

Modern Quebec: Cutting-Edge Culture in French

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Of the 32 million people who live in Canada, nine million speak French. Most of these live in the province of Quebec, where they have built a modern society, linked with the rest of the world. The rest of Canada's French-speaking society, mostly the Acadians of New Brunswick and the Franco-Ontarians of Ontario, is also a part of this dynamic situation thanks to a number of enterprises. The following is an overview of what is going on in French-speaking Canada.

The Arts

The cultural and artistic scene in Quebec is very dynamic, in part because the province's numerous local television and radio stations, newspapers and magazines are voracious consumers of homegrown content. Quebec is the only province in Canada that is a net exporter of cultural products.

Many high-quality television series in Quebec reach audiences of a million viewers, a very high ratio in a market of only nine million viewers. Satirical comedies, like *Les Bougons*, have even hit the two-million viewer mark. Claude Meunier's comedy *La P'tite Vie* even reached an unheard-of four million viewers. *Un gars, une fille* has been translated or adapted in 20 countries including the United States, where it appeared as *Love Bites*. The *Les Bougons* series was such a phenomenon that it was adapted for France and *The New York Times* wrote a feature story on it.

In the movie industry, Quebec has an annual production of about 30 quality films, which is large given the size of its market. Several local films have even outsold big American movies such as *Titanic* at the box office. A number of Quebec directors, including Deny Arcand (*The Decline of the American Empire*, *The Barbarian Invasions*, *Days of Darkness*, *Jesus of Montreal*), have been frequent nominees at the France's Cannes Films Festival and the Academy Awards. Quebec film production was particularly successful over the last decade. Jean-François Pouliot's *Seducing Dr. Lewis* won the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival. *The Barbarian Invasions*, by Denys Arcand, won an Oscar as the best foreign film, as well as two awards in Cannes – one for best screenplay – as well as three French Génie Awards. And Jean-Marc Lavallée's *C.R.A.Z.Y.* won the Audience Award at the AFI Fest in Los Angeles and Best Canadian Film Award at the Toronto International Film Festival. In 2009, 20-year-old Xavier Dolan created a sensation at Cannes with his first film, *J'ai tué ma mère*, which won three of the four awards at the Directors' Fortnight.

On the music scene, the songs of Marie-Jo Thériault, Malajube, Beau Dommage, Mes Aïeux, Daniel Lavoie, and Daniel Bélanger were all selected by English-speakers to be part of *49 songs from the 49th parallel*, a tribute to President Barack Obama's first visit to Canada. This is a mere sample of the dynamic francophone music scene north of the border, where for 15 years the success of Francophone singers has been unending. In Paris, where Quebec musicians have become recognized for their particular sound, musicians like Isabelle Boulay, Garou, and Daniel

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Lavoie are hugely popular. Composers like Jean Leloup and Ariane Moffat have recently made waves, and the rock musicals of Quebec lyricist Luc Plamondon – *Starmania* and *Notre Dame de Paris* – have made him a household name throughout the entire francophone world. In classical music, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, led by the American conductor Kent Nagano, is regarded as the best in Canada and one of the best in North America.

In literature, Quebec publishers release more than 4,000 titles every year. Quebec authors, who are particularly prolific, have won a number of international literary awards. In addition to Yann's Martel Booker Prize for *The Life of Pi*, these include Marie-Claire Blais (Prix Médicis for *A season in the life of Emmanuel*), Anne Hébert (Prix Fémina for *In the Shadow of the Wind*) as well as Acadian author Antonine Maillet's Prix Goncourt for *Pélagie-la-charrette*. Quebec has many distinguished and prolific authors with international readerships: Réjean Ducharme (*The Swallower Swallowed*), Yves Beauchemin (*The Alley Cat*), Neil Bissoondath (*The Unyielding Clamour of the Night*), Ying Chen (*Ingratitude*), Arlette Cousture (*Les filles de Caleb*), Marie Laberge (*Le Goût du bonheur*), Dany Laferrière (the American autobiography series of 11 books) and Michel Tremblay (*Sisters-in-Law*, *Plateau Mont-Royal Chronicles*) are all translated into dozens of languages.

Thanks to *Cirque du Soleil* and its ceaselessly creative new spectacles, Quebec has become a world-famous producer of circus art. Currently, Cirque du Soleil has 20 shows running simultaneously worldwide, including six in Las Vegas and one in New York City. *Cirque du Soleil* has also spawned productions like *Cirque Éloïze* and *Les 7 Doigts de la main*, as well as a National Circus School and *Cavalia*, a show now touring the world that combines horse-dressage and circus art.

In multimedia arts, the names Robert Lepage and Michel Lemieux stand out, with productions that combine acting, singing and new technologies. Robert Lepage, whom *The New York Times* called a “techno-chemist,” has staged shows ranging from rock artist Peter Gabriel's tour to Berlioz' *Damnation de Faust* for the Metropolitan Opera.

In dance, the work of companies like *Marie Chouinard's Company*, *Lalala Human Steps* and *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens* from Montreal are acclaimed in capitals throughout the world. Thanks to the work of the dance production company *Tangente*, Montreal has gained a reputation as having one of the most dynamic choreography scenes in North America. Edouard Lock, of *Lalala Human Steps*, is credited for having invented a new form of choreographic expression.

Science and Research

Quebec might be famous for the invention of the snowmobile, but present research and development endeavors in the province go far beyond the snow industry. For example, voice compression technology ACELP, patented at the University of Sherbrooke, made the

development of modern cell phone technology possible. ACELP is the central component of the three billion cellular telephones being sold by 200 companies worldwide.

In Quebec City, the Institut National d'Optique (INO) produces dozens of inventions every year, a number of which are used by the U.S. Army, NASA, and American industry in fields as varied as fiber optics and food transformation.

Quebec is also at the forefront of the development of nanotechnology. The Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières is currently working on integrating nanotechnologies to develop hyper-sensitive detection papers for the airport security industry as well as infection tests for the prevention of pandemics. It is also working on technologies using wood in the chemical refining industry, particularly in producing wood-based ethanol fuel.

Industry

Quebec's varied and successful industries are world leaders in a number of domains. They are known for their innovation and cutting-edge approach to problem-solving, whether in high tech areas such as energy and information technology, or in low-tech areas such as fashion.

Thanks to its vast hydroelectric potential, Quebec is the only region in North America that comes anywhere close to meeting the CO₂ targets set by the Kyoto Accord. Some of Quebec's dams, like Manic V and LG2, are among the largest in the world – and are open to visitors. Quebec's SNC-Lavalin was ranked as the world's number one “international engineering company” by the American magazine *Engineering News-Record*.

With Seattle and Toulouse, Montreal ranks in the top three aerospace centers in the world. Quebec accounts for 60% of Canada's Aerospace industry and exports 80% of its production. Its major brands include Pratt & Whitney Canada (jet engines), CAE (flight simulators), Héroux Devtech (landing gear), Spar (satellites), and airplane manufacturer Bombardier, whose Regional Jet and Dash-8 series are used by all U.S. airlines. After creating the Global Express business jet, Bombardier is now in the process of developing a new class of 100-seater airplanes, the C-Series.

In Quebec, 5,000 IT companies employ more than 140,000 people and produce a third of Canada's exports in the field. Quebec companies are household names in the visual effects industry as well as in video games, with the likes of Ubisoft, A2M, and Softimage (*Tom Clancy's Hawx*). Quebec has even opened a National School of Interactive Entertainment.

Montreal is home to half of Canada's industrial designers as well as half of Canada's fashion industry, thanks to its dynamic local manufacturing industry – unique in Canada. For design, this puts Montreal in the league of New York City and Los Angeles. Great names on the design scene include Jean-Claude Poitras, Philippe Dubuc, Marie Saint-Pierre, Marie Dumaine, and Anastasia Lomonova.

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Tourism and Entertainment

Quebec has many renowned tourist attractions. Founded in 1608, Quebec City is North America's oldest continual settlement. The ramparts surrounding Old Quebec, now a World Heritage Site of UNESCO, are the only remaining fortified city walls in the Americas north of Mexico. Some parts of Old Montreal have remained unchanged since the city was founded in 1642.

Quebeckers have founded a series of fantastic festivals, including Quebec City's Festival d'été, Montreal's Francofolies, and Montreal's International Jazz Festival – the biggest jazz festival in the world, with 3,000 artists from 50 countries playing for some 2.5 million spectators. Montreal's Just For Laughs Festival attracts two million spectators each year and has spawned franchises in Nantes, Toronto, and Chicago.

Winter lovers shouldn't miss the Quebec Winter Carnival. Another event, the "Red Bull Crashed Ice" downhill race, which takes place right in the old city, features skaters wearing hockey gear speeding down ice-covered ramps. The spectacle attracts crowds of 85,000. Ice-canoe racing is also growing in popularity: there are now three official races, in which 44 teams compete on the frozen St. Lawrence River, pulling their canoes over huge chunks of floating ice. Spectators and participants then cool off with a drink at Quebec's unique Ice Hotel, a hotel made out of ice!

Between June and August, whale-watchers can view up to 12 species of whales feeding in the St. Lawrence River east of Quebec City, including the beluga, the humpback whale, and blue whale, the world's largest animal.

Montreal is North America's cycling capital, with the highest proportion of citizens who bicycle to work and for fun on the continent. The province's numerous cycling trails all have heavy traffic. Every June, 30,000 cyclists bike around the island of Montreal on the Tour de l'Île circuit, a course geared towards families. Montreal even developed a new concept of self-serve bicycle stations called Bixi, which was listed in Time Magazine as one of 2008's most promising inventions: the concept will be implemented in Minneapolis, among other cities.

In team sports, the Montreal Canadiens hockey team, which celebrated its Centennial in 2009, is the most famous professional hockey team in the world. The Bell Centre arena is the second largest in North America and is perhaps the world's busiest. The Montreal Alouettes are one of Canada's best-known football teams. Soccer has recently displaced hockey and baseball as the most popular children's sport in Quebec, and Montreal recently built a new soccer stadium for its local team, the Impact.

Language and Society

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Quebec French is as varied as the French spoken in France. It has its own slang (called *joual*) and its own formal speech variety, which can be heard on state-run radio and television Radio-Canada. The difference between Quebec French and French from France is similar to the difference between American English and British English. Quebec French is neither older nor more archaic than European French; it simply evolved in a different way over the centuries.

Because of Quebec's rich production in the arts and in industry, many of Quebec's linguistic novelties have entered the mainstream of international French or are widely enough known not to need any explanation. Quebec was the first francophone society in the world to feminize job titles and functions, a practice that has been adopted by both Switzerland and Belgium and that is progressively entering the mainstream in France. Quebec's *Grand dictionnaire terminologique* provides on-line translation for roughly a million English technical terms in hundreds of fields, and receives 50 million information requests per year, half of which come from Europe – meaning it is consulted online 25 times more than the French Academy site is!

Each year, Quebec welcomes 20,000 foreign students, mostly to its universities. Tuition fees are very competitive, and Quebec university diplomas are universally recognized.

Quebec devotes a lot of attention to its educational system of primary and secondary schools, which are free and open to all. Students of primary and secondary levels regularly get top ranking in reading, writing, and math according to studies by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Thanks to universal health care and social programs in the province, Quebecers have higher life expectancy than Americans and one of the lowest child mortality rates in the world. Health services in Quebec are universal and free: Quebec's Medicare (*Régie d'assurance maladie*) is one of the models currently being examined by President Obama for the creation of a universal health program in the United States.

Quebec has also created a unique model of subsidized daycare that provides families with full-time childcare for seven dollars per day, per child.

In Ontario, where 500,000 Franco-Ontarians live, the French school councils are considered a model for helping ethnic minorities succeed. In addition, 300,000 English-speaking Canadian children – about 10% of the country's students – are enrolled in French immersion programs.

Finally, as far as its cuisine is concerned, Quebec's culinary production, while strongly influenced by French cuisine, has gained international renown on its own. In Montreal, chef Normand Laprise of *Toqué!* has created a whole new culinary school using local farm products. Many chefs have followed in his footsteps, using quality produce from Quebec's dynamic farm industry, and even contributing to the creation of creating specific produce like Charlevoix lamb and dozens of award-winning brands of cheese that are the envy of chefs even in France – Quebec accounts for 62% of Canadian cheese production. Martin Picard of *Au Pied de cochon*, invented a new recipe called *poutine au foie gras* (a dish consisting of French fries topped with

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fresh cheese curds, covered with brown gravy and foie gras). His TV series *Martin sur la route*, available on DVD, is also rehabilitating certain game meats like moose and snow goose.

International Affairs

Quebec is the only province in Canada that has developed its own international diplomatic service. Quebec has 24 foreign bureaus, including six in the United States, and one in Paris, Mexico City, Tokyo, Beijing, and other cities. Quebec is a founding member of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*, where it sits on a par with the government of Canada, and another Canadian province, New Brunswick.

This was how Quebec came to play a key role in the creation of the UNESCO's Convention on Cultural Diversity. In 2009, Quebec diplomats succeeded in convincing the European Union and the government of Canada to launch negotiations for a free trade accord. Twenty years earlier, the province of Quebec had been the federal government's strongest supporter in the negotiations for a North American Free Trade Agreement that, since 1994, has joined the economies of Canada, Mexico and the United States into the world's largest trade zone.

Francophones in Canada participate enthusiastically in many networks of international aid and advocacy, including Doctors without Borders and *Médecins du monde*, as well as Lawyers without Borders and Engineers without Borders. They are involved in various other international agencies like *L'Association francophone pour le savoir*, *L'Institut de l'Énergie et de l'environnement de la francophonie*, *L'Association internationale des mairies francophones* and even Francopol (the international training network of French-speaking police forces).

Law

Quebec is one of the rare jurisdictions in the world where civil law is practiced in both French and English. This gives Quebec lawyers a particular advantage, since most countries in the world (including most in the Americas) have a codified system of civil law, mostly influenced by France's Civil Code. Quebec's new civil code has been one of the main models for Russia's and China's new civil codes.

In other Canadian provinces, which use Common Law systems, it is possible to study Common Law in French, notably at the University of Ottawa (the national capital, in Ontario) or at the University of Moncton, in New Brunswick (the center of modern Acadian culture). At McGill University, in Montreal, it is even possible to study both the Civil Code and Common Law in both in French and in English – a unique profile.

Bilingual Canadian lawyers who are trained in both legal systems are in high demand around the world, where they are sought as consultants and experts. Thanks to their expertise in Common Law in French, jurists at the University of Moncton recently helped write the Constitution of Mauritius, one of the most dynamic centers of growth in the Indian Ocean.

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French – an American Language

Although the footprint of French in North America is smaller than that of Spanish or English, Quebec's contribution to ideas, invention and creation shows that French is also a language of progress. As an essential tool for anyone who wants to stay ahead of the game, French truly is an American language.

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