

Public Democracy

The Development of Public Diplomacy in Québec

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Québec's international Relations

Foundations and History

Québec is home to 7.7 million people, or close to a quarter of the Canadian population. It is the largest of the ten provinces that make up the Canadian confederation. Québec is a broadly French-speaking society.

It is a federated state, not subordinated to the federal level. By virtue of the Canadian Constitution, a number of fields fall under provincial jurisdiction, such as education, culture, health and social services, natural resources, municipal institutions and the administration of justice. At the federal level, the jurisdictions include criminal law, defence, international trade, currency and banking, navigation, airports and residual powers. Shared jurisdictions include taxation, immigration, agriculture, environment and prisons. The Canadian constitution does not assign responsibility for international relations.

Since the 1960s, Québec's actions on the international scene have followed what has been called the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine, which Premier Charest stated in another form in November 2004: "*Matters under Québec's jurisdiction at home are under Québec's jurisdiction abroad.*"

In 1967 a Department of International Relations (Ministère des Relations internationales, or MRI) was created. Its mandate is to plan and direct the foreign activities of the government and its departments and agencies and negotiate and oversee the implementation of international commitments, among other things. It also manages Québec's offices abroad.

Over the years, a network of offices has been established to meet Québec's needs. The network comprises various levels of offices, from General Delegations in major cities (London, Paris, Brussels, Munich, Tokyo, New York and Mexico) to Delegations, Offices of Immigration or Trade, and business agents.

Recently, two new offices have been established in the emerging economies of India (Mumbai) and Brazil (São Paulo); staff numbers have been increased in Shanghai, Beijing, Washington and Atlanta, among other places.

Overview

As the only primarily French speaking society in North America, the promotion and protection of Québec's identity has always been a priority. One concrete expression of this has been agreements in the fields of education and culture.

In education, for example, youth exchange programs have been established with Belgium, France and countries in North and South America. These agreements include both bilateral agreements and inter-university agreements. Additionally, the MRI supports the Association internationale des études québécoises (AIEQ), an arm's length NGO dedicated to promoting and developing Québec studies around the world. Since 1999, the MRI also has a program aimed at hosting key figures from abroad in order to give them a first hand experience and information on issues of mutual interest.

To support cultural outreach, the Québec government offers financial backing to its artists in all fields for productions abroad through two agencies under the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women.

Over the years, Québec has developed institutional cooperation in sectors such as education, science and technology, and culture, with countries and regions such as France, Flanders, Wallonie-Brussels, Bavaria and Italy. In Europe, Québec is a partner in various groups of states and regions. For example, Québec is one of the founders of the Conference of Partner Region Heads of Government and an observer at REGLEG and the Assembly of European Regions; it has also developed links with various institutions under the authority of the European Union and the Council of Europe. For the last two years, Québec has been a leader in the promotion of a Canada-European Union economic partnership. In the United States, Québec is an active participant in regional bodies such as the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers and the Council of Great Lakes Governors, as an Associate Member, and the Great Lakes Commission, as an Associate Commissioner and member of the Board of Directors.

Québec has worked to promote and exchange expertise on priority issues for its development, such as the environment, economy, science and technology. Currently, over 300 bilateral agreements are in force with national or federated governments in almost 80 countries.

The Québec government is responsible for the implementation within its territory of several international agreements concluded under the authority of the United Nations or other international organizations.

Moreover, the government closely monitors the work of international organizations in matters concerning its jurisdiction and interests.

In the field of multilateral relations, Québec has a seat on the governing bodies of La Francophonie (since 1971); Québec City co-hosted the Summit of the Francophonie on October 17 to 19 2008. Since 2007, Québec has had a representative on the Permanent Delegation of Canada to UNESCO.

Policy tools

In recent years, the Québec Government and the Department of International Relations have adopted a number of guidelines which constitute the basis for Québec's international relations. The objectives and priorities defined will provide the themes for public diplomacy in the territories covered by its offices, in accordance with interests within each territory.

The title 'Working in Concert' for the Government's international policy, published in May 2006, illustrates the Department's leadership of the other government departments, and its willingness to involve them and other key players from civil society. For example, the development and implementation of the Policy entailed the MRI coordination of 15 departments and agencies active on the international scene, which were involved both in drafting the policy as well as in implementing the 2006-2009 Action Plan, which contains 70 measures. The results of the Action Plan are monitored annually by the MRI.

Moreover, during its development process, the Minister consulted key players in civil society, such as cities, school boards and various organizations.

The Policy determined 5 main objectives for Québec's international actions:

- Strengthening Québec's capacity for action and influence;
- Fostering Québec's growth and prosperity;
- Contributing to the security of Québec and the North American continent;
- Promoting the identity and culture of Québec;
- Contributing to the cause of international solidarity.

These objectives have been complemented recently by the MRI's 2008-2011 Strategic plan, which states Québec's priorities in its political relations in various territories:

Increase Québec's presence, action and influence in:

- International organizations;
- International conferences;
- Negotiations affecting Québec's interests.

Strengthen Québec's actions with regard to:

- Governments;
- Networks of influence in countries, federated states or priority regions such as North America, Europe, as well as the growing markets in Asia and South America.

Both the Policy and the Strategic plan provide guidelines for the development of public diplomacy activities in a given territory.

Institutionalization of public diplomacy in the MRI

In 2006, the Information Division of the Department of International Affairs became the Information and Public Diplomacy Division (DIDP). As in many MFAs, the Information Division provided the Department as well as the offices abroad with graphic design services, a daily press review and a monthly press analysis.

The “public diplomacy” aspect was added in order to illustrate one of its functions which had developed in recent years, namely to develop various tools to be used by Québec representatives abroad to help them explain Québec policies, issues and society. Such tools include a standard presentation about Québec, called “Québec: an overview”, regularly updated with facts and statistics and translated into 9 languages. The DIDP also prepares and keeps up to date, with the cooperation of government departments, background documents on key issues (climate change, immigration, etc.) These tools are made available to all government departments and agencies. Monthly newsletters, available on line and illustrating Québec’s international activities, are also written and translated into various languages and sent by offices abroad to their contacts.

The Information and Public Diplomacy Division is also responsible for developing a definition of public diplomacy and an action plan, and for monitoring the development of two pilot projects in public diplomacy. These pilot projects are in the planning stage, where objectives are determined and partnerships identified. The DIDP also offers training on Public Diplomacy for MRI employees and provides expertise for monitoring the evolution of public diplomacy abroad and the efficiency of PD initiatives, which is a developing field.

A public diplomacy fund has also been integrated into the DIDP operating budget, to support the development of pilot projects. An initial assessment of the projects will be presented to the authorities after 12 months of activities.

Definition

Québec’s work to promote the adoption by UNESCO of a Convention on Cultural Diversity in 1998, described below, provided the basis for the development of a Québec definition of Public Diplomacy. The various definitions adopted by the federal government, the State Department and the FCO were also studied closely.

The DIDP definition is as follows:

“A program of initiatives to promote an objective of the government’s International Policy with networks of influence, in collaboration with partners in Québec and abroad. The results of the initiatives are measured and monitored over the medium to long term - 18 months to 3 years.”

This definition, and the concept of PD itself, does not imply a radical change in MRI activities abroad. However, it provides focus and criteria to govern the activities of overseas offices.

Currently, the program of activities of offices abroad includes formal political relations (cooperation commissions, political missions or visits and the like). In addition to this “traditional diplomacy”, the offices have always pursued opportunities, covering a fiscal year, to further Québec’s interests. Public diplomacy makes it possible to add a series of other initiatives:

- Focusing on one objective from the International Policy, adapted to the geographical area where they are conducted;
- With networks of influence as target audiences;
- Conducted with partners, both in Québec and in the territory of the office, such as departments, agencies, offices from the federal level or from other countries, as well as non-governmental organizations, universities, experts and business leaders, etc.

The program of initiatives should cover more than one fiscal year with regular follow-up. The results are assessed regularly.

UNESCO: a success story in public diplomacy

The work with UNESCO on cultural diversity, from 1998 to the present, has been a landmark in Québec’s international relations. According to the public diplomacy model, developed subsequently, the initiative can be described as follows:

- Québec’s priority and objective: create an effective legal instrument to defend and promote cultural diversity;
- Coordination of actions with other partners: the Canadian federal government, the Government of France and their governmental partners; coalitions of artists from Québec, elsewhere in Canada, and France, and other countries; researchers who, among other things, have completed feasibility studies; experts, one from Laval University who worked on the first draft of Convention; business people etc.
- Actions to target networks of influence: pressure by coalitions on their respective governments; use of all opportunities to press arguments in support of the international agreement; newsletters and seminars to raise awareness and swing support behind the Convention;
- Measurable results over the medium and long term: adoption of the draft Convention by UNESCO (2005); progress in the number of ratifications: from date of effect (2007) to October 2008 (92 countries have ratified or adhered to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions); long term objective: ratification of the Convention by over 100 countries.

Advantages of public diplomacy

Although Québec public diplomacy is still in the early planning stage, a number of advantages can nevertheless be identified.

Public diplomacy, seen as a set of activities complementary to traditional diplomacy involving ministerial presence, does not constitute a radical change in the work of the MFAs and their representatives abroad. On the contrary, there is continuity as it is an adaptation of their work to the requirements of the modern world.

Public diplomacy, with activities focused on a foreign policy objective—adapted to the territory they are set in—over a long period of time, brings coherence to the work of both MFA agents and representatives abroad. The advisors in various fields (economic, political and communications, under the leadership of the Chief of Post) work more closely together to target the networks of influence in their territory. The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders, both at home and abroad, is crucial for any given project to come to fruition and reach its aims of reaching and having a dialogue with the civil society. Finally, an assessment of the results of the projects and their efficiency has become particularly important in view of the Parliamentary reviews to which all departments are subject.

Since public diplomacy is a constantly evolving field, in MFAs around the world, discussions such as those at the REGLEG workshop and the Forum of the Federations allow all participants to extend their knowledge and appraise the value of the practice of public diplomacy, particularly for regions and sub-federal entities.