next generation, education is likely to be delivered in fundamentally different ways. And yet it will remain an intensely human experience, no matter what the technology.

The university world is ready for a renaissance — as is our city. That's not a coincidence.

Today, the links between universities and cities — between the knowledge economy, technology and growth on a global scale — are obvious. Around the world, migration into cities is an undeniable phenomenon. Demographers estimate that by the year 2050, 80 per cent of the global population will live in cities. Already, Greater Montreal has more than 10 per cent of Canada's population. We all love Montreal. We love its zest for life, for social justice, for the arts, for nature, for technology, for adventure.

Our wonderfully diverse city has many young people primed for greater things. To create a renaissance, we need to launch a major new initiative. A project that will attract new Quebecers while keeping our students here. A project that will inspire us.

As I said, cities can reinvent themselves. But what chemistry is needed? Think Florence, Rio de Janeiro, New York. Think Tel Aviv, Copenhagen, Melbourne, Shanghai. Each has had a healthy mix of entrepreneurs, artists, engineers, bankers, students, committed citizens, and newcomers. Each has had excellent leaders helping it toward its renaissance. An alignment of the stars helps too. And above all, each has had the sheer will to be bold, audacious, inventive; a will to embrace new ideas; to experiment.

If we want a renaissance for Montreal — and I believe we do — we will need bold commitment and real action.

We will need to rethink Quebec's stance on prosperity and wealth creation. We will need more philanthropy, and not just from the elite, but from the many. We must prove our greater will to collaborate, as well as our greater confidence. And we will need to think big. That means keeping in mind that the real competition is not down Sherbrooke Street or over the mountain, but well beyond.

Outside of Boston, Montreal has more university students per capita than any other city in North America — nearly 200,000. It's worth asking ourselves, how can we tap this population to play a key role in the revitalization of our city? I have three ideas, three proposals to share with you today.

Proposal one.

Let's create a network of start-up zones. These incubators would bring companies and NGOs together with our students, who will bring their own ideas and contribute to the projects of others. Let's be ambitious and create 100 of them, with 200 people attached to each zone, for the engagement of some 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students. That would be about 10 per cent of the total population of students in Montreal.

Sound impossible? A generation ago, the very idea of having nearly 200,000 university students in our city would have seemed impossible too.

These start-up zones would capture business and engineering opportunities and also the full spectrum of social innovation. Mixing engineers, designers and artists together in a room produces magic. I've seen it.

These student "entrepreneurs in residence" and the centres that cultivate them might be sponsored by a profession or an industry, and partner with one or more universities. They could be located on our campuses, or in your businesses. In our museums or our hospitals.

While I was at Ryerson University, we set up the Digital Media Zone, which brings together more than 150 students and alumni, not only from Ryerson but from anywhere in Toronto. In three years, it has fostered more than 70 companies and more than 900 jobs.

Last year Concordia launched District 3, a multidisciplinary workspace where our students make their new ideas come to life. It was founded by one of our graduates, Xavier Hervé, who helps students learn about every step of business development: ideation, brainstorming, rapid prototyping, intellectual property, teamwork, and more.

A couple of success stories from District 3. One team of students had a modest goal: nothing bigger than transforming agricultural practices. They created and patented an inflatable bed for growing plants that reduces the volume of energy that greenhouses consume, and reduces the need for pesticides. Another team in District 3 devised the Human Battery, a fabric that draws and stores energy from the human body as you move. Such projects, such hands-on experience — this is what Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, is looking for.

Montreal has another space similar to District 3: Notman House. But we need a network and greater visibility.

On to Proposal Two.

Let's support the start-up zones with new tax credits. In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo jump-started the process by creating Start-Up New York. Under a plan passed recently, businesses that set up shop on or near a university campus and support a school's academic mission will pay no corporate, property or sales taxes for 10 years. And to attract the brightest minds, employees will pay no income tax for the first five years and reduced taxes for the next five.

Just imagine such job- and opportunity-generating zones around every campus in Quebec. Imagine working in the same building as academic experts and graduate students in your field. Imagine where the coffee chats might lead.

Applying similar incentives in Quebec would build on the government's tax-credit model that has helped sustain the multimedia sector here since the late 1990s. And applying the plan to both for-profit ventures and social entrepreneurs in the not-for-profit space would foster social innovation. And how about micro-credit loans for these start-ups?

Is it too much to dream that we might create the next Google or the next Meals on Wheels, or even design the next Mars Rover — here in Montreal?

Proposal Three.

Let's invent new ways to invest in our infrastructures and, above all, in our talent so that we can better position ourselves globally. Every jurisdiction in North America is looking at ways to attract and retain top talent.

One example, again from the Big Apple. Recently, the City of New York announced a global competition to create a new university campus focused on next-generation innovation. The competition for land and support required

collaboration between at least two existing universities, and drew entries from around the planet. It was won by the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and by Cornell University — a fantastic partnership.

For us in Quebec, we must create something big to leverage our talent and infrastructure. Let's invent new programs that create opportunities for us to mix it up, make something new, solve problems together, venture beyond the known and the familiar.

Having an engineering professor spend a semester collaborating with researchers on the campus of Bell Helicopter, or at a start-up in Mile End, could benefit both sides and would accelerate the exchange of ideas. It's that collaboration across the borders of the so-called "real world" and the so-called "university bubble" that thrills people, and generates new ideas and opportunities in both arenas.

In my three proposals what I am really suggesting is to imagine a next-generation partnership between universities and the cities that host and support us.

In centuries past, universities considered themselves nobler than the gritty towns that hosted them. They built walls and gates around themselves. But in our time, universities will excel by opening those gates, or never building them at all.

Next-generation universities like Concordia will gather strength and reputation not from how many people they keep out, but for how many we can effectively engage — for the opportunities we can create by partnering with the so-called real world. Urban universities like Concordia are particularly well positioned to thrive. And I'm happy to say that Concordia has never had an ivory-tower attitude. Our two founding institutions were all about service.

Loyola College, founded in 1896, which is Concordia's NDG campus today, offered a classical Jesuit education. That may sound a bit old-fashioned, but it's not. The Jesuit model has always promoted rigorous critical thinking and lives of service to others.

Founded in 1926, Sir George Williams University, which is Concordia's downtown campus today, is named after the founder of the YMCA movement for adult education. Like the Jesuits, Sir George was all about providing a place where people could improve themselves and live self-determined lives. So for almost 120 years, Concordia or its founding institutions have been contributing to Montreal, Quebec, and the world.

Like the strands of a DNA helix, these two institutions came together in 1974, forging the urban, nimble, engaged university that we are today. The video that we saw earlier shows the amplitude of our research and the dynamism of our

community. Our faculty and students are chasing big questions in key Montreal clusters — from aerospace and clean technology to film and financial services; from information and communications technology to the life sciences. From health to culture to energy. And beyond.

Concordia is central to the economic and cultural fabric of Montreal. In 2011, a report from SECOR confirmed that Concordia's impact on the Montreal and Quebec economies represented 1.3 billion dollars. The development of our downtown campus, *Quartier Concordia*, has several beautiful buildings now. The glass façades of our new buildings blur the distinction between inside and outside, the university and the city. We like it that way.

But even more than buildings, our wonderful students are the real bridges between Concordia and the world beyond. Most are Quebecers, and 16 per cent are international students. About a quarter of our students are Francophone, a quarter Allophone. Many are *tri*-lingual. Today our students come from everywhere, and go everywhere. And in a globalized professional world that prizes excellence, creativity, and drive, our graduates have a leg up. They are indeed “next-generation graduates.”

I have offered three proposals on the notion that this wonderful old city, now a “ville de savoir,” can renew itself, and that Montreal's universities have a big role to play in that renewal. In the industrial age, cities turned to their waterways for economic growth. Today, smart cities turn to their universities.

To recap quickly, we need:

One: A network of start-up incubators that make a place for 10 per cent of our students to work in partnership with the private and not-for-profit sectors. It is said that Montreal already has a start-up culture. That's true. But that network is less visible than our potholes or aging bridges. Around the world and closer to home, we need to promote the city as a place of great new ideas, leading research and creativity. And we need our civic leaders to help us with that.

Two: A tax credit for new ventures that settle near university campuses, and for their employees. New York State offers one model, but we should invent our own.

And three: Investment in talent — and an explicit will to compete globally.

Cities are entering a golden age, an age of city-states. We need to build on that idea. Together we can leverage the talent in our universities in order to revitalize our city and our future. Now more than ever, we need to work together, not just to maintain the status quo but to go beyond it. Other cities have done it. We can do it too.