**Investigating municipal Access to Information via news coverage**

**of Montreal's housing crisis**

Noa Crebassa

A Thesis

In The Department

Of Journalism

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (Journalism Studies) at Concordia University Montreal, Québec, Canada

April 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By:         Noa Crebassa

Entitled:   Investigating municipal Access to Information via news coverage of

            Montreal's housing crisis

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Journalism Studies)**

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to
originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Dr. Andrea Hunter                                          Chair

Dr. David Secko                                       Examiner

Dr. Elyse Amend                                      Supervisor

Approved by:  _____

Dr. Andrea Hunter, Chair of Department of Journalism


_____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science

# ABSTRACT

**Investigating municipal Access to Information via news coverage of Montreal's housing**

**crisis**

Noa Crebassa

This study seeks to reveal the role of Access to Information (ATI) and public records in local journalism by conducting a thematic analysis of 107 news media articles about Montreal's housing crisis, and by examining original and previously released Access to Information request packages. This work highlights how local news media have covered the housing crisis thus far, with a deliberate focus on the sources and angles used, and how they might address the issue differently going forward, with increased focus on using official documents and ATI requests in the coverage. Importantly, this study focuses on Montreal's municipal ATI system, as previous work in academia has mostly focused on either Canada's federal ATI system or provincial/territorial systems.

This study reveals that, in stories about the housing crisis, local news media have tended to favour the voices of politicians and official statements, while only a few rare outlets sporadically use ATI to deepen their reporting.

This study recognizes that tight deadlines in news work and long delays in the municipal ATI system are in part responsible for local journalists' heavy reliance on political sources and official statements. However, the result of not using ATI as a journalistic source leads to a journalism that remains at the surface level and fails to provide citizens the information they are entitled to, that would allow them to make more informed decisions about municipal policies related to housing and municipal elections. With this important function of local journalism in mind, this study suggests increased use of ATI requests in gaining a deeper understanding of complex issues that directly target citizens.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this thesis has been an amazing journey due to the people that helped me along the way. First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Elyse Amend, for her patience, support and kindness throughout the time we worked together on this project. To Dr. David Secko for his positive attitude and feedback. I would not have been able to do this without them, and I am endlessly grateful for their positivity.

To my parents, Marina and Stéphane, my sister, Chloé, and grandma, Anne-Marie, back in France, who have picked up the phone and cheered me up during rough phases, and were my biggest cheerleaders despite the distance. A special thank you to my grandfather, who is no longer with us, who I miss every day and still is my biggest inspiration. I wish you could be here to celebrate this milestone, even though I know you are.

Thank you to my partner, Cameron, for helping me pick synonyms and brainstorming ideas, but also for being there and giving me his never-ending support. Thank you to my friends for listening to my endless rants and breakdowns. And finally, thank you to my two cats, Lionel and Oliver, for the always appreciated purrs and snuggles.

I never realized how many people it would take to write a thesis, and to each and every single one of you, again, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

# Table of Contents

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

**Introduction**

On March 16, 2023, a fire took place in a heritage building on Place d'Youville in Old Montreal, near the Pointe-à-Callière Museum. The building contained a mix of rental and Airbnb units, which are illegal in that specific area of Montreal (Radio-Canada 2023). The fire resulted in seven deaths, prompting the media to look at the impact of short-term rentals like Airbnb in Montreal, a city that has been facing a housing crisis for the last few years. The news coverage revealed that, despite legislation requiring short-term rental units to have permits, 92.5% of rentals on Airbnb lacked the proper documentation (Marchal 2023). Another property owned by the same person as the Old Montreal building, Emile Benamor, raised concerns in October 2023, highlighting further issues regarding short-term rentals in Montreal (Kamel 2023).[1] According to media coverage, Benamor continued to provide fake rental registration numbers for the units in that building and kept renting illegal Airbnbs despite what had happened in March 2023 (Kamel 2023b). In June 2023, Québec passed a law requiring short-term rental companies like Airbnb to ask for PDF certificates of government documents for them to manually verify whether the units are being rented legally (MacDonald 2023). Yet, despite changes in legislation, the issue of illegal rentals persists, because of weak laws and blame being passed from one governmental branch to another. Despite Airbnb's initial action in response to the legislation that saw it remove illegal

---

[1] The vacancy rate in Montreal fell from 2% in 2022 to 1.5% in 2023. The equilibrium rate was at 3% (Corriveau 2024). On July 1, 2023, Moving Day in Québec, 107 households in Montreal found themselves without a dwelling, highlighting the urgency of the situation (Radio-Canada 2023). The property referred to by Zachary Kamel in his March 23, 2023, article later burned down on October 4, 2024, killing two — a mother and daughter visiting Montreal from France (Lofaro & Rowe 2024).

rental units from its website, short-term rental units are still widespread across Montreal (Thomas 2024).

As part of this research project, a thematic review of 107 news articles in both Francophone and Anglophone media (from January 2023 to April 2024) that cover the housing crisis in Montreal and Québec, has revealed some preliminary trends in how local news media have addressed housing issues (see II. Methodology for more detail). Generally, most articles address the current state of the housing market by looking at data provided by government organizations (like Revenu Québec) or include official statements given to the press by Québec politicians. Most of these articles use secondary sources for information and do not seem to use Access to Information (ATI) requests to understand the city's role or the associated policy debates. This might in part be explained by the delays and significant setbacks journalists often encounter in the ATI process, which decelerates the news process and causes the coverage to happen at a much slower pace (Roberts 2006).

In *Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) highlight the importance of investigative journalism, which they refer to as upholding the watchdog principle. According to the authors, the watchdog principle involves more than monitoring a government, but extends to every realm of society, whether government, non-government or commercial. They consider that in the digital age, the responsibility of news organizations to uphold the watchdog principle is a responsibility that cannot be abandoned despite being resource-intensive (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021). ATI is one tool that allows journalists to fulfill their role as watchdogs by demanding access to documents and information that back the credibility of their coverage, as well as bringing forward issues that citizens need to know about. ATI requests have been used by some journalists

to decipher the extent of the housing crisis in Canada. For example, by accessing documentation from an ATI package from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, CTV News uncovered that ministers had been made aware as early as 2022 that housing construction had not matched the increase in population, therefore putting pressure on affordable housing and available units in the country (Al Mallees 2024). Regarding housing issues in Montreal, journalists have mainly focused on the reports proactively disclosed by municipal politicians through annual reports or statements provided by spokespeople for various organizations or politicians. However, some coverage has shown that some tenants use ATI requests to protect themselves when faced with reNoviction threats (Shingler & Hendry 2022). Ricochet Media is one outlet that used ATI requests in their investigative journalism on the housing crisis in Montreal and illegal Airbnbs. For example, in one article on apartment buildings turned into so-called "ghost hotels,"[2] Zachary Kamel used ATI requests to check the registration numbers provided on building owner Mike Firmin's rental listings. The investigation found them to be fraudulent, and the article outlined that some of the listings were in clear violation of municipal bylaws. Ricochet revealed how property owners like Benamor and Firmin operated similarly in Montreal, with both having several properties illegally listed across the island (Kamel 2023).

Despite recognizing the benefits of ATI requests to quality journalism (Larsen & Walby 2012), many scholars and journalists often overlook municipal ATI systems. Furthermore, for journalists, using ATI as a research tool can be quite complicated, especially at the municipal level. In an investigation by the *Journal de Montréal*, Stéphanie Martin (2023) revealed it took Montreal 105 days to answer their ATI requests for information on phone and food bills paid by the city for

---

[2] "Ghost hotel" is a term referring to a property listed on Airbnb in which the owner does not live, operated by a company and often advertised through various fake profiles (Chevalier 2019)

3

municipal officials between 2019 and 2021, total income made through parking meters between 2019 and 2021, the salary of elected officials in 2022, annual income of the five highest-ranking municipal officials, and average wait time to obtain a pool permit between 2019 and 2021. Most municipalities bounced the responsibility to other government bodies which delayed the processing of the requests (Martin 2023). According to the federal Access to Information Act (ATIA), federal institutions have 30 days to respond to ATI requests. In Québec, public bodies have 20 days to answer an ATI request; however, they can also ask for an additional 10 days if necessary (*Access to Information* n.d.). Similarly, the Québec municipalities have the same deadlines to meet (Montréal n.d.). Yet, the answers received by *Journal de Montréal* from the City of Montreal often contain incomplete information packages. Out of the 10 municipalities *Journal de Montréal* sent ATI requests to, eight municipalities responded past the 30-day time limit (Martin 2023). These significant delays and other flaws in municipal ATI systems are not uncommon, and weaken the feasibility of the watchdog principle when journalists try to cover important local issues, including those related to short-term rentals and affordable housing.

Access to Information (ATI) and Freedom of Information (FOI) laws are important in democracies, especially in today's digital world. Information is considered vital to democracy as it allows citizens to know more about the decisions their elected officials make on their behalf, and to make informed decisions in their daily lives. ATI/FOI represents both an accountability and transparency tool. ATI/FOI has represented a strong symbol of democracy, as democracies struggle with voter turnout and trust, therefore representing a way to rebuild legitimacy and accountability in public institutions. Providing information about what happens behind the scenes can help citizens feel more connected to politicians and better understand motives in decision-

making (Gingras 2012). Accessing information about how decisions are made in governments, no matter the level, can only help citizens better understand how an outcome is reached. ATI/FOI requests theoretically empower citizens as they can demand access to documents that could help them navigate political decisions, helping them form their own opinions down the line without intermediaries. Gingras (2012) emphasizes how a thick layer of secrecy remains in Canada despite passing the federal Access to Information Act (ATIA) in 1983. While she agrees that some secrecy is necessary, as not all information should be made public to protect sensitive information, she also believes governments need to do more to instill a proper balance between transparency and secrecy. Excessive secrecy leads to a lack of accountability and can lead to corruption, as some problematic behaviours within governmental organizations can go undetected for long periods. Future reforms of the ATIA need to include clear guidelines as to what documents are exempted and why, to avoid excessive misuse of exemptions. More resources need to be created to help more citizens take advantage of the ATIA and understand why governments make the decisions they take on their behalf (Gingras 2012).

But, the move towards openness has been complicated. Openness is interconnected with transparency, as the concept underpins systems that provide citizens access to documents that allow them to see the operations and activities of governments (Birkinshaw 2006). Despite a global push for increased transparency and openness at various levels of government, Roberts (2006) reminds us that there are areas that need to be protected from public knowledge. Allowing citizens to access all information available can be problematic, as it can cause more harm than good down the line (Roberts 2006). There needs to be a push to broaden ATI's transparency while being mindful of needing to keep some restrictions in place when needed.

By using the housing crisis in Montreal as a focal point, this project evaluates how local news media have covered this issue, and the role municipal ATI plays, or could potentially play, in the coverage. Issues of housing are particularly relevant today, as the patterns from the last few years seem to show the availability of affordable housing worsens every year. Based on this observation, it is crucial to evaluate the information recorded by the City of Montreal, to assess how much work Montreal has put in to help the situation and attempt to prevent the worsening of the housing crisis. Transparency around such issues is necessary, as it affects more and more people each year. Thus, in addition to a thematic analysis of the news coverage, this research makes use of ATI requests to obtain documents and information that may provide a clearer picture of what Montreal is doing to address the housing crisis. It also looks at proactively disclosed public records and previously released ATI packages related to housing, accessed through the city's Open Data Portal.

The overall objective of this thesis project is to highlight the importance of broadening journalistic sourcing practices and using municipal ATI requests and public records in the coverage of complex local issues like the housing crisis. My hope in doing this work is to help municipalities understand the important role they play in providing information to citizens and how their current stance helps maintain a culture of secrecy that weakens trust. Streamlining the application of ATI requests is also fundamental for citizens to use it more. The same can be said about journalists, as they largely still underuse municipal ATI as a way to deepen their investigative pieces. Streamlining ATI would not only encourage investigative journalism but also significantly improve its quality.

With this in mind, this research seeks to find answers to the following three research

questions:

> **RQ 1**: How have local news media in Montreal covered the issue of the housing crisis? What sources of information do they use?

> **RQ 2**: Based on information regarding the housing crisis gleaned from public records and ATI requests, what angles, issues and sources has the existing news coverage overlooked?

> **RQ 3**: How can the use of municipal ATI strengthen the coverage of housing issues in Montreal, and what are the obstacles?

Chapter One highlights the current literature on ATI in Canada and around the world from a journalistic perspective. One main observation in this literature review is the lack of research on ATI at the municipal level. Most of the work conducted in Canada has centred around the federal or provincial/territorial levels of governance. Research has yet to meaningfully engage with questions around how individual municipalities tackle their ATI systems and the problems resulting from significant discrepancies between them.

Chapter Two highlights the methodology I followed for the thematic analysis of the set of 107 news articles included in this study. It describes each specific phase of the thematic analysis in detail, with representative examples provided from key articles. This chapter also provides an overview of a descriptive analysis I carried out of 57 ATI packages related to housing issues in Montreal. I focus on describing the process of retrieving previously released ATI packages from

the City of Montreal, and filing new ATI requests with relevant municipal and provincial institutions.

In Chapter Three, I lay out my thematic analysis, which represents a study of 107 articles about the housing crisis from local Anglophone and Francophone news outlets between March 2023 and April 2024. This chapter goes into detail about the three themes the analysis resulted in. These themes are: (1) the Responsibility Crisis at all levels of governance, (2) the Claims of citizens and organizations on the housing crisis, (3) the Overrepresentation of politicians in news coverage.

In Chapter Four, I outline my descriptive analysis of previously released and new ATI packages. This analysis is meant to highlight information that could help journalists deepen their coverage of the housing crisis by showing municipal reactions to the housing crisis, actions done in the background that attempts to prevent the worsening of the spread of the housing crisis, as well as reactions from citizens to projects undertaken by boroughs. Putting forth such information could have tremendous significance for the coverage of the housing crisis, as well as allow journalists to assess whether actions taken by the municipal government are mitigating the housing crisis. This would help contribute to the watchdog role of journalists covering the housing crisis in Montreal.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the study's findings in relation to the existing literature on ATI reviewed in Chapter One. Here, I highlight the challenges faced by both journalists and the public in accessing ATI data, as well as the information already accessible that could guide a journalist's reporting without having to necessarily file new ATI requests. The goal of this chapter is to help municipalities and local public officials recognize the work they can do in improving their ATI

systems to encourage transparency. It also serves to provide insight into information that has been missed by journalists while conducting their reporting on the housing crisis. It is a reminder to journalists and public officials alike about how important ATI is to the coverage and understanding of a topic like the housing crisis, I also hope that this discussion and the conclusions of this thesis encourage Montreal, and other municipalities, to improve their ATI legislation for a better flow of information to be circulated.

**Chapter 1. Literature review**

Canada passed its Access to Information Act (ATIA) in 1983, a year after the British Parliament granted Canada the possibility of crafting its own Constitution. It appeared as a result of the Supreme Court of Canada recognizing access to information as a "quasi-constitutional" right. The ATIA only became recognized as similar to rights protected by the *Charter of Rights* in 2010, after a unanimous rule in favour of recognizing access to information to governmental records as such (Tromp 2020). Despite representing a move towards openness and transparency, it is necessary to highlight that the ATIA appeared in Canada during an era in which information represented political ammunition, triggering an increase in secrecy. On another hand, information also represents an accountability tool which grants citizens the power to be more informed about issues that directly concern them, leading to their empowerment (Gingras 2012). Canada has a history of secrecy, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper winning the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) Code of Silence award in 2007 by exercising tight control on communications, preventing transparency and allowing for secrecy to grow deeper within Canadian bureaucracies (Tromp 2020). Since its creation, the legislation has exhibited several weaknesses which have significantly diminished its purpose, which will be expressed in further detail below.

The Center for Law and Democracy's report (2012) outlines the ATIA's main problems in Canada: significant delays with granting time reaching years in some cases, limited government institutions subject to the ATIA, fees which can deter applications and exceptions to the ATIA which give government institutions the power to deny the publishing of documents, therefore allowing secrecy. Based on the Right To Information (RTI) Ratings', Canada's national ATI scored 53% (79 of 150 possible points) while Québec's provincial ATI scored 54% (81 out of 150

possible points). The "strongest" performer is British Columbia, with 65% (97 out of 150 possible points) (Karanicolas et al. 2012). An update of the RTI Rating in 2020 shows Canada at 62% scoring 93 out of 150 possible points (RTI Rating 2020). Despite an increase between 2012 and 2020, Canada still scores below the top performers — comparatively Afghanistan scored 92% (139 out of 150 possible points) and Mexico 91% (136 out of 150 possible points) (RTI Rating). However, it is not because a country has a strong RTI Rating or ATI legislation that it will generate a stronger use of it by journalists. In countries like Sweden, which has the oldest ATI system in the world, which was created in 1766, and has a high proportion of journalists using ATI as a source, they still face issues with using it in their reporting and more times than not, find ways to bypass it in their coverage (Appelgren & Salaverría 2018). Despite having ATI legislation, it is very important to emphasize the need for state transparency, so that citizens and journalists alike feel empowered to use such a tool. Not only for better journalism but also to allow citizens to make better decisions on topics that affect them directly (Birkinshaw 1997).

Nowadays, businesses and members of the public make up the majority of ATI users. The Access to Information and Privacy Statistical Report for 2022-2023 notes the federal ATI program received 52,377 new requests between April 1, 2022, and March 30, 2023. It closed 48,308 requests, including many that were carried over from previous years, and carried over a further 32,637 requests into the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The public makes up the highest proportion of requests, with businesses in the private sector following closely (Secretariat Treasury Board 2023a). In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the ATI and Privacy Statistical Report for 2023-2024, the Treasury Board indicates they received 46,857 requests and closed 47,664 requests, and carried 26,329 requests into the 2024-2025 fiscal year (Secretariat Treasury Board 2024). The application

of the ATIA to ATI requests is handled differently depending on the level of governance, being split between the federal, provincial and municipal levels. Initially, municipalities played a strong role in getting the federal level to adopt an ATI law but now are not the strongest actors (Duncan, Luscombe & Walby 2023).

In his 2015 electoral campaign, Justin Trudeau had made the promise of reforming the ATIA, as a way to break the pattern that had been installed by his predecessor. He wished to make requests more accessible, by removing fees and broadening both documents and institutions submitted to the Act, conducting a review of the legislation every five years and reinforcing the position of the Information Commissioner. Before its passing, many politicians and information advocates called out the proposed changes as too weak, or not significant enough to trigger any long-lasting changes. However, the passing of Bill C-58 in 2019 only triggered minimal change to the Act, with key ideas of the bill not having been incorporated into the law. Some call out a form of "new transparency," a term used in surveillance studies, which highlights that governments use a more digital approach to their ATI policies to pose as more open, while continuing patterns of surveillance, and control in the documents being provided on those public pages (Ducan, Luscombe & Walby 2023).

At the municipal level, ATI laws are not applied uniformly across the country, with a uniform system that can be found provincially and federally. To place an ATI request at the federal level, the process requires the applicant to fill in a form that outlines the information they are seeking and the government body targeted, and pay the $5 fee. There can be additional costs to reflect the retrieval work and additional time needed to fulfill the request. Government bodies have 30 days to respond to the request. There are a few exceptions that may grant agencies more time

to respond to an ATI request.[3] If an applicant is not satisfied with their experience or the answer received from a government body, they can file a complaint with the Information Commissioner, which may lead to legal proceedings (Government of Canada 2024).

Municipal ATI requests generally follow the federal procedures, albeit with some local differences specific to the municipality involved. In Montreal, for example, the requester has to file an application through a Google form and send it to the relevant government organization. There is no general application fee to submit an ATI request, although some charges may apply if the request involves photocopying documents or accessing a police report. The organization legally has to provide an answer within 20 days after the application is received and may have a 10-day extension if necessary. If an application is refused, the applicant has 30 days after receiving the notice to file a complaint with the Commission d'accès à l'information to get the application revised. After the requested documents have been sent to the applicant, information about the release packages is posted on a spreadsheet accessible via the city's online Open Data Portal, so others can access them as well (Ville de Montréal 2024). To compare, the City of Toronto charges a $5 application fee for all applicants to submit their requests. The relevant organization will have 30 days to respond to the applicant unless the organization asks for a time extension. Once the application is processed, the applicant has 30 days to file an appeal to the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office if they are not satisfied with the results. To file an appeal, the applicant has to provide their original request, the answer they received from the organization, and the total fees they were charged (Toronto 2024). Toronto also has an open data page that posts information from

---

[3] There are exemptions to the Act that prevents the release of documents involving topics of national security, law enforcement, trade secrets, personal information and advice to Ministers. The exemption can be mandatory or at the institution's discretion (Government of Canada 2019).

43 agencies, whereas Montreal's database only provides data from 10 agencies (Toronto 2024; Ville de Montréal 2024). In case of dissatisfaction, applicants can also complain to the relevant Information Commissioner should they not be satisfied with the information provided to them, or if it took longer than 30 days to receive their information package.

ATI and journalism overlap as it can be used as an investigative tool, which emphasizes its role as a watchdog, involving journalists in the political sphere by providing the necessary information people will need to make their political decisions (Hanitzsch & Vos 2018). By analyzing 18 countries, Hanitzsch (2011) explored the different dynamics of journalism to compare how the approaches taken by journalists vary from one country to the other. He found four types of global milieus in journalism: populist disseminator, detached watchdog, critical change agent and opportunist facilitator. The critical change agent is the category that seems more connected to the use of ATI journalistically. A critical change agent is critical of the business elite and governments, and brings importance to social justice, setting a political agenda and influencing public opinion (Hanitzsch 2011). It means providing the populations with the information that matters to them to keep them informed, using any source possible. ATI requests provide a way for investigative journalists to bring light to contentious issues and raise awareness on topics. In the context of the housing crisis in Montreal, ATI requests can be used to understand what is being done at the municipal level to address the problems or emphasize the lack of actions.

ATI allows individuals to gain access to information regarding topics that affect them differently. However, due to lengthy protocols and wait periods over the legal requirements, ATI remains an underused tool by the media. Nowadays, businesses and members of the public make up the majority of ATI users.

However, there is a theory-practice gap when it comes to ATI in Canada. Despite its usefulness in breaking important stories and keeping citizens aware of decisions taken by their government and elected officials, the discrepancies in how the laws are applied depending on the governance level create issues. Because of a lack of coherent application at the municipal level, ATI at the local level often lacks structure, which prevents journalists from exercising their watchdog role. Therefore, there needs to be a comprehensive reform to fix the issues of delays and impose a closer structure in municipal ATI across Canada to allow for a better flow of information between citizens and municipal institutions.

ATI/FOI represents a necessary tool in democracy as political accountability and representation are no longer strong enough. Political elections emphasize a growing lack of participation, with people losing interest in them. ATI represents a strong democratic tool by providing information citizens do not have access to, allowing them to obtain insight into their current government to express their voices better (Gingras 2012). Citizens must be made aware of the decisions taken on their behalf, as well as be able to understand how those decisions affect them. Accessing government documents is effective in allowing citizens to inform themselves and stay up to date with information that may be useful to them. Therefore, using ATI/FOI as an accountability tool strengthens democracy overall. However, Lidberg (2017) expresses how ATI/FOI issues usually don't interest the public, being an overly complicated process. To file an ATI application, an applicant is required to know what they seek to obtain from the organization they are submitting to. Minor differences in wording can trigger different responses. Overall, ATI has been neglected in political agendas, which results in aging ATI/FOI systems that fail to address their flaws.

Lidberg (2017) also emphasizes how ATI/FOI should be used in democracies to generate more transparency, which may increase trust and participation from the public. The FOI/ATI's political function blends with journalism through the watchdog principle. Despite ATI being a tool initially thought to help citizens understand their governments' decisions better, journalists have been using ATI requests as an investigative tool. It further emphasizes the role of watchdog embodied by journalists, involving them more in the political sphere (Hanitzsch & Vos 2018). Journalists being able to back their claims with information coming directly from government institutions adds credibility to the claims put forth.

More broadly, ATI/FOI also can be used as a research method, not only in journalism but in scholarly research in the social sciences and humanities. ATI/FOI provides more than an understanding of governance but serves to give reasons why those in power make their decisions (Walby & Luscombe 2017). Because of its structure, ATI/FOI on paper should remove the barrier of secrecy imposed by governments, causing them to face ethical implications of their decisions, yet it is different in practice. Using ATI/FOI as a research method tool allows deeper insight into a problem studied, captures more thorough data and experiences, and provides crucial information to craft better questions for qualitative interviews with those involved (Walby & Luscombe 2021).

Based on Walby and Luscombe's approach to using ATI/FOI as a research method, it is possible to see how using ATI to study the housing crisis in Montreal could help underline both its usefulness and shortcomings. It can provide an understanding of what can be studied and done using the current ATI system and assess what needs to be done to further the release of useful documentation that could help both journalists in their coverage, as well as citizens. Because of the scope of ATI and the fact it reveals information, not just about decision-making, but more

generally governing, it is necessary to decipher its current workings to make it more visible and encourage more of the population to use it, citizens, academia and journalists alike (Luscombe & Walby 2017).

While Access to Information has been studied in Canada, much of the existing academic literature has focused on the federal or provincial/territorial contexts, while overlooking municipalities. Internationally, a research project conducted in Switzerland does approach how municipalities handle ATI. Whereas the cantons are the bigger entities, similar to states, Swiss municipalities are more autonomous and in charge of more of their legislations, tailoring them according to what they specifically need (Mabillard & Keuffer 2022). The study outlines both the positive aspects of the municipal ATI system in Switzerland, while highlighting the limitations faced, as many cantons still do not have ATI legislation. This approach strongly contrasts with other countries, which adopt ATI at all levels when introducing the legislation. In Switzerland, the ATI moves at different speeds between levels of governance, with municipalities taking over the other levels (Mabillard & Keuffer 2022).

This study is interesting because it sheds light on ways to analyze municipalities, as well as provides an understanding of how complicated it can be to have an analysis focusing on them. Looking at Canada, such studies are notably absent, and the lack of attention towards municipalities is necessary given the important role of journalism to bring about transparency and accountability to political governance. Using ATI as a source, instead of relying on secondary or even tertiary accounts, can provide for stronger reporting, by using credible sources with verified information rather than statements that can be debunked after fact-checking. By focusing on Montreal, and using the housing crisis as a focal point, this study aims to address the theoretical

gap, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of ATI's role in creating a more responsible journalism.

By addressing these gaps in research, this study not only seeks to gain a better understanding of overlaps between journalism and ATI practices in Montreal, but also aims to inspire more research to be conducted on this subject, in other municipalities within Canada. Because of time constraints, I chose to only focus on Montreal as a way to start considering municipal ATI systems more closely. In doing so, it aims to encourage discussions on the evolving future of journalism in fostering both transparency and accountability at all levels of governance.

**Chapter 2. Methodology**

This chapter dives into the methodology behind the thematic analysis of the news articles as well as the retrieval and analysis of previously released and new ATI requests. Despite trying to obtain precise information in investigative pieces, journalists often turn to public sources instead of using ATI, as a way to obtain information quickly (Tromp 2020). ATI does represent a tool that allows journalists to perform their watchdog duty; however, as noted in the previous chapters, too many flaws in its system prevent them from doing so. To consider the overlaps in local journalism and municipal ATI more closely, this research looked at news articles about the housing crisis in Montreal from local outlets between March 16, 2023, and April 4, 2024, as well as previously released ATI packages, available through the City of Montreal's Open Data portal and my own ATI requests filed for this research. Such an assessment is necessary to understand what sources and angles journalists have used in their coverage of housing issues, and other information that may have been overlooked. The chapter is divided into four sections: 1) a brief description of the local news media outlets and the content I analyzed for this research; 2) the thematic analysis of the news content gathered; 3) the retrieval and descriptive analysis of relevant ATI packages; and 4) the methodological limits of this study.

**2.1 Local news coverage of Montreal's housing crisis**

My goal in this research was to analyze how local news media outlets in Montreal covered the housing crisis between March 16, 2023, the day a building with long-term rentals and Airbnb rentals burned in the Old Montreal neighbourhood, and April 4, 2024, the day I retrieved the news articles to be analyzed from two databases. In my sample, I chose to focus on digital print media

in both French and English, to capture possible differences in media coverage between the two languages. I chose to focus on six outlets: *The Montreal Gazette* and *Ricochet,* which are both English-language outlets, and French-language outlets *Pivot, Le Journal de Montréal, Le Devoir* and *La Presse*.

**Table 1.** *The Montreal Gazette/The Gazette*

| | |
|---|---|
| <br>*Figure 1. The Montreal Gazette Logo*<br>(From the *BANQ*'s website) | **Description:** Founded in 1778, *the Montreal Gazette* is an anglophone media owned by Postmedia since 2010. It is one of the oldest news media outlets in North America. Before being fully anglophone, *The Gazette* was first fully French, turning bilingual before it became English-only (The Canadian Encyclopedia 2014). |

**Table 2.** *Ricochet*

| | |
|---|---|
| <br>*Figure 2. Ricochet Media logo*<br>(From *Ricochet*'s website) | **Description:** *Ricochet* is an independent, non-profit and national media focusing on matters of public interest. They focus on investigative and opinion pieces on topics like climate change, Indigenous rights, and corporate and government accountability (Ricochet Media). Ricochet Media is an English-only media, as its Francophone section merged with *Pivot* in 2022 (Franco Ricochet Media Archive). |

**Table 3.** *Pivot*

| | |
|---|---|
| <br>*Figure 3. Pivot logo*<br>(From the *Pivot*'s website) | **Description:** Similar to *Ricochet Media, Pivot* debuted in 2021 intending to provide progressive news to the Québec media scene. It also focuses on investigative pieces covering both provincial, national and international topics. It is independent (Pivot). |

**Table 4.** *Le Journal de Montréal*

| | |
|---|---|
| <br>*Figure 4. Le Journal de Montréal logo*<br>(From the *Journal de Montreal*'s website) | **Description:** *Le Journal de Montréal* is a francophone media outlet founded by Pierre Péladeau, owner of the Québecor Group. It is one of the most followed media in Québec (Québecor). |

**Table 5.** *Le Devoir*

| | |
|---|---|
| <br>*Figure 5. Le Devoir logo*<br>(From the *FPJQ*'s website) | **Description:** *Le Devoir* is a francophone independent media outlet founded in 1910 by politician Henri Bourassa (Le Devoir). It covers topics from all levels of government within Canada, as well as international news. |

**Table 6.** *La Presse*

| | **Description:** *La Presse* is a francophone media outlet founded in 1884 by William Blumhart. Initially a strictly political magazine, it is now broader as it covers both Montreal news, provincial, federal and international information (Ville de Montreal Archives 2002) |
|---|---|
| *Figure 6. La Presse logo* (From the *La Presse*'s website) | |

To retrieve the content relevant to the project's first research question— How have local news media in Montreal covered the issue of the housing crisis? What sources of information do they use? --I used two different databases, namely Canadian Newsstream, for English articles, and Eureka, for French articles. I limited these database searches by selecting "Montreal" as the publishing location of the articles and by restricting the search results to the six news media outlets described in the previous section. I chose to look at coverage specifically from March 16, 2023, to April 4, 2024, starting with the fatal fire that happened in Old Montreal and ending on the day I captured articles from the databases. I used two different sets of keywords in conducting this research. In Canadian Newsstream, I focused on "Housing crisis" and "Montreal," whereas in Eureka, I used "crise du logement" in the lead and "Montréal" mentioned in the text. For both, I selected to retrieve only print/digital media, as the analysis focuses on text-based articles. With these specific search parameters in effect, I retrieved an initial set of 132 articles to be analyzed; 63 articles in English and 69 articles in French.

Out of the 132 articles gathered in the initial searches, a total of 107 articles were retained in this study's final set. The 25 articles removed from the final set were excluded for not matching

certain criteria. For instance, some broadcast transcripts appeared in the initial set, despite database searches being targeted only to print sources. Others were removed because they only contained 'housing crisis' within the article, without it being the focus or simply political commentaries. This inclusion/exclusion process led to a final set of 107 articles for the thematic analysis, which is explained further in the next section.

## 2.2 Thematic analysis of news articles

Per Braun and Clarke (2022), a thematic analysis is a robust method when a researcher opts for a qualitative analysis. They outline a six-phase outline to approach a thematic analysis method. However, whereas Braun and Clarke's background is in psychology, their method has successfully been applied in other fields, including journalism and social sciences.

A thematic analysis focuses on developing, analyzing and interpreting patterns within research data to understand an event. Braun and Clarke (2022) qualify it as reflexive, because it involves critical thinking both in our roles as researchers, as well as in the research process and practice (2022). It signifies just how involved a researcher is throughout every step of the process, both critically and emotionally tied to the project, rather than being someone detached.

To help identify the themes, I used initial codes to see which articles related to one another. These codes allowed me to analyze, decode and interpret the patterns of knowledge within my corpus (Braun & Clarke 2022). Because most of the articles included personal experiences, I needed to think beyond the content of the articles.

The thematic analysis of the news articles included in this study followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phased approach:

*Phase one: Dataset familiarization*

The scholars refer to this phase as "*reading and re-reading through text-based data items, repeatedly viewing visual data items, and if working with transcripts of audio data, also listening to the audio recordings.*" (Braun & Clarke 2022, 105). This first step required reading the entirety of the articles within the corpus, as well as paying attention to the pictures or any other media if they contained any.

*Phase two: Data coding*

The scholars refer to the second phase as "*the process of exploring the diversity and patterning of meaning from the dataset, developing codes, and applying code labels to specific segments of each data item*" (Braun & Clarke 2022, 119). After reading carefully each article in my corpus and developing a good understanding of the content, I started associating some keywords to the articles, to see which ones had commonalities, as well as to spot potential differences. Such steps allowed for the development of preliminary categories. I will explain the exclusion process in Chapter 3, including which articles were excluded, and which initial themes were dropped.

*Phase three: Initial theme generation*

The third phase "*involves a range of processes of engaging with the data codes to explore areas where there is some similarity of meaning*" (Braun & Clarke 2022, 158). The gathering of codes slowly began to form different themes. As I worked through them, by carefully defining their meanings, I realized overlaps which helped me refine my themes by either blending some or

refining them further. When looking at the themes, it is possible to see that they end up relating to one another, in one way or another, without being repetitive.

*Phase four: Theme development and review*

In phase four, "[*T*]*he purpose here is to review the viability of the initial clusterings, and explore whether there is any scope for better pattern development*" (Braun & Clarke 2022, 184). This phase involved more precise refining, defining and, if necessary, changing of the themes developed in the prior phase. This means that when a theme felt too weak or underdeveloped, it was either changed into a different theme, blended with another or simply removed. Removal of themes was minor for this research.

*Phase five: Theme defining, refining and naming*

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), phase five refers to "*further development around your themes, as well as more precise analytic work refining your analysis*" (201). What this step entails is providing a general definition for each theme and conducting the final revisions if necessary. Braun and Clark (2022) emphasize that "[*I*]*n addition to checking for internal theme clarity, theme definitions can be useful for thinking about the organisation and flow, the overall story your analysis builds towards*" (201). The ultimate goal in that phase is to make sure themes are relevant to the ideas extracted from the data.

*Phase six: Writing up*

In the last phase, the scholars emphasize it is "*about deep refining analytic work to shape the detail and flow of the analysis,*" meaning the analysis does not end with phase five but continues as it is being summarized (Braun & Clarke 2022, 214). In that sense, my primary goal was to demonstrate my analysis through the final themes found and support why they are relevant to this study.

## 2.3 Retrieval and descriptive analysis of relevant ATI data

In addition to the news coverage itself, I wanted to look at the previously released ATI packages covering housing issues publicly available on Montreal's Open Data Portal. Once the City of Montreal responds to an ATI request, whether with or without a release of information, information related to the request is posted to this portal for people to freely access. Using previously released ATI packages is necessary to understand the information already available to the public—which includes journalists—and to get an idea of what information people using ATI have has already been asked for. In that sense, previously released ATI packages indicate it shows what other sources and information could be used by journalists could use to deepen their reporting on the housing crisis. if they wanted to use documents garnered through ATI without filing a new request. I retrieved 55 previously released ATI packages from the City of Montreal by conducting three different searches. The first one, using the keyword "Airbnb," yielded four entries. The second, using the keyword "logements," provided 51 entries. It is necessary to indicate that only French-language keywords can be used to effectively search the Open Data Portal. Single keywords, rather than short phrases, also seem to be the most effective, is only accessible using French keywords and seemed to only work with single keywords, as using "crise du logement" in my third search attempt yielded no results.

Moreover, I also filed three new ATI requests both at the municipal level, through the City of Montreal, and at the Québec provincial level, with Revenu Québec and the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation., because the issue of the housing crisis connects to those two, especially when it comes to Airbnbs and short-term rentals. Whereas I received a link redirecting me to a web page from Revenu Québec, without clarifications on Airbnbs, I have gathered 69 documents from Montreal and three boroughs (1 for the City of Montreal, 2 for the Sud-Ouest borough, 65 for the Ville-Marie borough, and 1 for the Plateau-Mont-Royal borough). I have also received an email back from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation which provided some data to answer the request I had filed with them. I will go further into details about both the methodology and the approach for filing ATI requests in Chapter 4.

ATI is still underused, both in the media and academia, despite proving itself to be useful in diving deeper into specific issues and uncovering never-known problems (Luscombe & Walby 2017). Using ATI is necessary for this research project as it can provide an understanding of what the City of Montreal is actively doing to mitigate the housing crisis, and areas where it may not be sufficiently acting to prevent it from worsening (Luscombe & Walby 2017). Additionally, using ATI as an investigative tool in research can generally allow us to better assess a government's level of openness and transparency. This is something that has been overlooked at the municipal level, as existing literature on ATI tends to focus on national/federal systems (Luscombe & Walby 2021); thus, this project seeks to give ATI at the local/municipal level the attention it needs.

It is important to assess what is already accessible through Montreal's open-access platform before filing ATI requests. Thus, this step in the research also seeks to address what has already been shared and uploaded onto the city's proactive disclosure platform regarding the housing

crisis, and what data the City of Montreal keeps track of. In this thesis, the ATI packages are treated separately from the thematic analysis. The descriptive analysis of the ATI data is described further in Chapter 4. The findings of both the thematic analysis of news coverage and the descriptive analysis of the ATI data will then be discussed together in Chapter 5.

## 2.4 The limits of the research

The different trends and patterns observed are part of a set of news articles retrieved between March 16, 2023, and April 4, 2024. The use of keywords and search tools helped gathering a workable corpus to be analyzed in this study. The corpus also focuses solely on online text-based news articles, therefore, excluding broadcast coverage of the housing crisis in Montreal. This decision came as a result of time and resource constraints, as I had to focus on keeping this study manageable. With all this in mind, it is necessary to highlight that the housing crisis and topics connected to it, such as gentrification or homelessness, have been covered in other ways outside of the context I present in this study. Moreover, for this study, I chose to focus on local news media outlets that covered the housing crisis in Montreal and Québec. Thus, I excluded national articles to avoid redundancy in the media corpus. I also made this decision to prevent articles using other cities as examples of the housing crisis (like Vancouver or Toronto) being included, in order to keep the study tightly focused on Montreal. The next chapter details the process for the thematic analysis of the news content. It outlines the analysis' findings and includes representative examples for the news articles to further illustrate the themes discovered.

**Chapter 3. News media coverage of the housing crisis in Montreal: A thematic analysis**

The thematic analysis, as described in Chapter 2, focused on a core research question of this study: how did local news media cover the housing crisis in Montreal between March 16, 2023, and April 4, 2024? In addition to this main question, this research also analyzed the news articles with two particular sub-questions in mind, namely: (1) what main sources did this coverage draw on, and (2) did this coverage make use of ATI requests for documents and data related to the housing crisis? This chapter focuses on the thematic analysis I conducted in order to answer these questions. As described in the previous chapter, I followed the processes outlined by scholars Braun and Clarke (2022) on how to develop a thematic analysis in six phases: 1) dataset familiarization; 2) data coding; 3) initial theme generation; 4) theme development and review; 5) theme defining, refining and naming; 6) writing up. Using Canadian Newsstream and Eureka, I retrieved 132 news articles, of which 107 were retained for this study. The set of included articles is summarized in the table below.

**Table 7. Total of articles**

| News Media outlets | Total articles |
|---|---|
| Montreal Gazette | 46 |
| Ricochet | 3 |
| Pivot | 2 |
| Journal de Montréal | 14 |
| Le Devoir | 21 |
| La Presse | 21 |
| **Total** | **107** |

The thematic analysis of the 107 articles yielded three main themes: (1) the Responsibility crisis at all levels of governance, (2) the Claims of citizens and organizations on the housing crisis, (3) the Overrepresentation of politicians in news coverage. In the six following sections, I outline the steps I took following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases for thematic analysis, and describe how I moved from initial observations and codes, to formalizing the three themes.

**3.1 Phase one: dataset familiarization**

Once I compiled all the news articles, I created two tables in Notion, one for the English articles and one for the French articles included in this study. Notion is a productivity platform which allows users to personalize their workspaces, as well as collaborate similarly to how one would use Google Docs. Working with Notion felt self-evident because I have been using it for the last few years for its visual capacities and colour-coding options. Based on this, the software allowed me to keep track of all the articles within the same platform, as well as code effectively with visual cues to help quickly track similarities and differences between all of them. Table 8 shows the organization of the tables I used in Notion, which were identical to the English and French ones.

**Example one: Notion Table Organization**

*Figure 1: Notion table organization for the thematic analysis*



In this image, the table shows how I organized my thematic analysis within Notion. I added to the table all articles, in different tables to separate the French and English articles. In the "Article Name" section, the icon represents with a newspaper icon the articles included in the study, and the red dot those excluded. In "Codes" appears the initial coding phase developed in Phase One, before the themes became more developed in Phase Four and Five. Finally, having an "Author" section helped me capture who covered the topic of the housing crisis the most.

The most overwhelming stage of thematic analysis is the beginning, because of the number of articles to process, as well as the fact that there is no right or wrong to find a starting point for thematic analysis. Therefore, I started by attaching general ideas to the articles, keeping my codes rather broad to have an idea as to what I could find in each piece. I colour-coded every idea to

visually see how often some codes would appear in my two tables, in an attempt to keep track of how often news outlets contained similarities or differences between one another.

Choosing to focus on local outlets instead of national outlets like the Canadian Press or CBC News, for instance, helped exclude redundant articles that are written by the same journalist but appear across different outlets with a slightly altered headline. Being selective with the keywords, location and type of articles to collect allowed me to have a more specific corpus with only a small proportion found not to be relevant for the study. In this first phase of analysis, I developed initial keywords in an attempt to categorize the articles under general topics before refining the codes into more specific topics. Keywords included "inefficiencies and policy gaps," "positive measures taken by the municipality," "personal accounts," and "power struggles between government levels" to name a few. By familiarizing myself with the corpus, I began to grow a better understanding of how the media covered the housing crisis, as well as picking up their sources and approaches. That way, I progressively began to develop a more visual understanding of the corpus, developing descriptive themes that later turned into codes before formulating the definitive themes.

### 3.2 Phase two: data coding

In phase two, coding means beginning to make the date set speak about a specific research question. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), "[*T*]*he process of coding involves systematically working through each data item and your entire dataset*" (132). Throughout the progression of this phase, I reread each article carefully as I developed my codes, adapting my approach through the readings to fit the evolving understandings and connections to my research questions.

In the following sections, I outline the qualitative coding steps I followed: 1) processing the articles to general broad descriptive themes; 2) establishing an exclusion criteria.

### 3.2.1 Turning general ideas into codes

After inputting all 132 news articles initially retained into two different tables in Notion, I proceeded to read and pick out words within the articles that appeared to be relevant with questions linked to the study. Many keywords appeared to be repeated in the corpus such as "crise du logement" or "housing crisis," both "crise" or "crisis," "unhoused" or "intinérant(e)s," "help" or "aides" amongst other words. The repetition of such strong words throughout 107 articles highlights the intertwining of the issue between citizens and stakeholders. Besides the excluded articles, most, if not all, of the articles within the corpus, addressed directly the topic of the housing crisis in Montreal. I will describe the exclusion process in the section below. All had different approaches in covering the subject, which I will go into detail later on in this chapter (see pages 35-66).

This initial phase of analysis helped bring together certain articles based on similarities in subtopics. As mentioned earlier, some articles failed to cover the housing crisis or relate to any research questions, so I did not analyze them.

### 3.2.2 Exclusion of some articles: reasoning for the decision

The housing crisis in Montreal has become an important topic of discussion in the last few years, so a challenge was to keep the study on the coverage of it by news media outlets. Staying objective appeared to be challenging at times, having my own perception of the housing crisis and

carrying a certain level of bias on how politicians have been handling the situation so far. As outlined in Chapter 1, out of the 132 articles compiled through a thorough search in two databases, I excluded 25 articles from this study. This happened as a result of a very careful reading of all articles within the corpus and the beginning of codes forming within the texts. Articles excluded from this study either failed to discuss the main topic (i.e. not a specific focus on Montreal in the coverage of the housing crisis), failed to come from print sources or did not address the housing crisis at all. Even if some articles did briefly cover the topic of the housing crisis in Montreal, articles were excluded if no themes or codes could emerge from a brief mention. Because federal elections are happening in Canada in 2025, some articles refer to candidates talking about the situation in Montreal and therefore were added to the corpus, but I excluded them after careful consideration. Within the French corpus, I noticed a difference in the way some news media outlets addressed the topic.

**Example two. Article exclusion, "I'm almost sure on Québec Liberal leadership run, Denis Coderre says" (Tomesco 2024)**

*Figure 2. Example two. Phase 2.*



> contributed to "scapegoating" anglophones.
>
> "I'm saying that everybody has a place in the sun. Instead of pointing fingers, we should all work together to make this place shine again," he said.
>
> Anglophones "are part of the foundation. Montreal, Quebec is not the same because of their grandfathers and grandmothers who built this place."
>
> Asked whether he agreed with the notion that English has become too prominent in downtown Montreal, Coderre said: "When somebody serves me in English, I refuse to buy. That's it."
>
> Immigration is not the cause of Quebec's housing crisis, Coderre also said. While stressing he "truly believes" Quebec needs immigrants, the former federal immigration minister declined to specify how many new arrivals the province should take in annually.
>
> "My stand is we need to have enough immigrants to fulfil our duties," he said. "We have an issue of manpower, of people power; we have an issue of revenues. It can be a factor of pressure regarding housing, but the housing crisis is not

The housing crisis is a political topic, and at the center of a lot of political discussions any time there is an election approaching. The article "I'm almost sure on Québec Liberal leadership run, Denis Coderre says" by Frédérique Tomesco for the *Gazette* (2024) is a prime example of the politicization of the housing crisis. In it, Denis Coderre, politician and former mayor of Montreal, addresses the news media to discuss the possibility of running for the Liberal party in the next provincial election. He quickly brings up the topic of the housing crisis, which has been of increased importance in the city. Whereas the Coalition Avenir Québec government pointed fingers at immigration for adding pressure to local housing markets across the province, Coderre disagrees by saying there are other factors at play than just immigrants (Tomesco 2024). Despite making reference to the housing crisis, the article does so too briefly to connect to any of the keywords developed in Phase 1 of the analysis and was therefore excluded from this study. All the excluded articles addressed the housing crisis in similar cursory ways, some by not bringing up any relevant information regarding the housing crisis at all.

I had the same requirements and process for the entire corpus: the articles had to cover the housing crisis specifically in Montreal. For them to be considered in the analysis, the articles had to relate to those two aspects strongly. I excluded a total of 25 articles within the corpus during this round of analysis, leading to a new total of 107 articles.

### 3.3 Phase three: initial theme generation

In the previous phase, I began to generate some initial codes that remained descriptive. Moving into this phase, I compiled my codes to see possible themes fitting with the ideas that started to unfold. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), phase three "*involves a range of processes of engaging with the data codes to explore areas where there is some similarity of*

35

*meaning*" (158). Finding appropriate themes requires carefully reading and re-analyzing every article within the corpus. By doing a review of all the codes, I developed the following themes: 1) Measures taken by the municipality to address the housing crisis; 2) Statements by public servants; 3) Dialogues and reactions of citizens and stakeholders; 4) Voices of the victims of the housing crisis; 5) Responsibility crisis at all levels of governance; 6) Impacts of the housing crisis on tenants and organizations; 7) Other.

By doing this first round of analysis and making sense of the codes already established in the prior phase, my goal was to develop my first set of themes, based broadly on the articles' contents. I kept a strong focus on my first research question while conducting the thematic analysis, "How have local media in Montreal covered the issue of the housing crisis? What sources of information do they use?," I paid close attention to how the stories portrayed the housing crisis, specifically their focus on a political focus, with an overreliance on political statements throughout the corpus. While the analysis and resulting preliminary themes remained fairly descriptive at this point, it is important to mention that they become more focused in both phases four and five of the analysis.

Having the seven preliminary themes noted above helped me concentrate on the differences in coverage between the six news media organizations, determining the overlaps and differences within the corpus. In the following paragraphs, I outline some early findings related to the seven preliminary themes developed in Phase Three of this analysis.

The first theme "Measures taken by the municipality," gathered all the coverage that discussed both successful and unsuccessful legislation regarding the housing crisis, as well as future legislative projects. Article content that falls under this early theme puts forward different

angles, either by focusing on the Mayor of Montreal or borough mayors giving their ideas on how to boost housing and create strategies to prevent homelessness. Some articles mention specific failures in legislation, like the 20-20-20 bylaw the City of Montreal adopted in 2021, requiring project developers the same proportion of social, family and affordable housing units within new housing projects, "*The policy has clearly failed in creating new affordable housing stock, with zero new affordable units being built because of the policy through the end of 2023. Criticism has focused exclusively on the lack of new units, but missing is any discussion of why the location of those units is so important to kids. Even if the current policy had worked in creating more units, it likely would have come at the cost of further SES and racial segregation as they could have been built off-site on cheaper land in poorer neighbourhoods*" (MacKenzie 2024).

**Example three: Article Excerpt. "We're Moving in the Right Direction" (Hanes 2024)**

*Figure 3: Example three. Theme 1.*



In "'We're moving in the right direction'; In a sit-down interview after her recent health scare and a rough patch in her tenure, Mayor Valérie Plante emphasizes the positive," published

on January 23, 2024, in the *Gazette*, Allison Hanes (2024) focuses on Mayor Plante's feedback over the projects she has for the upcoming year, as well as her reflections about the 20-20-20 bylaw amongst other topics. Despite harsh criticisms, Plante still considers the bylaw to be a useful measure, "*Even with housing starts at their lowest levels in decades, Plante is adamant that the bylaw is "absolutely" still useful. "Before the 20-20-20 (bylaw) existed, every time there was stuff being built, we were hoping the promoters would include social and affordable housing. So that's why I always say the 20-20-20 is not a financial tool, it's a planning and management tool*," she said. "*I know there are critics and I hear them. But nothing has shown me that before it was better. If it would have been better before, we wouldn't be in this situation right now*" (Hanes 2024). Whether positive or negative changes are being made by the City of Montreal on the topic of the housing crisis, this theme captures the tensions within the municipality to act, the pressures faced by both journalists and citizens, as well as associations and stakeholders alike for a more significant change.

The second theme, "Statements by Public Servants," reflects a common pattern within most of the news coverage. 52 news articles have direct quotes or interviews with politicians, without taking into account associations that represent low-income citizens, the unhoused, housing advocacy groups or even victims of the housing crisis generally. There are several problems with such a stance, as it weakens the watchdog role of journalism, by failing to bridge the divide between citizens and politicians, which could in turn weaken the trust citizens have in the media by failing to provide a space for politicians to take accountability for actions that led to the worsening of the housing crisis. With news articles failing to include the voices of those directly impacted by the effects of the housing crisis, they are failing to show the extent of the housing
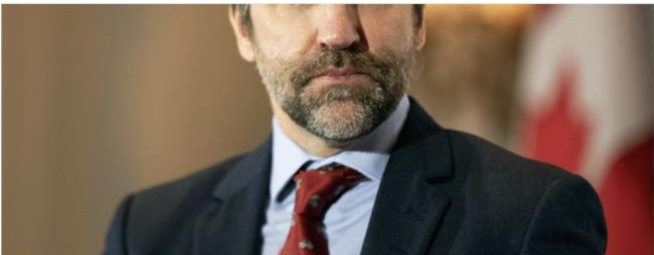
crisis, as well as the lives being impacted by the choices made by the municipal and provincial governments.

**Example four: Article Excerpt. "There are no quick fixes to housing crisis: minister Guilbeault visits home riding to mark new project for unhoused, people in need" (Magder 2024)**

*Figure 4: Example four. Theme 2.*



In "There are no quick fixes to housing crisis: minister; Guilbeault visits home riding to mark new project for unhoused, people in need," published in the *Gazette* on January 20th, 2024, Jason Magder writes about uncovered projects to help Montreal citizens struggling with homelessness or struggling to find apartments. This article cites five politicians: Steven Guilbeault, federal environment Minister, Valérie Plante, Mayor of Montreal, Pierre Poilièvre, Federal Conservative party leader, Benoit Dorais, Montreal's executive committee Vice-President in charge of housing, and Julien Hénault-Ratelle, the opposition spokesperson. The only person not involved in politics mentioned in the article is Gabriel Giguère, who had written a report on the

Namur-Hippodrome housing project in a paper published by the Montreal Economic Institute (Magder 2024). Centering an article on politicians can accentuate a feeling of bias, which can accentuate a lack of accountability perceived by citizens and victims of the housing crisis. Also, failing to incorporate voices from victims or housing organizations represents a missed opportunity to add more depth to the article, as a commentary from a housing organization on the Namur-Hippodrome project could have been helpful to contextualize it and explain its shortcomings.

Theme three, "Dialogues and reactions from citizens and stakeholders" seeks to group articles that give a voice to advocacy groups together, as well as developing managers. For this theme, I kept an eye out for any articles that referenced direct statements made by citizens, housing organizations or developers regarding the need for more actions from the municipal government, whether through direct quotes or commentaries.

**Example five: Article Excerpt, "'There is a crisis': Verdun needs shelter for the unhoused, intervention worker says" (Magder 2023)**

*Figure 5: Example five. Theme 3.*

In "'There is a crisis': Verdun needs shelter for the unhoused, intervention worker says," published in the *Gazette* on November 7, 2023, Jason Magder writes about the worsening of the housing crisis in Verdun, a popular neighbourhood in Montreal. In this article, there are points of view of both social workers who express the need for more shelters within the borough to address a growing demand for such due to the worsening of the housing crisis, as well as reactions from citizens, "*Last week, more than 200 residents concerned about the shelter attended an information session at Verdun's borough hall. Many decried the lack of communication by the borough, while others said that they were concerned for their safety with the arrival of the shelter*" (Magder 2023). The article portrays a conflicted feeling between citizens who volunteer at shelters and feel it is important to provide help locally to people in need, whether homeless or not, within the borough and not have people travel to the downtown area, while also highlighting citizens adopting a "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) stance on the issue, worrying about crime rates and safety.

The fourth theme, "Voices of the Victims of the Housing Crisis," pays close attention to the coverage that included stories shared by victims of renovictions or not being able to find affordable housing. One main element of this theme is the emotions in some of the statements, especially when they are stories told by victims of renovictions or people who frequented shelters temporarily as a result of their situations. Stories grouped under this preliminary theme provided a better idea of who the people affected most by the housing crisis are. In "Program offers quick housing aid for Montrealers having a patch of bad luck," published on January 25, 2024, in the *Gazette*, René Bruemmer (2024) shares the story of Michel Domaine and his wife, who had been evicted from their apartment by their landlord "*I was thinking of ending it," he said, drawing a*

*thumb across his throat. The couple had sold almost everything, including their wedding rings. "I*

*was cold, I was hungry, and there was nothing*" (Bruemmer 2024).

**Example six: Article Excerpt. "Program offers quick housing aid for Montrealers having a**

**patch of bad luck" (Bruemmer 2024)**

*Figure 6: Example six. Theme 4.*
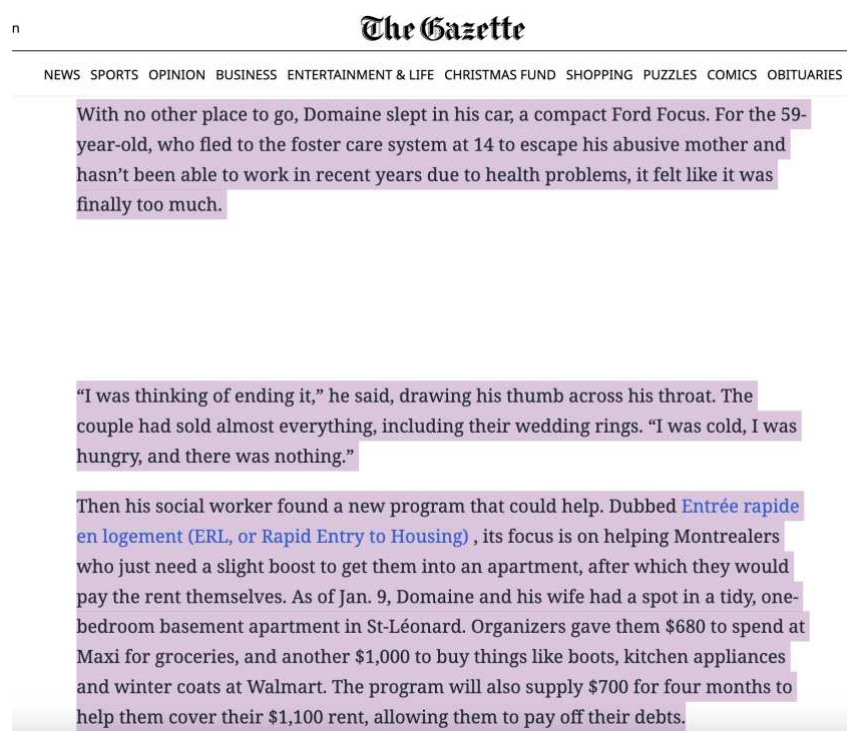


The article here highlights that no matter one's situation, people could be facing similar

realities to Mr. Domaine and his wife, as the higher costs of living are affecting more people each

year, "*Despite the fact Domaine's wife has a steady job as a machine operator, the couple couldn't*

*find another apartment in Montreal's tight housing market. She moved in with her son, but the*

*space was so small she had to sleep in the kitchen*" (Bruemmer 2024). However, thanks to the

"Entrée Rapide en Logement" (ERL or Rapid Entry into Housing in English), the couple moved

into an apartment in Saint-Leonard (Bruemmer 2024). First-hand experiences are important, especially when approaching a topic like the housing crisis. Hearing people's experiences, the struggles they faced, and the solutions (or lack thereof) are important so people know the realities of the situation.

Theme Five, "Responsibility Crisis at all Levels of Governance," groups coverage that highlights a lack of accountability by the municipal government in the housing crisis, including not adopting appropriate legislation and poor management of Airbnb and short-term rentals. Some coverage highlights the blurred boundaries between the provincial and municipal governments that constantly point fingers at one another to pass the blame, rather than adopting a firm stance on the issue at hand.

**Example seven: Article Excerpt. "A year after Airbnb crackdown, short-term rentals still a concern in Montreal" (Thomas 2024)**

*Figure 7: Example seven. Theme 5*
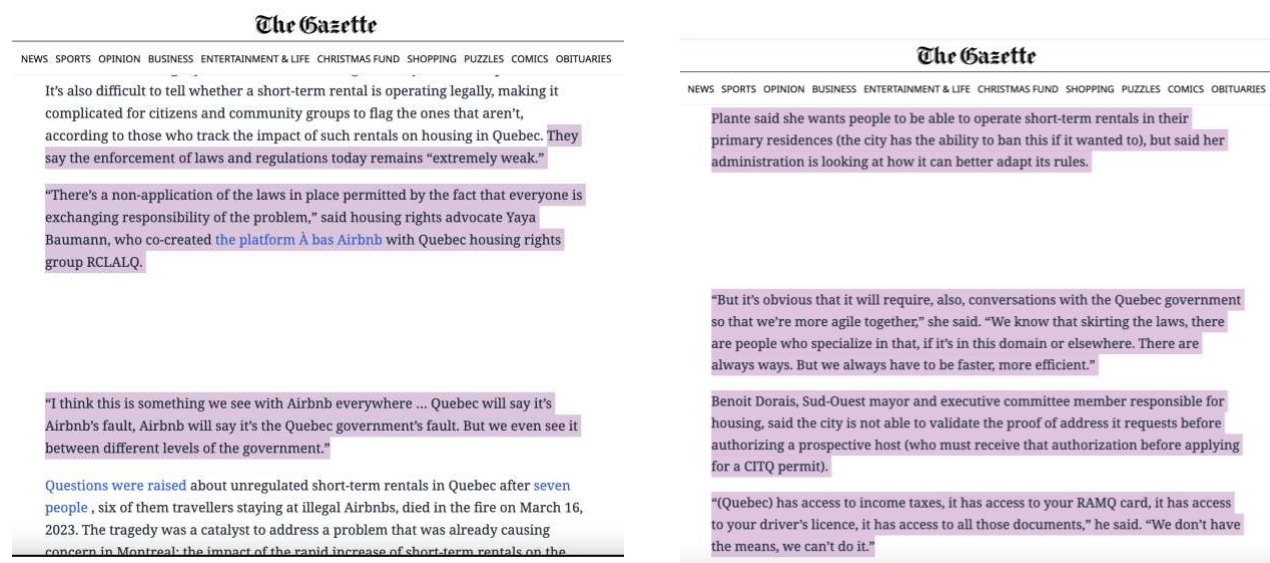
For example, in the March 23, 2024, *Montreal Gazette* article, "A year after Airbnb crackdown, short-term rentals still a concern in Montreal," Thomas (2024) points out the lack of communication between the levels of governance, which have to make decisions on the topic together for their decision-making to be stronger, "*There is a non-application of the laws in place permitted by the fact that everyone is exchanging responsibility of the problem [...] I think this is something we see with Airbnb everywhere ... Québec will say it's Airbnb's fault, Airbnb will say it's the Québec government's fault. But we even see it between different levels of the government*" (Thomas 2024). However, despite words from experts and legislators calling for a much-needed change in legislation, a year after the fire, not much has changed in preventing the spread of Airbnbs (and similar short-rental accommodations) around Montreal. It highlights a lack of coordination between the three levels of government, which delays a change in legislation regarding short-term rentals.

Theme six, "Impacts of the housing crisis on tenants and organizations," gathers all of the articles that refer to struggles members of the population face in finding affordable housing and the consequences (e.g. financial insecurity), without the people at the centre of the housing crisis and their voices explicitly being included in the story. This theme also includes the point of view of housing organizations which comments on the realities they deal with, as well as the obstacles they face in helping the ever-growing tenants in need.

**Example eight: Article Excerpt. "'We don't like being out here,' say striking public-sector workers" (Thomas 2023)**

*Figure 8. Example eight. Theme 6.*
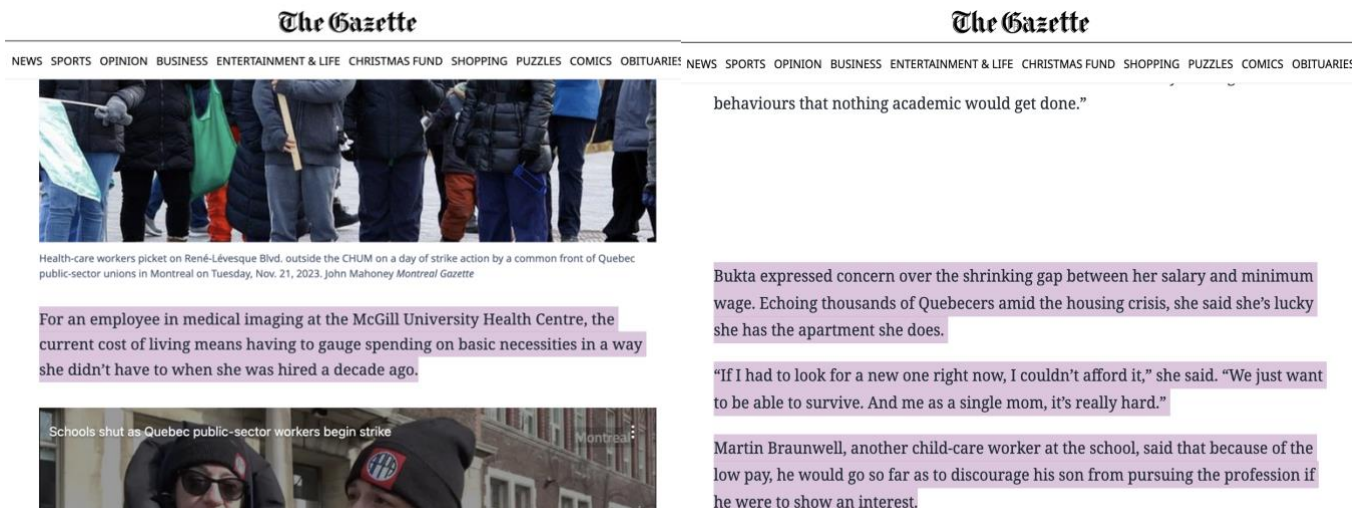


In "'We don't like being out here,' say striking public-sector workers," published in the November 22, 2023 edition of the *Gazette*, Katelyn Thomas (2023) outlines the impact of rising rent prices and stagnating wages have on renters, "*For an employee in medical imaging at the McGill University Health Centre, the current cost of living means having to gauge spending on basic necessities in a way she didn't have to when she was hired a decade ago.*" Protesters express how they have become more aware of their spending, and even go further by highlighting the need to restrict spending in certain areas to make sure they would have enough money to cover their rent, "*Now I really have to measure," said the employee, who asked to remain anonymous. "It's like: 'OK, sorry (kids), we're not buying meat this week, because we have to reduce at some point because I don't have enough money to pay'*" (Thomas 2023). By organizing themselves in events like protests, citizens can voice their discontentment about the lack of action by the municipality,

as, despite calls to action by the mayor of Montreal, the housing crisis keeps worsening year by year.

**Example nine: Article Excerpt. "Justin Trudeau is down, but don't count him out"**

**(Libman 2023)**

*Figure 9: Example nine. "Other."*



Justin Trudeau's accusation that India was behind the killing of a Sikh leader on Canadian soil can cause untold damage if he hasn't got his facts straight, Robert Libman writes. Kena Betancur *Getty Images*

Here I was, seething in my car from the exit ramp to Trudeau airport, inching along for an hour trying to get to the terminal to pick up two of my sons. Harried passengers on foot, desperate to catch their flights with suitcases in tow, weaved dangerously among the long line of cars and frustrated motorists.

The chaotic scene seemed a metaphor for the dysfunction that has gripped airports and other basic services and departments under federal responsibility, and the government overall. Nothing seems to be working.

Last year, Toronto's Pearson airport was deemed the worst in the world for delays. There was the passport fiasco, with Canadians camping outside federal offices desperate to get their documents in time for travel. Visas were delayed, derailing international conferences.

There is the controversy over alleged Chinese interference in our elections, straining relations with the world's second biggest economy. The Liberals have been talking big on the environment, but failing to deliver. Spending and debt are ballooning.

There are questions about the Liberals' moral compass. Voters in the Montreal region, particularly the western part of the island, have been among their most loyal supporters. Yet the government pulled a Brutus and stabbed anglophones in the back as they brushed aside major concerns about Bill C-13 — the revised Official Languages Act — in a naked attempt to appease Quebec nationalists.

"Justin Trudeau is down, but don't count him out," written by Robert Libman (2023) and published in the *Gazette* on September 22, 2023, is an example of articles that found themselves in the "Other" before being removed from the analysis. The article is a commentary on Trudeau's

government, addressing his lowest points, "*There is the controversy over alleged Chinese interference in our elections, straining relations with the world's second biggest economy. The Liberals have been talking big on the environment, but failing to deliver. Spending and debt are ballooning"* (Libman 2023). However, the content of the article strays too far away from the topic of this research, and the housing crisis is only mentioned briefly in one paragraph as an example of topic that is generating anger within Canadians, who have shifted support away from Trudeau, as the issues of raising costs of living have continued to worsen under his government, "*Add the housing crisis and the rise in grocery bills and cost of living - whether or not beyond Ottawa's control - and no wonder Canadians are angry, with polls putting the Liberals well behind the Conservatives led by Pierre Poilievre"* (Libman 2023). Whereas such articles could have been interesting in tackling why Canadians are asking for more action from all levels of governance on the topic of the housing crisis, such articles were later removed by not being focused enough.

## 3.4 Phase four: theme development and review

Once I developed an early set of themes, I started doing some pre-analysis before diving back into another round of analysis and narrowing it down. Doing this round of pre-analysis helped me realize that some themes needed adjustments, by either needing to be blended with other already existing themes, needed some rewording or simply did not fit with the projected study. This study required me to check back on my full set of included news articles frequently, re-read the articles, and re-analyze the content to make sure the themes represented the bigger picture, and not just a small portion of what they all covered. Taking breaks in the thematic analysis allowed me to keep my eyes open and sharp to catch details I had missed, keeping my goal to be as precise as possible in mind. Taking a break is encouraged by Braun and Clarke (2022), "*[T]he vivid*

*imagery evoked reflexive TA so well for us: a process of meaning-making that shifts and changes form, and sometimes feels slippery, tricky to grasp hold of. Such moments are ones where taking a break, and just letting the analytic ideas ferment in your head, can be really helpful in shifting how you're making sense of the data"* (187). Before diving into the explanation of the new themes, I will first highlight the main changes found in this phase.

### 3.4.1   Reworked themes

Despite most of the initial themes having survived the refining process, theme names were altered to be more specific about the issues they cover. In this reorganization of themes, I kept in mind that if a theme lacked support by not having enough articles to back it up, it could no longer apply to my analysis, "*This phase is partly about providing a validity check on the quality and scope of your candidate themes. But it's importantly also about developing the richness of your themes; you're aiming to develop a rich, nuanced analysis that addresses your research question*" (Braun & Clarke 2022, 184). Therefore, after defining my themes as they were in Phase 3, and connections missed in the previous phase of the thematic analysis, or those that became clearer through the reflexive refining process. I removed one theme entirely, as it blended better with another theme than on its own.

### 3.4.2 A better understanding of narratives

This revised set of themes puts forward a better understanding of the entire set of 107 articles included in this research, specifically in response to the question about how the six news media outlets approached the housing crisis in their coverage. It helped me grasp a more conceptual vision rather than a descriptive one. The revised themes aim to be more precise, with a better understanding of the core ideas they represent in the news media articles.

The revised themes are the following: 1) the municipal government's response; 2) political bias; 3) citizen and stakeholder reaction; 4) voices of the housing crisis victims; 5) responsibility crisis; 6) other.

A main difference between phases three and four is the disappearance of the previous theme six, "Impacts of the housing crisis on tenants and organizations." I recognized the similarities between this theme and the current theme five, "Voices of the Victims of the Housing Crisis," which I therefore decided to blend together. Therefore, the new theme for "Voices of the housing crisis victims," contains both articles that share first-hand stories from people who have been renovicted or are struggling to find affordable accommodations, as well as organizations sharing their understanding of the situation they deal with.

Theme one, "Measures taken by the municipality to address the housing crisis," has been reworded to "The municipal government's response" to clarify the theme. The goal of the rewording was to capture the theme's analytical goal of understanding whether or not the municipality's goals worked as intended, answering the questions: Are the changes effective or not effective?

Theme two has been reworded to state a stronger idea shared among the news media corpus, ranging from "Statements by public servants," to "Political bias in media coverage," to convey an over-reliance on political statements in articles, rather than using sources to support ideas.

The remaining theme titles stayed the same, with the same understanding and goals outlined in Phase Three. Only theme three's title slightly changed, as I decided to shorten it for clarity and to reduce repetition.

**3.5. Phase five: theme defining, refining and naming**

In this stage of the thematic analysis, the goal is to "*fine-tune your analysis – ensuring that each theme is clearly demarcated, and is built around a strong core concept or essence,*" highlighting the need to be as precise as possible to avoid any possible misunderstandings (Braun & Clarke 2022, 92). Based on their remarks, I narrowed my analysis to three final themes that appear throughout the six news media outlets studied in this research: 1) the municipal government's response; 2) claims by tenants and housing organizations; 3) overrepresentation of political actors/voices.

The first theme, "the Responsibility Crisis at all levels of governance," seeks to examine Montreal's stance on the housing crisis. It studies how politicians have reacted to the housing crisis throughout the news articles, what they have put into place to act on it and how they perceived the housing crisis itself. In this theme, news media coverage relied heavily on public servants' statements, commenting on their decision-making (like the 20-20-20 bylaw for instance), in which public servants either applauded the beginning of a move in the right direction in terms of housing in Montreal, or the events of something negative happening, passed the blame onto other levels of governance for more to be done.

The second theme, "claims of citizens and organizations on the housing crisis," includes the coverage that shared any personal connection with the housing crisis, sentiments expressed or concrete actions done by organizations to provide help to those targeted by high-rents and renovictions. In some cases, the testimonies are the article's entire content, whereas in others, the testimonies are used to portray the realities of the housing crisis, using them as examples of what people are going through.

Finally, the last theme, the "overrepresentation of politicians in news coverage," highlights something widespread — the overreliance on political sources, which overshadows the voices of the victims of the housing crisis. Instead of having a plurality of voices, including the ones targeted by the effects of the housing crisis, or obtaining relevant documentation that could support their claims, news organizations run to politicians for commentaries and statements, as they often are easier to get than filing an ATI request.

This section has outlined the process that led to the finalization of three relevant themes as they are more specific about what the coverage of the housing crisis has focused on the most. In the final section of this chapter, I will go into more detail about the three final themes and provide examples from representative articles to illustrate the themes further.

## 3.6. Phase six: writing up

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), the last phase of the thematic analysis is about "*aiming to weave together your analytic narrative and compelling, vivid data extracts, to tell your reader a coherent and persuasive story about the dataset that addresses your research question*" (93). This last phase of the thematic analysis is to put into words all of the work done to achieve the thematic analysis, a step that is not necessarily done while conducting the research itself. In this case, it is about going into details and being as specific as possible to understand better each step that led to a decision and why the decision matters.

The finalized themes all understand the coverage of the housing crisis in Montreal by the media and how it is approached by the media, citizens and politicians alike. All play a part in the housing crisis, both in providing an understanding of it and tackling it to decrease its effects, when

possible. It gives the vision of how the six news media organizations perceive the housing crisis, by focusing on their perspectives.

In theme one, the *Responsibility Crisis at all levels of governance*, Montreal's municipal government is at the center of the analysis, but also extends the focus to the provincial and federal governments, as the media outlines the actions done by the municipality, and the lack thereof at times, to tackle the housing crisis and bring forth change in the city. Whether their policies are successful or not, this theme aims to reflect the work being done by the local government to prevent the issue from worsening and becoming beyond control. Political involvement in this category stems directly from political speeches and law making decisions. Comments came from the Mayor of Montreal, Valérie Plante, as well as borough mayors, opposition parties, and federal and provincial politicians. What is interesting here, is the contrast between what politicians say when interviewed by the media or through speeches, and the actions they put forth to address the situation at hand. It even highlights the disconnection between the provincial and municipal governments.

There is oftentimes a misunderstanding by politicians of the realities faced by citizens. For instance, in an article named, "Montreal shouldn't be 'a city where only rich people can afford' homes, Plante says,"[4] published on June 21, 2023, in the *Gazette*, François Legault, Québec's premier, expressed how in his four years as premier, he has not witnessed any family left unhoused on July 1, which is traditional "moving day" in the province (Riga 2023). However, instead of

---

[4] I wanted to point out that the version of this article in my corpus is different from the digital version posted on the *Gazette*'s website. Whereas the story appears as such in my news corpus, it appears as though it has been reworked when posted onto the website, with some of its content pulled and moved into another article.

fact-checking the premier's statement and possibly speaking to relevant housing advocacy groups[5] the article leaves the premier's words unchallenged.

However, the article also outlines the desire of Montreal's mayor, Valérie Plante, to bring about change in the city, to revert the trends of the housing crisis and prevent it from facing a similar fate from Toronto and Vancouver, "*Mayor Valérie Plante says she doesn't want Montreal to become like Toronto or Vancouver - cities where only rich people can afford housing. She made the comment as she dismissed Premier François Legault's contention that higher housing prices are an inevitable side effect of rising salaries*" (Riga 2023). However, in the version accessible on the *Gazette*'s website, Premier Legault's words are challenged by Valérie Plante who disagrees with his position, arguing that rising wages are not going to magically solve the housing crisis as such a measure will not necessarily trigger people to become able to rent or purchase more than they are now (Riga 2023). Despite a discrepancy between the two articles not disclosed anywhere on the *Gazette*'s website, the change in the article's content is rather interesting to describe just how complicated capturing the full story may be.

Theme two, the *Claims of citizens and organizations on the housing crisis*, focuses on the people and organizations that fight against the housing crisis, and especially on how the media helped provide them with a platform to share their stories and their own understandings of the housing crisis in Montreal based on their lived experiences. This theme had been present since the early phases of this analysis, however, had been reworded to convey the emotional undertones it contains. It highlights both the frustrations of victims of renovictions, the feeling of powerlessness

---

[5] In an article from *Le Devoir*, "Un autre 1er juillet sur fond de crise du logement à Montréal," Jeanne Corriveau writes on how since the beginning of 2023, Montreal had already received 314 requests from households who worried they would not be able to find housing by July 1st. In contrast, she highlights the city had received 900 requests in 2022 (Corriveau, 2023).

they have faced and the lack of actions by the municipality to address the situation, and includes the statements of organizations that work alongside those people, helping turn a few stories into something more positive.

In "Homelessness in the West Island? It's 'in every borough,'" published on February 29, 2024, in the *Gazette*, René Bruemmer (2024a) shares the story of Michael McGillis. McGillis had just recently been sent back to Québec, after spending 49 years in Florida and recently, 7 months in a US immigration detention facility, "*It's nothing personal," Michael McGillis told the customs and immigration officer at Montreal's Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport. "But I'm going to have to hit you*." The article focuses on his story, from his arrival in April 2021 back in Montreal with no money, no apartment, and no plan to be accommodated by Ricochet. This emergency shelter had recently opened on the West Island of Montreal (Bruemmer 2024a).

**Example ten: Article Excerpt. "Homelessness in the West Island? It's 'in every borough'" (Bruemmer 2024a)**

*Figure 10: Phase 6. Theme 2.*
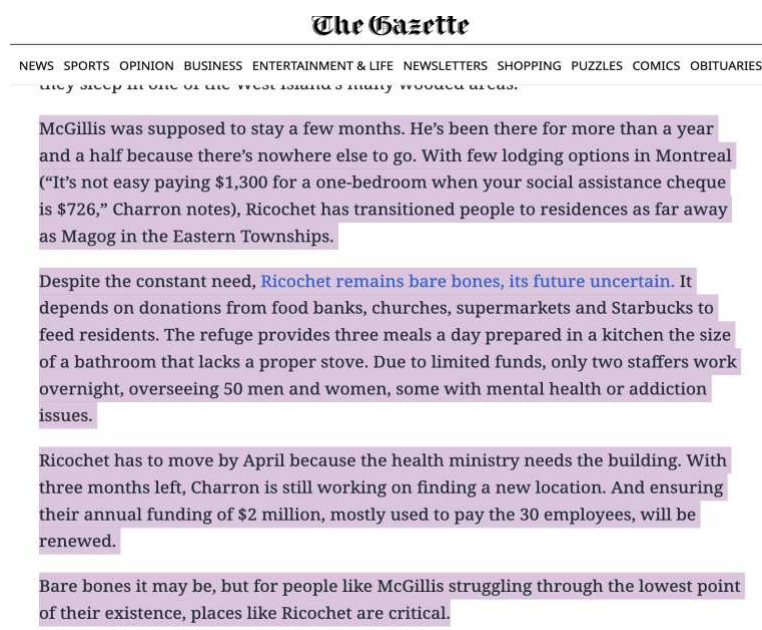
Bruemmer's article also discusses the need for more shelters to open throughout the island and to secure existing ones, which struggle to keep welcoming people and stay open (Bruemmer 2024a). With demand growing more and more every year, from people needing help searching for a place to stay temporarily when facing evictions, homelessness or economic stress, shelters like Ricochet become crucial, and their slow disappearance becomes problematic. In "The Fight to Revive an Abandoned Home for Single Mothers," published on August 23, 2023, in the *Gazette*, Allison Hanes (2023a) shares the story of Project Chance, an organization offering shelter for single mothers enrolled in secondary education, which shut down in 2019 due to maintenance issues which had caused the deterioration of the building. The organization did not have the money required to fix a collapsing plumbing system, forcing it to rehouse the residents and children that had been living at the Cavendish Boulevard address in the NDG borough, "*The last plumber I spoke to when the entire system was collapsing said to me as we stood in the boiler room 'This is the way you plumb a swimming pool,'" Casey* [board member of Project Chance] *recalled. "It was doomed from the start." Plastic piping was connected to old radiators. Four buildings were linked together with no shut-off valves for individual units, let alone each structure. Water damage was prevalent. The only reliable solution, Casey said, would have been to rip out the plumbing and heating systems to start from scratch*" (Hanes 2023a). Both articles highlight the fragility of support systems in Montreal for the victims of the housing crisis and the homeless.

Lastly, theme three, the *Overrepresentation of politicians in news coverage*, politicians remain at the forefront, through their involvement in news pieces, revolving around the ideas and statements of those in power, discussing their visions and understandings when asked to comment on their actions and issues at large. However, it also includes journalists and the choices they make

in their coverage of the housing crisis. By highlighting their overreliance on political statements, it also highlights the choices they make to obtain easier statements. Despite having some articles that include tenants, and organizations, an overwhelming majority of news articles focus on politicians.

**Example eleven: Article Excerpt. "Valérie Plante wants Québec to help solve Montreal's housing crisis" (Magder 2023a)**

*Figure 11: Phase 6. Theme 3.*
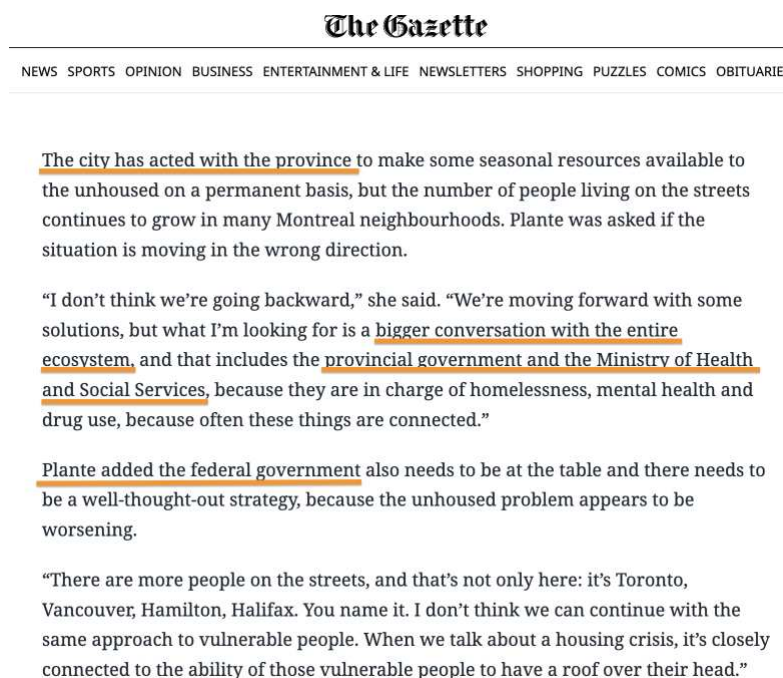


An example of such a phenomenon implicating both the municipal government, as well as the federal and provincial governments is the article "Valérie Plante wants Québec to help solve Montreal's housing crisis," published in the *Gazette* and written by Jason Magder on June 18, 2023. In the article, Plante outlines how Montreal needs help from the other two levels of governance to be able to reverse the effects of the housing crisis more effectively, "*We're moving forward with some solutions, but what I'm looking for is a bigger conversation with the entire*

*ecosystem, and that includes the provincial government and the Ministry of Health and Social Services, because they are in charge of homelessness, mental health and drug use, because often these things are connected. Plante added the federal government also needs to be at the table and there needs to be a well-thought-out strategy, because the unhoused problem appears to be worsening*" (Magder 2023a). The article centers on politicians' voices, notably Montreal mayor Valérie Plante and Québec housing minister France-Élaine Duranceau, without adding insides from housing organizations, developers or simply people who have experienced homelessness. Plante does refer to the growing numbers of homeless people in cities like Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, however, fails to provide deeper insight into numbers, only remaining at a surface-level of information (Magder 2023a).

To highlight the overreliance on political or official statements, I counted each reference, either direct through a quoted statement or implicit by being paraphrased, of all politicians, housing organizations and others, including banking institutions or real estate companies. For the total **382** statements included across the 107 articles analyzed, **270** were from politicians, **94** from housing organizations, and **18** from other sources. It is important to keep in mind that even when politicians are not providing statements directly to the press, but are still mentioned by name or by their party, the coverage maintains them as participants in the conversation about housing issues. Based on the themes I have developed through my thematic analysis, I was able to answer a portion of my first research question, developed by my understanding of how the six news organizations covered the housing crisis and the sources they focused on. This thematic analysis shows journalists' strong reliance on political sources in their coverage of the housing crisis. Local media have provided politically-focused reporting of the housing crisis, centering on the Montreal administration's

reactions to it, while minimizing other actors and issues involved in the housing crisis. I will further

outline my findings in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4. Descriptive analysis of the ATI packages

This research project focuses on Access to Information (ATI) as a tool for both quality journalism and qualitative research. As mentioned in Chapter 1, ATI and Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation gives Canadian citizens the right to obtain information from various governmental organizations at the three levels of governance: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal (Tromp 2020). Despite representing a tool that grants more governmental transparency and openness, Canadian ATI has been criticized in recent years for failing to be an efficient tool, due to long processing times, lack of responses and fees, which can deter individuals from submitting ATI requests, and long lists of exemptions which grant the power to government institutions to refuse the disclosure of documents, all allowing a layer of secrecy to remain (Karanicolas et al. 2012). As mentioned in Chapter 1, institutions in Montreal have 20 days to provide an answer to an ATI request, with the possibility of applying a 10-day extension if they need more time to retrieve the appropriate information (Ville de Montréal 2024). This chapter focuses on my second research question: Based on information regarding the housing crisis gleaned from public records and ATI requests, what angles, issues and sources have the existing news coverage overlooked?

I chose to conduct a descriptive analysis of the ATI packages I gathered, which involves both previously released packages and new ones I filed requests for, for the purposes of this study. Because municipal ATI has not been studied in depth, I thought it was important to consider the corpus of ATI packages separately to understand how useful ATI could be in helping journalism become more qualitative. By this I mean, the use of ATI in reporting helps one become more qualitative by going deeper into the topic they are reporting on. Whereas relying on political or

other secondary sources remains on the surface level, the use of primary sources may help a journalist with information that has not yet been revealed to citizens and that directly impacts them. ATI requests can also help journalists access hard facts rather than basing their reporting on potentially inaccurate or deceptive information gleaned from second or third-hand statements.

A descriptive analysis therefore represented a way to outline some information about municipal ATI that needs to be understood to highlight its usefulness in journalism. ATI documents can provide information that citizens are unfamiliar with, whether specific laws or actions done by the government. In the context of the housing crisis, it is important to familiarize ourselves with what the municipality is doing to keep track of the issues, the actions done to limit the worsening of the situation and whether or not their actions are successful. All of these ideas will be explored in this chapter. The insights gathered through this analysis will be helpful to emphasize how journalists can use ATI in the future for their investigative pieces, as well as how Montreal can improve its ATI structure to facilitate such an initiative to happen.

## 4.1 Approach

Because Montreal proactively releases information related to previously completed ATI packages on their Open Data portal after decisions on them are made, I decided to search what was already available to the public first. I performed two searches on the website, using the specific keywords "logement" (housing) and "Airbnb." Searching expressions like "crise du logement" yielded zero results as the platform provides search results only for singular words. For the keyword "logement," I received a total of 53 documents, and "Airbnb" yielded four. The total of previously completed ATI packages studied for this research was thus **57**.

I also decided to submit my own ATI requests based on information gleaned through the news coverage and some municipal measures I wanted to follow up on. I filed three ATI requests: one with the city of Montreal, one with the Ministry of Tourism and one with Revenu Québec. Montreal is not the only one dealing with Airbnb, or short-term rentals as there at least are two other actors involved. The Ministry of Tourism is one, for people to be able to rent on Airbnb, they have to obtain a registration number from the Corporation de l'Industrie Touristique du Québec (CITQ — Corporation of Québec's Tourism Industry in English). The CITQ is mandated by Québec's Ministry of Tourism to provide those registration numbers. Revenu Québec is involved as the fiscal information, as well as revenue generated by the location of Airbnb rentals are directly sent to them (CITQ).

I have therefore sent the following requests to the three institutions listed above. I want to emphasize that, because the requests have been made in French, those English translations may not capture the same precision as they did in the original language of submission.

**Access to Information Request to Revenu Québec:** How many complaints have you been receiving about short-term rentals posted on platforms like Airbnb between March 2023 and today? This includes illegal ones. How many investigations have you conducted since 2022? How many sanctions have been given since 2022 to illegal Airbnbs? Please send me all documents you possess, including internal memos, emails, transcriptions of meetings, etc. Please exclude any documents that may violate one's privacy.

**Access to Information Request to the City of Montreal:** How many short-term rental units have been sanctioned by the Airbnb squad since its creation? Please add any reports you may have, even for Airbnbs considered to follow the law. How many complaints have you received (through all channels, including the 311-phone line) about illegal Airbnbs between January 2023 and today? Please send me all documents you possess, including internal memos, emails, transcriptions of meetings, etc. Please exclude any documents that may violate one's privacy.

**Access to Information Request to the Ministry of Tourism:** How many reports of fraudulent tourist registration certification have you given in the 2023-2024 period? How many tourist registration certifications have been given in the same period? Do you keep track of the fraudulent numbers to crack down when they are reused? Please send me all documents you possess, including internal memos, emails, transcriptions of meetings, etc. Please exclude any documents that may violate one's privacy.

Based on those requests. I wanted to know the kind of complaints the city had received between March 16, 2023, and April 4, 2024. I also inquired about the tourism squad that had been created by the city of Montreal to perform in three boroughs: Ville-Marie, Sud-Ouest and Plateau-Mont-Royal. Created after the March 2023 fire, the goal of the squad is to target the three neighbourhoods with the most illegal Airbnbs to respond to citizens' complaints and make sure they operate with the proper permits. If the visited units do not have proper permits and operate illegally, the inspectors can fine them and lodge further action to be done. The results of the inspections are then transferred to Revenu Québec, which is in charge of applying the *Tourist*

*Accommodation Act* and can therefore apply additional fines (Ducas 2023b). Complaints have to be placed using the 311 municipal phone line, for inspectors to be sent to locations. The squad's goal was to inspect Airbnb and short-term rental units to make sure they had the proper permits and documentation, in an attempt to limit the number of illegal Airbnbs in those three areas (Gazette 2023). I therefore asked the city of Montreal to provide any complaints received via the 311-phone line regarding Airbnb/short-term rental units, as well as data regarding the squad's performance. For this, I obtained one document from the City of Montreal, and also from three boroughs; two from the Sud-Ouest borough, 65 from Ville-Marie and one for Plateau-Mont-Royal, for a total of **69**. In total, this analysis includes **126** ATI packages, with a total of **90** pages. All of the documents provided in the ATI packages I received from all the institutions are digital packages, with documents either in PDF, in a Google document or directly answered in an email response.

I asked the Ministry of Tourism for information regarding the number of CITQs provided during the time frame, as well as if they had been notified of any fraudulent CITQs that had been delivered. Based on those questions, the Ministry of Tourism provided me with answers in an email answer. Finally, I asked Revenu Québec about inspections they had conducted between March 16, 2023, and April 4, 2024, the number of sanctions they had provided to illegal short-term rentals and the number of complaints they had received. Despite Revenu Québec's goals outlined, and confirmed to me by the Ministry of Tourism, Revenu Québec redirected me to a website page that contains information regarding inspections they conducted but failed to provide any documentation relating to Airbnbs in particular. As the link provided by Revenu Québec

directs back to their website, and they did not comment further, I excluded this response from the rest of the analysis. The rest of the ATI packages are discussed in further detail below.

When drafting my ATI requests, I paid close attention to what I had been reading about both in my news media corpus, as well as the research I had done in preparation for beginning this study. What that work revealed is who does what to the housing crisis and short-term rentals, and how many different players were involved. The provincial and municipal levels of governance are both involved when it comes to tourist housing units, involving both the City of Montreal and its boroughs, and various institutions from Québec: Revenu Québec and the Ministry of Tourism. Having those specific details in mind, I filed one request with Montreal, one with the Ministry of Tourism and one with Revenu Québec. The request I had sent to Montreal had been sent to three boroughs: Ville-Marie, Sud-Ouest and Plateau-Mont-Royal as I demanded access to data from the tourism squad, and these specific boroughs are the ones where its operations take place. However, I could have filed ATI requests directly in those boroughs, and simply mentioned such an action while filing an ATI request with the City of Montreal.

Going through the previously released ATI packages helped to get an understanding of what types of requests resulted in a disclosure of documents, as well as what did not. This process also helped inform the processes of drafting my own ATI requests, which I worded to minimize the chances of "no records found" responses from the institutions I intended to file requests with. From the corpus of previously disclosed ATI packages, it appeared that the more specific a request was, the more documents the applicant received in return. Instead of a vague request with solely the information desired, it is necessary to highlight a timeframe and provide a list of documents that would be of interest. Whether you want to include a text searchable PDF document, letters,

memos, or internal emails, such requests have to be made clear within the application. For all of my applications, I highlighted the desire of all of those documents, wanting to see much of the information that the institutions would be provided back as a result of those appearing in the application. The more complete and specific a request is, the more likely an answer will be provided. In an attempt to minimize exemptions and redactions, I indicated information that I did not need in my ATI packages, namely any information that could violate one's privacy, in accordance with the *Privacy Act*. The *Privacy Act* and the ATIA are two interconnected federal legislations, as in providing information to citizens, institutions have to make sure they do not compromise information about those the information requested is on (Tomasic 2023). In acknowledging the *Privacy Act*, I aimed to show that I am aware documents can contain sensitive information, and therefore encouraged the institution to provide any documents they could provide, without facing the threat of a 'no-record' answer based on the nature of the documents.

In choosing the timeframe for all those documents, I focused on the same timeframe I chose for this study: 2023-2024. I suspected there would be an increase of concern amongst citizens on properties that may be hosting Airbnb rentals near them, who would turn to the municipal phone line, 311, to make complaints for investigations to take place. I also wondered if any kind of legislative changes had been pursued following the Old Montreal fire of March 2023. Were institutions still providing as many CITQ numbers for new tourist housing units? How many investigations have taken place since the creation of the tourism squad? How effective are those investigations? Those questions stuck as I worded my ATI requests, wanting to see what new information official documents could provide, and assessing how important ATI requests can be as a research method.

I decided to file those three ATI requests with the three institutions due to their involvement in managing short-term rental units and holding information regarding the housing crisis, specifically for the City of Montreal and its boroughs. The goal of filing my own ATI requests for this project was to understand the kind of documents journalists could benefit from if they filed their own for their coverage of complex topics like the housing crisis, and pull out significant documents that contain the most information, which will be discussed in the following section. I wanted to compare what information both available on the Open Data portal and my own ATI requests could indicate, and what journalists could benefit from in accessing those two tools.

**4.2 Overview of the ATI packages**

*4.2.1    Previously released ATI packages from the Montreal Open Data portal*

I began my analysis of ATI regarding the housing crisis in Montreal by searching the Open Data portal from the City of Montreal. I gathered what information is already accessible in the Open Data to assess what journalists could already use and what those documents can say about the housing crisis and short-term rentals. Based on the keyword searches I have done to retrieve content that related the most to the issue of rentals, I obtained a total of **57** packages, which contained about **1,730** pages of information. In some of the material provided, a lot of different types of documents: from statistics to construction guidelines established by the City or boroughs, PowerPoints, lists of permits or complaints, tables with contribution funds, urban planning regulations, non-compliance notices as well as "no record" responses.[6]

---

[6] "No record" responses refer to institutions holding no information relating to an applicant's request. If a government does not keep track of certain information, if there is no written proof, the data does not exist. This practice leads to poor governance and preserving secrecy (Tromp 2020).

**Example twelve: ATI Excerpt**

*Figure 12: A "no record" answer from the Pierrefonds-Roxboro borough in Montreal (12_130_Avis_de_non-*

*conformité_par_année_pour_les_inspections_de_logements_de_2010_à_2022_biffé)*

Le 27 juin 2022

TRANSMISSION PAR COURRIEL ▮

Monsieur ▮

OBJET :   Demande # 130 - Loi sur l'accès aux documents des organismes publics et sur la protection des renseignements personnels
*Avis de non-conformité par année - Inspections de logements - 2010 à 2022*

Monsieur,

En réponse à votre demande d'accès aux documents reçue le 8 juin 2022, nous ne détenons aucun document relativement à votre demande.

Le Chapitre IV Section III de la loi stipule qu'une personne dont la demande écrite a été refusée en tout ou en partie par le responsable de l'accès aux documents ou de la protection des renseignements personnels peut demander à la Commission d'accès à l'information de réviser cette décision. Une personne qui a fait une demande en vertu de la présente loi peut demander à la Commission de réviser toute décision du responsable sur le délai de traitement de la demande, sur le mode d'accès à un document ou à un renseignement, sur l'application de l'article 9 ou sur les frais exigibles. Ces demandes doivent être faites dans les trente jours qui suivent la date de la décision ou de l'expiration du délai accordé par la présente loi au responsable pour répondre à une demande. La Commission peut toutefois, pour un motif raisonnable, relever le requérant du défaut de respecter ce délai.

Nous vous prions d'agréer, Monsieur, l'expression de nos sentiments distingués.

Me Alice Ferrandon
Secrétaire d'arrondissement de Pierrefonds-Roxboro

/rl

p.j. : avis de recours

The document above is an example of a "no records found" response provided by the Pierrefonds-Roxboro borough. It can be seen in the object that the applicant requested to obtain information on housing inspections performed between 2010 and 2022. The letter contains a brief description of the original question asked by the applicant, and in the body of the email, adds the lack of government record that the applicant had requested access to, as well as the possibility they have to file a complaint with the Information Commissioner if they want their application re-evaluated. Such answers from institutions are always delicate, because if they do not have records

on the issue of non-compliance notices given to housing units, as well as inspections conducted on such units, how are they containing the issue of the housing crisis? One can ask: how likely is it that they truly do not possess any documents of non-compliance notices for the whole time frame (2010-2022)? It is possible they may not have records available for a whole period the request covered; but why not provide the documents they do have, while disclosing that they may not have tracked that information during a certain period within that timeline, or that the issue had not been as prevalent before as it now is? A counterpoint to those questions is the wording used by the applicant in their ATI request. "No record" responses from an institution may indicate more research to be done by the requester on the topic of interest, in order to maximize the chances of obtaining a response with disclosure of documents. This highlights how different institutions may keep track of the same phenomenon across different levels of government and therefore requires applicants to keep track of what has been searched before filing their own.

**Example thirteen: ATI Excerpt**

*Figure 13: PowerPoint from an ATI package provided by Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Côte-des-Neiges borough (3-2023-104)*

This example is a PowerPoint presentation that had been used during a meeting between the elected officials of the borough Notre-Dame-de-Grâce--Côtes-des-Neiges (NDG-CDN) on improving regulations to prevent the worsening of the housing crisis within the borough. The presentation gives an overview of the context of the meetings, highlighting a few challenges the neighbourhood faces, some ways to politically revert the trend and slow the impact of the housing crisis, and a projected timeline. It provides a step-by-step analysis of discussions between elected officials in the NDG-CDN borough. The document outlines that by April 2020, there had been **1,437** ads found on Airbnb for the borough, with **349** of them being for full units, for rental over 90 days and made available recently on the platform. Therefore, this data indicates that **349** units have been removed from the housing market in favour of short-term rentals. The document proceeds to highlight desired changes to be made to the local legislation within the borough, some of the measures being the forbidding the division of units in already existing residential areas, the forbidding of eliminating rental units in existing residential areas, stricter laws around short-term rentals — which includes restricting or forbidding certain areas in which they can be located within the borough, have more precise definitions regarding tourist accommodations to prevent further confusions.

In the same package, copies of other PowerPoint presentations are provided, which indicate the progress made by city officials in the desired action against the worsening of the housing crisis. One is a PowerPoint of a discussion between City officials and citizens, that includes similar points from the PowerPoint previously discussed but includes a moment for questions. The document also includes a list of comments that had been received by the borough by both citizens and housing organizations in support of the bylaw, indicating that it represents a change in the right direction,

69

*"I am in active resistance against any policy that could potentially promote renovictions. I've watched renovictions destroy Vancouver, Toronto and Victoria's low income neighbourhoods and it has been detrimental to the cultural variance and young people's/low income folks ability to afford housing. Gentrification creates an increasingly more intense housing crises at the cost of the whole city. Keep housing affordable, keep developers out*" (3-2023-104, 212). This ATI package highlights both the concerns by elected officials, citizens and housing organizations alike, as well as steps performed by the NDG-CDN borough that attempt to bring about change in its district.

### 4.2.3   Montreal and the three boroughs

In Montreal, the ATI system covers the centralized City administration, meaning any documents relating to the city as a whole.[7] If the person processing an ATI request at the City level believes specific boroughs would better answer your request, the request will be transferred. A person can also directly file an ATI request with a particular borough and can specify if they still want to obtain information from the City of Montreal. To submit an ATI request to the city of Montreal, the applicant must complete a Microsoft Form outlining the documents they wish access to and some personal information for follow-up communications. As mentioned in the first subsection, I have received a total of **70** documents from the City of Montreal, and three boroughs: Ville-Marie, Sud-Ouest and Plateau-Mont-Royal.

The documents released were largely related to complaints (**65** of the documents received) received by the city or boroughs from concerned citizens on the topic of short-term rentals. The

---

[7] Montreal is a large agglomeration, comprising 15 boroughs as well as 14 reconstituted cities. The agglomeration acts jointly on issues such as social housing, transportation and emergency services (Montréal 2025).

complaints had been lodged from the 311-phone line and sent by Ville-Marie as an answer to my

ATI request. The documents outline the nature of the complaints, provide a brief description of

the situation faced by the citizen who made the complaint, and indicate whether the complaint has

been solved, rejected, or is still ongoing. These documents are interesting, as they highlight

people's vigilance about what is happening around them, especially when they notice a flow of

different people visiting a specific address, and garbage littering the streets outside of collection

days.

**Example fourteen: ATI Excerpt**

*Figure 14: ATI package from Ville-Marie (23-211042 — 11-26_DECISION_24-798_CREVASSA_Noa)*



However, as emphasized by example fourteen, the complaint first has a header that contains

the message left by citizens regarding the concern they have about a property. Below, in a table,

are the various actions and comments left by city workers regarding the case. The complaint

documents remain on the surface level, as they do not explain precisely the issue at stake, besides

what the citizen has said either through a phone conversation with an agent or via an email form. They highlight a strong sense of concern for housing in the city, with citizens being more vigilant about what is happening around them, but failing to outline what city workers do to address the issue. The address being provided in the complaint documents is an indicator that such documents could be asked for in the context of an investigative piece. Thinking back to the March 16, 2023, fire of an Emile Benamor property, journalists could have asked the city, and the Ville-Marie borough, if they had received any complaints on the property by citizens, whether the inspections had revealed any irregularities, and what had been done to address those. A note is that Ville-Marie could have compiled those **65** documents into a single PDF file, rather than submitting independent ones. The redacted data seen in this document hides any personal information that might contribute to publicly finding out who the person who made the complaint is, or who is being referred to in the complaint. Information redacted is phone numbers, names, email addresses, phone numbers, case files and the type of intervention pursued by the investigative squad. Any data provided back as a result of an ATI request has to comply with the *Privacy Act* (*Access to Information Act* 2023).

**Example fifteen: ATI Example**

*Figure 15: ATI package from the Sud-Ouest borough (2023-09-25)*

Sud-Ouest provided me with two documents, without much context. The two documents are similar, providing a list of addresses, the type of activity that categorizes the property, and the status of the request. Based on the documents I have requested that targeted this borough, I am assuming this could be about the tourism squad, as all of the requests opened above are regarding permits and inspections. However, the delivery of such documents without any context or further documents to provide an example as to what those requests/complaints contain is strange. The borough had not reached out to me for any clarifications on the documents I had requested, which I believe could have maybe been necessary for them to provide better-suited documents than two lists of properties. Similarly to the previous example, the data blacked out in this document is case file numbers, addresses and postal codes, hidden so they do not reveal anything personal about the people being investigated by the squad, according to the *Privacy Act*.

**Example sixteen: ATI Excerpt**

*Figure 16: ATI package from Plateau-Mont-Royal (Réponse_24-665)*

| Dernières extractions : Août 2023 à Octobre 2024 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progression cumulative** | | | | |
| | Plateau - Mont-Royal | Sud-Ouest | Ville-Marie | Total |
| **Nouvelles requêtes** | 245 | 84 | 253 | 582 |
| **Inspections effectuées** | 272 | 180 | 398 | 850 |
| **Analyse** (extraction d'annonces, conversation avec requérant, propriétaire, etc.) | 240 | 164 | 620 | 1024 |
| Avis de non-conformité | 21 | 29 | 49 | 99 |
| Avis de convocation | 22 | 33 | 64 | 119 |
| Constats | 39 | 27 | 53 | 119 |
| Dossiers fermés (non fondés OU preuve insuffisante) | 9 | 10 | 16 | 35 |
| Dossiers fermés, car | 4 | 0 | 4 | 8 |

Plateau-Mont-Royal's ATI package contained a single Google document, in which they provided a table containing information regarding the tourism squad's performance between August 2023 and October 2024. The document also contains three bullet points aimed at providing clarification to some of the data contained inside the table. What is interesting in this document is the number of new requests made in 14 months (**582**). The table does not provide a category for already existing requests, but the borough indicates that at least **600** of the inspections must have been the result of complaints made directly by citizens. Out of the 1,024 inspections conducted by the tourism squad, only **35** requests closed as a result of unfounded complaints or insufficient proof. On the other hand, **99** properties received a notice of non-compliance, and **119** received a notice of violation and a notice of convocation. The document provides useful information, as it shows that the squad created by the City of Montreal to address the concern of citizens on the rise of illegal Airbnbs/short-term rentals is being dealt with and is seeing a certain degree of results.

**Example seventeen: ATI Excerpt**

*Figure 17: ATI package from the City of Montreal (2024_5096)*



| Activité<br>Arrondissement | Airbnb | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Ahuntsic – Cartierville | 26 | 26 |
| Anjou | 8 | 8 |
| Côte-des-Neiges – Notre-Dame-de-Grâce | 87 | 87 |
| Lachine | 24 | 24 |
| LaSalle | 27 | 27 |
| Le Plateau-Mont-Royal | 446 | 446 |
| Le Sud-Ouest | 175 | 175 |
| L'Île-Bizard – Sainte-Geneviève | 6 | 6 |
| Mercier – Hochelaga-Maisonneuve | 96 | 96 |
| Montréal-Nord | 7 | 7 |
| Outremont | 4 | 4 |
| Pierrefonds – Roxboro | 15 | 15 |
| Rivière-des-Prairies – Pointe-aux-Trembles | 14 | 14 |
| Rosemont – La Petite-Patrie | 106 | 106 |
| Saint-Laurent | 47 | 47 |
| Saint-Léonard | 7 | 7 |
| Verdun | 47 | 47 |
| Ville-Marie | 410 | 410 |
| Villeray-Saint-Michel – Parc-Extension | 48 | 48 |
| Ville de Montréal | 232 | 232 |
| **Total** | 1832 | 1832 |

Finally, the City of Montreal provided back only a single document as a PDF. It is a table of all the Airbnbs operating in Montreal. The breakdown of all the territories per borough is striking—with the three boroughs having the most being Plateau-Mont-Royal (**446**), Ville-Marie (**410**) and South-West (**175**). It explains why the tourism squad created by the City focuses on these three boroughs in its pilot phase, considering **56.27%** of the Airbnbs on the territory. I am leaving the "City of Montreal" data aside here because I found it quite confusing to have it stand out as a category when all the boroughs are listed independently above. Why would "The City of Montreal" have a different category? I believe such a document could come with a quick explanation of certain statistics like Plateau-Mont-Royal did with their own ATI package. Explaining the data provided could be useful in making the information clearer, and allow others to piggyback[8] more effectively.

### 4.2.4 Ministry of Tourism

**Example eighteen: ATI Excerpt**

*Figure 18: ATI package from the Ministry of Tourism*



En ce qui concerne les sujets relevant de notre direction, il nous est possible de vous fournir les informations suivantes :

- 6 751 nouveaux enregistrements d'établissements d'hébergement touristique ont été effectués par la Corporation de l'industrie touristique du Québec (CITQ) pour la période du 1$^{er}$ janvier au 31 décembre 2023. Ce nombre total de 6 751 nouveaux enregistrements comprend les enregistrements de 3 483 établissements d'hébergement touristique général, 13 établissements d'hébergement touristique jeunesse et 3 255 établissements de résidence principale. Il est à noter que ces données ne comprennent pas les enregistrements relatifs à des établissements de camping ou de pourvoirie.

- 3 847 nouveaux enregistrements d'établissements d'hébergement touristique ont été effectués par la Corporation de l'industrie touristique du Québec (CITQ) pour la période du 1$^{er}$ janvier au 13 novembre 2024. Ce nombre total de 3 847 nouveaux enregistrements comprend les enregistrements de 2 062 établissements d'hébergement touristique général, 4 établissements d'hébergement touristique jeunesse et 1 781 établissements de résidence principale. Il est encore une fois à noter que ces données ne comprennent pas les enregistrements relatifs à des établissements de camping ou de pourvoirie.

- Il vous est possible de consulter les définitions des différentes catégories d'établissements d'hébergement touristique à l'article 1 du *Règlement sur l'hébergement touristique* (R.L.R.Q. c. H-1.01, r.1).

---

[8]Term used that refers to people using an already existing ATI to formulate another request, to get more information based on what has already been provided by an institution.

Finally, the Ministry of Tourism only provided a small email answer containing information regarding the ATI request I had sent to them. The information is broken down into three bullet points, addressing first the amount of CITQ provided in 2023 and 2024, definitions for the different categories of accommodation facilities, and the different fines given in case of violation of the legislation. The Ministry outlines that 6,751 new tourist accommodation establishment registrations had been done to the CITQ between January 1st and December 31, 2023. Comparatively, the number was 3,847 between January 1st and November 13, 2024, indicating a decrease in CITQ requests. However, my ATI request also asked about the amount of CITQ that was fraudulent, and the Ministry of Tourism turned me to Revenu Québec for such a piece of information, as they are in charge of conducting inspections and investigating Airbnb/short-term rentals. I will note how I did not receive an answer from Revenu Québec on the topic of Airbnb, as they simply redirected me to a page about all types of short-term rentals, without providing a breakdown of more specific information, nor how they get to the numbers they disclose on their website.

**4.3 Summary of Findings**

The use of the Montreal Open Data portal to access already disclosed ATI packages is necessary because it provides access to information that could be valuable in news coverage about housing issues in the city. Keeping track of the housing crisis does not necessarily mean talking about it only on July 1, which is unofficially known as "Moving Day" in Québec.[9] There are always

---

[9] In Québec, leases are renewed annually, and it is standard for them to begin on July 1. The term "Moving Day" is used to refer to the annual renewal/beginning of leases in the province, and is an important date to update data on the housing crisis in Montreal, and other cities across Québec.

stories to report on, and keeping track of what boroughs are doing to reverse the trends of the housing crisis, and to respond to citizen concerns and housing organizations alike is necessary. Such information is important to include in news reporting, as well as in the coverage of the housing crisis. Instead of focusing on the lack of action from the municipal government, reporting on the boroughs is crucial as it could impact a change at the municipal level. Keeping track of the documents added to the Open Data portal is necessary to formulate future ATI requests, to prevent negative answers or to avoid redundancies. Examples of such would be stories covering a lack of action from Montreal's municipal government, with journalists analyzing differences between what is said by politicians in statements and their actions. Such investigations could see whether alarms have been raised behind the scenes within the municipality, and what is being done that is not being disclosed to the general population. Another example would be an investigation on gentrification and the data the municipality holds on the topic. Using ATI for such stories would be an indicator of the kind of transparency the municipality is willing to offer to its citizens.

Despite having gotten ATI packages from a majority of the government institutions I had reached out to, certain limitations appear in the way they handled the ATI request, or in the package they had provided back. Positively, all of the institutions had respected the legal timeframe for ATI, and all extended the time frame once using the legal 10-day extension, leading to an answer within 30 days of the ATI requests being sent. Overall, the ATI packages received by the city of Montreal, and three of its boroughs are good in the sense that they provide information that could yield more requests that could be useful in the coverage of the housing crisis. However, where Montreal's system gets confusing is in its different layers, as the City and the individual boroughs often hold different information. As a result the City may release less information with the hope

that the boroughs will provide some more. I came to this conclusion due to the discrepancy in the documents received by the city (**1**) and Ville-Marie (**65**). Such a strategy can trigger less information provided in the end, which can lead to keeping a layer of secrecy. It can also lead to confusing boundaries and creating confusion as a result within the municipal layer of governance, with the possibility of citizens or journalists not knowing specifically where to place their ATI or see it bounced around without too much explanation. Institutions passing the responsibility to others is something also noticeable and has a common pattern within the thematic analysis. Montreal and the boroughs have done so, as well as the Ministry of Tourism; this emphasizes a responsibility crisis on how institutions handle the housing issues. Despite overseeing the deliverance of CITQ registration numbers, the Ministry of Tourism passed the responsibility of inspection and further information on Revenu Québec, when it is possible they also store that information or receive communications on them raises some questions. The findings of the ATI packages will be discussed in greater detail in the next Chapter, which will also include a discussion on findings from the thematic analysis.

**Chapter 5. Discussion**

As stated in Chapter 3, a thematic analysis of a set of 107 of news articles resulted in three main themes: 1) the Responsibility Crisis at all levels of governance; 2) the Claims of citizens and organizations on the housing crisis; 3) the overrepresentation of politicians in news coverage. The objective of the thematic analysis was to understand the main sources journalists from the six news media organizations covered in this study used in their coverage of the housing crisis, as well as how they framed it. It felt important to analyze how sourcing and approach affected the news content, and comparing this with other possible directions the coverage could have taken through consulting underused sources like public records and documents and data obtained via ATI requests. This chapter focuses on the findings of the thematic analysis of the news coverage and puts them into conversation with the findings of the descriptive analysis of the previously released and recently filed ATI packages discussed in the previous chapter.

Lastly, this chapter discusses the evolving role of journalists, especially regarding the traditional watchdog role in the context of ATI. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) note: "The watchdog role was second, after informing the public, among the answers journalists volunteered as to what distinguished their profession from other types of communication. As trust in the press declined, the watchdog role has remained one of the few elements of journalistic enterprise that the public tends to favor" (201). Moreover, I will also reflect on what could be done to improve the municipal ATI system to trigger a better use of ATI for local investigative journalism work in the future. This chapter is broken down into three parts: 1) the sources used by journalists; 2) the main problems in the municipal ATI system; and 3) the changing role of journalists.

### 5.1 The sources used by journalists

A main finding of the thematic analysis of the news articles is the overwhelming presence of politicians' and official statements over other sources and voices. The findings are based on the thematic analysis conducted on the 107 news media articles. The analysis indicated articles about the housing crisis disproportionately used politicians as a main source over others, such as tenants affected by renovictions or housing organizations. Politicians' voices do need to be included in news articles, as they need to explain why they make their decisions on behalf of citizens. However, it is also important to contrast their points of view with citizens, organizations and those directly affected by the housing crisis, who may have different information and points of view to add to the story and what is at stake. By focusing so heavily on politicians' voices and official sources and statements, the coverage of the housing crisis gives an overbearing confidence to political voices, without hearing about what people want from their local government. It fails to hear personal stories of what people have gone through, or local initiatives from citizens and housing organizations to combat increasing rents and threats of renovictions. It fails to analyze possible contradictions between politicians' statements and what can be found in laws, or paperwork regarding what the government is focusing on. By not diving deeper, the reporting stays on the surface level, doing a disservice to the public who are entitled to know about the decision making done in Montreal about the housing crisis.

By looking at the corpus of news media articles, in 107 articles, I tallied up all mentions of politicians, organizations and 'others,' oftentimes banks or construction companies. In this calculation, I counted each mention of a politician's name, even if it did come up multiple times in the same article. I found 270 mentions of politicians, 94 related to housing organizations, and

18 mentions of "others," such as Desjardins (a banking group) or Broccolini (a real estate company). The most quoted or mentioned politician is Montreal's mayor, Valérie Plante, who is quoted 126 times across the 107 news articles, either through direct quotes or mentions by other politicians, citizens or organizations. These results indicate a preference by journalists for using political sources in their reporting, largely leaving out tenants and housing organizations that could provide a more personal or relatable angle to the coverage.

Journalists relying on political sources for news articles appear logical, as they often hold press conferences for journalists to attend, have assistants and spokespeople who can answer questions on their behalf, and sometimes proactively provide statements to the press. The statements they provide impact citizens as they are responsible for the decision-making regarding the housing crisis. In democracies with an ATI system, openness can be seen as a threat by some, as it could reveal to the public information that politicians do not want the public to know, limiting the disclosure of documents and keeping a hold of a narrative remains important (Roberts, 2006). However, a major theme this analysis highlighted is the potential weakening of public trust in the media, as coverage amplifies politicians' voice, considering their voices as a "given" and prioritizing them over other voices that may have more useful information to provide on the topic. Luscombe and Walby (2021) highlight how dangerous it can be to maintain secrecy about decision-making as it can blur boundaries between what constitutes situations of public interest, and which ones are not. Focusing too much on politicians' comments can lead to a feeling of mistrust in the media, which readers can feel are helping politicians in pushing their agenda, and failing to investigate a lack of action on the housing crisis further.

An overreliance on political voices raises the issue of a lack of diversity in the voices represented in news coverage on the housing crisis. As previously noted in this chapter, Montreal mayor Valérie Plante is overrepresented in the news coverage analyzed with **126** references made to her. Such trends in the coverage do not capture the full implications of the housing crisis, and center the whole situation on its political aspects, putting the economic and social factors aside. This coverage fails to meaningfully include the voices of victims and housing specialists, which results in dehumanizing the situation by failing to include victims and housing. Relying so heavily on the mayor, both through direct quotes or references, can disproportionately center the coverage of the housing crisis on its political aspect and accidentally can be seen as journalists helping to push an agenda by relying on political statements, rather than informing the public on the conditions of the housing crisis in Montreal, and possible solutions or ways forward. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) do state that journalists push agendas, by indicating to citizens what information matters or not in choosing what to cover. Therefore, they highlight the problem of relying so heavily on only one type of source, specifically social media that amplifies disinformation that can spread like wildfire once published. The more the same information is repeated, the more people are prone to believe the information as fact, whether true or not (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021).

Gingras (2012) highlights how important it is for citizens to access documents withheld by governmental institutions, as they are prone to rely on intermediaries to form their own opinions and judgements on a matter. This is particularly important to keep in mind when covering the topic of the housing crisis. Hearing only political perceptions of and official statements on the situation, without truly taking into consideration the voices of victims and housing organizations, can undermine the realities of the situation. When political statements can be easier to get, it is worth

82

asking whether the statement provided is strong enough on its own, or whether having other voices challenge the political statement may provide more nuances.

## 5.2 Municipal ATI and the impact it can have on reporting

Filing an ATI request with the City of Montreal is a rather straightforward process. The City provides on its website a direct link to an Microsoft Forms website, where the applicant can add information about themselves, as well as information about the documents they are requesting to obtain from the municipality. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the City of Montreal circulated my request to three of its boroughs that had information about my request that the City itself did not hold. In total, it took Montreal 15 days to provide documents back, Sud-Ouest 12 days and Ville-Marie and Plateau 20 days. All responded within the 20-day deadline, without using the 10-day extension they can invoke if they need more time to locate and process the requested documents. The wording of an ATI request matters in order to receive a faster response. Luscombe and Walby (2017) highlight the importance of wording and doing research prior to filing an ATI request, as it will impact response times but also increase the likelihood of receiving documents back. It is necessary to know how the level of governance, or the institution you are filing a request with refers to an issue, as well as who is responsible for what you are looking for. By doing research and digging deeper on government websites, one can get a better picture of what the information already available and what is missing, so they can maximize their chances of getting documents back.

The benefits of using ATI are numerous. First, it allows citizens and journalists to check how an issue is being dealt with by a municipality, and the level of concern they are attaching to the issue. In the case of the housing crisis, requesting documents from boroughs in Montreal

revealed how certain boroughs approached the issue differently. The release package from the Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame de-Grace borough (3-2023-104) helped identify what elected officials are doing to prevent the worsening of the housing crisis within its boundaries, and trying to listen to its citizens through public consultations in order to hear opinions and adapt their approach if necessary. Using ATI while covering complex situations like the housing crisis is necessary, as citizens need to be aware of the decisions and the actions taken by the municipal government on their behalf. Other documents like *demande2023-1711* outline all the projects of social and affordable housing being developed, in construction or constructed, as well as the number of units within the development reserved for that effect. Such data is important to report on, because it can provide important statistics on the affordable housing that will be added to the market once the developments are finished. For example, *document2023-1711* indicated that the City of Montreal, across its boroughs, would see an added total of 4,479 affordable and social housing units on projects to be built between January 1, 2018, and March 31, 2023. It also noted an addition of 1,440 affordable and social housing units to possibly appear in private developments, noting that developers may choose to pay a fine instead of actually following the 20-20-20 bylaw (Document2023-1711). Having such data in articles can provide a sense of hope for more affordable housing units to be added to the housing market as soon as those projects are completed. Whereas the coverage currently focuses mostly on the political statements and the negative aspects of the housing crisis, searching for positive information through access to information, and what the municipality is actively doing is crucial. Journalists filing the same requests in multiple institutions may lead to an answer being provided by one of them.

Despite some benefits in using ATI as a source and a research method, there were a number of setbacks I encountered. Certain information may be withheld from the population, as well as journalists depending on the wording that they have used or the framing of their request. In this sense, institutions decide what they will release, and what they will exclude from ATI packages, based on the information the documents contain. Such actions maintain a level of secrecy, which proves problems of openness that ATI represents (Luscombe & Walby 2021). The process of filing an ATI request can represent a setback for working journalists, due to issues of time, as well as the research it needs to be as precise as possible. Filing an ATI request takes time, which journalists working for a news organization often do not have.

Whereas democracies use having an ATI system as a way to show transparency and openness to communicate information with the general public, they can also use ATI as a disguise to maintain secrecy — through redactions, long extensions, or failing to provide applicants clear instructions on people can submit their requests. Politicians who are in favour of updating ATI systems during election campaigns have been noted to scale back their promises while in power, as they benefit from secrecy being maintained. An example of such a phenomenon is the Justin Trudeau Liberal Party's campaign promise in 2015. One of his desires had been to broaden the institutions and documents covered by the ATIA. However, once bill C-58 passed, the changes made to the ATIA remained fairly limited, with some critics suggesting the amendments weakened it. For example, many criticized the changes for still excluding cabinet confidences from the ATIA — contradicting the initial push for transparency Trudeau had initiated (Duncan, Luscombe & Walby 2023). Information became seen more as political ammunition than a way to inform citizens about decision-making, therefore allowing governments to make decisions with minimum fallout

(Gingras 2012). Instead of highlighting how multifaceted the housing crisis is, the news coverage of the housing crisis has largely focused on its political dimension, leaving behind the economic, social and public health issues tied to it.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) argue that in today's journalism, false watchdog-ism in news media has arisen, where journalists investigate a phenomenon to satisfy an audience, without actually doing a public service. The coverage of the housing crisis as analyzed in Chapter 3 relate to their statement, with most of the coverage representing the way politicians view the phenomenon, rather than actively trying to investigate and see the issues in policies, the risks encountered by tenants and the role played by politicians and stakeholders in the worsening of the housing crisis in Montreal over the last few years. ATI remains underused both in academia, as noted by Luscombe and Walby (2017), and this underutilization is not too dissimilar in journalism. In order to boost transparency, the ATI packages I have received from the City of Montreal, three of its boroughs and the Ministry of Tourism have all been made accessible publicly through Google Drive. The links to all of the packages are accessible in the Bibliography, under "Access to Information Corpus."

## 5.3 Gaps between what is done and what can be improved

The current coverage of the housing crisis, as outlined in Chapter 3, relies heavily on political voices sharing their vision of the problem, as well as the lack of action done by the City of Montreal and Québec government to slow down the situation. Secondary sources are at the forefront of the pieces, either through direct statements from stakeholders, politicians, and in few cases from housing organizations and tenants. Yet, bringing ATI requests into the mix of sources used could have an impact on how the situation is covered moving forward. ATI packages analyzed

in Chapter 4 indicate the work done by the City and its boroughs to control short-term rentals, the building of social and affordable housing and keeping track of both units facing sanitary issues or illegal exploitation for short-term rentals. Some ATI packages provide legislative texts which highlight the boundaries in which Airbnbs are legal in the City (12-2023-37-Biffé), and what is done by boroughs to restrict these areas in order to prevent an additional stress on the local housing market (3-2023-104). Obtaining such information provides nuance to the statements provided by politicians, and can fact-check whether or not their words are actually being put into action.

ATI is necessary for journalists to pursue their watchdog role, meaning pursuing an investigation and bringing forth matters of public interest. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) highlight how necessary the work of watchdog journalists is, they remind us that it is threatened due to costs and delays in publishing stories. Holding politicians accountable for their actions is always necessary, and highlighting matters of public interest is also essential for people to be empowered to make educated decisions (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021). Whereas Gingras (2012) emphasized that democracies are now facing more defiance from citizens and therefore low voter turnouts, transparency and communication between politicians and the citizens they serve is necessary to bring voters back to the polls. People need to know how decisions are made on their behalf and ATI provides them with stronger proof of political behaviours.

When using politicians as sources, it is important to not take their words at face-value. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) highlight the importance of hearing from a plurality of voices on a particular topic. A reliance on stakeholders or politicians, who may be directly implicated in the issue will not be helpful to citizens, as it will not resonate with the rest of the community. It is a journalist's duty to keep in mind that they have to inform a larger group, and highlight a variety of

opinions, not just from one side. They also indicate how studies have shown time and time again how readers overwhelmingly prefer when the media had no political views, therefore raising questions about the current way Montreal's local organizations are reporting on the housing crisis (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021).

Despite greater use of ATI over the years by scholars and journalists alike, there is still a growing feeling of caution coming from political institutions, who fear the potential consequences of providing documents to those who can heavily scrutinize them (Luscombe & Walby 2017). Similar to governmental institutions, journalists also act carefully when doing their job. They invoke ideas of journalistic objectivity, avoiding to over-involve themselves with the topics they cover to maintain a detached stance. This detachment allows them to maintain a distance, and cover a topic without explicitly taking a specific side.

This study highlights the need for more scholarly research to be pursued on Access to Information and Freedom of Information systems and how they work in practice at all levels of government, specifically at the municipal level, which is largely overlooked in academic research. Further study would also help journalists within Canada, so they can gain a better understanding of how to file ATI requests in different jurisdictions and maximize their chances of information disclosure.

This would not only help journalists, but academic researchers and citizens as a whole. Luscombe and Walby (2017) indicate how ATI is becoming more of a popular research method in the social sciences. ATI remains significant in helping journalists be watchdogs, as they will have the possibility to research which documents will be the most helpful for the investigation they are conducting, and bringing to light matters of public interest. One model that seems to be followed

the most in Western cultures is the one of 'detached watchdog,' as expressed by Hanitzsch (2011). In that model, the journalist holds a critical position on both political figures and elite members of society, despite keeping a rather separate stance and providing limited intervention to bring about change. It mainly reports from a distance and keeps the topic at bay (Hanitzsch 2011). Despite a few critical articles within the corpus of news media articles, a majority of them involve politicians within the local government and tend to not be overly critical of the struggles faced by the City of Montreal to tackle the housing crisis effectively. This 'detached' stance is visible, as most of the articles do not use ATI (except for *Ricochet* and *Pivot*), relying on the words of politicians and bringing a minimal amount of challenge to what had been said, "*It makes sense that such a profile goes along very well with an emphasis on providing the audience with political information*" (Hanitzsch 2022, 485). Such reliance on a detached watchdog approach is best explained by the prevalence of the belief that journalists have to remain objective, no matter the issue they report on. Despite a more recent critique of objectivity, it remains the norm within the industry (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021).

The "detached watchdog" model that persists in most news media organizations appears to be problematic by failing to involve the journalists more in the situation they are reporting on, therefore lacking more involvement on their part. Using ATI as a source moves away from the detached perception by allowing journalists to be more involved in the investigation and the story they are reporting on. In that sense, the journalist becomes one with the topic covered and provides the citizens with a deeper knowledge and understanding of an issue. With such a vision of journalism, one that is more based on activism and less passive, it comes with the reality of moving away from objectivity and bleeding into a certain sense of subjectivity. It is important to realize

that no matter what, journalists, like any humans, cannot be a hundred percent objective at all times. Recognizing this point should allow for the classic model of journalism to detach itself from the objective progressively and will, in turn, strengthen investigative reporting by providing information of greater use to citizens.

Using ATI as a research method and a source will represent a way to challenge what they are saying regarding an issue, and assess whether or not they are doing what they say they are. It will provide more concrete proof to citizens that they are being heard, and whether or not the plans and promises made are being followed through. Using primary sources is important in the coverage of a topic like the housing crisis. Both official documents, and the voices of people directly affected by the issue is critical to gain a better understanding of the realities individuals face.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to understand how the housing crisis had been covered by Montreal-based news media organizations, as well as to pay close attention to the sources being used by reporters when covering that topic. The project paid close attention to the coverage of the housing crisis by six local news organizations, both Anglophone and Francophone, that both relied on political sources, mostly leaving ATI behind as political sources provide answers quicker than ATI or other sources could. The goal of the research was to emphasize the usefulness of ATI for journalists to preserve their watchdog role. ATI provides a better understanding of what happens in governments behind closed doors, hence providing transparency and allowing scrutiny. The different rollouts of ATI across municipalities in Canada maintain a level of secrecy by failing to have a unified model. Journalists may choose to file a provincial or municipal ATI request instead of municipal since the process is more codified, or they may simply turn to other sources altogether for the sake of time.

**Example nineteen: *Ricochet'*s deep dive on Montreal's Airbnb problem (Kamel 2023a).**

*Figure 19: Use of ATI in journalistic work*



Firmin was, until recently, one of the largest Airbnb hosts in Montreal, according to data from Inside Airbnb, a website that collects data on short-term rentals from around the world. At its peak in May, Firmin's operation included over 70 listings spread across at least 15 buildings in Montreal alone. All of these listings included license numbers ostensibly issued by the Corporation de l'industrie touristique du Québec, which regulates short-term rentals.

Using data obtained from the provincial government via an access to information request, Ricochet has determined that all of the licence numbers on Firmin's Airbnb listings are fraudulent. Many of his listings are also in violation of by-laws meant to regulate short term rentals at the borough level.

Despite dozens of reviews describing horrific conditions, including windowless rooms, blood-stained sheets, bed bugs, unsafe wiring and mold-covered walls, his listings remained active until this week, when his main profile disappeared. Several smaller accounts also involved in his operation were, however, still active as of publication time.

One source claimed negative reviews were inexplicably scrubbed from 'Mike's' profile. Over the course of this investigation, Ricochet observed dozens of negative reviews disappear. Firmin describes them as "fake" reviews, and says they were removed by

In "City for Sale: Airbnb scam quadruples rents, replaces long-term tenants with ghost hotels," published on the *Ricochet* website on July 6, 2023, Zachary Kamel (2023a) exposes the reality faced by tenants who are evicted for their units to be converted into short-term rentals, or to be used exclusively on platforms like Airbnb. Kamel exposes two notable figures running ghost hotels in Montreal, Mike Firmin and Emile Benamor, whose property had burned down in the Old Montreal neighbourhood on March 16, 2023. To gain appropriate information on the properties he refers to in the article, Kamel filed ATI requests with relevant Québec government institutions to investigate whether the properties displayed by Firmin followed provincial and municipal legislation. In this case, it was proven Firmin's CITQ numbers displayed on his rental ads appeared to be fraudulent (Kamel 2023). Obtaining such information from governmental institutions strengthens the reporting by allowing journalists to move into a more active version of being a watchdog, being able to provide proof of the claims they are bringing forth. However, it is important for institutions to increase transparency, to allow citizens to scrutinize the decisions that have been made on their behalf, and the problems that may have been caused along the way.

Mabillard and Keuffer (2022) agree with Worthy's (2017) opinion, which indicates that once transparency is made the norm in a democracy, it is hard to bring back levels of opacity. However, they argue that there are various ways transparency can manifest itself, which they refer to as "passive transparency" and "active transparency," where governments achieve different strategies depending on one issue. "Active transparency," refers to documents proactively released by governments, whereas "passive" points to the packages released as a result of requests made and having been answered by institutions (Mabillard & Keuffer 2022). In their profession, journalists are expected to be transparent with their readers and be mindful of how words can

deceive readers or be misinterpreted (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2021). Based on such facts, the same standard should apply to politicians and governments, with a move towards greater use of documents released proactively to bridge gaps between politicians and the community it serves, as well as a push for a greater assessment of ATI requests, to maximize the withholding of information.

Another problem highlighted when I filed the new ATI packages discussed in Chapter 4, are the jurisdictional and department overlaps (Tromp 2020) between numerous institutions that deal with housing issues. The housing crisis and short-term rentals issue show such a problem. While municipalities are in charge of keeping track of the phenomenon within their jurisdictions, provincial departments, such as the Ministry of Tourism and Revenu Québec, also have their hand in the issue. When one wants to obtain information, one must know what government institution might hold the documents or data one wants to access, which is not always a realistic expectation. Another problem that Tromp (2020) highlights, is how this gives leeway for institutions to respond negatively to the ATI requests they receive. They justify the withholding of information by claiming another institution is responsible for holding the documents in question; this represents a responsibility crisis, which forces an applicant to file for the same documents at different branches of a government to increase their likelihood of receiving the documents. I encountered this issue with the Ministry of Tourism and Revenu Québec, where the Ministry of Tourism for information on investigations to Revenu Québec, who simply redirected to a website link without much more information. Revenu Québec does not address the number of investigation requests they have received, the proportion of which showed units had proper permits and which did not. The breakdown of the information on Montreal from Revenu Québec's website also fails to provide

information for 2022 and 2023, which had been asked in my request (*Activités d'inspection dans le secteur de l'hébergement touristique | Revenu Québec* n.d.).

Without better communication between institutions, as well as clear boundaries between what their responsibilities are, ATI will remain difficult to use for journalists. Institutions need to communicate better with one another to prevent the communication of information outside of the institution's boundaries. Communication between institutions and citizens needs to be improved for documents to be shared. Generating a greater amount of transparency is needed, and institutions working in tandem on the same issues and bouncing requests back and forth do slow down the ATI process.

Despite tools made accessible to the population, there is still an underuse of ATI requests as a way to obtain information not readily available online. Applicants need to have strategies when it comes to filing ATI requests, in terms of wording used by institutions they file their requests with. Municipalities are more prone to withholding information, as emphasized by Stéphanie Martin in her *Journal the Montréal* investigation of municipal ATI referred to in previous chapters. Martin's report highlighted that Montreal was among the worst players, with a delay of 105 days for an incomplete package, way above the 20-day deadline (Martin 2023).

Nevertheless, when it functions properly, ATI represents a strong way for journalists to dig deeper into investigative pieces, putting on the forefront hidden information and data for citizens to scrutinize and engage with. Using ATI as a research method is also valuable for many fields, and more guidelines have to be formulated to empower journalists, researchers, and citizens alike to use such tools for their own research purposes. ATI represents a strong way to obtain hidden information that may be valuable for citizens to know. Because of the constraints in filing requests,

journalists refrain from using ATI in their reporting. The use of ATI by news organizations should be made more of a priority due to the existing challenges faced by citizens. I hope that this study can trigger changes in ATI laws in Canada, at all levels of government, with institutions realizing the role they play in broadening communication and transparency between them and citizens. This study also aims to get journalists, both working or in training, to deepen their own reporting by using all the tools available to them in order to reinvigorate their watchdog role. Journalists need to advocate for greater access to information and for more changes to ATI systems across all levels of governance in Canada, its provinces/territories, and municipalities.

# Bibliography

1. *Academic texts and policy documents*

*Access to information. (n.d.). Gouvernement Du Québec. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from* [*https://www.Québec.ca/en/access-information*](https://www.Québec.ca/en/access-information)

*Access to Information Act: Plain Language Guide to Exemptions and Exclusions*. (2023, September 29). [https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/access-information-privacy/aia-plain-language-guide.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/access-information-privacy/aia-plain-language-guide.html)

*Activités d'inspection dans le secteur de l'hébergement touristique | Revenu Québec*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 6, 2025, from [https://www.revenuQuébec.ca/fr/salle-de-presse/statistiques/activites-dinspection-dans-le-secteur-de-lhebergement-touristique/](https://www.revenuQuébec.ca/fr/salle-de-presse/statistiques/activites-dinspection-dans-le-secteur-de-lhebergement-touristique/)

Appelgren, E., & Salaverría, R. (2018). The Promise of the Transparency Culture: A comparative study of access to public data in Spanish and Swedish newsrooms. *Journalism Practice*, *12*(8), 986–996. [https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1511823](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1511823)

*Bienvenue—Site web des données ouvertes de la Ville de Montréal*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 7, 2024, from [https://donnees.montreal.ca/](https://donnees.montreal.ca/)

Birkinshaw, P. (1997). Freedom of information and open government: The European community/union dimension. *Government Information Quarterly*, *14*(1), 27–49. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-624X(97)90050-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-624X(97)90050-2)

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.

Chevalier, J. (2019, May 6). "These guys are predators": Condo owner says home turned into Airbnb "ghost hotel." *CBC News*. [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/condo-owner-violated-airbnb-ghost-hotel-1.5122219](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/condo-owner-violated-airbnb-ghost-hotel-1.5122219)

Duncan, J., Luscombe, A., & Walby, K. (2023). Governing through transparency: Investigating the new access to information regime in Canada. *The Information Society*, *39*(1), 45–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2022.2134241

Gingras, A. (2012). Access to information: An asset for democracy or ammunition for political conflict, or both? *Canadian Public Administration*, *55*(2), 221–246. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2012.00215.x

Hanitzsch, T. (2011). Populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents and opportunist facilitators: Professional milieus, the journalistic field and autonomy in 18 countries. *International Communication Gazette*, *73*(6), 477–494. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048511412279

Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2018). Journalism beyond democracy: A new look into journalistic roles in political and everyday life. *Journalism*, *19*(2), 146–164. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916673386

Kamel, Z. (2023b, July 26). City for sale: Airbnb scam quadruples rents, replaces long-term tenants with ghost hotels. *Ricochet*. https://ricochet.media/justice/housing/city-for-sale-Airbnb-scam-quadruples-rents-replaces-long-term-tenants-with-ghost-hotels/

Kamel, Z. (2023a, March 23). *Fatal fire: Landlord knew about illegal rentals, ignored safety issues—Ricochet*. Retrieved February 6, 2025, from https://ricochet.media/justice/housing/fatal-montreal-fire-landlord-and-building-owner-confirmed-to-be-working-together-in-Airbnb-scheme/

Karanicolas, M., Mendel, T., & Centre for Law and Democracy (Canada). (2012). *Failing to measure up: An analysis of access to information legislation in Canadian jurisdictions*

(1–1 online resource (22 pages)). Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD). https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/243726

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2021). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect* (Revised and updated 4th edition). Crown.

*Le Devoir | Le Devoir*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 12, 2024, from https://www.ledevoir.com/le-devoir/le-devoir

Lidberg, J. (2009). The International Freedom of Information Index: A Watchdog of Transparency in Practice. *Nordicom Review*, *30*(1), 167–182. https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0145

Lofaro, J., & Rowe, D. J. (2024, October 4). *2 dead after fire rips through historic building in Old Montreal*. CTVNews. https://www.ctvnews.ca/montreal/article/2-dead-after-fire-rips-through-historic-building-in-old-montreal/

Mabillard, V., & Keuffer, N. (2022). Does freedom of information contribute to more open administrations? An empirical analysis of the link between active and passive forms of transparency. *International Review of Public Administration*, *27*(1), 55–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/12294659.2022.2044107

Marchal, M. (2023, March 19). *Incendie dans le Vieux-Montréal: L'inaction des autorités contre Airbnb montrée du doigt | Incendie dans le Vieux-Montréal*. Radio-Canada; Radio-Canada.ca. https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1964523/incendie-vieux-montreal-Airbnb-citq-frapru-corpiq

Martin, S. (2023, January 5). *105 jours pour répondre à 5 questions: La Ville de Montréal cancre de la transparence*. Le Journal de Québec.

https://www.journaldeQuébec.com/2023/01/05/des-informations-difficiles-dacces-a-montreal

*Mission*. (n.d.). Pivot. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from https://pivot.Québec/mission/

Montréal, V. de. (2025, February 05). *Agglomeration council*. https://montreal.ca/en/city-government/agglomeration-council

Montréal, V. de. (n.d.). *Demander l'accès aux documents de la Ville*. Retrieved May 9, 2024, from https://montreal.ca/demarches/demander-lacces-aux-documents-de-la-ville

*Montreal Gazette*. (n.d.-a). BAnQ. Retrieved November 13, 2024, from https://www.banq.qc.ca/plateformes-numeriques/montreal-gazette-0/

*Montreal Gazette*. (n.d.-b). Retrieved November 12, 2024, from https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/montreal-gazette

Roberts, A. (2006). *Blacked out: Government secrecy in the information age* (Cambridge, New York). Cambridge University Press.

RTI Rating. (2020, September). *Country Detail | Rti Rating*. https://www.rti-rating.org/country-detail/

Secretariat, T. B. of C. (2023a, January 18). *The Access to Information Act*. Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/access-information-privacy/access-information-act.html

Secretariat, T. B. of C. (2023b, December 20). *Access to Information and Privacy Statistical Report for 2022-2023*. https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/access-information-privacy/statistics-atip/information-privacy-statistical-report-2022-2023.html

Secretariat, T. B. of C. (2024, December 20). *Access to Information and Privacy Statistical Report for 2023–24*. https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/access-information-privacy/statistics-atip/information-privacy-statistical-report-2023-2024.html

Tomasic, N. (2023). Balancing privacy with access to information for commercial fisheries data: A critical review of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's "rule of five" policy. *FACETS*, *8*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2022-0153

Toronto, C. of. (2017, August 15). *Freedom of Information* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada). City of Toronto; City of Toronto. https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/access-city-information-or-records/freedom-of-information/

Tromp, S. L. (2020). *Fallen Behind: Canada's Access to Information Act in the World Context* (Second edition, revised and updated). FIPA BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association.

unspecified. (n.d.). *Ricochet Média*. Ricochet Média. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from https://franco.ricochet.media/

Walby, K., & Luscombe, A. (2017). Criteria for quality in qualitative research and use of freedom of information requests in the social sciences. *Qualitative Research*, *17*(5), 537–553. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116679726

Walby, K., & Luscombe, A. (2021). Freedom of Information Research and Cultural Studies: A Subterranean Affinity. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *21*(1), 70–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708620917421

## Appendices

*Appendix 1: News stories analyzed*

Authier, P. (2023, March 6). Liberals, QS set to square off in Saint-Henri—Sainte-Anne by-election. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Authier, P., & Magder, J. (2023, September 15). Half of Québec's 10,000 unhoused people are in Montreal. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Banville, A. (2023, July 7). Dans l'ombre de la ligne bleue, des locataires poussés vers la sortie. *Le Devoir.* https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/794207/crise-du-logement-dans-l-ombre-de-la-ligne-bleue-des-locataires-pousses-vers-la-sortie

Bazzo, M.-F. (2023, March 7). Montréal change. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/debats/chroniques/2023-03-07/montreal-change.php

Beaudin, A. (2023, August 21). Forum des affaires: Les immeubles de bureaux : une situation préoccupante pour Montréal. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/marche-immobilier/2023-08-21/forum-des-affaires/les-immeubles-de-bureaux-une-situation-preoccupante-pour-montreal.php

Beaulieu, C., Gaudreau, L., Hellwig, L., Prince, J., & Shagge, E. (2023, July 29). Quartier Namur-Hippodrome et crise du logement. *Le Devoir.* https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/795355/montreal-quartier-namur-hippodrome-et-crise-du-logement

Bock-Côté, M. (2024, March 19). Les destructeurs de Montréal et le rêve des grandes tours phalliques. *Le Journal de Montréal.*

https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2024/03/19/les-destructeurs-de-montreal-et-le-reve-des-grandes-tours-phalliques

Bruemmer, R. (2024, January 25). Program offers quick housing aid for Montrealers having a patch of bad luck. *Montreal Gazette.* https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/article131942.html

Bruemmer, R. (2024a, February 29). Homelessness in the West Island? It's 'in every borough.' *Montreal Gazette.* https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/article131643.html

Bruemmer, R. (2024b, May 2). Montreal rolls out plan for anticipated July 1 housing crunch. *Montreal Gazette.* https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-rolls-out-plan-for-anticipated-july-1-housing-crunch

City to crack down on illegal Airbnbs, Plante promises. (2023, August 4). *Montreal Gazette*, A.6. https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/article55092.html

Cloutier, J.-F. (2023, March 23). *10 ans de bataille judiciaire pour faire fermer des logements dangereux affichés sur Airbnb*. Le Journal de Montréal. https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/03/23/des-annees-de-litige-sur-Airbnb

Corriveau, J. (2024, February 1). *Les plus fortes hausses de loyer en 30 ans dans la région de Montréal | Le Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.ledevoir.com/economie/806327/plus-fortes-hausses-loyer-30-ans-region-montreal

Corriveau, J. (2023, March 22). *Valérie Plante accuse Québec d'ignorer la crise du logement*. Le Devoir. https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/montreal/786311/valerie-plante-accuse-Québec-d-ignorer-la-crise-du-logement

Corriveau, J. (2023a, May 29). *Des experts à la rescousse pour le site de l'ancien hippodrome de Montréal*. Le Devoir. https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/montreal/791930/des-experts-a-la-rescousse-pour-le-site-de-l-ancien-hippodrome-de-montreal

Corriveau, J. (2023b, June 15). Montréal se prépare pour un autre 1er juillet sur fond de crise du logement. *Le Devoir.* https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/793050/montreal-se-prepare-au-1-juillet

Corriveau, J. (2024a, March 11). Nouveaux logements pour des personnes avec un trouble de santé mentale à Montréal. *Le Devoir.* https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/808822/nouveaux-logements-accueillir-personnes-trouble-sante-mentale

Cox, E. (2023, August 3). The Montreal shuffle: Inside the Airbnb hustle taking homes off the market. *Ricochet*. https://ricochet.media/justice/housing/the-montreal-shuffle-inside-the-Airbnb-hustle-taking-homes-off-the-market/

Desplanques, A. C., & Loiseau, C. (2023, May 6). *Pénuries et crises sociales à l'horizon*. Le Journal de Montréal. https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/05/06/penuries-et-crises-sociales-a-lhorizon

Dubuc, A. (2023, December 7). *Règlement pour une métropole mixte | Des logements neufs plus chers à Montréal | La Presse*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/marche-immobilier/2023-12-07/reglement-pour-une-metropole-mixte/des-logements-neufs-plus-chers-a-montreal.php

Dubuc, A. (2023a, May 29). Montréal: Recul dans les transactions de terrains. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/marche-immobilier/2023-05-29/montreal/recul-dans-les-transactions-de-terrains.php

Ducas, I. (2023, March 20). Incendie mortel dans le Vieux-Montréal: Québec veut obliger Airbnb à bannir les logements illégaux. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/politique/2023-03-20/incendie-mortel-dans-le-vieux-montreal/Québec-veut-obliger-Airbnb-a-bannir-les-logements-illegaux.php

Ducas, I. (2023a, August 2). Montréal s'attaque aux centaines d'Airbnb illégaux. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-08-02/montreal-s-attaque-aux-centaines-d-Airbnb-illegaux.php

Ducas, I. (2023b, November 10). Crise du logement: Huit immeubles protégés de la spéculation immobilière dans l'Est de Montréal. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-11-10/crise-du-logement/huit-immeubles-proteges-de-la-speculation-immobiliere-dans-l-est-de-montreal.php

Ducas, I. (2024, January 30). Montréal: La Ville achète deux propriétés pour des projets de logements. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2024-01-30/montreal/la-ville-achete-deux-proprietes-pour-des-projets-de-logements.php

Ducas, I. (2024a, March 21). Migrations interrégionales au Québec: Montréal de moins en moins attrayant pour le reste du Québec. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2024-03-21/migrations-interregionales-au-Québec/montreal-de-moins-en-moins-attrayant-pour-le-reste-du-Québec.php

Dussault, J. (2023, July 11). *Le campement sous le viaduc Ville-Marie est démantelé | Le Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/794383/le-campement-sous-le-viaduc-ville-marie-est-demantele

Dussault, J. (2023a, July 29). *Vivre dans une tente au cœur de Montréal depuis deux ans | Le Devoir*. https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/795357/itinerance-depuis-deux-ans-dans-une-tente-au-coeur-de-montreal

El-Soueidi, Y. (2023, June 15). Yara El-Soueidi: Montreal's grim rental market risks getting worse. *Montreal Gazette*, A.6.

Faucher, O. (2023, February 14). *«Le monde ne veut plus venir dans le Village, ils ont peur»*. Le Journal de Montréal. https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/02/14/le-monde-ne-veut-plus-venir-dans-le-village-ils-ont-peur

Feith, J. (2023, March 23). Québec had tools to crack down on Airbnb, but failed to act: Expert; "You have apartment buildings that just aren't designed to be operated like hotels." *Montreal Gazette*, A.3.

Fournier, M.-E. (2023, July 7). Densification à Montréal: Le droit de veto de 26 personnes. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/chroniques/2023-07-07/densification-a-montreal/le-droit-de-veto-de-26-personnes.php

Girard-Bossé, A. (2023, March 20). Front commun à Montréal pour le maintien d'AccèsLogis. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-03-20/front-commun-a-montreal-pour-le-maintien-d-acceslogis.php

Goudreault, Z. (2023, September 13). *Des locataires appelés à réintégrer un bâtiment abîmé par un incendie à Montréal | Le Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from

https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/798000/locataires-appeles-reintegrer-batiment-abime-incendie

Goudreault, Z. (2023a, September 11). Des solutions féministes pour une ville plus inclusive | *Le Devoir*. Retrieved https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/797764/i-le-devoir-i-de-cite-solutions-feministes-ville-plus-inclusive

Goudreault, Z. (2023b, September 14). La crise du logement à Montréal au coeur de «Ma cité évincée» | *Le Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.ledevoir.com/culture/cinema/798070/crise-logement-montreal-coeur-documentaire

Goudreault, Z. (2023c, August 15). Projet de logements étudiants en vue sur le site d'un stationnement sur le Plateau | *Le Devoir*. https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/796256/des-logements-etudiants-pour-remplacer-un-stationnement-dans-le-plateau-mont-royal

Goudreault, Z. (2023d, March 8). Montréal demande l'aide de Québec pour s'attaquer au logement social et aux transports. *Le Devoir*. https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/montreal/784456/soutien-financier-montreal-demande-l-aide-de-Québec-pour-s-attaquer-aux-logements-sociaux-et-aux-transports

Goudreault, Z. (2023e, April 12). Des changements proposés pour avoir plus de logements abordables à Montréal. *Le Devoir*. https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/788782/crise-du-logement-des-changements-reglementaires-proposes-pour-avoir-plus-de-logements-abordables-a-montreal

Goudreault, Z. (2023f, July 10). Des reprises de logement contestées dans des quartiers où les loyers explosent. *Le Devoir.* https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/794312/montreal-des-reprises-de-logement-contestees-dans-des-quartiers-ou-les-loyers-explosent

Grammond, S. (2023, July 8). L'autosabotage de Montréal. *La Presse.* https://www.lapresse.ca/debats/editoriaux/2023-07-08/l-autosabotage-de-montreal.php

Gyulai, L. (2023, October 7). Projet Montréal withholding report card on housing 'fiasco, 'opposition suggests. *Montreal Gazette*, A.3.

Gyulai, L. (2024, February 3). Director of economic development quits after only 16 months on job; Opposition at city hall concerned about surprise departure amid housing crisis. *Montreal Gazette*, A.4.

Gyulai, L. (2024a, March 1). City urged to adopt regulations based on developers'' real intentions'. *Montreal Gazette*, A.3.

Hanes, A. (2022, November 30). Property owners are shouldering too much. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Hanes, A. (2023a, August 19). The fight to revive an abandoned home for single mothers; In N.D.G., where the housing crisis is acute, a task force is striving to resuscitate Project Chance so that vulnerable women and their children get the support they need. *Montreal Gazette*, A.8.

Hanes, A. (2023b, August 25). Simplistic solutions won't solve housing crisis. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Hanes, A. (2023c, September 18). The unhoused crisis is not unsolvable; We know the fixes, but Québec has lacked the political courage to make real change. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Hanes, A. (2024, January 23). "We're moving in the right direction"; In a sit-down interview after her recent health scare and a rough patch in her tenure, Mayor Valérie Plante puts the emphasis on the positive. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Hughes, J. (2023, July 6). Opinion: Montreal keeps dismantling encampments. What happens to unhoused campers? *Montreal Gazette*, A.2.

Jolicoeur, M. (2023, March 8). Cinq fonctionnaires pour relancer l'immobilier à Montréal. *Le Journal de Montréal*. https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/03/08/cinq-fonctionnaires-pour-relancer-limmobilier-a-montreal

Kamel, Z. (2023c, September 6). Conflit d'intérêts: Les élues qui décident du logement à Montréal sont aussi propriétaires. *Pivot*. https://pivot.Québec/2023/09/06/conflit-dinterets-les-elues-qui-decident-du-logement-a-montreal-sont-aussi-proprietaires/

Kamel, Z. (2023d, October 19). Incendie du Vieux-Montréal: Le propriétaire a continué d'héberger des locations à court terme illégales. *Pivot*. https://pivot.Québec/2023/10/19/incendie-du-vieux-montreal-le-proprietaire-a-continue-dheberger-des-locations-a-court-terme-illegales/

Kelly, B. (2023, June 29). SPCA sees alarming rise in abandoned cats and dogs; Housing crisis, no-pet clauses worsen the tragedy, director says. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Kramberger, A. (2023, March 2). Ricochet's rental project offers a boost to West Island housing. *Montreal Gazette*, A.6.

Lajoie, Z. G., Étienne. (2023, January 27). La plus forte hausse des loyers en 20 ans dans la région de Montréal. *Le Devoir*. https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/779357/la-plus-forte-hausse-des-loyers-en-20-ans-dans-la-grande-region-de-montreal

Lalonde, M. (n.d.). Montreal aims to increase rental housing inspections to 10,000 in 2024.
*Montreal Gazette*. Retrieved September 27, 2024, from
https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-aims-to-increase-rental-housing-inspections-to-10000-in-2024

Lalonde, M. (2023, June 30). Allison Hanes: Montreal's Moving Day has always been
stressful. Now it's a time of crisis. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Lazar, M. (2023, September 22). City targets cars, not housing crisis; Letters to the editor.
*Montreal Gazette*, A.9.

Lebel, A. (2024, January 24). «On est en colère»: Des locataires veulent interdire les évictions
pour agrandissement de logement. *Le Journal de Montréal*.
https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2024/01/23/on-est-en-colere-des-locataires-veulent-interdire-les-evictions-pour-agrandissement-de-logement

Leduc, L. (2023, May 15). Au moins 360 000 ménages incapables de répondre à leurs besoins
de base. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-05-15/au-moins-360-000-menages-incapables-de-repondre-a-leurs-besoins-de-base.php

Legault, J. (2023, March 21). Incendie du Vieux-Montréal: Le vrai drame est celui des âmes
volées. *Le Journal de Montréal.*
https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/03/21/incendie-du-vieux-montreal-le-vrai-drame-est-celui-des-ames-volees

Léouzon, R. (n.d.). Avec la gentrification, Verdun est-il devenu le nouveau Plateau? | *Le
Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from
https://www.ledevoir.com/economie/808342/devoir-cite-verdun-nouveau-plateau

Libman, R., & to, S. (2023, September 22). Robert Libman: Justin Trudeau is down, but don't count him out. *Montreal Gazette*. https://www.montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/article54182.html

Loiseau, C. (n.d.). «Ça m'a pris six mois pour m'en remettre»: Des résidents fortement ébranlés de leur éviction de la RPA du Mont-Carmel │ *Le Journal De Montréal*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/06/26/eviction-de-la-rpa-du-mont-carmel---ca-ma-pris-six-mois-pour-men-remettre

Loiseau, C. (2023a, January 24). Des locataires menacés d'être évincés de leur logement à prix abordable après la vente de leur immeuble. *Le Journal de Montréal.* https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/01/24/des-locataires-menaces-detre-evinces-de-leur-logement-a-prix-abordable-apres-la-vente-de-leur-immeuble

Loiseau, C. (2023b, February 6). «J'ai perdu 10 livres à cause du stress»: Des locataires craignent être victimes de «rénoviction». *Le Journal de Montréal.* https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/02/06/jai-perdu-10-livres-a-cause-du-stress-des-locataires-craignent-etre-victimes-de-renoviction

Loiseau, C. (2023c, June 2). Crise du logement: «Je ne trouve pas de logement qui répond à mes besoins et je n'ai plus les moyens de vivre à l'hôtel». *Le Journal de Montréal*. https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/12/31/crise-du-logement---je-ne-trouve-pas-de-logement-qui-repond-a-mes-besoins-et-je-nai-plus-les-moyens-de-vivre-a-lhotel-je-ne-sais-plus-quoi-faire

Loiseau, C. (2023d, August 7). [PHOTOS] De nouveaux locataires coincés dans des appartements insalubres: «Je ne peux pas rester ici». *Le Journal de Montréal.*

https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/08/08/de-nouveaux-locataires-coinces-dans-des-appartements-insalubres---je-ne-peux-pas-rester-ici

Mackenzie, M. (2024, February 10). Where we put affordable housing is crucial; Not enough to simply build more units, Michael MacKenzie writes. *Montreal Gazette*, A.10.

Magder, J. (2023a, June 19). Valérie Plante wants Québec to help solve Montreal's housing crisis. *Montreal Gazette*, A.3.

Magder, J. (2023b, November 8). 'There is a crisis': Verdun needs shelter for the unhoused, intervention worker says. *Montreal Gazette*, A.3.

Magder, J. (2024, January 20). No quick fixes to housing crisis, minister says as project inaugurated near the Village. *Montreal Gazette*, A.4.

Morin-Martel, F. (2023, September 30). Une maison pour que des femmes autochtones puissent « réaliser leurs rêves » | *Le Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/799139/maison-femmes-autochtones-puissent-realiser-reves

Nguyen, M. (2024, March 6). Crise du logement: Un prêtre retourne volontairement dans la rue | *Le Journal De Montréal*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2024/03/06/crise-du-logement--un-pretre-retourne-volontairement-dans-la-rue

Ouellette-Vézina, H. (2024a, March 25). Coût minimal de 20 millions: Montréal met en vente l'îlot Voyageur avec plusieurs conditions. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2024-03-25/cout-minimal-de-20-millions/montreal-met-en-vente-l-ilot-voyageur-avec-plusieurs-conditions.php

Ouellette-Vézina, H. (2024b, April 2). Projets de logement: 30 millions de plus pour la décontamination à Montréal. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2024-04-02/projets-de-logement/30-millions-de-plus-pour-la-decontamination-a-montreal.php

Plante, V. (2023, November 8). Valérie Plante: Midway in my second mandate, efforts are bearing fruit. *Montreal Gazette*, A.8.

Projet de loi 31: Manifestation à Montréal pour défendre les cessions de bail. (2024, February 3). *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/2024-02-03/projet-de-loi-31/manifestation-a-montreal-pour-defendre-les-cessions-de-bail.php

QMI, A. (2024, January 12). Îlot Voyageur: 700 logements devraient voir le jour au centre-ville de Montréal. *Le Journal de Montréal*. https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2024/01/12/ilot-voyageur--700-logements-devraient-voir-le-jour-au-centre-ville-de-montreal

Riga, A. (2023, June 21). Montreal shouldn't be 'a city where only rich people can afford' homes, Plante says. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Selley, C. (2023, May 16). Ottawa has no answer to Québec's anti-immigrant narrative; Chickens of pessimism over French come home to roost, Chris Selley says. *Montreal Gazette*, A.5.

Suhanic, G. (2023, November 21). Ottawa will be sympathetic, but not overly generous; Here's what economists are looking for in Tuesday's fall economic statement. *Montreal Gazette*, NP.7.

Tanguay, S. (2024, January 18). Poilievre accuse les «maires incompétents» de Montréal et

    de Québec de bloquer les chantiers. *Le Devoir*. https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/canada/805581/poilievre-accuse-maires-incompetents-montreal-Québec-bloquer-chantiers

Teisceira-Lessard, P. (2023a, April 11). Institut des Sourdes-Muettes: « Je ne peux pas croire

    qu'à Montréal, on laisse ça dépérir ». *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-04-11/institut-des-sourdes-muettes/je-ne-peux-pas-croire-qu-a-montreal-on-laisse-ca-deperir.php

Teisceira-Lessard, P. (2023b, April 14). Crise du logement: Montréal met 5,6 millions pour

    l'acquisition du Manoir Lafontaine. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-04-14/crise-du-logement/montreal-met-5-6-millions-pour-l-acquisition-du-manoir-lafontaine.php

Teisceira-Lessard, P. (2023c, December 18). Un demi-million grâce au droit de préemption:

    Montréal a appelé la police, confirme l'élu responsable. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-12-18/un-demi-million-grace-au-droit-de-preemption/montreal-a-appele-la-police-confirme-l-elu-responsable.php

Thériault, W. (2023, July 2). Montréal en mode déménagement: Des défis et de la

    débrouillardise. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/grand-montreal/2023-07-02/montreal-en-mode-demenagement/des-defis-et-de-la-debrouillardise.php

Thomas, K. (2023a, March 25). Old Montreal fire: Airbnb to crack down on illegal rentals in

    Québec. *Montreal Gazette*, A.3.

Thomas, K. (2023b, April 27). Petite-Patrie tenants are fighting eviction. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Thomas, K. (2023c, November 22). 'We don't like being out here,'say striking public-sector workers. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Thomas, K. (2024, March 17). A year after Airbnb crackdown, short-term rentals still a concern in Montreal. *Montreal Gazette.* https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/a-year-after-Airbnb-crackdown-short-term-rentals-still-a-concern-in-montreal

Tomesco, F. (2023a, March 10). Approval for Montreal real estate projects to be sped up under new city plan. *Montreal Gazette*, A.4.

Tomesco, F. (2023b, June 6). Québec needs 'a game plan' for housing crisis: Minister; Legislation expected by summer for new residential construction. *Montreal Gazette*, A.7.

Tomesco, F. (2023c, June 7). Revised plan for project in Bridge-Bonaventure would add 2,200 homes. *Montreal Gazette*, A.5.

Tomesco, F. (2023d, June 27). Time to build housing is now: Desjardins CEO stresses. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Tomesco, F. (2023e, July 6). Investors plan to convert Sherbrooke St. Office tower into residential units. *Montreal Gazette*, A.4.

Tomesco, F. (2024, February 19).I'm almost sure on Québec Liberal leadership run, Denis Coderre says. *Montreal Gazette.* https://montrealgazette.com/news/my-mind-is-almost-made-up-on-Québec-liberal-leadership-run-denis-coderre-says

Tomesco, F. (2023f, July 15). The complicated case for office conversions; What will happen to all the empty towers in downtown Montreal? Frédéric Tomesco reports on efforts to transform some into living space. *Montreal Gazette*, A.8.

Tomesco, F. (2023g, September 21). The affordable housing crisis is driving poverty, Centraide says; Umbrella organization now assists around one in five residents. *Montreal Gazette*, A.1.

Tomesco, F. (2023h, October 28). Royalmount's rise is "just the beginning"; Carbonleo CEO Andrew Lutfy is betting on the desire Montrealers have for luxury goods, Frédéric Tomesco reports. Will they be drawn to midtown? *Montreal Gazette*, A.10.

Tomesco, F. (2023i, November 18). Montreal city councillors won't receive a pay increase in 2024. *Montreal Gazette*, A.14.

Tomesco, F. (2023j, December 6). Old NFB building could become housing project, developer says. *Montreal Gazette*, A.5.

Vallières, M. (2023, March 9). Montréal lance un « plan d'action » pour accélérer les projets immobiliers. *La Presse*. https://www.lapresse.ca/affaires/2023-03-09/montreal-lance-un-plan-d-action-pour-accelerer-les-projets-immobiliers.php

Yaccarini, C. (2023, October 30). *L'Est de Montréal encore victime d'une iniquité | Le Devoir*. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/800922/politique-Québecoise-est-montreal-encore-victime-iniquite

*Appendix 2: Access to information packages analyzed*

I have made each ATI package accessed for this research accessible on Google Drive. The links are attached to the packages below.

11-26_DECISION_24-798_CREVASSA_Noa, Montréal (Ville Marie), 29 November 2024. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1__42TUwI-LimFpvwl3HU282KqF5Q6yYT?usp=sharing

- 23-66961_biffé
- 23-75559_biffé
- 23-125770_biffé
- 23-179935_biffé
- 23-209080_biffé
- 23-211042_biffé
- 23-220320_biffé
- 23-220463_biffé
- 23-228650_biffé
- 23-229715_biffé
- 23-230648_biffé
- 23-230698_biffé
- 23-230815_biffé
- 23-230855_biffé
- 23-233142_biffé
- 23-233907_biffé
- 23-234019_biffé
- 23-241158_biffé
- 23-244604_biffé
- 23-249508_biffé
- 23-252164_biffé
- 23-252296_biffé
- 23-265195_biffé
- 23-296045_biffé
- 23-306659_biffé
- 23-311055_biffé
- 23-320966_biffé
- 23-323513_biffé

- 23-332850_biffé
- 23-339283_biffé
- 24-3162_biffé
- 24-3711_biffé
- 24-41186_biffé
- 24-47745_biffé
- 24-50072_biffé
- 24-55571_biffé
- 24-57195_biffé
- 24-64206_biffé
- 24-64752_biffé
- 24-75907_biffé
- 24-84735_biffé
- 24-90758_biffé
- 24-96285_biffé
- 24-96474_biffé
- 24-102517_biffé
- 24-120059_biffé
- 24-129107_biffé
- 24-143794_biffé
- 24-157838_biffé
- 24-161815_biffé
- 24-171202_biffé
- 24-180715_biffé
- 24-181323_biffé
- 24-192756_biffé
- 24-188067_biffé
- 24-212185_biffé
- 24-212225_biffé
- 24-217365_biffé
- 24-223701_biffé
- 24-240483_biffé
- 24-241173_biffé
- 24-251750_biffé
- 24-273612_biffé
- 24-280416_biffé

"Rapport Airbnb 1er Janvier 2023-21 nov. 2024," Ville de Montréal, 25 November 2024. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dwrnmO8yDYhu1QkhHn3pwsiTHKkFlClw?usp=sharing

"Réponse_24-665," Montreal (Plateau-Mont-Royal," 28 November 2024. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10MxmL1XgOiArrxrV5BETf9N74pqDKrCF?usp=sharing

- Tableau

"2023_Airbnb_Biffé," Montreal (Sud-Ouest), 20 November 2024. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EJDQOZloTzfjLQR43H11BJsQCVQPOLlQ?usp=sharing

"2024_Airbnb_biffé," Montreal (Sud Ouest), 20 November 2024. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EJDQOZloTzfjLQR43H11BJsQCVQPOLlQ?usp=sharing

Already released packages (https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EJDQOZloTzfjLQR43H11BJsQCVQPOLlQ?usp=sharing)
- 3-2023-104, Montreal (CDN-NDG), 16 March 2023.
- 12_2023_37_biffé, Montreal (Pierrefonds Roxboro), 19 April 2023.
- SO23-059, Montreal (Sud-Ouest), 23 March 2023.
- 02_DAI_2512_ANJOU, Montreal (Anjou), 12 Octobre 2023.

- 13_2022-241, Montreal, 4 July 2022.
- 13_2023-240, Montreal, 20 July 2023.
- 56-2021-0074-00, Montreal
- demande2023_2119, Montreal, 18 May 2023.