

JOURNALISTIC APPROACH

This is a report on a phenomenon that is particular in Quebec: many churches are being destroyed or bought by real estate developers to build condominiums. I was interested in investigating the origins and the impacts of this phenomenon on the society and the citizens.

During my first year of master's, I took a data journalism course which introduced me to the perks of this tool, especially in a pandemic context. As part of a course in innovative journalism practices, I therefore used my new skills to carry out this report.

I collected the data on the city of Quebec and the government's websites. I realized in the beginning of the process that the documents were not updated: I had to check each information by using recent press articles. Subsequently, I used a spreadsheet to have a global picture of the inventory. The Flourish tool helped me to make several visualizations and graphs to illustrate the current situation in the National Capital region.

Then, I went on a hunt for experts and testimonies. I listed the different stakeholders that had been cited in the press and contacted them one by one. I was able to have a phone interview with each one of them, which allowed me to trace back the source of this phenomenon. A couple of stakeholders led me on some tracks that I hadn't considered and to other stakeholders that had remained hidden in the background. After an interview with Father Busque from the Bienheureuse-Dina-Bélanger parish in Quebec, I was able to have an exclusive document that provides an inventory of the Church of Très-Saint-Sacrement's current health. The parish was reluctant to publish this document, because "it should not be open to interpretation." However, after talking about the SOS Saint-Sacrement committee's scepticism as to the figures released in the media about the renovation costs, Father Busque has agreed to provide the document as proof for my story.

The pandemic context was both favorable and unfavorable for the production of this report. Fortunately, the web was full of resources and stakeholders were available during these times of confinement. However, this context provided me from going out there to check the real condition of the churches. But what's nice about data journalism is that you can request feedback from the public to improve your work.