

THE REGIONAL CULTURAT MOVEMENT IN ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE



**LOCAL COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INTERCULTURAL
EMPOWERMENT PARTICIPATION DIVERSITY
IDENTITY ATTRACTIVENESS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

1. Background

Abitibi-Témiscamingue is a region of nearly 145,000 inhabitants located in western Quebec. It has an area of 65,000 square kilometres, and is made up of five regional county municipalities (RCMs) with a few mid-sized cities, and about sixty rural communities. Many of these towns are quite small and often isolated, but comprise more than a third of the population. The history of Abitibi-Témiscamingue is intertwined with the exploitation of natural resources. It is therefore recognised by governments as a "resource region", and its isolation hinders its economic development. Given that the area is dominated by the mining and forestry industries, the population fluctuates considerably with respect to these

markets. Furthermore, the appeal of this work is a major challenge for both the industry and SMEs, in maintaining their success. The territory is also home to 7 Algonquin communities. Regrettably, establishing the reserves and mandatory residential schools for Indigenous youth lasting into the late 1960s contributed significantly to the weakening of this culture throughout the territory, and to the isolation of members of Indigenous communities.

2. Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Culture

Culturat is a regional mobilisation initiative developed in 2012 that promotes arts and culture as a sustainable development practice. It brings together 62 municipalities, 7 Algonquin communities, and 17 development agencies.

The 69 local signatory governments support the following guiding principles:

- Culture is one of the main mobilising sources for a community
- Cultural diversity is an asset to be preserved and promoted
- The integration of arts and culture in its living environment, as well as a flourishing and welcoming community can contribute to improving the quality of life of citizens
- The cultural effervescence of the region and the pool of high quality regional artists contribute to improving the image of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and its attractiveness, thanks to increased visibility in national media
- The level of pride and investment in the population helps to attract labour and migrants, as well as to increase tourism traffic
- The use of regional products in restaurants in Abitibi-Témiscamingue stimulates the economy and encourages sustainable development
- Education plays a key role in emphasising the value of culture and openness to others

THE CULTURAT CHARTER OFFICIALLY COMMITS THE SIGNATORY MUNICIPALITIES TO IMPLEMENT CONCRETE ACTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE AND PUBLIC SPACES WITH AN APPROACH THAT PROMOTES THE COMMON GOOD AND SOCIAL INNOVATION.

3. Objectives and Project Implementation

1.1. Primary and Specific Objectives

CULTURAT aims to make Abitibi-Témiscamingue a major hub for identity, arts, and culture. It aims to:

- Catalyse social, economic, and cultural development by encouraging all the actors of a community to develop arts and culture in their region;
- Create animated, aesthetically pleasing, and welcoming public spaces;
- Understand, engage with, and value local or regional cultural and artistic wealth;
- Bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples together by creating opportunities for engaging with, expressing, and valuing Algonquin culture.

1.2. Project Development

Main Actions Carried Out

To date, nearly 450 projects have been carried out under the Culturat framework and are divided into 4 major regional projects: public art, cultural engagement, establishing understanding between different communities, and beautification. Such projects address to the strategic focus of the movement: To create and preserve a mobilisation based on the arts, culture, and identity; Create a climate conducive to creativity and innovation; Improve the attractiveness of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and its cultural position at the extra-regional level.

Focuses 1 and 2: Promote the arts and culture while encouraging regional cultural consumption, and make Culturat known throughout the region

- Personalised canvassing with various targeted actors to encourage them to join the movement (municipalities, chambers of commerce, businesses, etc.) and development of a customer approach.
- CULTURAT.ORG website and CCAT tools (cultural calendar, directory of artists and organizations, news releases, Boutique des Arts).
- Personalised tools on the website (directory for teaching guides, guide for purchasing artwork, a murals guide, etc.).
- Promotional campaign and contest: "Participate in the Landscape" (243 beautification proposals), "CULTURAT Puts the Ball in Your Court", "My CULTURAT Summer" (168 participants), "I Want to Get to Know You".

Focus 3: Promote Algonquin culture and work to bring people closer together.

- Ensure critical work is done on the ground.
- Dialogue Day (conference and networking between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists).
- Establishment of the Anicinabe Cultural Circle.
- Co-creation of projects with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, and development of projects related to Indigenous culture (artistic, events, promotional, etc.).
- Promotion of Algonquin culture (blogs, radio, columns, profiles, videos, etc.).

Focus 4: Make Culturat known nationally and internationally, while making it part of the major sustainable development goals.

- Present this approach to national and international bodies (Canadian Heritage, UNESCO, Coalition for Cultural Diversity, the Arts and the City Network, UCLG, etc.).
- Candidate for the *UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award*.
- Development of a partnership with UQAT to document the process, and with UQAM to develop research projects.

THE CULTURAT CHARTER WAS SIGNED BY 62 MUNICIPALITIES (98% OF THE POPULATION), THE 7 INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, THE 5 CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, AND THE 5 SCHOOL BOARDS OF THE REGION, AS WELL AS BY MANY CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS.

Of the 450 projects completed: 218 were citizens' initiatives, 104 were school projects (several of them with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists), 28 were by businesses, 66 came from municipalities, and 55 were initiated by various organisations. Committees were set up by the municipalities of Val-d'Or, Rouyn-Noranda, and La Sarre to complete the projects. In addition, the media has invested more than \$750,000 in the promotion of Culturat since 2014.

The population of Abitibi-Témiscamingue has become heavily involved in the process and has enthusiastically joined the movement, as shown by the results of polls. Indeed, 91% of the citizens surveyed considered Culturat to be a social project, and 98% saw this as an approach to promote local artists and cultural organisations. In total, 84% of citizens were aware of Culturat, and 87% felt its approach was appropriate. Finally, 69% of the citizens surveyed had participated in the process.

The approach has favoured multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder projects: Charter signatories include 7 band councils and 2 Indigenous Friendship Centres, which sit on the Anicinabe Cultural Circle; more than 50 projects involved professional or semi-professional, Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous artists; nearly 80 projects dealt with establishing understanding of Algonquin culture. Algonquin artists and organisations in particular have received funding for projects in this area.



4. Impact

1.1. Direct Impacts

Impact on Local Government

There is a growing desire in the region to make public spaces more attractive and meaningful, while carrying a collective cultural identity. Communities in the Abitibi RCM can now gather around sources of artistic expression that reflect their environment and their history. Citizens of Val-d'Or will be able to reflect together on the use and development of public spaces through an open process of innovation. In La Sarre and Rouyn-Noranda, artists are involved in urban planning processes, while businesses and citizens are increasingly placing orders for outdoor artwork.

ASIDE FROM THE PROJECTS CARRIED OUT IN EACH REGION, A TRUE CHANGE TOOK PLACE IN THE APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE ACROSS THE PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES.

Impact on Culture and Cultural Stakeholders in the City

Most of the artists who were part of the movement from the beginning have seen enormous success today. They are regularly contracted by companies, the school environment, and the municipalities to produce works or to organise workshops. Culturat also participates significantly in the professionalisation of Indigenous artists by involving them in collective projects.

Greater Impact on the City or Territory and its Population

With respect to establishing understanding between different communities, a real change of mentality is taking place towards a mutual desire to positively get to know each other through arts and culture. This is especially true for school-age children.

Additionally, the transformation of Abitibi-Témiscamingue's urban landscape through the addition of public art is a new source of pride for the region's population.

1.2. Assessment

In the Spring of 2017, Tourism Abitibi-Témiscamingue (TAT) conducted a collective assessment process that led to the development of a 2017-2022 strategic plan. The strategic review first consisted of a literature review, a small citizen survey, a history of TAT activities, and an inventory of Culturat results. As part of the strategic diagnosis, key stakeholders were consulted. An analysis was performed of environmental factors, strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and constraints (FFOC analysis), risks, and issues, all in order to establish lines of action and reflection. Finally, the strategic development plan set out its vision, foundations, values, and missions. It outlines the main focuses of the movement, its development strategy, and lists recommendations and courses of action.

Three Quebec universities (UQAT, UQAM, and Laval University) also expressed interest in conducting research projects on the movement.

1.3. Key Factors

- The initiative has received support from the media in promoting this approach to the population.
- A personalised and direct approach has been undertaken with each of the municipalities involved, using adapted communication strategies to create what Henry Mintzberg calls "communityship", that is, the leadership of a community of people.
- The scale of the process has allowed each sector to find its place according to its own priorities.
- Listening to the needs of an environment allows for constant readjustments that correspond to the needs of each sector.
- The perseverance and passion of the Tourism Abitibi-Témiscamingue team was vital.

1.4. Ongoing Work

The strategic development plan submitted at the end of 2017 made it possible to classify Culturat's actions under four regional projects in order to detail the process and provide clear guidelines for future actions. The cultural development of the territory, inclusion and diversity, as well as ecology and the environment will be the next targets of the initiative.

With the help of the Culturat team, Minswashin, an Algonquin organization, was created last year with the goal of producing and promoting Anicinabe art, as well as the professionalisation and enhancement of Indigenous artists. New partnerships are also under way, notably with the cultural mediation organisation *Culture pour tous* (Culture For All).

5. Further information

The City of Val-d'Or, on behalf of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, was a candidate for the third annual "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (November 2017 - May 2018). The jury

for the award drew up its final report in June of 2016, and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture highlight this project as a good practice in the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture, as a special mention for the third awarding of the Prize.

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