

## THE ESTRIE ART AND CULTURE GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PARTICIPATION STRATEGY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT  
CULTURAL POLICIES PROMOTION GOVERNANCE  
SUPPORT IDENTITY INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION

### 1. Context

Estrie is one of the 17 administrative regions of Quebec, Canada and is made up of six RCMs that groups all municipalities under one administrative entity. In 2015, it represented 322,099 inhabitants. The main urban centre, Sherbrooke, accounts for 162,163 residents (50% of the population). It is situated 155 km from Montreal and 235 km from the city of Quebec, the two largest centres for francophone cultural development in North America. From 2011 until 2014, the public administration invested nearly 14 million dollars in art and culture in the region (10<sup>th</sup> out of 17 regions).

<sup>1</sup> The committee members of the General Assembly, from left to right: Maurice Bernier, ex-president of the Estrie RCE (regional conference of elected officers) and ex-prefect of the RCM (regional county municipality) of Granit, Pierre Mino, director general of the Estrie Council of Culture, Angèle Séguin, artistic director of the Théâtre des Petites Lanternes and president of the General Assembly, Mario Morand, senior adviser to the Estrie Directorate General of the Ministry of Health and Social Services – CHUS (Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke), Guy Fauteux, CPA auditor, CA associate, Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton, Marie-France Bélanger, director of CEGEP in Sherbrooke, Alain Larouche, ex-director-general of Eastern Townships Tourism, and Sylvie Luce Bergeron, president of the Estrie Council of Culture. Absent from photo: Stéphane Laberge, head of French services at ICI Radio-Canada Estrie.

The dynamic cultural sector in Estrie has produced a number of high quality productions. However, arts and culture struggle to be recognised and to occupy a more deserving space in the region. Culture is a fundamental part of community development. Involvement of citizens and communities is necessary to help it play a truly important role in the region's well-being. One of the practical aspects of its implementation has been the development of a cultural strategy bringing together actors from throughout the region.

From 2012 to 2016, along with the support of the Estrie RCE, the Estrie Council of Culture (CCE) has held the General Assembly on arts and culture and brought together cultural actors from the public and private sectors. **The aim is to strengthen the credibility, visibility, and importance of arts and culture as a vehicle for development, as well as to mobilise regional decision-makers on related issues.**

This process involves three workshops: one for consulting artists and cultural organisations, one for working closely with environments that may play a cultural role, and one that enables meetings between artists and cultural bodies from various sectors. This resulted in establishing a forum for the General Assembly on arts and culture.

THIS HELPED CREATE A BROAD MOBILISATION OF REGIONAL ACTORS FOR THE DYNAMIC COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE. ]

## 2. Estrie and Culture

In Estrie, all RCMs have adopted a cultural policy, and a number of municipalities have adopted Agenda 21 for culture in Quebec. Despite this, Estrie ranks 16th out of 17 in terms of municipal investment in culture. Investments by the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) [*Quebec Council of Arts and Literature*], the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC) [*Society for the Development of Cultural Enterprises*], and the Canada Council for the Arts are also below the national average. In 2015, the Government of Quebec implemented new regional governance, abolishing the RCEs and the local development centres, and transferred their responsibilities to the RCMs. Against this background, the General Assembly of arts and culture allows culture itself to drive development under the governance of the RCMs.

Quebec cannot develop itself further without the contribution of the regions, in addition to a proper artistic and cultural plan that contributes to the co-creation of cultural identity. Such a plan must also help to avoid a simple market for certain national production centres, in accordance with the 16th objective of Agenda 21 for culture in Quebec. It recognises the following. "Recognising and valuing artistic expression as well as the specific cultural character of regions by combating homogenisation and standardisation of culture through diverse production in the region."

Inspired by an approach to development that integrates culture as a means to drive the economy, social cohesion, and stability, over the last three years the Estrie RCE and the Council of Culture have set up committees for drafting a strategy on cultural and artistic development. In an effort to mobilise the driving forces of all sectors of society, a multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach was favoured. This was based on studies highlighting the non-artistic and non-cultural benefits of a dynamic cultural environment. Included in these were: positive economic impacts, employment generation, attracting tourism, improved quality of life, participation in senses of belonging and commitment, retaining larger numbers of residents (especially youth and artists), contributions to the attractiveness of companies and the creative class, and finally, social integration cohesion.

This approach is quite similar the Culture 21: Actions issue, "Governance of Culture" in that it strives for a transversal and horizontal governance among societal and regional actors in favour of comprehensive and sustainable cultural development.



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### 3. Objectives and Project Implementation

#### 1.1. Primary Objectives

The aim is to strengthen the credibility, visibility, and importance of arts and culture as a vehicle for development, as well as to mobilise regional decision-makers on related issues. This broad, participative, and transversal, programme brings together institutional and municipal actors, citizens, public and private actors, and all sectors of society. This has helped create a broad mobilisation of regional actors for the dynamic comprehensive development of arts and culture.

Its specific goals are to develop a shared vision for the future of arts and culture, to improve local cohesiveness, to establish priority issues for a plan on arts and culture, and to stimulate the emergence of various projects.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO REITERATE THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS AND CULTURE AS A PRIORITY, AND AS A VEHICLE FOR DEVELOPMENT, TO LOCAL DECISION-MAKERS.

<sup>2</sup> On the 12th of January, 2016 the General Assembly Forum on arts and culture in Estrie was held at the CEGEP in Sherbrooke campus. The city's cultural community, along with its corporate and community partners in education, health, municipal government, tourism, and the media, have taken another important step in the process of developing and implementing a regional cultural strategy. The discussions and votes by the participants were reflective of clear signs of consensus in the community. Over the next few years they will guide various regional development actors, and will reinforce the credibility, visibility, and the way arts and culture drive sustainable development.

From left to right: Ariane Émond, freelance journalist, author, and host of the Forum, Maurice Bernier, ex-president of the Estrie RCE and ex-prefect of the RCM of Granit, Francine D'Entremont, manager of the Flying Squad program of the Canada Council for the Arts and teacher at the National Theatre School of Canada, as well as executive director of the Fonds de Stabilisation et de Consolidation des Arts et de la Culture du Québec (the Arts and Culture Stabilization and Consolidation Fund of Quebec), Guillaume Déziel, self-taught in studio recording, corporate law, entrepreneurship, management, and publishing, Serge Auray, chairman and CEO of Laboratoire M2, and Groupe Poly M2, and administrator of Sherbrooke Innopole board member, and Pierre Mino, director-general of the Estrie Council of Culture in Quebec, Canada. © Photo credit: Jean-François Dupuis.

## 1.2. Initial Stages

In 2012, the CCE (Estrie Council of Culture) held the General Assembly on arts and culture, bringing the cultural sector together with other spheres.

### **Workshop I: An Approach that Includes Artists and Cultural Organisations**

In the spring of 2012, 100 artists and cultural workers were asked to identify what they considered to be priority issues for cultural development in Estrie, such as its needs, difficulties, and factors of this vision, as well as actions likely to push forward the role arts and of the culture. These included awareness of the arts and culture, improvement of the conditions for its creation, and a broad dissemination of works produced.

### **Workshop II: An Approach that Includes Areas Likely to Play a Role in a Cultural Plan**

In order to widen the scope of debate, six working groups were established, comprised of individuals recognised for their expertise in business, education, media, municipalities, health, and tourism. There were 75 people who participated in 11 sectoral meetings, during which the participants were called upon to identify the place and role of arts and culture in their sectors. Participants noted their agreement on the critical role of arts and culture. They also highlighted the importance of collaboration and dialogue with the cultural community, as well as the need for a cultural strategy.

THIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO STRUCTURE COURSES OF ACTION IN COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SPHERES.

### **Workshop III: Meetings of Artists and Cultural Organisations with Various Other Spheres**

Since 2014, representatives from all sectors of society addressed the following as priority issues: the community's recognition of the contribution of arts and culture; establishing mechanisms for interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration and consultation; public, private, and self-directed funding; cultural education; offering shared services to artists and cultural organizations; digitalisation. Over 60 people took part in 15 working sessions. Two recommendations and some fifteen courses of action emerged from these meetings. The degree of progress varies according to the course of action. Some are still in the pioneering phase, while others could be implemented quickly.

### **The General Assembly Forum**

A public forum was held to bring together over 160 people made up of citizens and cultural actors that included artists and cultural workers, elected officials as well as RCM and municipality representatives, leaders in health and education, business people, key people in tourism, and media representatives. The forum resulted in recommendations on arts and culture, guidelines for cultural choices made by regional actors, potential short- and medium-term projects, and even specific commitments for a number of partners. The process has led many regional decision-makers to discuss the place of arts and culture. The result of this should be to draft, publish, and promote committees for the implementation of chosen guidelines and courses of action.

## 4. Impacts

### 1.1. Direct Impacts

#### **Impact on the Local Government**

The General Assembly has made it possible to reiterate the importance of arts and culture as a priority, and as a vehicle for development, particularly to the RCM prefects. As part of an awareness campaign, 84 of Estrie's political figures examined and signed A21C in Quebec.

#### **Impact on Culture and on the Local Cultural Actors of the City/Territory**

They have made it possible to structure the needs and courses of action over the next 5 to 10 years in collaboration with local cultural and socio-economic spheres. There were 327 notable participants,



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with artists, professionals, and cultural organisations that all made their voices heard among citizens and public institutions.

### Impacts on the Territory and Population

They have empowered citizens with access to local art and culture.

#### 1.2. Crosscutting Impact

The General Assembly has enabled a number of sectors to be launched and to be open to the realities of arts and culture. This process provided the opportunity and the desire for decision-makers and stakeholders in these sectors to further dialogue and favour the implementation of related actions. Here, there were a noted 233 participants.

#### 1.3. Evaluation and Continuity

The approach is one of mobilisation and is not presently subject to evaluation measures. Finalising priority courses of action, and establishing project implementation committees are the primary focus. The degree of progress for each project and its implementation strategy will be evaluated on an annual basis.

## 5. Further Information

Estrie was a candidate for the second "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (January – May of 2016). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2016, and requested that the

<sup>3</sup> From left to right: Serge Auray, businessman, Maurice Bernier, ex-president of the Estrie RCE, ex-prefect of the RCM of Granit, and member of the General Assembly, Hugues Grimard, chairman of the RCM of Estrie panel, Alain Larouche, ex-director-general of Eastern Townships Tourism and member of the General Assembly, Guillaume Déziel, self-taught in studio recording, corporate law, entrepreneurship, management, and publishing, Marie-France Bélanger, director of CEGEP in Sherbrooke and member of the General Assembly, Mario Morand, senior adviser to the Estrie Directorate General of the Ministry of Health and Social Services – CHUS and member of the General Assembly, Jim Corcoran, native of Sherbrooke and guest artist, Angèle Séguin, President of the General Assembly, and Pierre Mino, director general of the Estrie Council of Culture. © Photo credit: Jean-François Dupuis.

Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

Text approved in December, 2016.

Good practice text published in January, 2017.

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