

MUNICIPAL FUSION IN THE SHERBROOKE REGION: THE CASE OF LENNOXVILLE

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ABSTRACT

In February and March of 2000, a group of Bishop's University geography students conducted a survey of Lennoxville residents regarding the possibility of municipal fusion with the City of Sherbrooke. The Mayor and Town Manager of Lennoxville screened and approved the questionnaire as well as other materials that were given to the respondents. These included letters from the Mayor as well as a brochure explaining which services are administered locally and which are administered regionally. The study was intended as an educational project for students and as a planning tool for town officials, but it also provided an interesting view of Lennoxville as a community. In addition to describing the details of the project and its methodology, this paper reviews some of the findings and experiences of the students who worked on it.

RÉSUMÉ

En février et mars 2000, des étudiants en géographie de l'Université Bishop's ont mené un sondage d'opinion auprès des habitants de Lennoxville concernant la possibilité d'une fusion avec Sherbrooke. Le maire et le directeur général de Lennoxville ont approuvé les questionnaires ainsi que tout le matériel qui a été distribué aux participants, soit les lettres du maire et le dépliant faisant la distinction entre les services gérés par la municipalité et ceux qui sont gérés par la région. Cette étude devait servir d'exercice pédagogique pour les étudiants et d'outil de planification pour les fonctionnaires municipaux. Cependant, elle nous a aussi fourni une vision intéressante de la communauté de Lennoxville. Cet article présente les détails de l'étude, sa méthodologie et un compte rendu de la recherche et des expériences vécues par les étudiants.

Introduction

This paper addresses the case of Sherbrooke, but specifically on one of its existing suburbs, the Town of Lennoxville. It summarizes the findings of a survey of Lennoxville residents regarding their attitudes toward a possible merger with Sherbrooke. A group of Bishop's University Geography students conducted the study during winter and early spring 2000, after the subject had been raised but before it had been settled. While the Quebec government was actively promoting local government fusion as outlined in Minister Harel's White Paper on municipal reform, 85 percent of respondents were opposed to the idea at least for Lennoxville; less than 10 percent supported the fusion concept. Lennoxville residents appear to have viewed the joining of particular services with Sherbrooke and other local jurisdictions somewhat more favorably, though none of the options were supported by even a near majority. Approval of such regional services ranged from 14 percent (Administrative Services) to 27 percent (Recreation Services) whereas disapproval ranged from 51 percent (Municipal Housing) to 72 percent (Administrative Services). Moreover, 78 percent of respondents were opposed to the possibility of creating a regional government to administer all regional services (including existing and future regional service provision); only 16 percent of respondents supported this idea.

The respondents who participated in the study were generally enthusiastic about contributing to the project. Several of them expressed great satisfaction with Lennoxville officials for their interest in the views of people who live in the community. Nearly all of the student interviewers were invited for tea and other refreshments during some of their interviews. Lennoxville residents demonstrated a generous spirit in addition to a strong interest in local governance in their responses. The following sections of this report detail the methodology and findings of the study.

Methodology

The project team conducted the study throughout the Bishop's University winter term from early-January to mid-April 2000. During January and February, the team drafted a brochure and questionnaire. Lennoxville Mayor, Doug MacAulay, and Jacques Gagnon, Town Manager, screened and approved both documents before they were administered. In late-February, the students participated in debates on municipal fusion to ensure that each interviewer could answer basic questions on the study and its general subject matter.

Students thereby became familiar with arguments on both sides of the issue, putting them in a better position to anticipate the kinds of responses they might encounter. It also enabled them to answer respondents' questions about fusion in as objective a way as possible. The brochure was used to further this informative aspect of the project. It explained existing local and regional service delivery so that all respondents could answer the survey questions from a similar base of knowledge about these issues. French and English versions were prepared for the brochure, questionnaire and letters from Mayor MacAulay and myself that explained the project and its purpose.

Respondents were randomly selected from the 1998 list of eligible voters residing in the Town of Lennoxville. This choice was made to eliminate temporary residents such as students. The project team used a random digit method to ensure that each person had an equal chance of being selected. Of the 3,572 individuals on the list, 220 were ultimately interviewed (6 percent of eligible voters and 5.5 percent of the overall population). An effort was also made to reflect the approximate proportions of anglophones, francophones, homeowners and renters. This proved to be more difficult than was originally anticipated. The main reason for this is that several of the people who appeared on the 1998 voter registry had apparently moved away from Lennoxville, most of them renters who are inherently more mobile than homeowners. It was often difficult to find renters who had not moved, though every effort was made to determine if they had moved within Lennoxville by cross-referencing with the telephone directory.

Discussion

The team had to draw several random samples to ensure a sufficient number of responses given the difficulties encountered. Over 1,200 names were selected to derive the 220 participants included in the survey of which 77 percent were anglophone, 23 percent were francophone, 77 percent were homeowners and 23 percent were renters. This compares to the overall Lennoxville population of 67 percent anglophone, 26 percent francophone, 47 percent homeowners and 53 percent renters based on the 1996 Canadian census (See Figure 1). A more current voting list (unavailable due to provincial election rules) most likely would have allowed for sub-samples that better reflected the overall population; however the 1998 list did offer a considerable advantage for the purpose of this study. The fact that every respondent had lived in Lennoxville at least two years

means that the views expressed in the survey reflect at least that much “lived experience” in the area. Given the town’s reputation for local loyalty, its unique sense of place and history, as well as its aging population, overrepresentation of more settled residents are also useful. Over 70 percent of survey respondents reported having lived in Lennoxville more than ten years.

The survey instrument included ten questions of which eight were closed-ended, requiring respondents to select from a pre-determined list of options. The remaining two questions were open-ended, allowing for answers not anticipated by the project team. In addition to questions about support or opposition to fusion with Sherbrooke, the survey addressed issues associated with existing Lennoxville and Sherbrooke services. It also addressed the option of joining selected services with Sherbrooke. These services included Fire Protection and Rescue, Cultural Services, Recreation Services, Community Services, Public Works Services, the Municipal Housing Bureau, Urban Planning Services, and Administrative Services. Respondents were also asked whether they would support the creation of a regional government to coordinate all regional services and to provide their demographic profile. The results of these questions follow.

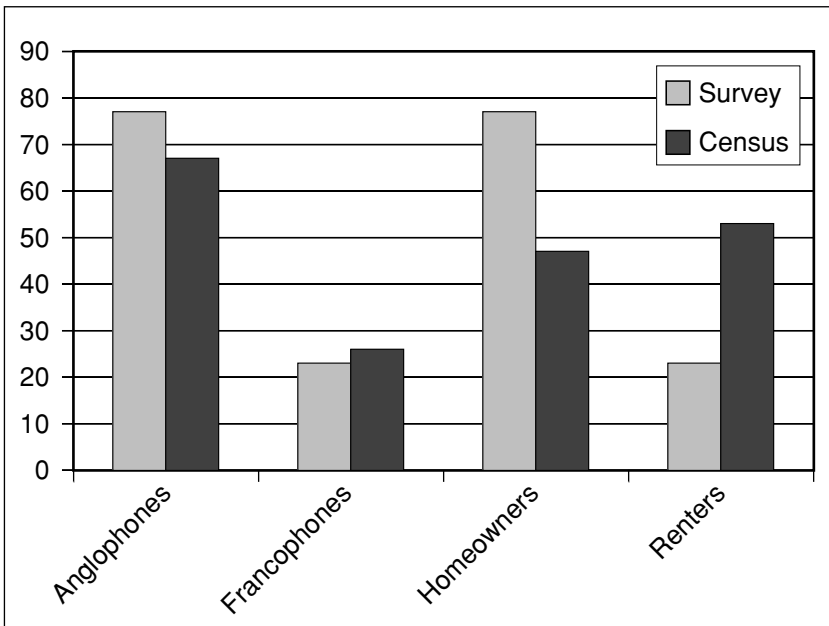


FIGURE 1

Proportional Representation of Amalgamation Survey

Fusion with Sherbrooke

The first question on the survey read as follows: *If a formal proposal were made to fuse the Town of Lennoxville with the City of Sherbrooke, what would be your reaction?* The options were *very supportive, somewhat supportive, no opinion, somewhat opposed and strongly opposed* and were coded as 1-5, respectively. The mean score was 4.4 (between *somewhat and strongly opposed*) and the mode (most common response) was 5 (*strongly opposed*). An overwhelming 85 percent of respondents were opposed to fusion to one degree or another; 65 percent were *strongly opposed* and 20 percent were *somewhat opposed*, whereas 9 percent were either *somewhat supportive* or *very supportive*.

The second question read as follows: *If fusion were to reduce the cost of delivering local government services for Lennoxville residents, how would you react?* The mean score was 3.6 (between *no opinion* and *somewhat opposed*) and the mode was 5 (*strongly opposed*). Even with the possibility of reduced cost, 62 percent of respondents were opposed to fusion to some degree; 35 percent were *strongly opposed* and 27 percent were *somewhat opposed*, whereas 22 percent were *somewhat supportive* and 10 percent were *very supportive*. The third question was the same as the second one, except that it assumed costs would increase. Predictably, respondents were even more opposed to fusion under this scenario. The mean was 4.7 and the mode was 5 (*strongly opposed*). Nearly all (95 percent) were opposed to some degree; 80 percent were *strongly opposed* and 15 percent were *somewhat opposed*, whereas 5 percent were either *somewhat supportive* or *very supportive* (See Table 1).

Question	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	No Opinion	Somewhat Opposed	Strongly Opposed	Total
1	6 (3%)	14 (5%)	12 (6%)	45 (20%)	143 (65%)	220 (100%)
2	22 (10%)	48 (22%)	14 (6%)	59 (27%)	77 (35%)	220 (100%)
3	1 (.5%)	9 (4%)	1 (.5%)	34 (15%)	175 (80%)	220 (100%)

TABLE 1

Support for Fusion with Sherbrooke

Question 4 was open-ended and read as follows: *Aside from cost concerns, what are your reasons for your support or opposition to fusion with Sherbrooke?* These responses were difficult to tabulate, but most of them focused on service quality issues associated with the small size of Lennoxville (with the assumption that smaller is better) or the need for bilingual services (with the assumption that fusion

would threaten this). Some respondents simply reiterated cost concerns (with some holding the assumption that fusion would increase costs and others assuming that it would decrease costs). Though this question seemed to be successful as far as allowing respondents to speak as freely and creatively as possible about fusion, most respondents simply reiterated issues addressed in parts A-D of the closed-ended questions described in the following sections. Many respondents used this question to express their satisfaction with the “personal touch” of Lennoxville service delivery (similar to the category *personalized services*).

Importance of Existing Lennoxville Services

Question 5 was designed to determine the most important factors Lennoxville residents associate with local services. It read as follows: *If you were to plan services for the Town of Lennoxville, what degree of importance would you give the following elements?* The question was divided into four parts (A-D) and addressed *quality of service*, *service in French and English*, *personalized services* and *cost*. The possible responses were *very important*, *somewhat important*, *not very important*, *not at all important* and *do not know*. The findings indicate each of the survey questions reflect important opinions and concerns of most Lennoxville residents.

In response to *quality of service*, the mean was 1.2 and the mode was 1 (*very important*). Compared to the other elements of this question, *quality of service* elicited the strongest responses; 99 percent of respondents ranked this issue as *very important* (85%) or *somewhat important* (14%).

Service in French and English was similarly important and resulted in a mean score of 1.3 and a mode of 1 (*very important*); 97 percent of respondents ranked this issue as *very important* (76%) or *somewhat important* (20%).

Personalized services (as compared with anonymous service provision typical of larger jurisdictions) were also described as important by most respondents. This question resulted in a mean score of 1.5 (between *very* and *somewhat important*) and a mode of 1 (*very important*); 92 percent ranked this issue as *very important* (60%) or *somewhat important* (32%).

Cost resulted in similar findings with a mean of 1.5 ((between *very* and *somewhat important*) and a mode of 1 (*very important*); 95 percent ranked this issue as *very important* (62%) or *somewhat important* (33%). Clearly, each of these elements of service provision are important to Lennoxville residents (See Table 2).

Question	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Do not know	Not Very Important	Not at all Important	Total
5A Quality	188 (85%)	30 (14%)	0	1 (.5%)	1 (.5%)	220 (100%)
5B Bilingual	168 (76%)	45 (20%)	1 (.5%)	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	220 (100%)
5C Personal	132 (60%)	71 (32%)	3 (1%)	11 (5%)	3 (1%)	220 (100%)
5D Cost	136 (62%)	73 (33%)	4 (2%)	5 (2%)	2 (1%)	220 (100%)

TABLE 2
Importance of Existing Lennoxville Services

Satisfaction with Existing Lennoxville Services

Question 6 was intended to ascertain respondents' degree of satisfaction with existing Lennoxville services based on the same four elements and options associated with Question 5. It read as follows: *What is your degree of satisfaction with existing services provided by the Town of Lennoxville in regard to the following elements?* The findings were largely consistent with those of the previous question, indicating a large degree of satisfaction with services.

In response to *quality of service*, the mean score was 1.6 (between *somewhat* and *very satisfied*) and the mode was 2 (*somewhat satisfied*); 96 percent of respondents said they were *very satisfied* (40%) or *somewhat satisfied* (56%) in this regard.

Lennoxville services were ranked slightly higher on the category of *service in French and English* as compared to *quality of service* with a mean of 1.5 (between *somewhat* and *very satisfied*) and a mode of 1 (*very satisfied*); 95 percent of respondents said they were *very satisfied* (55%) or *somewhat satisfied* (39%).

Lennoxville services were also ranked highly with regard to *personalized services*, though somewhat less so than on the first two elements. The mean score was 1.7 (between *somewhat* and *very satisfied*) and the mode was 2 (*somewhat satisfied*); 89 percent of respondents said they were *very satisfied* (42%) or *somewhat satisfied* (47%).

With regard to *cost*, Lennoxville services were still ranked highly, though less so than on any of the other three elements. The mean

Question	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Do not know	Not Very Satisfied	Not at all Satisfied	Total
5A Quality	88 (40%)	124 (56%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	220 (100%)
5B Bilingual	122 (55%)	86 (39%)	5 (2%)	0	0	220 (100%)
5C Personal	93 (42%)	103 (47%)	13 (6%)	1 (.5%)	1 (.5%)	220 (100%)
5D Cost	50 (23%)	128 (58%)	19 (9%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	220 (100%)

TABLE 3
Satisfaction with Existing Lennoxville Services

and mode were both 2 (*somewhat satisfied*); 81 percent of respondents said they were *very satisfied* (23%) or *somewhat satisfied* (58%). Lennoxville residents seem to hold very high opinions of existing local services (See Table 3).

Satisfaction with Sherbrooke Services

Question 7 was intended to ascertain respondents' degree of satisfaction with services provided by the City of Sherbrooke based on the same four elements and options associated with Questions 5 and 6. It read as follows: *How would you evaluate services provided by the City of Sherbrooke in regard to the following elements (assuming you have some knowledge of them)?* For the most part, respondents were either unable or unwilling to provide feedback on this question. The mode or most common response in each case was 3 (*Do not know*) and the mean was in the same range (2.7-3.2). For this reason, separate calculations that eliminated the non-response category were also made.

To the degree that people did express opinions of Sherbrooke services, their opinions differed depending on the question. In each case, the degree of adequacy expressed was less than the degree of satisfaction associated with Lennoxville services (though keep in mind the difference in numerical coding between the two give the elimination of the *do not know* category in the Sherbrooke calculations).

Respondents ranked Sherbrooke the highest regarding *quality of service*. The mean was 2.2 (between *somewhat* and *not very adequate*) and the mode was 2 (*somewhat adequate*); 71 percent of respondents that answered this question said they believed Sherbrooke services were *somewhat* (59%) or *very adequate* (15%) on this measure.

Bilingual services were ranked the lowest according to respondents that answered this question. The mean was 2.7 (between *not very* and *not at all adequate*) and the mode was 3 (*not very adequate*); 59 percent of respondents said they believed Sherbrooke services were *not very* (38%) or *not at all adequate* (21%).

Respondents ranked Sherbrooke somewhat better with respect to *personalized services* and *cost* which both had a mean of 2.5 (between *somewhat* and *not very adequate*) and a mode of 2 (*somewhat adequate*). With regard to *personalized services*, 54% of respondents that answered the question said they believed Sherbrooke services were *somewhat* (42%) or *very adequate* (12%). They ranked their neighboring city similarly with regard to *cost* of services; 53.5% chose *somewhat* (44%) or *very adequate* (9.5). Lennoxville residents seem to vary considerably in their knowledge and approval of Sherbrooke service delivery (See Table 4).

Question	Very Adequate	Somewhat Adequate	Not Very Adequate	Not at all Adequate	Total
5A Quality	15 (12%)	73 (59%)	25 (20%)	10 (8%)	123 (100%)
5B Bilingual	15 (11%)	41 (30%)	51 (38%)	28 (21%)	135 (100%)
5C Personal	12 (12%)	42 (42%)	35 (35%)	12 (12%)	101 (100%)
5D Cost	9 (10%)	42 (44%)	29 (31%)	15 (16%)	95 (100%)

TABLE 4

Rankings of Sherbrooke Services (don't know category eliminated)

Acceptance of Joining Particular Services with the Sherbrooke Region

Question 8 was divided into 8 parts (A-H) and was intended to determine Lennoxville residents' views about joining particular services with the Sherbrooke region. The survey team described this option as being similar to the way police and some other services are provided in the area. The wording and ordering of the questions matched that of the brochures handed out prior to the interviews to provide a common base of knowledge about existing local and regional service provision (See Appendix).

For each service, the majority of respondents were unwilling to support further regionalization, though the degree of opposition varied considerably from 51 percent (Municipal Housing Bureau) to 72 percent (Administrative Services). Opposition to joining Fire Protection and Rescue Services (70%), Community Services (68%), Cultural Services (65%) and Public Works Services (65%) was also particularly high. Recreational Services received the highest support for a regional approach, although among a minority of respondents (27%). The idea of a regional government to coordinate all regional services received the greatest opposition among respondents (78%). Most Lennoxville residents seem to prefer keeping existing local services as close to home as possible (See Table 5).

Question 9 was open-ended and, like Question 4, was intended to give respondents the opportunity to express any views that the project team had not anticipated. The responses to these questions were similar in that most people reiterated concerns expressed in the closed-ended questions. Again, the most response was an expression of concern that creating more regional services might erode the *personalized* nature of Lennoxville service delivery.

Question	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	No Opinion	Somewhat Opposed	Very Opposed	Total
8A Fire & Rescue	19 (9%)	34 (15%)	12 (5%)	42 (19%)	113 (51%)	220 (100%)
8B Cultural Services	22 (10%)	28 (13%)	26 (12%)	52 (24%)	92 (42%)	220 (100%)
8C Recreation Services	25 (11%)	34 (15%)	30 (13.5%)	52 (24%)	79 (36%)	220 (100%)
8D Community Services	14 (6%)	26 (12%)	31 (14%)	61 (28%)	88 (40%)	220 (100%)
8E Public Works	23 (10%)	28 (13%)	27 (13%)	56 (25%)	86 (39%)	220 (100%)
8F Municipal Housing	12 (5%)	28 (13%)	67 (30%)	39 (18%)	74 (34%)	220 (100%)
8G Urban Planning	13 (6%)	35 (16%)	44 (20%)	54 (25%)	74 (34%)	220 (100%)
8H Admin. Services	11 (5%)	20 (9%)	29 (13%)	53 (24%)	106 (48%)	220 (100%)
9 Regional Government	10 (5%)	25 (11%)	13 (6%)	49 (22%)	123 (56%)	220 (100%)

TABLE 5

Acceptance of Joining Particular Services

Comparison of Sub-Populations

Comparisons of responses among certain sub-population groups were also revealing, notwithstanding their proportions relative to the total population. This section includes comparisons among francophones and anglophones and among homeowners. None of the French/English comparisons indicated great differences in the various responses, though francophones appear to be somewhat less opposed to amalgamation. The Own/Rent comparisons revealed slightly greater differences in support of particular regional services. Mean rankings by population sub-group for satisfaction with existing Lennoxville services and support for amalgamation or regional services are shown in Figures 2 through 7.

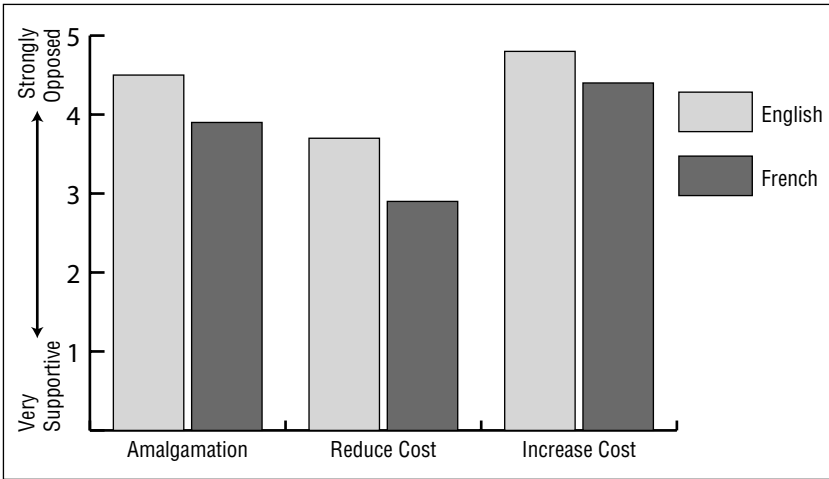


FIGURE 2
 Mean Responses to Amalgamation by Language

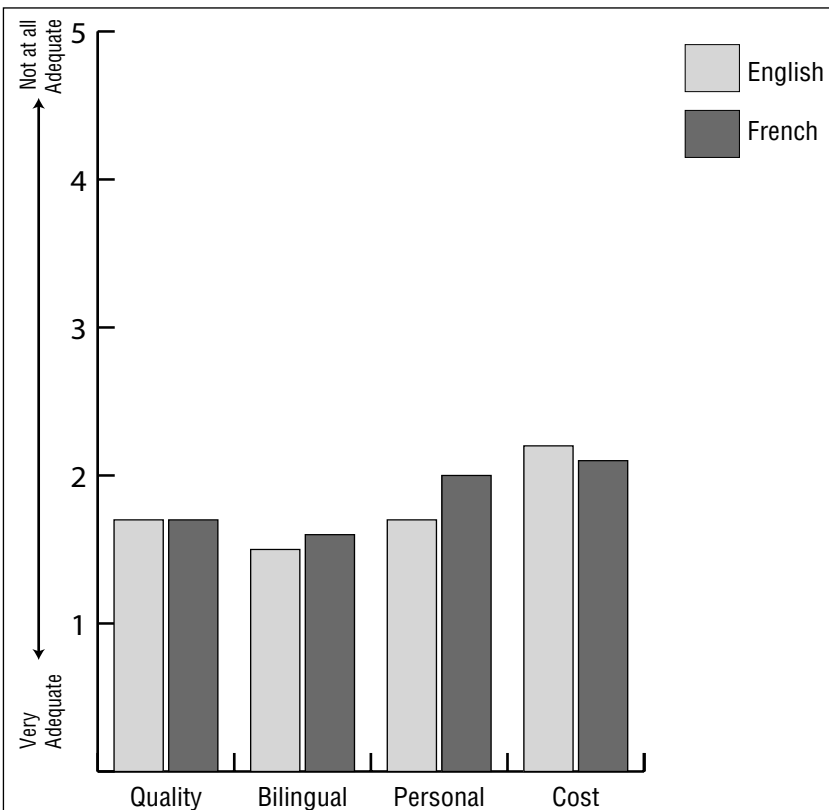


FIGURE 3
 Mean Rankings of Existing Lennoxville Services by Language

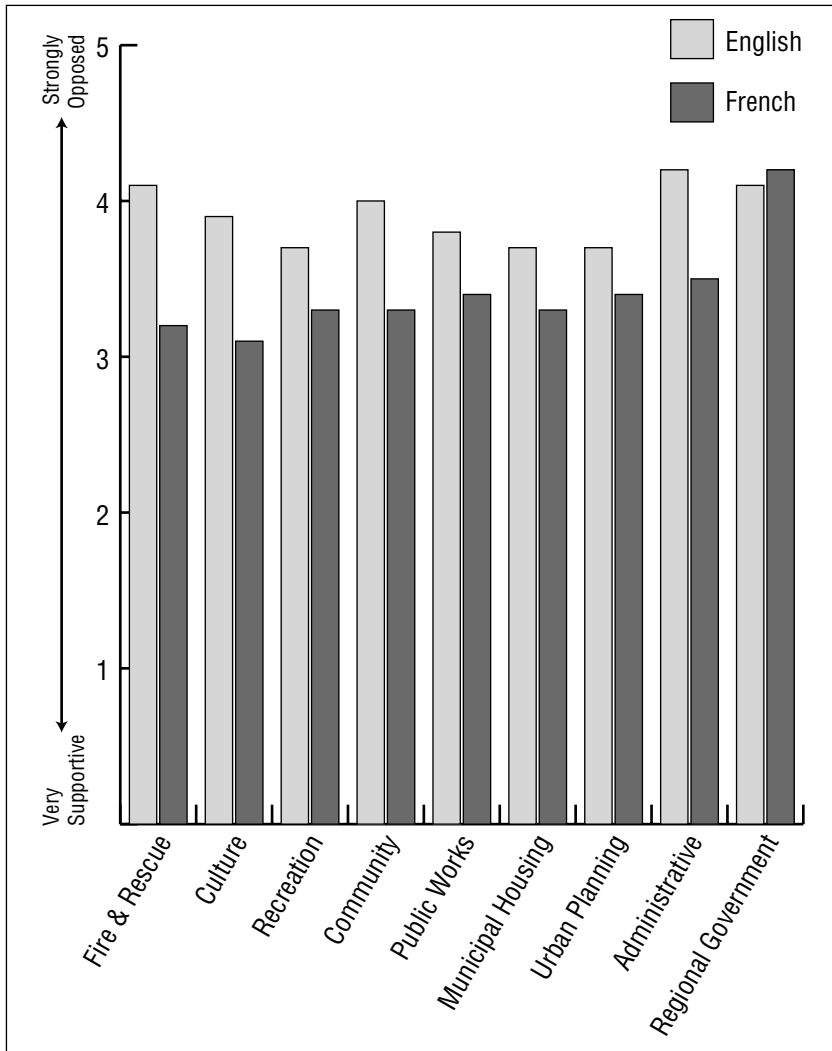


FIGURE 4
Mean Support for Particular Regional Services by Language

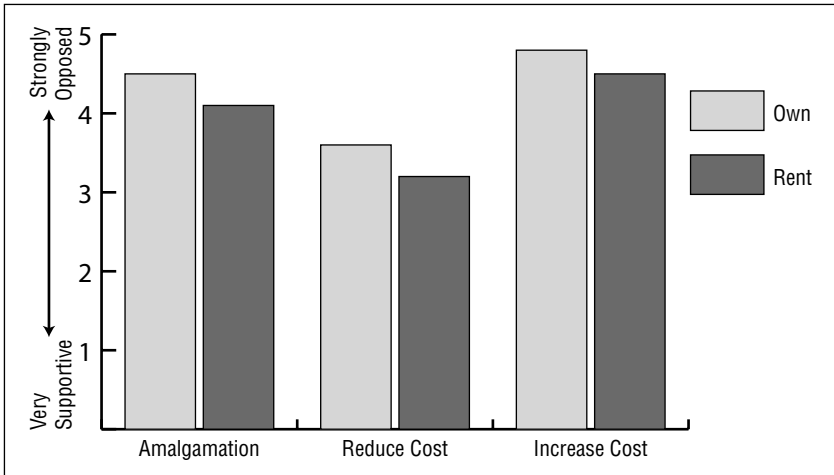


FIGURE 5
Mean Responses to Amalgamation by Own/Rent

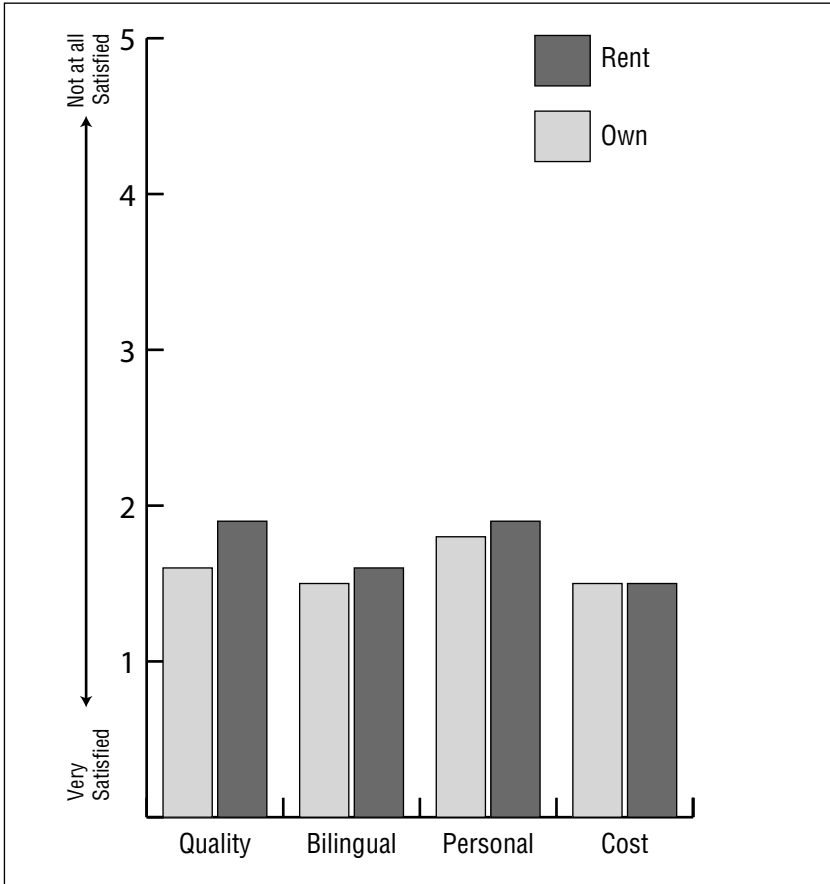


FIGURE 6
Mean Rankings of Existing Lennoxville Services by Own/Rent

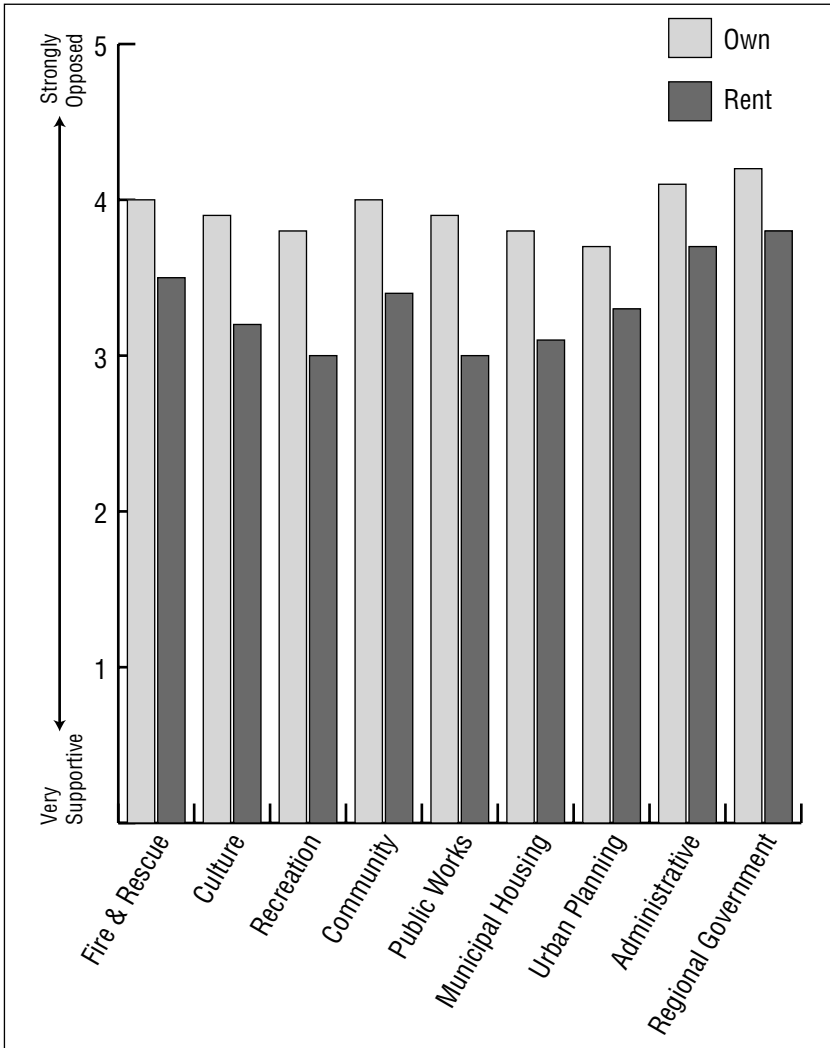


FIGURE 7
Mean Support for Particular Regional Services by Own/Rent



22 February 2000

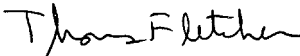
Dear Lennoxville Resident:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As a resident of Lennoxville, you have been randomly selected for your opinions on the possibility of fusion (or amalgamation, as it is sometimes called) of the Town of Lennoxville with the City of Sherbrooke. Approximately five percent of Lennoxville residents will be surveyed for this project. A team of Bishop's University Geography students is conducting the study under my direction and that of Jacques Gagnon, Town Manager of Lennoxville.

The attached brochure explains the services the Town of Lennoxville provides and those provided by the City of Sherbrooke and certain regional organizations. We ask that you read it and schedule a time to answer a brief questionnaire regarding your thoughts about existing services in Lennoxville as well as your opinions about fusion. Your confidentiality will be respected by keeping your responses anonymous.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at 822-9600 extension 2476. Again, thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,



Dr. Thomas H. Fletcher,
Assistant Professor of Geography

Attachment

L E N N O X V I L L E



February 22nd, 2000

Dear Citizen:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your generous offer to participate in this project. As Mayor of the Town of Lennoxville, I believe it is important to understand the views of residents. Given the current discussions about local government fusion in the Montreal region and other areas, it will be useful to the Town government to know how you would feel about such a proposal in the Sherbrooke region.

A team of Bishop's University Geography students is carrying out this study with my support. Dr. Thomas Fletcher, Department of Geography, Bishop's University, is supervising the project along with Mr. Jacques Gagnon, Town Manager of Lennoxville. They ask that you read the attached brochure which describes local and regional services and to schedule an appointment to answer a brief questionnaire. We will ensure that your confidentiality is respected. The information will be most useful to the Town government for planning purposes.

If you have any questions, please call Thomas Fletcher at 822-9600 extension 2476 or Jacques Gagnon at 569-9388. Again, thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mayor Doug MacAulay

Attachment

L E N N O X V I L L E



DO YOU KNOW WHO PROVIDES YOUR LOCAL SERVICES?

The Town of Lennoxville provides the majority of local services to its citizens. Others are provided through Regional Community organizations. For your information, the following chart lists those services provided both locally and regionally.

TOWN OF LENNOXVILLE:

- Fire Protection & Rescue
- Cultural Services (Upland's Museum and Library)
- Recreation Services (parks, trails, pool, skating, baseball, soccer, day camp, etc.)
- Community Services: Lennoxville encourages and supports more than 50 local non-profit organizations
- Public Works Services (drinking water, local waste water management, road and sidewalk maintenance and construction, street lighting, snow removal, bridges, solid waste and recyclable materials management)
- Municipal Housing Bureau
- Urban Planning Services (Zoning, construction permits, subdivision, environmental concerns)
- Administrative Services

REGIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICES:

- Police Services
- Regional Economic Development
- Regional Urban Planning
- Public Transportation
- Waste Water Treatment
- Regional Trails
- Inter-municipal Ski Hill

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