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SOCIAL TOURISM IN QUEBEC... AND IN CANADA

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An open definition

The concept of social tourism in Quebec refers to programmes, achievements and actions aiming at making a reality of the right to holidays and the accessibility to tourism for all categories of the population, including the youth, families, the retired, people with a limited physical capacity, people with a modest income... Those programmes also have to take into account the quality of the relationship between visitors and host communities. It is mostly about association tourism, following the footsteps of association leisure. We can mention, among others, holiday centres (holiday camps, family camps), youth hostels, educational trips for young people or for seniors, etc. We can also mention the achievements which contribute to make accessible the practice of outdoor activities (bike lanes, hiking trails...) and to increase the democratisation of the territory for recreational and touristic purposes. Some measures are implemented by the Quebec Government to make part of the territory accessible for outdoor activities and to financially support associations which contribute to increasing the accessibility to holidays and to tourism.

A relatively low departure rate

Despite the actions of several organisations, tourist activity is not widespread, far from it! We need to highlight the fact that the current legislation in Quebec gives two weeks of paid holidays after working for one year non-stop with the same employer, and three weeks after five years of non-stop work. Between November 2002 and October 2003, 44% of the respondents did not have a tourist trip in Quebec (meaning a trip of 80 km at least with one night spent outside home). To explain this situation, financial reasons came first (23%), followed by work overload (13%), lack of time (13%), lack of interest (12%) and health problems (11%)¹. A more recent survey, carried out in 2006, reveals that around 46% of

¹ Data collected from questions in an "omnibus" survey carried out by Léger Marketing in November 2003 for the Company of the tourist attractions in Quebec in collaboration with *Festivals et Événements Québec*, the Quebec Leisure Council and ARUC in social economy.

adult Quebecois did not make any trip in Canada in the past twelve months and 61% have made no international trip in the past few months².

A wide network of associations and diverse initiatives

In Quebec, the Quebec Leisure Council represents national leisure organisations and encourages the cooperation between its members and intervening bodies. It is a vast network made of around 4,700 member associations from 45 national gatherings stepping in several activity fields in leisure, like cultural leisure, outdoor leisure, scientific leisure, socio-educational leisure and touristic leisure. In the association leisure 250,000 voluntaries are working, with the equivalent of 7,000 jobs. Associations promote activities, equipments and practices. They maintain a collective heritage, train human resources, guarantee the accessibility and the quality of services, and defend the interests of those who enjoy the activities as well as the accessibility to the territory in a perspective of sustainable development.

Recognized for their expertise and dynamism in the field of leisure, those organisations (including the Quebec movement for family holidays, the Association of Quebec camps, Youth Tourism, Quebec Bike, Kéroul, the Quebec Federation for hiking, the Quebec Federation for canoeing, Festivals and Events Quebec...) also step in very significantly in the Quebec supply of tourism products and services. The interventions of these non-profit associations combine social and economic logics, usually associated with social economy. Therefore the accessibility of products and services makes up for a major worry and gives a specific colour to any of their interventions. Moreover, the associations gather an important group of consumers hungry for tourist offers; they provide original products and services, encouraging not only internal tourism but also attracting foreign tourists in all regions of Quebec.

We can also find in different regions of Quebec non-profit organisations or cooperatives whose interventions have at least a partial relation to social tourism, such as ecomuseums, interpretation centres, theme parks and some private accommodation or food establishments³. The hosting villages (around ten in Quebec) as well as several native communities (American Indian, Inuit) also welcome visitors in order to make them discover their lifestyle and traditions.

Some for-profit companies share the values of social tourism expressed in the *Montreal Declaration - Towards a humanist and social vision of tourism*⁴ and play an active role in the promotion of an accessible and responsible tourism, including, among others, *Global Tourisme International*. Organisations such as *Mer et Monde* (Sea and World) and *Horizon Cosmopolite* (Cosmopolitan Horizon)

² Data from a survey carried out in 2006 by the Print Measurement Bureau (PMB).

³ Among those organizations, we can mention *l'Autre Jardin*, a hotel located in the town of Quebec, belonging to Carrefour Tiers-Monde, and the Bed and Breakfast Cuisine collective *Hochelaga Maisonneuve*, in Montreal.

⁴ BITS (1996), *Montreal Declaration – Towards a humanist and social vision of tourism*, adopted in September 1996 by BITS General Assembly.

set up trainings and intercultural exchange programmes in around thirty countries, in the field of solidarity tourism.

The Government's intervention

Quebec's Government (generally through the leisure department, currently the Minister for Education, Leisure and Sports⁵) set up over the past thirty years a programme of recognition and financing for national leisure organisations supporting their mission and their functioning. Another program aimed at the financial accessibility is available for holiday camps and family holiday centres. The State officially withdrew a few years ago its funding for outdoor camps and youth hostels, although he is still stepping in, occasionally, in favour of more general programmes related to infrastructures or social economy. As for Kéroul, they benefit from specific Government measures to increase the accessibility of people with limited physical capacities.

Even if the Quebec networks of national parks and fauna reserves have mainly conservation of natural heritage objectives, they also contribute to making accessible the practice of outdoor activities, although the prices are still quite high for using refuges, mountain houses and equipments managed by the Company of outdoor establishments in Quebec.

Actions to encourage access to tourism for all

Considering the necessity to support the development of measures to favour access to tourism, The Quebec Leisure Council together with other intervening bodies requested for a more vigorous action from government authorities, in particular for the public consultation for a new tourism policy in Quebec. The claims were expressed during a conference *Towards an accessible, sustainable and solidarity-based tourism*, organized by the Leisure and social tourism yard from the Alliance of research universities-communities in social economy. This conference, held in Montreal on June 2nd 2004, gathered more than seventy people from different environments (national federations, economic and community development corporations, holiday centres, tourist attractions, universities and high-schools). The Quebec Leisure Council adopted a Declaration, introduced during the conference, requesting for concrete means of action in order to:

- Encourage accessibility to tourism for all;
- Increase the minimum legal time of holidays for the population, without forgetting insecure workers;
- Increase, in the different regions of Quebec, the tourist supply adapted to the conditions of the different customers in particular through the development of collective resources in leisure, with a particular attention given to young people, families with young children, the elderly, immigrants, people with a limited physical capacity;
- Financially support access to holidays and tourist trips to Quebec, for people with a modest income among others;
- Increase the social and economic benefits of tourism for regions and host communities;

⁵ Quebec's Government is a honorary member of BITS through the Minister for Education, Leisure and Sports.

- Encourage the mobilisation of all tourism actors, be they private, public or community organisations, for the search for concrete and innovative solutions to the current challenges of that industry such as: the implementation of a Holiday-card, the development of an *Accessible Route*, a Coastal Path, a National Path and ensure the durability of infrastructures.

Quebec's tourist policy, adopted in 2005, mentions that "the adoption of the supply will have to take into account the needs of the different categories of the population" but it is still greedy on action measures⁶. The numerous representations and studies carried out by the Quebec Leisure Council for the implementation in Quebec of a holiday-card, inspired by the French and Swiss holiday voucher, are still dropped.

Elsewhere in Canada

Speeches about social tourism do not have the same coverage in Canada as in Quebec. There is no unifying organisation such as the Quebec Leisure Council. Besides, similar achievements to those in Quebec are aimed at the accessibility of tourism but they are not always classified as social tourism. Holiday camps operate in the different Canadian provinces, gathered in provincial associations (similar to the Association of Quebec Camps) and under the Canadian Camping Association. Youth hostels are based in the different Canadian provinces and several of them are gathered under Hostelling International Canada and its "regional associations". The Association of Saint Laurent's Youth Hostels is one of the associations while owning the hostels in Montreal, Mont-Tremblant, Toronto and Niagara; it also accredits the hostels HI in Quebec and on a large portion of the Ontarian territory. The organisation Travel Cuts/Voyages Campus (travel services for young students, based on the whole of the Canadian territory) belongs partly to the Canadian Federation of students and is a dynamic intervening body in the industry.

Like in Quebec, there are different networks of provincial parks and a federal network of national parks contributing to the accessibility of the territory for practicing outdoor activities.

Finally, it is worth reminding that BITS has had a section dedicated to Americas since 1994, whose secretariat is based in Montreal, in the offices of the Quebec Leisure Council.

⁶ Gouvernement du Québec (2005), *Vers un tourisme durable. Politique touristique du Québec*, Québec, ministère du Québec, p. 29.