INTRODUCTION

Crosscultural Communication: A Global View

By Lise Thériault, Quebec Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities

Crosscultural communication is a force for change and social transformation in building an inclusive and pluralistic society that is open to the world.

Crosscultural communication takes the concrete form of joint activities or projects designed to break down barriers between groups and enhance understanding. Whether these crosscultural communication projects are civic, educational, athletic, cultural, familial, or communal in nature, they promote the shared values of equality, solidarity, and dignity.



Preliminary remarks

Immigration has long contributed to the renewal of the labour force and assisted in Québec's social, economic, and cultural development. This contribution has helped make Québec a modern, open state that is proud of its diversity.

Immigration has also undergone change during this time. Since the late 1980s, we have felt the effects of international conditions. On the one hand, Québec is admitting more immigrants. On the other hand, fewer of these immigrants come from traditional immigration pools, such as Mediterranean and Northern Europe, and more of them come from Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East and North Africa, countries in South and East Asia, as well as the Caribbean and Central America. In short, immigration has diversified considerably in 20 years, both socially and religiously.

These recent transformations in the ethnocultural composition of immigrants have led to an increasing diversification of the Québec population, particularly in the Montreal region. The Island of Montreal welcomes the vast majority of Quebec's immigrants and visible minorities. Nearly 70% of Québec's immigrants and nearly 76% of Quebec's visible minorities live on the Island of Montreal. With Laval, Montreal has a share of the immigrant and visible minority population that exceeds its demographic weight in Québec as whole (25%). In addition, over 125 cultural communities call the Montreal region home.

The concentration of immigrants and — *de facto* — cultural communities in Montreal has not been without impact on crosscultural relations in Québec. Though crosscultural contacts are not exclusive to Montreal, they are in fact more frequent than elsewhere in Québec. Over the years, Montrealers have developed a sort of "peaceful cohabitation" between members of cultural communities and the population as a whole, as Annick Germain[1] has described so well. Germain's study on the dynamic of crosscultural (or interethnic) relations in the Montreal area has shown that cohabitation between cultural communities is an urban phenomenon defined by lively public interaction, a high degree of civility, and a respectful distance. Exchange and communication are exceptions rather than the rule, but tolerance for differences is a given in Montreal public spaces.

The same cannot be said about the other regions. Aside from Laval and perhaps Montreal's South Shore, the regional status of crosscultural relations is quite different. A "hiatus" or disparity has developed over the years between Montreal and the rest of Québec in the areas of cultural pluralism and identity associations[2]. This hiatus is explained in large part by the demographic weakness of cultural communities within regional populations and the lack of appropriate measures to attract immigrants and help them settle in the regions on a long term basis.

However, this situation should change with efforts to increase immigration to the regions. Moreover, immigration is becoming a major factor in regional development. Regional and local players are increasingly cognizant of the potential benefits of immigration for regional growth, notably for regions with declining populations or labor shortages. Steps are being taken to raise awareness among employers and the general public in the regions about how diversity contributes to Québec's development as well as to foster crosscultural dialogue.

For 15 years now, Quebecers have been more open to immigration and crosscultural relations. The results of Québec public opinion surveys[3] conducted since 1992 show Quebecers are increasingly favorable to immigration in their attitudes and behaviors, whether in terms of crosscultural contacts or perceptions regarding the integration of immigrants into Québec society. The results also show that young people who have been exposed to ethnic pluralism on a daily basis believe that ethnically diversified schools play a positive role in promoting understanding and harmony between young people[4]. This bears out the finding of a qualitative study[5] of high school students that "for young people, school embodies pluralism in its most positive incarnation given the great diversity and extensive social networks encountered there. Not that school is free of tensions. But youth have succeeded in putting in place a set of operational principles in school that allow them to

maximize their contact with others, despite the distance that separates them." This study helps identify those factors conducive to communication between young people: prioritizing individual versus group characteristics, relativizing cultures, acknowledging the need to accommodate, and ensuring reciprocal contact.

In summary, perceptions and attitudes regarding cross-cultural relations have changed in Québec, and support for crosscultural awareness measures is increasing.

The foundation of an approach that fosters crosscultural communication

Since the late 1960s, a consensus has slowly developed regarding the admission and integration of immigrants. First, that immigrant integration is inseparable from immigration. Immigrant admissions must take into account the needs of Québec society and its ability to accommodate newcomers. Second, that admission and integration must occur in French. French is the common language of public life and society and must be widely shared. Furthermore, admission and integration efforts must seek to ensure full, universal participation in and contribution to Québec's economic, social, and cultural development and its democratic life. Openness to multiple cultures is encouraged, provided the fundamental values of Québec society are respected. Acknowledgement of pluralism by the population as a whole and support for closer ties with the francophone majority are crucial factors to the success of any integration policy.

Three models have successively guided MICC's involvement in these areas since the adoption in 1990 of the policy statement on immigration and integration, *Au Québec pour bâtir ensemble: le modèle intercommunautaire, le modèle civique et le modèle interculturel.*

The inter-community model was used in the years following adoption of the policy in 1990. While affirming its new economic and linguistic integration goals, the government of the day undertook as part of its diversity education and awareness strategy to implement measures aimed at recognizing "cultures that contribute" to Québec society. Centered on integrating newly arrived immigrants, this model, which could be called "culturalist," had three goals: increase knowledge and understanding of Québec society, strengthen support for pluralism among the Québec population as a whole, and bring cultural communities and the "majority community" together. This approach focused mainly on bringing communities rather than people together based on their unique cultural differences. Funded activities were moving towards a crosscultural communication program such as it exists today, namely one focused on working together to achieve common goals that transcend differences, in full respect of one another.

By creating Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration in 1996, the government showed its desire to break with the inter-community model and stress what unites and brings Quebecers together, rather than what divides them. The civic model therefore rejected the categorization of citizens based on their ethnocultural origin or migrational history by opting for an approach or model that stressed civic responsibilities and the moral duty to participate in Québec's development, regardless of citizen status. At the heart of this pact was the responsibility to live and act in accordance with the principles underlying the rights and freedoms in Québec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.* Among other values and principles to be respected were the acceptance of the rule of law, tolerance for dissenting opinions, respect for minority rights, and the rejection of force and violence as ways to promote one's ideas. The civic model was also aimed at encouraging greater civic, political, social, and cultural participation through civic education and by making as many people as possible feel that they were truly "citizens of Québec."

Such a concept nonetheless required special effort to make room for diversity, as the importance accorded it was rather limited. The civic model negated ethnocultural differences and had trouble taking into account the phenomena of community "ghettoization" and social and cultural isolation, as well as the barriers to employment facing visible minorities, women and young people especially.

The crosscultural model favored by this government is aimed at drawing on the enormous potential— not just cultural, but economic and social as well— of the women, men, children, and families that Québec welcomes, by building bridges between the Québec government and cultural communities to ensure that all can contribute fully to the development of Québec society. This model is in line with the 1990 policy and formalizes the need for harmony between the individual integration of immigrants or people from cultural communities and the collective welfare of a society that wishes to welcome people who can contribute to its demographic growth and economic development as well as ensure the continuity of the French fact in North America and its openness to the world. To do so, it calls on and holds accountable all players involved in this process — including immigrants, of course, but also employers, elected officials, community workers, teachers, daycare educators, sports coaches, and ordinary citizens — to help ensure its success. This model is anchored in the daily lives of people in the process of integrating so as to better address the particular difficulties some groups may experience.

It has the three following goals:

- Increase openness to diversity by encouraging cross-cultural communication and dialog within Québec society
- Promote the economic, social, and cultural contribution of immigration and cultural communities to Québec's development
- Fight discrimination and racism

Perspectives on crosscultural communication

Crosscultural communication is a fundamental part of the process by which members of cultural communities can participate fully in society. It requires the involvement of these members as well as various community figures. As a goal and challenge of Québec's integration policy, crosscultural communication is also a force for change and social transformation. On the one hand, it is aimed at helping people from cultural communities become full-fledged members of Québec society and influence the issues that concern them based on their needs and aspirations so that they can participate fully in the economic, social,

community, political, cultural, and athletic life of Québec society, regardless of ethnic or national origin, race, color, religion, language, sex, or sexual orientation. On the other hand, crosscultural communication is aimed at raising awareness among the Québec population of how these people contribute to Québec's growth while also seeking to overcome barriers to dialog and crosscultural communication, abolish cultural distance, eliminate prejudice and stereotypes, and fight discrimination and racism. The ultimate purpose of crosscultural communication is to build an inclusive, pluralistic society that is open to the world.

Crosscultural communication takes the concrete form of joint activities or projects designed to break down barriers between groups and enhance understanding. Whether these crosscultural communication projects are civic, educational, athletic, cultural, familial, or communal in nature, they promote the shared values of equality, solidarity, and dignity.

Lise Thériault
Quebec Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities

Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles
May 13, 2005

Notes

[1] A. Germain et al. (1995), *Cohabitation interethnique et vie de quartier, ministère des Affaires internationales,* de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, collection Études et recherches No. 12, 325 p.

[2] M. McAndrew (2003), "Immigration, pluralisme et education", in Alain-G. Gagnon (under the direction of), *Québec: état et société,* T. 2, Montréal, Québec Amérique, 345-368.

[3] JTD conducted surveys on racial and crosscultural relations for the department in 1992 and 1996. Another survey conducted in 2000 by Ekos compared Québec opinions to Canadian opinions.

[4] M. Jodoin, M. McAndrew, and M. Pagé (1997), *Le vécu scolaire et social des élèves scolarisés dans les écoles secondaires de langue française de Montréal: une analyse comparative,* research report, Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration.

[5] A. Laperrière et al. (1993), *La construction sociale des relations ethniques et de l'identité culturelle chez les adolescents de quartiers multiethniques,* Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, Québec.