

Bicycle paths and greenery are concentrated in affluent neighborhoods

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According to a new study, Montreal's most disadvantaged neighborhoods have fewer bike paths, green spaces and trees than more prosperous neighborhoods. More diverse neighborhoods—i.e. areas of Montreal

with a greater proportion of racialized people—are similarly underserved.

The study was conducted by the INTERACT research group, part of the University of Montreal's Public Health Research Center. INTERACT studies the impact of the urban environment on [health](#) and [social disparities](#) by analyzing unequal access to urban amenities that promote health and [physical activity](#) in Montreal neighborhoods. Its latest study raises questions about who really benefits from spending on urban facilities in Montreal.

Bicycle paths and [green spaces](#) are known to improve quality of life: living in their vicinity provides direct benefits in terms of physical activity, air quality and [mental health](#).

"It's a matter of social inequality," said Yan Kestens, lead researcher at INTERACT. "Historically, immigrant and working-class populations have settled in more industrialized and cut-off neighborhoods. More affluent neighborhoods have been able to invest more in green space, trees and access to recreational activities. This pattern has created the health disparities we find across these populations today: people living near green spaces report better overall health than those living in enclaves."

Problem accentuated by gentrification

Gentrification is clearly a major factor in this dynamic today; the study found more extensive bicycle path development in gentrified neighborhoods than non-gentrified neighborhoods.

It is less clear whether [gentrification](#) is truly the cause of neighborhood improvements. "It's a chicken-and-egg situation," said Behzad Kiani, a postdoctoral fellow on the research team. "We're not sure yet whether

gentrification drives investment in the built environment or, conversely, changes in a neighborhood's environment draw new populations to move in and improve the neighborhood. We are currently trying to answer this question by studying the direction of the causal relationship between gentrification and the urban environment."

Geographic disparities in Montreal are strikingly evident in the location of bicycle paths. In Montréal-Nord, an economically disadvantaged neighborhood with a high proportion of members of visible minorities, residents have been asking for years for more safe bicycle paths in view of the serious road safety issues in the borough. Montréal-Nord is among the Montreal boroughs with the least-developed cycling networks.

It is clear that investments in the urban environment are critical to residents' health and wellness. However, their location must be carefully planned if the benefits are to be available to the entire population, not just those who are already the most advantaged.

Provided by University of Montreal

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