

# Municipal Cultural Policies in Quebec<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:* The current state of municipal and regional cultural policies in Quebec represents a major evolution since the adoption of Quebec's Cultural Policy in June 1992. A "municipalization" of cultural policy has occurred. Over the past ten years, there has been a fourteenfold increase in the number of municipalities with cultural policies in Quebec (to 93 today), and this phenomenon appears to be growing and gaining greater influence as the new century begins. These cultural policies have become important strategic tools for cultural, social, and economic development in the province. This paper reports the main findings of a recent study that examined the content of 51 cultural policies of Quebec municipalities.

*Résumé:* L'état actuel des politiques culturelles municipales et régionales au Québec représente une évolution majeure depuis l'adoption de la Politique culturelle québécoise en juin 1992. Une municipalisation des politiques culturelles a eu lieu. En dix ans, le nombre de municipalités québécoises ayant une politique culturelle s'est multiplié par quatorze, jusqu'à quatre-vingt-treize aujourd'hui. Ce phénomène semble s'accélérer et gagner en influence au début du nouveau siècle. Ces politiques culturelles sont devenues des outils stratégiques importants pour le développement culturel, social et économique de la province. Cet article rapporte les résultats d'une étude récente qui a examiné le contenu de cinquante et une politiques culturelles dans les municipalités québécoises.

As community identity and quality of life assume ever-increasing importance for citizens, cultural policies—especially local and regional policies—are becoming more and more strategic. Increasingly, the notion that the quality of social bonds is tied to the quality of cultural bonds is gaining favour. These cultural bonds develop through a balanced relationship between local and regional practices (practices within geographic communities), what people do, and the public's perception of the quality of life of those communities. Expressed differently, social exclusion and cultural exclusion go hand in hand.

Just as federal and provincial cultural policies contribute to strengthening cultural identities and social cohesion at the macro-social level, so too do regional and local cultural practices (and the expectations and aspirations that form their underpinning) contribute to strengthening local identities and building communi-

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ties. The heightened involvement of municipalities in cultural development activities (including the development of cultural policies and plans) is evident across Canada. Within Quebec, the impetus for the development of municipal cultural policies can be attributed in large part to the unique provincial policy context in which they have emerged.

**Chapters 3 and 4 of Quebec's cultural policy and a kind of "municipalization" of culture**

Quebec's Cultural Policy of 1992 (Ministère des affaires culturelles, 1992) sets the overall direction in matters of culture within the province, especially where it concerns citizens' access to and participation in a municipality's cultural life. This direction can be summed up as follows:

- to bolster education and awareness of the arts and culture, with schools providing the best route to access culture;
- to improve access to arts and culture, using public libraries as an essential resource; and
- to encourage citizen participation in artistic and cultural life, through active participation and by volunteering.

According to the authors of Quebec's cultural policy, municipalities are the obvious "first-line providers in matters of access to culture and facilities." Referring to Chapters 3 and 4 of Quebec's Cultural Policy, one could call the phenomenon of booming municipal cultural policies in Quebec a kind of "municipalization" of culture in terms of responsibilities for intervening locally in the lives of participants, both in their communities and surrounding regions. All cultural practices involving leisure and recreational activities invariably take place at the local level. Therefore it makes sense to have the responsibility for these activities lie with a public administration in an area close to the people—notably in the form of a municipal cultural policy.

In the spirit of Chapter 3 of Quebec's Cultural Policy of 1992, some 41 cultural development agreements have been signed between municipalities and the Ministry of Culture (currently affecting a majority of the Quebec population). Since the start of the program *Ententes de développement culturel* (cultural development agreements), more than \$100 million has been invested over a five-year period (1995-2001); half of this amount comes from the Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications (Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 1999). The development activities outlined in these agreements are aimed primarily at municipal libraries and the promotion of local heritage. Those municipalities that have had the opportunity to sign agreements with the Ministry represent a kind of vanguard at the forefront of municipal cultural development, and a certain number of them (almost 10) are playing a leadership role.

In 1996, guided by this same spirit, the Quebec Ministers of Culture and Education released the *Guide de la concertation scolaire-municipale dans le domaine des bibliothèques* (*Guide to Consensus-building between Schools and Municipalities in the Area of Libraries*). The release of this guide represented the first major

initiative to come out of the Protocol of Agreement reached between the two ministries for the year 1997-98. The Protocol entitled *Deux partenaires indissociables* (two indivisible partners) came about as a direct result of Chapter 3 of Quebec's Cultural Policy (see Ministère de la Culture et des Communications & Union des municipalités du Québec, 1995).

### **Some basic definitions**

An important first step is to avoid confusing the terms *action plan* and *cultural policy*, which certain municipalities do. A *cultural policy* is the general framework within which a municipality expresses its goals and objectives; it is based on political will, and must be adopted by a resolution or decision of the municipal council. An *action plan* uses the policy to identify concrete measures, actions, and short-term engagements (3 or 5 years) which the municipality can undertake, and establishes priorities based on a timeframe. The action plan flows from the ongoing practices and actions actively supported by local and regional authorities. Cultural committees often confuse or intermingle these two very different steps.

Generally, a municipal policy must include the expectations and end goals (anticipated results) of the municipal council in matters of culture, and sets down the broad cultural directions, shared municipal values, principles, and norms to be respected. A municipal policy should also outline the strategies, general tools, and mechanisms of intervention, keeping in mind the established directions. Finally, a municipal policy should set down rules for cultural intervention and administrative procedures, in accordance with the end goals of the municipal council.

Generally speaking, a municipal cultural policy should be useful for the following purposes:

- to define more clearly the cultural identity of the community;
- to be better attuned to the needs and aspirations of the population, artists, and cultural organizations;
- to be in a better position to offer cultural products adapted to specific needs, in order to improve the quality of life of citizens;
- to foster a longer-term vision and better planning of services offered by municipalities in the many spheres of cultural activity;
- to plan more efficient use of cultural resources (given today's budgetary constraints);
- to set priorities, initially within the cultural sector but also in other areas of municipal intervention;
- to include culture among municipal issues;
- to position the municipality as a key regional player;
- to give the municipality the knowledge and necessary framework to discuss and negotiate partnership agreements with other players in the cultural arena; and
- to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each party in the implementation of cultural activities.

In a recent study funded jointly by the Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications and the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (de la Durantaye, 1999; Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 2000), we examined the content of the 51 cultural policies of Quebec municipalities and discovered major trends and commonalities among the policies (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Selected findings of content analysis of cultural policies of Quebec municipalities, 1999**

<b>Percentage of municipalities with a policy, by size</b>	
100,000+ inhabitants	100%
25,000-99,999 inhabitants	42%
10,000-24,999 inhabitants	22%
under 10,000 inhabitants	<1%
<b>Goals mentioned</b>	
Quality of life	17.7%
Social development	17.2%
Cultural identity	15.3%
Economic development related to culture	14.3%
Personal development	13.8%
Local cultural development	11.8%
Municipal outreach	9.9%
<b>Values mentioned</b>	
Access to culture	50.7%
Right to culture	26.1%
Freedom of expression and of creativity	13.0%
Fairness	10.1%
<b>Principles of action mentioned</b>	
<i>By local municipalities:</i>	
Support for increased responsibility	14.6%
Partnership	14.1%
Consensus-building	13.5%
Quality of life	10.3%
<i>By regional municipalities:</i>	
Consensus-building	23%
Access to heritage sites	23%
<b>Areas mentioned</b>	
Heritage sites and museums	29.1%
Arts	19.2%
Libraries	11.3%
Visual arts and crafts	10.5%
Performing arts	7.2%
Cultural events	5.6%
Leisure activities related to culture	5.2%

<b>Functions mentioned</b>	
Support	18.0%
Consensus-building	14.0%
Dissemination	13.6%
Promotion and marketing	7.9%
Enhancement	7.9%
Education	6.3%
<b>Targeted audiences mentioned</b>	
Citizens	31.7%
Organizations and associations	24.9%
Artists	19.8%
The public	5.3%
Businesses	4.5%
Educators	3.9%
<b>Ties with other levels of government mentioned</b>	
Mega-city	42.4%
Intercity	16.3%
Schools	41.2%

Further analysis of the policies and their commonalities revealed the following insights:

1. More and more, municipal cultural policies are being aimed at families and children, rather than at individual artists.
2. Citizens and their quality of life are the major concerns of elected municipal officials, even in areas related to culture, such as municipal cultural policies.
3. Access to culture and a citizen's right to culture, in the sense of cultural freedom and local and regional cultural identity, represent intrinsic values for elected municipal officials; consequently, municipal organizations and associations receive their greatest attention.
4. Freedom of expression and artistic freedom, while officially recognized and encouraged in the cultural policies formulated by elected municipal officials, is conditional upon a rotation of culture and arts among existing facilities (municipal or private) in its jurisdiction, for example, public libraries, arts and exhibition centres, and art galleries, with the same priority given to municipal and regional organizations and associations.
5. In the same vein, the first rule of elected municipal officials is to support the taking in hand, by individuals (including artists) and by associations and organizations, of cultural and artistic initiatives. The municipality sees itself as a partner, with responsibilities for championing or leadership, and, in this role, encourages consensus-building and partnerships between the various cultural groups.
6. Therefore, locally elected officials have made their first pivotal point of cultural intervention a high degree of public support, which translates into

actively supporting the initiatives of their citizens, associations, or organizations.

The second pivotal point of intervention for elected officials is the dissemination of heritage, visual arts, and crafts, rather than the performing arts or multimedia (which elected officials seem more and more inclined to entrust to other advocates).

For their part, MRCs (municipal regions of the county) have made dissemination their first pivotal point of cultural intervention on the regional level, beginning with visual arts and crafts, and including heritage and museums in their dissemination priorities. There appears, therefore, to be a certain degree of harmonization of activities between the two levels of government: local and regional.

7. In keeping with the cultural direction that they have set, elected officials encourage dissemination of heritage and museum objects through municipal facilities, most often libraries and archives, arts and exhibition centres, and art galleries.

The MRCs prefer using public heritage buildings, churches, and temples for cultural dissemination.

The traditional role of municipalities, as overseers of heritage sites and museums, libraries, and other facilities for dissemination of visual arts, seems to be a deciding factor in the direction taken in municipal cultural policies at the local and regional levels. Other areas of activity and functions are perhaps better suited to a delegation of authority, or even a devolution of authority, by the municipality.

8. Concerning tie-ins with mega-cities and between cities, elected officials tend to look for agreements and protocols that support tourism (the same holds true for MRCs) and are most likely to favour consensus-building and partnerships on a regional level. Here, the support function (firm support and recognition) is the most important. For MRCs, the greatest focus is on joint promotion of organizations and activities. MRCs insist on access to regional facilities and list them systematically in their cultural policies. They also encourage consensus-building among organizations, associations, and artists. Proportionally, the MRCs, more than local municipalities, firmly set down and prioritize their policy objectives in their action plans.

The main type of links mentioned by the MRCs at the intermunicipal level are, first, joint promotion of organizations and activities and, secondly, a regional direction plan and/or an agreement to access facilities.

The main type of links with schools mentioned in the cultural policies of the MRCs are: first, agreements and protocols, followed by facilities and then libraries.

### Conclusion

Over the last three decades, municipalities in Quebec, as well as in the rest of Canada, have instituted programs involving cultural activities and facilities. For instance, over the past ten years in Quebec, there has been a fourteenfold increase in the number of municipal cultural policies (to 93 today), and this phenomenon appears to be growing and gaining greater influence as the new century begins. This suggests that a reorientation in the way in which we think about and develop cultural policy is needed.

In the recent study examining the content of the cultural policies of Quebec municipalities, one of the most surprising findings dealt with the municipal mission most often mentioned and given top priority by the local and regional municipalities studied—quality of life. This was followed by: social development, affirmation of local cultural identity, personal development, and local cultural development. Analysis of the results of this study lead us to believe that the civic missions, mentioned at the top of the list of municipal cultural policies, are clearly directed towards creating an essential link between quality of life, affirmation of cultural identity, and development of a local culture in the community.

We also observed, and this needs to be investigated further, a similar situation in English Canada with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' "Quality of Life Reporting System," a composite index of the quality of life in Canadian municipalities but, at present, without a cultural dimension. We believe that this cultural dimension is already well enshrined in the mission of municipalities in Quebec, as evidenced by the large number of municipal cultural policies, and represents a step forward taken as recently as the last decade. However, a comparative study involving other Canadian provinces is needed on this subject.

What is certain, based on the recent study, is that municipalities in Quebec are evolving a definite role in cultural matters in keeping with the quality of life of their citizens. And we believe that a similar global tendency is evolving, particularly in France and Great Britain, one that Canada is unlikely to escape. Such a tendency should be documented and compared on an international scale.

The situation in France warrants greater attention on the part of Canadians, since the involvement of territorial administrations in matters of culture is much further advanced than it is in Canada, and their municipal and regional cultural indicators are better developed. Recently in France, measures have been undertaken in large urban areas to improve co-operation between levels of government through the development of a social territorial contract called a *contrat de ville* (city contract), aimed at establishing some consistency in the state's interventions in a variety of areas, including culture, education, transportation, safety, tourism, leisure activities, and the war against social exclusion (poverty, unemployment, homelessness, suicide) (see Conseil interministériel des villes, 1998). The goal for the French is to put the different public policies, including those dealing with culture, to work within a more global framework. The *contrat de ville* model would allow the Quebec government or other provincial governments, municipalities in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, and their partners to commit themselves

to working together, in a cohesive way, to put into place development policies (including cultural policies) and urban renewal policies targeted to specific jurisdictions. This is one way of dealing with the problem of social cohesion in the age of globalization.

The situation in towns in Great Britain over the last two decades warrants equal attention. In these towns, culture and recreation have gradually evolved into means of providing social services and social stability, and tools for economic development and redistribution of resources (see Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993). This has occurred within the framework of the transfer of roles and functions from the national state to local government. In Quebec and in Canada, we have witnessed a similar transfer of responsibilities from the higher orders of government (federal and provincial) to local and regional administrations. In fact, Quebec's Cultural Policy of 1992 is characterized by a kind of municipalization of culture.

This transfer from the national level to the local level is being acknowledged more and more. As early as 1992, the Earth Summit stated: "Local level strategies and plans have proved far more successful than those at the national level in terms of making a direct impact" (cited in Kleberg, 1998).

#### Note

1. A previous version of this article was published by Les Arts et la ville in both French and English (de la Durantaye, 2000). It is published here in a revised form with permission.

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