

ROUYN-NORANDA, CULTURAL CAPITAL



LOCAL GOVERNANCE CREATIVITY **LEADERSHIP**
COMMUNITY INCLUSION **IDENTITY** ATTRACTIVENESS
PROMOTION **EMPLOYMENT** CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

1. Context

Founded in 1926, Rouyn-Noranda is a city with 41,934 inhabitants, located 600 km to the northwest of Montreal, whose economy has historically been based on mineral and forestry resources. It spreads over a vast territory, including an urban area and several rural communities. Although it is geographically remote from major urban centres, Rouyn-Noranda is a city stimulated by numerous mining industry projects and thriving local entrepreneurship. In terms of entrepreneurship, it is one of the 10 most dynamic cities in Canada.

Rouyn-Noranda relies on its cultural vitality and exceptional quality of life, which make it one of the most active cities in Quebec, with a positive migratory inflow, attracting many new arrivals, families and businesses to the area. As the major cultural centre in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the city has experienced an exciting cultural atmosphere that has set it apart on a national and international scale. The municipality is famous for the beauty of its festivals, the creativity of its artists, the

audacity of its entrepreneurs and the quality of its hospitality, which make it a choice tourist destination, attracting a growing interest from the public, artists and investors.

In 2010, it put forward its bid for the title of 'Culture Capital of Canada', awarded by the federal government of Canada. The community showed a very enthusiastic involvement in this project, which saw an unprecedented mobilisation of people. Disappointment came when the city found out that the Minister of Heritage had not accepted Rouyn-Noranda's bid. In an audacious gesture and to positively regain the support inspired by this project, Rouyn-Noranda decided to proclaim itself as 'Cultural Capital' to the delight of the population and the city's cultural sector, who felt the need to go further by fulfilling the proposed initiatives.

ROUYN-NORANDA HAS TRANSFORMED SOMETHING THAT COULD HAVE BEEN POTENTIALLY DISAPPOINTING FOR THE COMMUNITY INTO A PROJECT OF MOBILIZATION AND LOCAL PRIDE.

Many long-term **structural measures** for the development and promotion of arts and culture and an **extensive program of celebrations** (activities initiated by the community artists and organisations) have allowed the city to **capitalize on its cultural vitality**, which has been recognised by several players from the national and international cultural sectors. The city hopes to **act as a catalyst for cultural development** by proclaiming its identity, character and personality as a cultural city loud and clear. Rouyn-Noranda also wants to **make itself a major point of attraction** for amateurs in arts and culture in Quebec and Canada.

The 'Rouyn-Noranda, cultural capital' project has been an opportunity to launch structured projects for the future and has engaged the community, setting off a process of cultural development that is still ongoing today. The main aim of the cultural policy being: 'to create a real synergy of individual and collective strengths in the community centred around a collective project for cultural development'. The city is supporting initiatives from the cultural sector and is adapting its programs and measures to this sector's needs. This developmental approach has turned Rouyn-Noranda into a catalyst for cultural development and an ideal partner for contributors in this sector.

The city of Rouyn-Noranda's unfailing commitment to arts and culture shows its willingness to **promote cultural development** by **supporting the work of artists and cultural organisations**. This commitment is also testament to the city's strong belief that **cultural vitality is directly linked to the quality of life of citizens** and constitutes a **way of attracting and retaining** professionals and tourists. This strategy contributes to the integrated local development, which is thought to be long-term. Distanced from the major centres and economically focused on more traditional sectors, this project will allow for economic diversification in a human, social and sustainable context, which will promote jobs and place citizens at the heart of the city.



2. Rouyn-Noranda and Culture

The city's cultural mission is to promote a cultural awakening of its citizens. It also seeks to develop a cultural and artistic community within the territory with an aim to foster a healthy and harmonious living environment, as well as enhance the appeal and sustainable development of the area.

- In 1997, the city adopted a **cultural policy**, which aimed to use the cultural awakening among citizens at the heart of municipal concerns. Cultural development relies on the contribution of arts and culture to the personal fulfilment of citizens, to the strengthening of social cohesion, to community development and to the city's influence. The cultural policy emphasizes the fact that **cultural development is done in an integrated way and through partnerships**.
- The city of Rouyn-Noranda has taken advantage of its small size in order to effectively meet the needs of the cultural sector, by listening, by being flexible and by being original. The city makes use of the expertise of artists and cultural organisations at the heart of its committees (Cultural Committee, History and Heritage Committee) as well as carrying out consultations and studies to better meet its targets. The plans and policies integrate culture: *family and senior policy* (which stresses the importance of access to cultural, social and festive activities (costs, participatory conditions and mobility)), *rural development plan* and an *urban and village renewal program*.
- Since 2001, the city has been collaborating with the minister of Culture and Communications in Quebec in order to carry out structured projects as per the *Cultural Development Agreements*.

In 2011, the city invested \$3.1 million to support and develop its culture, in other words 5.1% of the total budget. The city then supplemented this with another \$333,500 in 2012-2013 for the 'Rouyn-Noranda, Cultural Capital' project.

The project acted as a powerful factor for social cohesion by creating an unprecedented mobilization among the community and the artistic and cultural sectors. It has produced a sense of enthusiasm and pride among the population through its stated objective to proclaim its **unique identity, character and personality as a cultural city** to the rest of Quebec and Canada. The project has also worked as economic leverage, as it represents an investment of almost \$1 million invested in structured projects, legacies and celebratory activities, as well as employment contracts for artists, cultural workers and other citizens. The 'Rouyn-Noranda, Cultural Capital' project is also fully in line with the Agenda 21 for Culture principles.

THE CITY'S GESTURE CONVEYED PERSEVERANCE, AUDACITY AND ENTREPRENEURIALISM. BOTH ORIGINAL AND AUDACIOUS, IT HAS STRENGTHENED SOCIAL COHESION AND HAS MADE PEOPLE PROUD TO BE FROM ROUYN-NORANDA

3. Objectives and implementation of the project

3.1. Overall and specific objectives

The 'Rouyn-Noranda, Cultural Capital' project has provided the sector with an opportunity to show its audacity, originality and creativity by acting as a **catalyst for creative energy** and inviting everyone to come up with a project. The initiatives have been strongly encouraged, as detailed by the following guidelines:

- promote Rouyn-Noranda's cultural vitality;
- **celebrate its identity, character and personality;**
- showcase all artistic disciplines;
- **develop the partnership;**
- **encourage involvement from citizens;**
- **fight against social and cultural exclusion;**
- **showcase the cultural diversity** in Rouyn-Noranda;

- **showcase the indigenous community** and their traces on the territory;
- celebrate the seasons and inhabited areas;
- adapt the territory within the city and its districts

These guidelines have helped create projects that improve the **quality of the urban environment** and the **quality of life for citizens**, by **integrating all components of society**.

The city's initiatives are measures that have been identified as either priorities or important for local cultural development:

- the development of a campaign to promote cultural sponsorship, which acts as a premise for a global development strategy for cultural sponsorship within the community and was followed up in 2013 by the implementation of a Culture and Sponsorship prize.
- the development of a cultural signature.
- the creation and maintenance of a website for promoting projects carried out within the context of the 'Rouyn-Noranda, Cultural Capital' project (www.rm2012.org) and hosts the RN project blog, which is managed by a group of artists to showcase Rouyn-Noranda's cultural and artistic vitality.
- the installation of a permanent work of art called 'Cohesion', in the basin of '*La Place de la Citoyenneté et de la Coopération*', created by a young local artist chosen by a jury, evokes '*the strength of cooperation between citizens in order to help the community. The movement of water reflects how local culture is dynamic and constantly changing. The sloping aspect shows the constant search for balance, which is a reminder that cooperation is happening all the time.*'
- creation, production and installation of new display columns to promote cultural community activities.
- the creation of a campaign video broadcast on social media that promotes Rouyn-Noranda's cultural identity.

THE PROJECT HAS ALSO WORKED AS ECONOMIC LEVERAGE, AS IT REPRESENTS AN INVESTMENT OF ALMOST 1 MILLION DOLLARS INVESTED IN STRUCTURED PROJECTS, LEGACIES, CELEBRATORY ACTIVITIES AND EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS.

3.2. History

Since 2008, the city of Rouyn-Noranda has competed for the title of 'Cultural Capital of Canada'; a title awarded by the Department of Canadian Heritage to deserving municipalities, accompanied by financial support in order to carry out a year-long program of celebrations.

In 2010, the city presented its bid, involving a monitoring committee and a project manager. The community got involved with this bid with great enthusiasm. After several months of unprecedented work and mobilization, the municipality introduced a program including 22 projects, of which 17 were initiated by the community and involved hundreds of artists, organisations and volunteers. Financial partners also invested, bringing the project budget up to almost \$1.3 million. The whole city expected a nomination. The sector was ready and had already integrated its 2012 activities into this program of celebrations. It was with great disappointment that the city learned of the Ministry of Canadian Heritage's decision to dismiss Rouyn-Noranda's bid, even though it had been recommended by the jury, and to award the honour to the city of Calgary instead, depriving Rouyn-Noranda of the \$500,000 that it so deserved.

However, this visibly biased manoeuvre did not curb Rouyn-Noranda's desire to celebrate and stimulate its cultural vitality. Consequently, on the 12th March 2012, **in an audacious gesture, Rouyn-Noranda chose to declare itself as 'cultural capital'**. This self-proclamation came much to the delight of the population, and especially to the cultural sector, who felt the need to proceed with the project after such great mobilization and to fulfil the proposed initiatives. Rouyn-Noranda transformed something that could have been potentially disappointing for the community into a **project of mobilization and local pride**.

3.3. Organisation

Thanks to an increased investment from the municipality, with support from several partners and the willingness of promoters to adapt their projects to a new financial framework, 27 projects were completed in 2012-2013, involving more than 100 artists and organisations. This represented an investment of \$480,000 towards developing arts and culture in Rouyn-Noranda. This self-proclamation, which coincides with Rouyn-Noranda's tenth anniversary as a major city, gave rise to a program that celebrates the city's rich culture, arts and heritage. This new major city was born in 2002, following a merging of municipalities, which were previously the territory of the regional municipal county.



The whole program focuses on the idea of showcasing Rouyn-Noranda's identity, character and personality as a cultural city. As such, the municipality has initiated several strategic actions that aim at developing and promoting arts and culture and has enabled an extensive celebratory program in the form of cultural activities introduced by artists and organisations from the community. Other initiatives celebrated Rouyn-Noranda's 10th anniversary, as well as its cultural vitality: celebrations in rural districts, hosting the 25th conference for the 'Arts and the City' network, a celebration of the new exhibition centre, free concerts in collaboration with the city's festivals, etc.

The sector's initiatives constitute the majority of the program and should meet the major guidelines set out by the city. These include 5 festivals and a dozen cultural organisations, involving around a hundred artists, who have carried out 20 very original and creative projects. A few examples: the installation of an art piece in lights on the façade of the visual arts centre, the production of a faux-documentary on Rouyn-Noranda's cultural identity, the creation of an audio-circuit on heritage and the community, a provincial improvisation tournament, a children's art exhibition with an early childhood centre from the area, themed days on the history of music in Rouyn-Noranda, an original composition from the conductor of the regional symphonic orchestra and a theatrical play honouring the pioneers of Rouyn-Noranda. All of these initiatives have contributed to strengthening social cohesion and the sense of pride that citizens feel towards their community.

4. Impacts

4.1. Impact on the local government

In light of this project and the importance of culture for improving the quality of life for citizens, members of the municipal council and civil servants have mobilized themselves to develop and maintain the feeling of belonging and pride. All of the town's initiatives are now working to develop its commitment towards integrated and dynamic cultural development.

4.2. Impact on the culture and the local cultural officers

By declaring itself as 'cultural capital' and by proceeding with its celebratory program, the city has led a movement that has been very beneficial for the community and cultural sector. In 2012-2013, an investment of \$480,000 into arts and culture enabled the completion of 27 planned projects, worth almost \$1 million. 200 professional or amateur artists, 65 cultural or community works and more than 150 volunteers were involved.

4.3. Impact on the land and the population

The self-proclamation was proof of respect and consideration for the community and the local cultural and artistic sector, who responded to the city's call for projects of unique quality and originality. Despite the lack of an official designation, it was important to channel the city's creative and mobilizing energy. This movement led to a wave of enthusiasm and pride at the heart of the population and cultural sector. It intensified their sense of pride towards the city's cultural vitality.

4.4. Cross-cutting Impacts

A community with a sense of pride and belonging has taken over and has started developing its own projects. The city's gesture conveyed perseverance, audacity and entrepreneurialism. Both original and audacious, it strengthened social cohesion and has made people proud to be from Rouyn-Noranda. It has contributed to developing cultural tourism and to preparing the local community for the CULTURAT 2015 project, which brings the cities from the region together. It has enhanced the quality of life and positively influenced migratory inflow by attracting new arrivants, families and businesses to the territory.

THE 'ROUYN-NORANDA, CULTURAL CAPITAL' PROJECT HAS PROVIDED THE SECTOR WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW ITS AUDACITY, ORIGINALITY AND CREATIVITY BY ACTING AS A CATALYST FOR CREATIVE ENERGY AND INVITING EVERYONE TO COME UP WITH A PROJECT.

4.5. Continuity

Through the cultural development agreement with the Ministry of Culture and Communications in Quebec, the city will pursue its activities over the next few years following these main areas of focus:

- the regional CULTURAT 2015 project, which the city is preparing its local programs for
- the awareness-raising campaign for the importance of cultural sponsorship in collaboration with the business sector in Rouyn-Noranda
- the development of a Youth-Culture program, aimed at providing access to arts and culture for young people from all backgrounds
- the continuation of promoting arts and culture by installing new, unique display columns created by a local artist within the context of the project
- a promotional campaign video for the city's cultural identity
- the development of a future online platform to develop artistic and cultural achievements
- the culture and sponsorship prize

5. Relative Information

The city of Rouyn-Noranda was a nominated candidate for the first 'UCLG International Award - Mexico City - Culture 21' (January-May 2014). The awards jury produced a final report in June 2014 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to promote this project as a practical example for the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

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