

## CULTURAT 2015, A GREAT LOBBYING INITIATIVE, ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE



ATTRACTIVENESS **CULTURE** PARTICIPATION **HERITAGE**  
**EMPOWERMENT** SUSTAINABLE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH  
STRATEGY **FIRST NATIONS** DEVELOPMENT **ART**  
NETWORK **JOBS** EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE

### 1. Context

Abitibi-Témiscamingue is a large region situated in West Quebec, covering 65,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the territory spreading from the 47<sup>th</sup> to the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. The region is made up of 5 regional county municipalities, and Val-d'Or, Rouyn-Noranda, Amos, La Sarre and Ville-Marie as its county towns. In addition, there are many medium-sized towns and rural communities that make up more than one third of the region's overall population, which is around 145,000 inhabitants. Its history is intimately linked with the exploitation of the territory's natural resources and was colonized at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century for the richness of its soil and land. However, Algonquins have been known to live on Témiscamingue soil for more than 8,000 years. Their heritage is still present at the heart of the rural community.

There is a particular vibrancy that brings the region's cultural background to life. Over the last decade, the region has hosted many festivals, artists and cultural organisations have seen a rise in business, new community structures have been built, reflecting the region's pervading cultural dynamism.

Furthermore, in 2010, there were 400 professional or semi-professional artists in the region and 345 cultural organisations. In 2008, the towns collectively decided to work towards improving the quality of life of their citizens and direct their regional development accordingly.

Moreover, with a view to initiating dialogues and diagnosing the cultural tourism situation, in collaboration with Abitibi-Témiscamingue Tourism (TAT), the *Conseil de la culture de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue*, CCAT (Abitibi-Témiscamingue Culture Board) organised the cultural symposium 'Cap Tourisme', which brought together many workers from the sector. As a result of this symposium and in response to recommendations made by professionals in the sector, the position of Cultural Tourism Development Officer was created and a Regional Cultural Tourism Issue Table was set up. As a result of the Table consultation and collective work from all sectors of the community, a decision was made to create a regional highlight in 2015.

At the same time, TAT entered into a consultation process with the World Centre of Excellence for Destinations (CED). Based on the System of Measures for Excellence in Destination, around 100 recommendations were made, many of which involved practices with regards to cultural tourism. However, an overriding conclusion from the consultation determined that not only is culture a source of inspiration for communities, but also a tool for bringing people together. As such, it is through culture that the region has chosen to start a consultation process, with the aim of improving the quality of life of its citizens and making the region more attractive.

THE INITIATIVE EXPLICITLY FOLLOWS THE VISION AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THE AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE. IT WAS INITIATED IN LINE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC'S INITIATIVE APPROACH TO ELABORATING ON QUEBEC'S AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE, WHICH RESULTED IN THE LAYING DOWN OF PREMISES PRIOR TO THE MEETING AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE CULTURAL SECTOR AND OTHER SECTORS OF SOCIETY, PARTICULARLY THOSE RELATING TO TOURISM.

CULTURAT is the collective response of the region and municipalities to try to lobby for the quality of life of their citizens. It stems from the assessments made by the 'Tourisme Culturel' diagnostic-tool: Progress report on Abitibi-Témiscamingue carried out by TAT in February 2011 and following the numerous recommendations of the CED on the subject of cultural tourism. CULTURAT represents a powerful, unique and structured initiative from a region that is taking charge and taking concrete action to move forward as a whole. Despite the common vision of development, the initiative preserves and showcases the distinctive characteristics of its territories and populations.

## 2. Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Culture

Each of the 45 signatory municipalities has their own policies and programs with regards to cultural development. However, to their adherence to the CULTURAT process and their commitment to take action signifies that they are all committing to the well-being and quality of life of their citizens. These 45 municipalities have agreed upon a certain number of guiding principles, for which they have given their approval. These principles, which are directly related to the quality of life of citizens and social cohesion, **use culture as a source of inspiration and a tool for bringing populations together:**

- culture is one of the main sources of inspiration for a community;
- integrating arts and culture into the community as well as improving cultural tourism activities contributes towards the enhancement of citizens' quality of life;
- there is a high quality pool of artists in the region that with an abundance of creativity;
- a blossoming welcoming environment lends itself to the well-being and retention of people in the communities;
- the liveliness of a population's living environment is an indication of its happiness;
- the increased media attention, stimulated by a cultural buzz, contributes to positively strengthening perceptions of a region;

- the level of pride and sense of attachment that residents feel towards their territory contributes to the attraction of the workforce, immigrants and an increase in tourist populations;
- the increased presence of regional cuisine in restaurants in Abitibi-Témiscamingue stimulates the economy, the knowledge of producers and sustainable development.

The initiative explicitly follows the vision and the principles of the Agenda 21 for Culture. It was initiated in line with the government of Quebec's approach to elaborating Quebec's Agenda 21 for Culture, which resulted in the laying down of premises prior to the meeting and partnerships between the cultural sector and other sectors of society, particularly those relating to tourism. It is explicitly based on the principles of Quebec's Agenda 21 for culture, culture:

- Is a factor of social cohesion;
- Acts as an economic lever;
- Contributes to the quality of the built environment;
- Contributes to residents' the quality of life;
- Integrates all components of society;
- Helps to rejuvenate the personality of a place (it gives it an image that suits its identity and that cannot be imitated due to its authenticity);
- Catalyses creativity.

The approach is part of this commitment. It involves synergising culture with other sectors to allow culture to become an important factor in tourist, social and economic development, while at the same time increasing the appeal of the region for citizens, tourists and future newcomers, and enhancing both their attachment to their territory and their quality of life.

CULTURAT REPRESENTS A POWERFUL, UNIQUE AND STRUCTURED INITIATIVE FROM A REGION THAT IS TAKING CHARGE AND TAKING CONCRETE ACTION TO MOVE FORWARD AS A WHOLE. MEANWHILE, IT PRESERVES AND SHOWCASES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ITS TERRITORIES AND POPULATIONS WITH A COMMON VISION OF DEVELOPMENT.

### 3. Objectives and implementation of the project

#### 3.1. Overall and specific objectives

CULTURAT comes from a regional commitment to work on its arts and culture in order to improve the quality of life of citizens and the appeal of the region. It involves a consultative approach that unites the tourist and cultural sectors in order to promote dialogue and partnerships with other participants: businesses, schools, citizen, regional and local authorities. The project involves embellishing the territory using arts and displays, bringing people together and showcasing its art, culture and land.

CULTURAT was designed to meet several objectives and requirements:

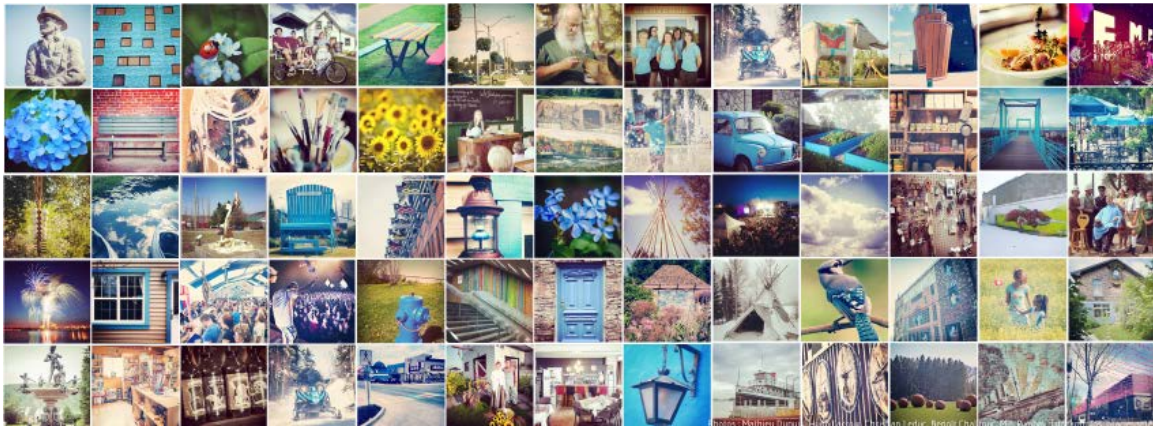
- To respond to the commitment of the municipalities to improve citizens' quality of life;
- To develop solutions to the weaknesses and requirements identified during the symposium and by the diagnostic tools put together by the CCAT and TAT in relation to cultural tourism;
- To implement the recommendations from the Centre of Excellence for Destinations in relation to cultural tourism;
- To follow the principles from Quebec's Agenda 21 for Culture;
- To get participants from the sector and possible partners to join and provide them with the tools for action.

#### 3.2. Key stages

In 2008, the municipalities of the region committed to focusing their development on improving the quality of life of citizens. In 2009, the CCAT organised the '**Cap Tourisme Culture**' symposium, which brought the cultural and tourism sectors together. Following on from that, an Issue Table was put in place and Abitibi-Témiscamingue invested a resource dedicated to the development of cultural

tourism. It is within this context that the CULTURAT project emerged, in 2009, **as a structured and inspirational way to focus community development on arts and culture.**

CULTURAT has instigated a consultation process to help determine a common action strategy for the municipalities and to engage numerous sectors and form ties and partnerships between the community's driving forces, whilst simultaneously integrating arts and culture into different spheres of society. This approach includes everyone (municipalities, indigenous communities, businesses, organisations, citizens, etc) and invites all participants to take action to transform and **embellish their territory; to support the cultural offerings** by participating in cultural life, by bringing the area to life and by contributing towards **promoting its visibility.**



CULTURAT is actively researching culturally sustainable development by looking to:

- Increase and enhance cultural tourism activities;
- Increase the region's visibility;
- Increase 'favourable' media coverage using a communication strategy;
- Develop the importance of the First Nations' presence;
- Increase the resident population's attachment to the area;
- Increase the presence of regional products and regional cuisine in restaurants;
- Make the area more welcoming and flowery.

All of these objectives lead to the project's peak, whereby a maximum number of organisations and citizens will have adhered to this approach and will be carrying out the agreed actions to promote and liven up this region in order to showcase its creativity and cultural richness to Quebec, Canada and the rest of the world.

THE COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES ALL CONVERGE ON THE SAME FINDING:  
CULTURE IS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR COMMUNITIES, BUT ALSO A  
TOOL FOR BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

### 3.3. Completed Initiatives

In addition to those previously mentioned, several initiatives have been carried out to this end:

- **Establishing a broad public dialogue (2012-2013):**
  - Meet **all the mayors in the region** (5 regional municipalities) and the **board of managing directors of the municipalities**;
  - Meet the members of the Table Régionale de Concertation sur le Tourisme Culturel (Regional Cultural Tourism Board);
  - Meet stakeholders from the **cultural sector** to understand their needs and their vision with regard to the development of arts and culture in our region, as well as to determine which connections to make with different sectors, their vision for 2015 and how best to create and diffuse it.



- Meet the indigenous communities living in the territory to inform them about the initiative and encourage their involvement;
- Meet the **Cultural Commissions** and the **municipality's cultural committee**;
- Meet all the **territorial and rural development officers**;
- Meet the different ministries (MAMROT (Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Regions and Land Occupancy), MCCQ (Ministry of Culture and Communications of Quebec), MTO (Ministry of Transportation of Ontario), Emploi-Québec, MAPAQ (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), Regional delegates, Health Agency);
- Brainstorm with artists and people from the sector to encourage participation into CULTURAT and develop strategies to encourage commitment to other initiatives in other sectors;
- Meet all the **Chambers of Commerce** in the region.
- Creating and publishing the **culturat.org** website (2012):
  - Explaining the CULTURAT initiative and including the 'Tips and Tricks' sections for different target publics
  - Bringing together different tools to help create networks with the cultural sector (including a cultural calendar, a tool for searches and tenders, useful references)
- **Signing of the Charter of Commitment of Municipalities and Organizations (2012-2014):**
  - 45 municipalities signed the commitment charter (more than 90% of the population).
  - A dozen organizations from the cultural, tourist, economic sectors also signed the charter.
- **Start of Project Announcements (2014):**
  - Municipalities, schools and businesses are preparing projects. A series of public announcements are planned to increase the region's presence, until the summer of 2015;
  - 12 municipalities have already announced 12 projects within the CULTURAT framework;
  - A joint project related to CULTURAT and the region's Chambers of Commerce.

### 3.4. Coming in 2014-2015

Including an 'arts boutique' on the culturat.org site in April 2014: a tool that allows people to see and buy work done by artists in the region;

- Initiatives seeking a collaboration with UNESCO for a CULTURAT exhibition;
- Initiatives to establish a Rural Fund (Fonds pour la ruralité) to encourage small communities to engage in the project and exhibit their land;
- Starting the citizen campaign to promote the CULTURAT initiative by June 2014;
- Setting up an intensive promotion strategy to increase the presence of CULTURAT within the media and among citizens until 2015.

BY ENCOURAGING THE FORMATION OF NETWORKS BETWEEN ART, CULTURE AND OTHER SECTORS, CULTURAT IS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ARTISTS, THE CREATION OF WORK OPPORTUNITIES, A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULTURAL SECTOR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A 'MAINSTREAMING REFLEX' FROM ARTS AND CULTURE TOWARDS OTHER AREAS.

## 4. Impacts

### 4.1. Impact on the local government

Mobilizing local governments to support culture will help encourage synergy, empowerment and dialogue within the territory. 45 municipalities (more than 90% of the population) have already signed the charter of commitment to the initiative and are committed to focusing their development in connection with CULTURAT and to carrying out certain initiatives to this end. The aforementioned municipalities have already announced 15 projects, which shows that this commitment process is underway and is acting on its targets. Other municipalities are expected to prepare a special program by 2015.

#### 4.2. Impact on culture and the local cultural officers

Participants from the cultural sector are the centre of the CULTURAT initiative. In addition to their collaboration, they also complement the other areas. By encouraging the formation of networks between arts, culture and other (economic, tourist, academic, indigenous, municipal, etc) sectors, CULTURAT is contributing to the professionalization of artists, the creation of work opportunities, a greater understanding of the cultural sector and the development of an 'mainstreaming reflex' from arts and culture towards other areas.

#### 4.3. Impact on the land and the population

By exhibiting the land using artistic development and bringing the area to life in a unique way, CULTURAT is contributing towards improving the citizens' quality of life. The intra-regional promotion of CULTURAL gives residents a better overview of what is going on in their region, a better knowledge of its wealth, its culture and its territorial identity, which increases their feeling of attachment, integration and pride towards their territory.



#### 4.4. Cross-cutting Impacts

The initiative has brought together several participants from cultural, tourist and economic sectors and seen a vision and cross-cutting action strategy emerge in these areas. It has also allowed other non-cultural sectors to commit to cultural development, and it is through highlighting its arts and culture that CULTURAT is involved in:

- Inspiring a sense of pride and increasing the regional population's attachment through a mobilizing and inclusive approach;
- Pushing the limits of creativity and ingenuity;
- Increasing the appeal of the region among the specialized workforce and trying to retain the indigenous workforce by providing a lively, interesting living environment;
- Increasing the region's appeal and notoriety among the First Nations, the people of Quebec, Canadians and overseas markets.

#### 4.5. Continuity

The CULTURAT initiative was designed from a sustainable development standpoint. The work being done to further promote and liven up the territory is expected to reach a peak in 2015. Until they become 'a way of thinking about development' at the heart of the community, the integration of arts and culture will persevere. Connections and networks have been created and established in the long-term. The multitude of tools developed to implement concrete actions will remain open and available; the CULTURAT.ORG website in particular. Promotion of culturat.org will continue and the community will inevitably continue to benefit from the positive impacts of its development. These structures are established and sustainable and will keep the project alive. In a way, the technical and financial aspects will be taken care of by businesses in their sector.

### 5. Further Information

The Abitibi-Témiscamingue region was nominated 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 of the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

Text approved in September 2014.

Good practice published in October 2014.

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Social media: YouTube :

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKMpE2lepXI2BVlxSk5QuLtOq7zsYMVk>

Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/CULTURAT2015?ref=bookmarks>

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