

Black Community Archive of Montreal

By Dr. Clarence S, Bayne

The human social system is a complex adaptive system. It consists of a network of live and non-live agents interacting and responding to continuous change in the agents and system itself: a change in any agent causes other agents to change. This causes the system to change, which causes further changes in agents, and the process continues infinitely. The system is dynamic, and the change or direction of change tends to be unpredictable. In this system the human being is an intelligent agent capable of thought, and making innovative responses aimed at maximizing its objective and subjective well-being of the intelligent member agents. We are concerned with changes which are a result of combination of factors that produce utility (satisfy needs and or solve problems). The diagram below presents such a system as two interacting sub-spaces of the system: the belief space and the population space. The belief space is the brain of the complex adaptive system. This is where patterns (cause and effect indicators) sensed in the data created by the large number of interactions between agents are gathered, processed, stored as knowledge which is updated and used as information and utility producing inputs by future generations of intelligent human agents. The stored data takes two forms, expressed in Figure 1 as situational knowledge and normative knowledge. Museums, Libraries, archives, parks are preservers of memories and experiences, conveyers of knowledge and wisdom. Figure 1 is a geographic mapping of the sum of all the interactions (operations) between all agents in the population space and between the population space and the belief space. In these spaces the human species mission and purpose is to reproduce and increase its populations, provide security and maximize its wellbeing. To accomplish this it requires access to knowledge and the capacity to produce innovative responses to change in the system. The literature on complex theory shows that

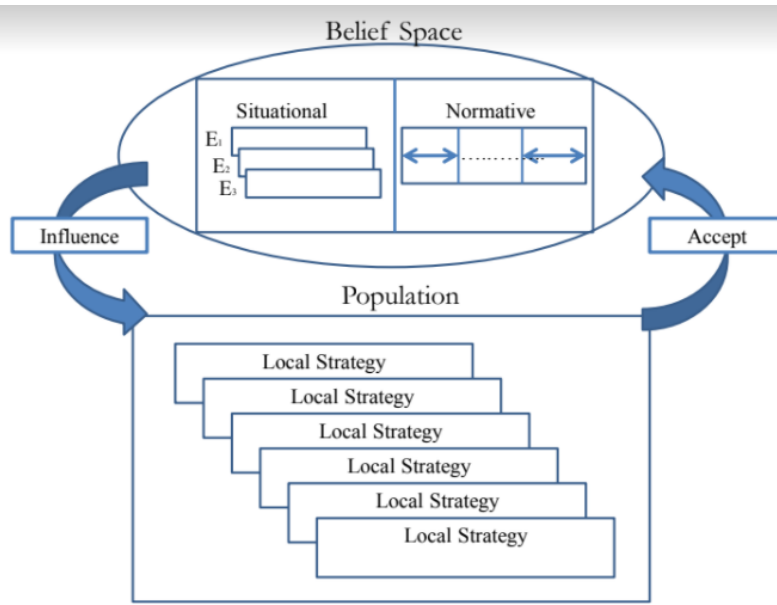


Figure 1: Cultural Framework

any category of the human specie requires an adequate supply of ingenuity in order to achieve its mission of longevity, reproduction of the group, and sustaining its socioeconomic and psychosocial needs. Thomas Homer Dixon in his book “The Ingenuity Gap” (page 3). States that a “a good deal of the right kind of ingenuity is essential” but not in itself enough to guarantee the group achieving the objective stated above, “but also it depends on the availability of other, more conventional factors of production, like capital and labour,.... Yet in our economies ingenuity usually supplants labour, and growth in the stock of physical plant is usually accompanied by growth in the stock of ingenuity.” Archives can be used as dynamic agents in the belief space that encourages and support the capacity for independent learning and a creative response to unpredictable change.

The Black Community Archives of Montreal and Quebec have been evolving for many years. However, the emergence of a knowledge ecosystem, and with it the growth in the appreciation of the importance of diversity, the need for the sustenance and control of the biospheres of the world, including the Americas, drew attention to the problems associated with gaps in this knowledge framework. In particular, in Canada mis-representations and the absence of artifacts and lack of access to documentation that represent the presence and contributions of significant sub-populations have systemically excluded Blacks and Other marginalized sub-groups from the Canadian story. The telling of Canadian History

tends to associate the origins of the Canadian social, cultural, economic and political curriculum with the singular arrival of Europeans of British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese ancestry to the Americas and the West. The stories record and advance the ownership, and reinforce the appropriations of entire biospheres and the wealth in those spaces by European nations and cultures. It seems that in the evolution of this proprietorship that agencies such as libraries, museums, churches, expatriate governments agent gathered data, stored and updated knowledge pertinent to their absentee interest and life styles. These expatriates maintained information in the form of artifacts, statutes, and monuments that served to sustain their values (beliefs) and honour the achievements of rich expatriates, the privileged and powerful sub-classes.

As the European nations expanded control and ownership from their metropolises in the European continent, these museums and other structures containing the memories of their achievements and conquest became static reminders of the past as described by these power classes controlling colonies of residence and conquests. They promoted the concept of whites as the superior race; and, that among the white human species only the Aryan race evolved to a position of being the superior class by virtue of proving themselves arguably most capable of building civilizations and structures that guarantee long life and happiness.

Arthur de Gobineau's thesis on the superiority of the White Race and within it the Aryan race being the chosen and preferred people, was supported, popularized and exported to the new world outside Britain and Europe by British Historians in the 18th Century. It became the justification for the trans-Atlantic African slave trade, the wars fought in the settling of the West, and the practice of a mercantilist and colonial capitalism.

The expansion of the doctrine of White race superiority created the roots of Jim Crowism in the USA, and systemic discrimination and racism in Canada. The libraries, museums and city structures and stories were static representations of this system of discrimination and racism. In fact until recently, museums and libraries did not tell the stories of nor reach out to the poor and marginalized classes of citizens. The rich and powerful built statues and monuments to the memory of slave-owners (James McGill,) and the killers of the children of indigenous peoples. Blacks were either excluded/ignored or represented as

diminished humans Place names such as “Nigger Rock “ are official references of presence in certain places; and for many years the Black Face Minstrel shows (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minstrel_show) played by White artists portraying Blacks as funny but inferior human characters. This form of entertainment has been totally rejected by Blacks in North America, and has become the target of virulent protest by Blacks in Canada up to the present time. The Trudeau Blackface as a party disguise in his youth and the opposition attempt to use it against him in the 2019 Federal Election is a case in point).

Over the last fifty years the concept of the museum and archives has been changing to become a place that stores knowledge, and provide teaching and research materials to enrich the education curriculum and life experience of diverse peoples. The Black community has for over a hundred years been trying to get private and public Canadian and Quebec archivists to upgrade their collections on the presence, contribution and history of Blacks. Essentially for 100 years between 1863 and 1963 (from emancipation to the liberation of the Canadian Immigration Act) Blacks were excluded from the landscape of Quebec history and operations. The massive increase in Black immigrants to Quebec and Canada, as a whole, in the early sixties reopened the debate on the strategies for nation building and the integration of Blacks in these societies. It became increasingly clear that the creation of knowledge and histories had to become more inclusive and race base.

The N.C.C., the Black Studies Center, Concordia and its scholars and faculty have played a significant role in demonstrating, and promoting the more dynamic role a Library and Archive system can play in facilitating the education, learning and research process at Concordia and the community. of Blacks, other visible and indigenous communities in Montreal and Québec. This process goes back to the fifties and sixties involving the Concordia Library collection of Oscar Peterson and jazz fonds; and discussions with Professor Bayne as the Director of the Graduate diploma in administration at Sir George Williams University. These changes in the role played by archives emerged as the Concordia Archives evolved with the concepts of a city or region as a network of people in a complex adaptive regional ecosystem. In such a system public and university libraries and archive agents/structures are parts of the knowledge belief subsystem responsible for the storage and creation of knowledge hubs serving everyone’s research and innovative response needs. Thus, the early probing at Concordia Library and

archives grew to involve persons such as Dr. Dorothy Williams (N.C.C.); Dr. Clarence Bayne (Graduate Diploma of Administration, and the Black Studies Center); Dr. Leo Bertley, Dr. Horace Goddard and others.

Over the past seven years, [Alexandra Mills](#) has been sifting through the contents of hundreds upon hundreds of boxes of archives from Montreal’s Black community groups and organizations. Her role as Concordia’s special collections archivist since 2014 has been greatly facilitated by developments in the Black communities itself. This is reflected in diagram Figure 2 below mapping the communication flows and planning linkages of the knowledge hub currently represented by the Blacks in Quebec program of the BCRC-ICED-BSC .

Figure 2: Proposed linkages and Information flows between Key Organization in the Black Community Forum

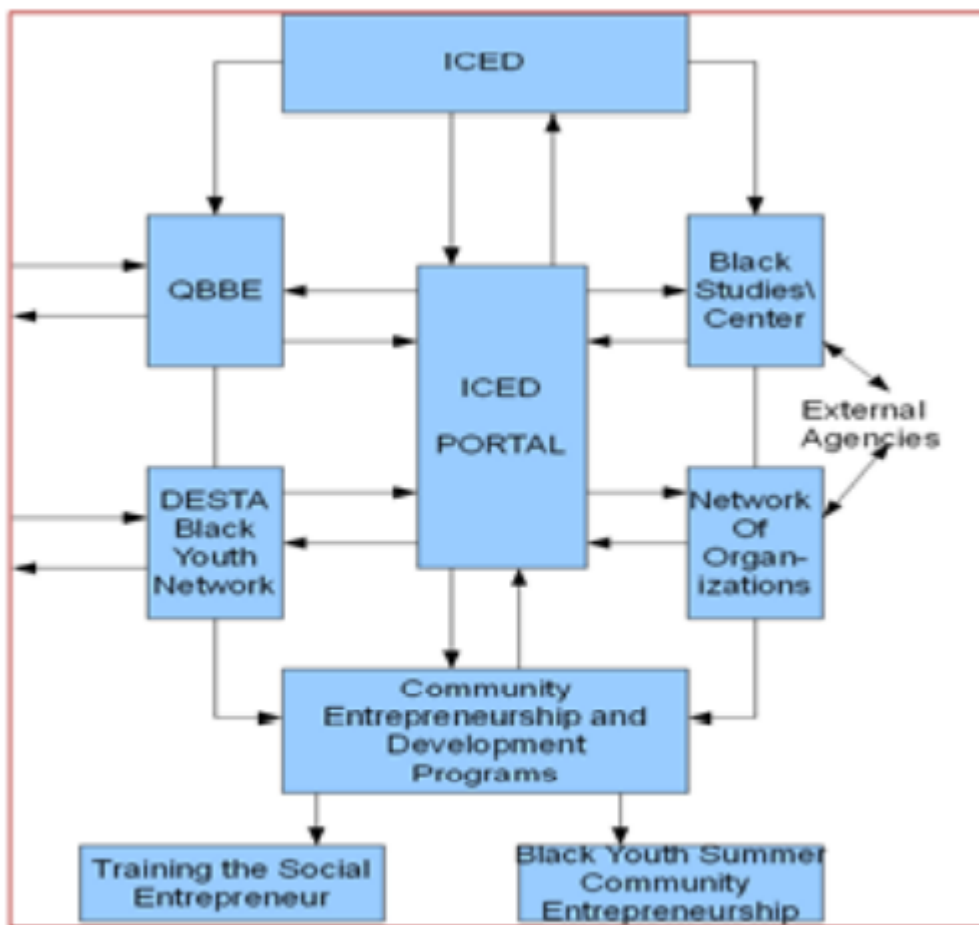


Figure 2: Communication and planning chart

It is hoped that the Concordia Archives will be the core common storage and informing center of the system. Alexandra and her colleagues have been cataloguing multiple decades' worth of documents and preparing finding aids for researchers and students. This process has been facilitated by negotiations between the Concordia Archives and Dr. Bayne and his community colleagues at Black Theater Workshops (BTW), Québec Board of Black Educators (QBBE), and the Black Community Resource Center (BCRC). Collections include the archives of the [Black Theatre Workshop](#), the [Black Studies Centre](#) and the Negro Community Centre, as well as those of community leaders Graeme Clyde, son of NCC executive director Stanley Clyde, Leon Llewellyn and the recently deceased Dr. Horace Goddard (member of the BCRC, the BTW, the Black Writers Guild of Montreal, the QBBE and the English Montreal School Board (EMSB)). Processing of the Black Studies Centre fonds is almost completed and it should be available for consultation this fall, while processing for the Goddard collection is ongoing and it should be available for consultation within the year.

In addition to these archives at Concordia, there is the Roy States collection at Mc Gill University that helps to complete the picture during the sixties to the early

eighties. Also at the National Archive there are the fonds of Dr. Dorothy Wills and Dr. Clarence Bayne founders of the National Black Coalition of Canada, Dr. Howard Mc Curdy, Dr. Wilson Head a past president.

The possibilities for future archive collection:

- Professor Bayne's Archives;
- the QBBE Archives;
- the BCRC Archives;
- updates from the BTW.

It would also be recommended that a curator can be hired to coordinate communications and information systems that link Concordia Archives with the key historical and communication centers evolving in the larger Black community of Montreal. An approach is suggested by Professors Bayne and Saade of Concordia and the international journal INDIRE in collaboration with the Black community archiving initiatives of a Black knowledge hub located at the BCRC and the BSC. The Bayne, Saade approach propose that BSC, BCRC and Concordia ICED build a results-based communication and informing system that creates a common collection and processing data base linking several community centers in the Black ESC. This would establish and sustain services to support the decisions searches of the centers and their

members in the emerging Black community ecosystems; and the changing social, economic and and political landscape of Québec.

There are three time related phases to the development and construction of the proposed network of Black communication centers.

1. The first phase is the development stage requiring a review of the center's mission and history of successes and failures. Online Reports will be updated periodically.
2. The second phase relates to development of information and data collection structures, content creation and validation, content management. The Global Reporting Initiative system (GRI) will be used as guidelines for reporting and making standard organization disclosures; and keeping track of local fitness indicators.
3. The third phase is the usage stage: sustainability.

A real life feedback process need to be in place that will enable a continuous monitoring and updating of the effectiveness of the communication of ICED and BCRC with the centers, and between centers. This will facilitates the creation and sustainability of learning resources (workshops, lectures, archival displays) and provides continuous access to new knowledge stored at

the common database. It helps to reduce the ingenuity gap at the local organization and leadership level of activities and connections with the Centers monitoring the changes in the social indices of the community. A picture of this process over the three time phases is presented below in Figure 2 below:

Fig 3: Three Construction Time Phrases for the Information and Communication Network System.

