

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY: CULTURE AS A DRIVER OF SOCIAL PROGRESS



INTERGENERATIONAL INCLUSION SOCIAL
WELL-BEING YOUTH DIVERSITY PARTICIPATION
EDUCATION CITIZENSHIP COMMUNITY

1. Background

Pincourt is a town of about 15,000 inhabitants located on the outskirts of Montreal, in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region. Founded in 1960 on an island shared with three other municipalities, the town covers 7.11 square kilometres, and has a population density of 2,048 inhabitants per square kilometres.

This suburban bedroom community is mostly composed of small houses around a commercial area. It has been calculated that 72% of residents work outside the region. With a median age of 40, the town

has experienced tremendous growth and a massive influx of new inhabitants coming from different cultural communities. The population is made up of 16% immigrants and 43% of Anglophones, making it one of the few cities in Quebec to hold the status of a bilingual town, recognised by the Charter of the French Language. Indeed, Pincourt faces many challenges in terms of social cohesion, organisation of local life, and a sense of belonging.

2. Pincourt and Culture

Over the last decade, culture has developed a great deal in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region. The Regional County Municipality (RCM) has adopted a Cultural Policy, and the most populous town in the region has set a new benchmark for cultural initiatives. Cultural mediation is increasingly used and several events have been organised to reflect the scope and impact of the work of cities, NGOs, and artists.

While Pincourt does not yet have its own cultural policy, this trend has still had an influence on its social development through culture and cultural mediation.



THE TOWN'S SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS AS DEFINED BY THEM, AND TO IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS THAT DIRECTLY INVOLVE THEM.

While the town was developing policies for family and seniors, one citizen proposed a more innovative and inclusive approach that would meet the needs of all citizens. Instead of carrying out several approaches for specific audiences, the aim was to design an overarching social development policy (SDP) capable of responding to challenges. It provides a framework for social policies and action plans, such as the action plan for persons with disabilities.

The SDP makes it possible to better respond to the needs of the town's most vulnerable citizens and to those wishing to participate in local social development. Under the authority of the town council, a monitoring committee made up of members of civil society is in charge of outlining policy along with the support of a committee of elected officials responsible for social development and culture.

3. Objectives and Project Implementation

Main and Specific Objectives

The general objective of the Social Development Policy is to improve citizens' quality of life.

Specific objectives identified in the latest SDP Action Plan include:

- Poverty alleviation
- Citizen participation in culture to strengthen the sense of belonging in the town
- Strengthen the well-being of the population and social cohesion
- Provide access to quality housing
- Promote healthy living habits and activity
- Support for economic development
- Promotion of the environment and territorial planning

1.1. Project Development

Main Actions Carried Out



The social development policy was adopted in 2013 and is a citizen participation approach that aims to improve people's quality of life through collective intelligence.

Since 2013, two action plans have been developed under the SDP, in which culture occupies a key cross-cutting position. It centres on four modes of intervention:

- Citizen committees
- Town activities and programmes
- Partnership activities
- Calls for projects

SDP PARTNERS, BOTH IN TERMS OF THE ACTION PLAN CONTENT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES, INCLUDE SCHOOLS, EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES, CITIZENS' COMMITTEES, COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS, AND BUSINESSES.

- **4 citizen committees** were created for the implementation of various activities

- Intercultural Committee: An annual intercultural festival is organised with the support of the town, during which the different communities of the region are invited to present their culture. In anticipation of the festival, cultural mediation with an artist is held in schools around town. An annual evening is also held to highlight a specific cultural community, with the aim of combating racism and discrimination by strengthening intercultural exchanges between citizens.

- Design Committee: To revitalize the town, the committee worked on the creation of two mural frescoes in the parks. Created through cultural mediation, the fresco is the work of artists from Pincourt assisted by about twenty amateur and professional artists. Additionally, to promote two unknown parks in the town, schools collaborated on a project to build and decorate birdhouses.

- **Youth Action Committee:** Alongside the support of a high school teacher, members of the committee who were passionate about rap organised a musical competition, demonstrating that it is possible to mobilise young people around cultural events. "Ptownrapfest" consisted of a two stage contest, preceded by courses on the history of rap.

- **Town and Health Committee:** Residents of the Municipal Department of Housing were asked to participate in building a meeting place for seniors. Cultural mediation workshops were then held to allow residents to leave their mark on the roof of the building with paintings, photos, and writing. Having participated in the development of such a place, down to the detail of the roof, those involved in the project felt a genuine sense of belonging. Following this experience, a new cultural mediation project will take place in a park with the the awarding of an annual social inclusion prize to various organisations for their initiatives.

- **Activities and programmes in the town.** The town relies on cultural actions to achieve its social development goals. The "Take-Away-Biblio" programme aims to develop a passion for reading in children from infancy up to 5 years old, which would also contribute to their academic success. Similarly, a "reading buddy" project pairs primary school children in disadvantaged situations with high school students. The "Transpo-Bilbio" programme delivers books to seniors' homes and provides transportation to the library once a month. An artist visited schools around town to compose the song of the children of Pincourt, which is sung during children's activities.

- **Partner activities.** For the last 4 years, an outdoor mini library has been providing citizens with access to free books in the summer.

- **Calls for projects.** Over the last three years, calls for projects have been used to finance citizens or artists who wish to participate in the social development of the town. This allows the town to participate in the implementation of projects that it does not have the capacity to do on its own. For example, an artist collaborated with school students to create a mural on two fences, at the entrance to the town and in front of the school, both places that were frequently vandalised beforehand. Paintings and a video were designed in collaboration with the secondary school to show cultural diversity.

An annual budget of \$3,000 is allocated to each of the committees, \$10,000 for calls for projects, and \$20,000 is earmarked for actions under the SDP. Since its launch, the town has also benefited from a total of \$150,000 from various donors.

4. Impact

1.1. Direct Impacts

Impact on Local Government

The governance of the town has been transformed with the creation of the Social Development and Culture Division, and the establishment of a monitoring committee for the SDP as well as four citizen committees. Citizen consultations have become more and more frequent, as well as cultural mediation techniques. In the local government, using culture as a driver of social development has become increasingly systematic. As a result of the SDP, culture has spread to other departments and other areas of town politics.

Impact on Culture and Cultural Stakeholders in the Town

The SDP has encouraged community organisations, local artists, and institutions such as the municipal library to collaborate more with the town in the area of social development. Initially, the library occupied a more traditional role, lending books and hosting lectures, but recently has adopted



a more social approach. The activities carried out have allowed citizens to better know the artists of Pincourt and emphasise their importance.

The citizens' committees generated more than 40 cultural activities for nearly 3,000 beneficiaries. As part of the town's activity programme, around 1,200 meetings were organised for 700 citizens, children, and adults. Partners organised about 50 meetings, while the call for projects generated about 30 activities for nearly 400 participants in the cultural sphere alone.

IN ADDITION TO THE ACTIVITIES ALREADY CARRIED OUT, THE ANNUAL INTERCULTURAL FESTIVAL AND ITS CELEBRATION ARE IN THEIR FIFTH YEAR.

Greater Impact on the Town or Territory and its Population

The SDP initiatives are aimed at both the general population and specific groups: families, youth, immigrants, seniors, and persons with disabilities. The increased use of citizen consultations, both in the plan's development and in the activities themselves, has made it possible to engage a significant number of youth and adults in the challenges of municipal politics.

Other significant impacts, which are difficult to quantify, include: improving the health of the inhabitants, promoting literacy among youth, breaking the sense of isolation of the elderly, strengthening skills for youth, improving academic and social success, bringing together different cultural communities, instilling a greater sense of belonging in the town's citizens, and much more.

1.2. Assessment

The monitoring committee ensures the evaluation of the SDP. In total, nearly 3,000 citizens have been involved in these processes, with around 1,500 cultural activities each year.

Key Factors

Support from elected officials was essential for implementing the SDP. Their openness to the monitoring committee and the recommendations issued by citizens' committees have both been major factors in the success of the policy. They have also been valuable allies for the recruitment of volunteers, particularly given their close work with citizens.

Another key factor is having staff that is committed to social development full-time. Volunteer involvement and the work time provided by applicants in the call for projects doubled the time and effort provided by officials.

1.3. Ongoing Work

Today, the SDP is firmly entrenched in the town, with a permanent place in its structure and regular budgets, with committees and programmes. The policy will be updated with the next action plan in 2020.

5. Further Information

The City of Pincourt 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, and as a special mention for the third awarding of the Prize.

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