

The American Sphere of Influence, the World Free Market and Municipal and Regional Cultural Policies: the Québec Case

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1. INTRODUCTION

Some time after the Summit of the Americas, which was held in Québec City amid controversy and behind closed doors, it seems appropriate to talk about the handing down of culture and of cultural identity in the context of globalization.

The levels of governance that make up local municipalities, regional municipalities and urban communities, are geographically and socially a better location for interventions, being more efficient and better able to counteract damages to social cohesion, which are affecting our societies and our cities in particular.

Community identity and the perception of the quality of life at the local level are becoming more and more important. Cultural policies, in that context, are much more strategic, especially those devoted to localities and regions. Local governments being those nearest to their populations and to problems

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derived from the damage done to social cohesion, the municipal level has henceforth to be considered a strategic level of intervention.

On the other hand, as federal and provincial cultural policies contribute to asserting cultural identities at the macrosocial level in a context of globalization of cultural exchanges, local and regional cultural participation (with all the expectations, aspirations and cultural policies which lie behind them) contribute to asserting local identities. If the national or provincial cultural policies focus on macrosocial aspects of identity, they contribute little to the manifestation of local identity. Municipal cultural policies contribute to them.

As for culture, the relationship between the provincial level, which has constitutional responsibility (in Canada, local, municipal and regional governments are given their powers by the provincial government), and the municipal, local or regional levels did not develop suddenly. This relationship corresponds to the level of community and cultural development. This is why it must be examined in the broader context of society as a whole.

This new relationship should also be put in the context of a transfer of roles or functions from the state government to the local government. In Québec and in Canada, this devolution of powers from the higher levels of government to local and regional administrations can be exemplified, for example, by the Ryan reforms in education and the Trudel reform of municipalities. The transfer from the national to the local is increasingly accepted. The Earth Summit underlined, as early as 1992, that: “Local strategies and plans have proved far more successful in making a direct impact than those at the national level” (Kleberg, Ed. 1998).

I shall try to show that, when it comes to the handing down of culture, local and regional municipalities, especially in the context of serious municipal reorganization, are playing and can play, a not insignificant role. When one takes into account all the possible ways of handing down culture, the local and regional levels are better positioned than other levels, provincial, federal or international.

2. SMALLER POLITICAL SOCIETIES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CULTURE: THE QUÉBEC CASE

2.1 LINGUISTIC SPACES: THE FRENCH FACT IN AMERICA

Forty years ago, the first article of the political agenda of the Québec Liberal Party, put before the voters during the memorable general election of June 22nd, 1960, an election which symbolizes the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, was entitled: Creation of a Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

The explanatory note introducing that article is less well known. It stated: “In the context of Québec, the most universal element we have to develop thoroughly is the French fact. *It is more because of our culture than the force of our numbers that we are going to make ourselves respected.* It is through our language and our culture that a French presence on the North American continent will be asserted” (Lapalme, 1988: 315-316).

That credo has transcended any political party for a number of generations. Our great poet Gaston Miron made that credo clear in 1978, stating that “a work, only because it was written in French here, was a subversive and revolutionary act: it introduced a difference in North America” (1978). But that is not a drawback for society in the twenty-first century, which is crossbred, tolerant and pluralistic.

In fact, the originality of Québec society is not visible to the casual observer. As the authors of *A Cultural Development Policy for Québec* (Government of Québec, 1978) put it, for the visitor, it is not easy to detect at first glance a specific and original culture there. The observer may be tempted to see only a wide amalgam of borrowed elements. The French heritage of language and civil law, the Amerindian heritage of ways of living and dealing with nature, the British heritage of political institutions and criminal law, the American heritage of economic, industrial and technological structures, and the Roman Catholic heritage of institutions and religious thinking.

Of course, on closer examination, one sees original productions: *Cirque du Soleil*, the book publisher *La Courte Échelle*, *Softimage*, the *Festival international de la poésie*. But “Everything is working as if those productions had slipped through a sociocultural framework whose rules had been thought of and developed elsewhere. A great many of Québec’s collective structures are borrowed. History shows clearly that several decisions which had a significant bearing on it came from Versailles, London, Rome, New

York or Washington... It is a paradoxical culture whose components often came from outside, however original its inner life..." (*idem*). This collectivity has fully entered into major North American trends, with its important movements of urbanization and industrialization from the beginning of the twentieth century through the two World Wars. However, the question remains: "is it possible to remain the same while multiplying borrowings from a world which is not indebted to us?" (*ibid.*).

In his book, *Raisons communes* (1995), Fernand Dumont admitted he had been surprised by Ms. Kari Levitt who, in her book on the spread of multinational firms in Canada, placed her emphasis on the cultural aspects of the phenomenon: to her mind, the supreme danger was the manipulation of cultures and needs — of ways of living — by major powers foreign to the country. "She was convinced that, if we have to resist, it is not because of a sham taste for economic autonomy, but because *human beings should be free to choose their ways of living and the meaning of their lives* from the customs and *solidarities* inherited from history" (1972). Fernand Dumont concluded that, for the same reasons, an authentic cultural development will be born in Québec only if it calls upon its own cultural resources, from which it must draw its strength and fidelity in order to be useful to human beings. "People waiving their rights to be adults because they despise themselves are not good partners" (1995: 72).

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising to see Québec defining itself partly by the culture of its citizens — i.e., by their ways of living, how they use their free time and by what their idea of a society is.

And this, in spite of the existence in Canada of what Abraham Rotstein had already called a "territorial ethic" or "mappism," which translates a concern about the integrity of Canadian territory from sea to sea, with "a powerful central government which could stand for the cultural and social needs of Canadians in confronting the expansionism of large American firms" (Levitt, 1972: XXII).

But that Canadian paradigm did not historically prevent Québec provincial governments from developing *their own strategies*. For example, the Québec Liberal governments of Gouin (1905-1921) and Taschereau (1921-1936), as well as the Union Nationale governments of Duplessis (1936-1939 and 1944-1959), accepted the rules of the game imposed by American capital with its financial and industrial interests. More recently, it did not prevent the Parti Québécois and the future Premier of Québec, Bernard Landry, from being effective supporters of NAFTA, even if more than one region of Canada had reservations about it.

According to Eric Kierans (1978), from 1945 on, Canada's National policy has used multinational and transnational firms which allowed Canada to become a satellite in an interdependent world economy. The result was that Canada, a free market, became more vulnerable to international cycles and more dependent on large corporations.

Québec found its solution to the problem of continental integration in the building up, thanks to the Québec government, of a structured and functional network of québécois institutions which integrated themselves with both Canadian and American networks. There is the emergence, here, of a model, originally under the control of the government, which integrated the Québec economy into the international market; there is a wide consensus about this model in Québec, among both workers and employers.

In any case, the *Cultural Development Policy for Québec*, launched under René Lévesque in 1978, and written partly under the influence of the late Fernand Dumont, took for granted that culture is first and foremost a way of living, a common creation. Culture is education and pedagogy (Government of Québec, 1978: 153). According to the White Paper, the three cornerstones of cultural policy are: ways of living, creation and education.

In their introduction to the White Paper on cultural policy for Québec, the authors mention that "every culture is characterized by diversity: *diversity* of classes, generations, minorities, *regions*." They conclude their introduction by saying that henceforth States will try to use filters, by means of agreements, to confront the international flow of mass culture.

They quote Premier Daniel Johnson, who in February 1968, in a memorandum to a federal-provincial conference held in Ottawa, stated: "Only a language and a culture that are vibrant and alive, supported by strong social and political foundations and capable of genuine creativity can claim to be respected by other languages and other cultures" (*idem*, vol. 1: 31-32).

The authors of the *Cultural Development Policy for Québec* mention also that the first important action taken, in 1977, by the Ministry of Cultural Development, under Camille Laurin, was a White Paper on language policy, which became the famous Charter of the French Language or Bill 101. This approach, according to its 1978 authors, is more than traditional in Québec, it is central to its *history*.

3. MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL CULTURAL POLICIES

It was provincial government policy which in 1992 determined Québec's major orientations on cultural matters, especially those concerning local and regional municipalities, which deal with citizens' access to, and participation in, cultural life. Those orientations were notably:

1. to reinforce education and awareness of the arts and culture (Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1992: 99);
2. to promote access to arts and culture, the public library being an essential resource (*idem*: 107; Bailargeon, 1998);
3. to facilitate the participation of citizens in artistic and cultural life, notably through cultural participation and volunteer activities (Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1992: 116-117).

These orientations have had implications at the local and regional levels. It is in the context of chapters three and four of *La politique culturelle de l'État du Québec* that we can refer to a certain "*municipalization*" of culture in terms of responsibility for action in the lives of those who practice it: the local community and the region it belongs to.

Any cultural activity undertaken as leisure is always done *somewhere*. It is then normal that a certain availing of work, in the sense of *a close by public territorial administration responsibility*, has a full meaning. It can be found here usually as a *municipal cultural policy*.

In 2001, there were 85 municipalities (73 local and 12 regional) in Québec which had approved a cultural policy. These municipalities comprise the majority of Québec's population; 33 other municipalities (15 local and 18 regional) were about to approve cultural policies. In the coming months or years, Québec will benefit from 118 local or regional cultural policies. This number is remarkable. I think that, both in the West and internationally, it is a major phenomenon.

It must be emphasized that in Québec the number of municipal cultural policies has multiplied by 14 between 1990 and 2001. This is a significant development. This Québec phenomenon depends on a unique way of seeing the world, where the development of a community is a priority, using culture and

democratization as tools for carrying out that development. The municipal cultural policies in Québec are mainly phenomena of urban life and modernity (De la Durantaye, 1999).

These cultural policies are meant in the first place for young people, those under 18 years of age, and also for families. They are connected to education and shaping future users. The target audience of these cultural policies are first the citizens of the municipality. Cultural policy is seen as an important step in the development of citizenship, a well advanced degree of citizenship, including the attitude of solidarity that underlies it.

The idea that social cohesion is derived notably from the quality of cultural coherence seems to lay itself down more and more, especially at the municipal level. This cultural coherence is a kind of fruit of a balanced relationship between local and regional cultural participation, what the people do, and the perceptions citizens have of what the quality of life is in the territory they belong to shows up in their daily lives. In other words, social exclusion and cultural exclusion go together. To succeed in reaching social and cultural inclusion, cultural islands and ghettos have to be avoided. It is in fact modern urban life that can give the territory that identity and can favour its inclusion.

In the context of globalization, metropolitan areas and capital cities turn themselves toward cultural and artistic import and export. They leave to peripheries and isolated cities complementary roles, more domestic, in the diffusion, animation and promotion of culture. It seems that a hierarchy of cultural functions is unfolding through the marketing of cultural goods and services.

But that dualism: *the proximity of cultural services versus cultural services whose direction is the world or the "nation,"* that duality of global/national and local, is fragmenting cultural development in general in a given territory and makes relatively trite the cultural development of cities. A better integration between these levels would lead to a better social cohesion.

These changing situations call for a re-definition of public services in general, and the provision of arts and culture in particular, at the municipal level, inasmuch as these administrations are seen, geographically and politically, as places that supply a number of front line services to local communities that are more and more pluralistic and heterogeneous, whose cultural needs and interests are more and more diversified.

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