"IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD"

Christophe Berthet, CEO Immigrant Québec and co-founder of the Salon de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration au Québec (SIIQ). "An immigrant at the service of other immigrants" is how he can be presented.

This well-known African proverb reminds us that a child's education is not limited to the one received at home. This saying could easily be transposed to an individual immigrant: it takes a whole community that believes in him and his projects to facilitate his integration.

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

I submitted my application for the CSQ (Certificat de Sélection du Québec) mid-June.

I am young - less than 35 years old - French-speaking, with a university education, and I have three children. The response was not long to come: I received a positive answer at the end of September. At the beginning of October, I applied to the federal government: at the end of January, I finally received my permanent residence!

As a French citizen, I hesitated to depart via an International Experience Canada (EIC) program: the PVT (Working Holiday Program). I learned that the 7,000 annual invitations from the federal government had not been taken up due to a lack of candidates for immigration...

When I arrived in Montreal, I faced considerable challenges: the first was finding a job. And the economic indicators were not so encouraging:

An unemployment rate that approached 9%, which is more than twice as high for the immigrant population.

The province lost nearly 40,000 jobs compared to the previous year, despite an active population increasing by almost 15,000 persons.

Nevertheless, I was comforted about my future and that of my children in the long run. The reason for this was that a study published by the Quebec government on the outlook for the labour market raised the alarm: "over the next ten years, Quebec labour market will need 367,000 persons to meet job growth. It will also require more than one million people to take over from those who will retire. Approximately 1.4 million people will have to join or reintegrate their job to meet the labour market's needs, which represents more than one-third of the workforce in 2009. But who will fill the jobs? (Source: https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs2093946)

You will see that my immigration process is not new but goes back to 2008. It illustrates how much things have changed in

less than 15 years, both in terms of the economic situation in Quebec and the issuance of immigration visas.

BRINGING TOGETHER IMMIGRANTS AND THE ECOSYSTEM

It also sheds light on the reality that we have experienced for a long time that the call for workforce will be critical in many fields before 2020 in all the regions of Quebec.

At that time, my status as an immigrant portrayed a reality. There were many initiatives to support newcomers, but knowing who is doing what and what services are offered, could take a lot of time and effort.

I started connecting with the community of newcomers, who shared an interest in migration issues since they arrived, as I did. One of the questions we asked ourselves was how successive governments would respond to economic problems, with the understanding that immigrants must have been part of the equation. How would immigration policies deal with this demographic issue that would put pressure on the province's finances?

We had to participate actively in the societal transformation looming on the horizon.

At that time, we decided to create a fair at the Palais des Congrès to gather the newly arriving immigrants and immigration professionals who provided the former with services in (employability and regionalization organizations, recruiters, etc.). The Salon de l'immigration et de l'intégration au Québec (https://salonimmigration.com) has taken shape. However, it is hard to bring this idea to life as an immigrant when you have no professional contacts... But we had the vision... And luck!

Many people joined the project, including my employer, who became our main sponsor, and a person from the MICC (the former name of the MIFI – Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration) who firmly believed in the project.

This was the actual kick-off of Immigrant Quebec and a fantastic human adventure. We started in 2012 without any advertising budget and received nearly 7,000 visitors whom we helped find answers in their new venture. Based on this success, a website was launched (https://immigrantquebec.com). At the same time, we provided information to immigrants on social networks. We also published free guides where we find all the information on this wonderful province: Immigrating to Quebec (https://immigrantquebec.com/fr/guides).

Immigrant Québec has become the first information media for immigrants in Quebec.

BRINGING THE ECOSYSTEM TOGETHER FOR THE BENEFIT OF IMMIGRANTS

In 2018, we wanted to continue on this path, but we went even further. Indeed, we have seen many initiatives created throughout Quebec over the past ten years around immigration issues of regionalization, attracting and retaining talents, integration, and employability. Some programs and projects have been successful, and others have not met less success. Some have been reshaped differently, and others have been invigorated even though they were doomed to fail. We realized that we must reflect on how each ecosystem actor must adapt to respond to these challenges better.

The Quebec Immigration Summit took shape in our minds (https://sommet-immigration.com). Its objective was meant to gather every year, professionals interested in the field of immigration in Quebec. On October 16, 2019, we created a fantastic networking, collaborative and cross-sectoral discussion space for immigration in Montreal, Quebec. More than 400 participants from the key players of the ecosystem presented initiatives and best practices through conferences and workshops for each of the identified challenges. The government of Quebec has actively participated to this initiative through several ministries, led by the MIFI (Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration) and the MTESS (Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale).

This event is now becoming a major event in Quebec. We are proud to showcase the initiatives of all the organizations in the ecosystem and humbly contribute to advancing reflections on the subject and, in fine, on immigration policies.

AN INFORMED ECOSYSTEM AT ALL TIMES

COVID-19 stepped into our lives in early 2020 and turned many practices upside down in all sectors of activity.

From the perspective of our small organization, the impact has been significant. Meetings, forums and conferences had no more place in this new reality. We decided to continue our mission of informing the ecosystem through a website targeting professionals and providing them with the latest events and the best initiatives.

At the end of March 2021, we were ready to launch immigrantquebecpro.com: a platform aimed at informing professionals dealing with immigration in Quebec and which relies on the expertise of its renowned partners to offer reliable and useful information. This platform is a website updated every day with news, files, technical information and experts' comments.

At the same time, we have launched a 300-page guide for professionals, which can be downloaded free of

charge, in partnership with the Ordre des Conseillers en Ressources Humaines Agréés (CRHA), entitled "Hiring an Immigrant in Quebec." The printed version will be available in October 2021 during the 2nd Immigration Summit. (https://immigrantquebecpro.com/embaucher-une-personne-immigrante-au-quebec).

MANAGING LARGE-SCALE PROJECTS

In the meantime, the Government of Canada, through the Foreign Worker Program, requested us to participate in a call for projects to support TFWs (temporary foreign workers) during COVID-19.

The main idea behind the project was to communicate valuable information and manage a call for projects - to all NPOs in the province – that benefit the most vulnerable TFWs (agricultural workers, agri-food workers, etc.) (https://info-tetquebec.com).

GIVE TO BETTER RECEIVE

Thanks to our work, our experience has been acknowledged as developing innovative experiences and tools to help immigrants make informed choices in their immigration process. At the provincial level, we have been viewed as federating immigrant communities and public and private actors concerned with an immigration constructive approach of "working together."

The efforts exerted by a community of immigrants for nearly 15 years in serving Immigrant Quebec to support newcomers allow us today to build a more prosperous and inclusive Quebec, from event to event and from initiative to initiative.

These accomplishments were born out of the thoughts of immigrants who wanted to do their part to be integrated and help their communities and who have been especially well supported by the enterprise's ecosystem and successive government policies.

They demonstrate in the best way that immigrants must do their part, but for them to succeed, they must receive help from the whole community.