

MONTRÉAL : REINVIGORATING OUR CITIES THROUGH CULTURE



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“The Agenda 21 for culture provided city mayors with a revolutionary strategy in 2004. Ten years later, the cities that have put its principles into practice have greatly benefited, offering their citizens a better quality of life. Now, we can go even further!”

I am taking the torch from my predecessors in promoting the international program known as *Agenda 21 for culture*. It is a privilege for me to join the ranks of those who have devoted themselves to developing culture with so much passion and conviction.

Ten years of international cooperation, hard work and determination to place culture at the heart of our local priorities—an unprecedented feat! Prior to this Agenda, cultural policies were affairs of state. They are now a concern for everyone, a way for cities and local authorities to affirm and realize their vision. A vision that will help to build the cities of tomorrow.

Over the last ten years in Montréal and Québec, I have seen culture become a major tool and avenue for development. Culture, after all, can help to resolve complex urban problems. It should not be regarded as an instrument, but rather as an intrinsic element in human and social development.

I have devoted the better part of my career to cultural development. In recent years, as CEO of the **Segal Centre for Performing Arts**, I was able to observe first-hand the power of culture, its unifying role, both transversal and universal. It is my firm conviction that all actions encouraging citizens to take part in cultural activities contribute directly to the well-being and sustainability of our communities. As aptly expressed in the African proverb, “Culture is the possibility of creating, renewing and sharing values—the breath that increases human vitality.”

The *Agenda 21 for culture* provided city mayors with a revolutionary strategy in 2004. Ten years later, the cities that have put its principles into practice have greatly benefited, offering their citizens a better quality of life. Now, we can go even further! It is imperative to have a common vision, to work multilaterally, to share our successful ideas in order to raise the profile of our cities.

Montréal, Cultural Metropolis: an Agenda for Culture since 2005

From the very beginning, the Ville de Montréal has been involved with the UCLG Committee on Culture. Now serving as a Co-President, it is proud to have been the first city¹ in the world to have supported the UCLG’s call for the recognition of the role of culture in sustainable development, on a par with the economic, social and environmental sectors. It was this support that led to Montréal’s invitation to address, on behalf of 1,000 cities, the General Assembly of the United Nations.²

But let us take a step back. In 2005, Montréal adopted both the *Agenda 21* and its *Cultural Development Policy*. This policy³ singled out culture as an important lever for development, inspired by *Agenda 21* and adopting the four tools⁴ proposed to implement it. Since then, this inspiration has manifested itself in various projects initiated by Montréal, Cultural Metropolis, all of which are participatory, cross-disciplinary and favourable to cultural diversity.

The *Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* thus recognizes the cultural rights of citizens, while the citizen’s organization **Culture Montréal** acts as a regional council that encourages participatory democracy. One of the spin-offs of these initiatives is the birth of “local antennae” that are now rallying citizens at the community level. These groups of artists, citizens and organizations are determined to develop cultural neighbourhoods.⁵ Since 2008,

¹ ville.montreal.qc.ca/culture/agenda21culture

² ville.montreal.qc.ca/culture/onu

³ agenda21culture.net/index.php/fr/39-articles/article/290-jean-robert-choquet-et-marie-eve-bonneau

⁴ The UCLG outlined the four tools required to implement the *Agenda 21 for culture*: (1) Local cultural strategy; (2) Charter of cultural rights and responsibilities; (3) Culture Council; (4) Cultural impact assessment.

⁵ ville.montreal.qc.ca/culture/quartiersculturels

the annual publications of *At a Glance—Montréal, Cultural Metropolis* have presented the top initiatives undertaken in Montréal. In addition to these compendiums of nearly 500 projects, the city has commissioned a research group to measure the effects and impact of cultural mediation projects, the results of which will be published in May 2014⁶.

Culture and sustainable development: a relationship to be stimulated

Culture should not be something we turn to after attending to other priorities or urgencies. When it comes to urban initiatives and sustainable development, culture should have a much larger role.

Since 2006, Montréal has been designated as a UNESCO City of Design, and is thus a member of the **Creative Cities Network**. This is why incorporating creativity in our development plans and design competitions is another priority for us. I am convinced that the work being done by Montréal and the other Cities of Design can be put to good use in this new phase.

The new *Agenda* must also take into account the work done by elected representatives in encouraging cultural entities and citizens to help find solutions and to evaluate, in a transparent way, the policies that are currently in effect. My duty as an elected official is also to stress the impact of cultural initiatives in other urban spheres and to encourage multidisciplinary teams to formulate major projects.

The challenge awaiting us is considerable: to enlist the cooperation of all the region's major players in implementing the new *Agenda*. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to confirm that we will disseminate the new *Agenda*, aiming to enrich it with our local experiences. We will also ensure that culture is recognized as a major priority in our *Montréal Development Plan*.

⁶ montreal.mediationculturelle.org