

# BUILDING ON THE STRENGTHS OF A COLLECTIVE CULTURE: THE CASE OF THE *ÉTATS GÉNÉRAUX DU COLLECTIF DES PARTENAIRES EN DÉVELOPPEMENT DES COMMUNAUTÉS*

BY MYRIAM BÉRUBÉ

*This publication is part of a series of case studies that illustrate different ideas to inspire changemakers involved in community development in the Quebec context.*

Québec's solidarity-based collective culture is rooted in a rich history and a distinctive French language and is embodied today in the promotion of social values such as equality, social justice, sustainability, cultural diversity, participatory democracy and recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples. It is reflected in the policies, institutions, artistic endeavors, and daily life of local communities. How can we leverage the strengths of this collective, supportive culture to better address the many challenges we face today (pandemic impacts, growing inequalities, socio-ecological transition, etc.)? The case of the *Collectif des partenaires en développement des communautés* provides an example of how we can mobilize and unite to increase communities' collective capacity for action and their power to co-influence public policy.



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

For the partners of the Collective, community development is a process anchored in a territory (defined by the actors who compose it) and based on the principles of:

- Consultation and mobilization
- Citizen participation
- Social justice
- Improved quality of life
- Respect for local dynamics
- Equity between territories
- Empowerment of individuals and communities

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## BACKGROUND

*Alone we go faster, together we go further.* This expression is often used in community development contexts, as it underscores the idea that collaboration and collective work can lead to more sustainable and far-reaching results than individual efforts. Community development is an approach that aims to empower local citizens and community partners to shape the future in a way that responds to their needs and aspirations. Together, they carry out collective actions to improve living conditions and quality of life, empower individuals and communities and, ultimately, bring about social transformation by reducing inequalities.<sup>1</sup>

In Quebec, community development encompasses a wide range of initiatives. Cooperation between citizens, community organizations, public and municipal institutions, and economic actors is essential to creating stronger, more resilient communities. The Quebec government also plays a major role in developing public policy and implementing programs to strengthen communities in areas such as education, health, housing, employment, and culture. This means comprehensive, integrated development that encompasses social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Impacts are felt in all spheres of daily life, for example, housing, safety, living conditions, and cultural development. Community development is a constantly evolving process, reflecting the changing needs of communities and the population's aspirations.

## THE COLLECTIF DES PARTENAIRES EN DÉVELOPPEMENT DES COMMUNAUTÉS LAUNCHES A MAJOR MOBILIZING AND UNIFYING COLLECTIVE INITIATIVE

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<sup>1</sup> Eastern Townships Community Development Observatory. "À propos" <https://oedc.qc.ca/a-propos/> Accessed February 23, 2024 (in French).

The Collectif des partenaires en développement des communautés (CDPDC) was set up in 2007 as a network of organizations and citizens committed to supporting local communities as they organize their own economic, social, cultural, and environmental development.



Faced with the changes that have occurred over the past decade in Quebec's territorial and community development, notably the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-ecological crisis, how can we increase our capacity to take collective action and develop more resilient communities? To answer this question, the Collectif des partenaires launched the [\*États généraux\*](#) in 2021, aimed at taking stock of community development in Quebec and mobilizing partners from different sectors to reflect together, build a shared vision, influence political decision-makers, and propose avenues for collective action.

The process was divided into three phases: the environment scan, the collective analysis, and the national gathering, which then led to the launch of five major province-wide community development projects. The collective aspect was evident at every stage of the process, drawing on the strengths, relationships, and expertise of dozens of national partners. For example, the various networks played a key role in mobilizing the different regions involved in the environment scan. Researchers and students joined the process to prepare the fact sheets presented at the collective analysis stage, while a number of capacity-building organizations co-organized and led workshops at the national gathering.

*Les États Généraux en développement des communautés* are:

More than 100 presentations of the approach;

Approximately 40 territories in 16 regions of Quebec;

Several networks mobilized;

Connections with researchers;

More than 600 people participated in the presentations or workshops;

More than 450 participants at the national gathering, representing more than 350 organizations.

### **Environment scan and collective analysis**

More than 40 territories took part in the “environment scan,” aimed at mapping the current state of community development at local and regional levels in Quebec. The Collectif's approach was to start from the current situation in each territory, proposing questions for reflection without imposing a uniform approach to answering them. This great flexibility helped local partners to take ownership of the stocktaking exercise, which at times took the form of a collective reflection involving a hundred or so partners, and at other times an in-depth discussion between a few partners in a local working group. Beyond the scan report itself, the support and tools offered by the Collectif team helped generate positive ripple effects for the communities involved, whether in terms of consolidating ongoing collective initiatives, strengthening, and broadening partnerships, repositioning certain actors, or gaining a broader understanding of local issues.

The collective analysis then invited participants from the social, economic, cultural, and environmental sectors to share the information gathered in the territories, particularly in terms of challenges, issues, strengths, and possible solutions. This crucial step enabled us to

deepen and enrich our understanding of the situation, which was captured [in thematic fact sheets and podcasts](#) by [l'Opération veille et soutien stratégiques](#).



Photo credit: Collectif des partenaires en développement des communautés

## The National Community Development Gathering

The process culminated at the National Gathering, held both virtually and in-person, over one week in the fall of 2022. This large gathering illustrated the strength of collective culture, bringing together 450 people from nearly 350 organizations in many different sectors - community, solidarity economy, socio-ecological transition, culture, and municipalities, including elected officials, public institutions, and others - around a common goal: to lay the collective foundations for the future of community development in Quebec.

The Tamarack Institute took part in this initiative alongside the leading forces in community development in Quebec, including several intermediary organizations seeking to better support local communities and catalyze collective action.

## Priority actions

This collective exercise, rich in exchanges and learning, enabled us to identify priorities, each with major action areas, with the following objectives:

- Promote community development at all levels;
- Gain greater visibility with the general public;
- Influence decision-makers;
- Encourage collective action on the themes emerging from the Estates General, by bridging the gap between needs in the field, collective capacity, and the added value of coordination on a provincial scale.

More specifically, the five working groups<sup>2</sup> address the following issues:

1. The development of a **common understanding of community development** by local actors through a broad and inclusive process, to better position themselves and continuously feed their reflection around practices that best meet the needs of their populations served.

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<sup>2</sup> Collective of Community Development Partners. "Presentation of the construction sites". <https://collectifpdc.org/les-chantiers-nationaux/presentation/> Accessed February 23, 2024 (in French).

2. The establishment of a space for exchange that provides clear guidelines and the chance to explore different concepts towards **improved recognition of territorial equity at all levels**.
3. The implementation of a joint reflection to move away from project-based **funding** and offer funders a reference framework that would provide local organizations with a longer-term support and will allow them to better respond to their communities.



Photo credit: Myriam Bérubé

4. The development of greater consultation with partners working on the socio-ecological transition, to raise awareness and the train community development sector on the importance of the **socio-ecological transition** and to mobilize them to contribute to these changes.
5. Strengthening promising human resources practices in the community development sector in response to various **workforce shortage issues**.

The working groups are propelled by the collective enthusiasm sparked by the *États généraux* process. A living, dynamic ecosystem, interrelated and interconnected, they are made up of working groups, laboratories for experimentation, and field projects, training activities, networking and mobilization, the creation of tools and multiple projects, all carried out in consultation with a multitude of participants from different backgrounds and in line with each of the priority areas.

Supported by the Collectif team, work on the projects began in autumn 2023 and will continue over the next five years, thanks notably to the financial support of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation.

## CONCLUSION

Collective culture is a strength of Quebec's community development ecosystem, and this case allows us to identify certain learnings that can inspire changemakers and the intermediary organizations that support them, elsewhere in Canada and beyond.



***“The experience of the États généraux has shown that uniting in the face of social challenges is essential. Working together means sharing our struggles and hopes to find lasting solutions.”***

*– Nadia Cardin, Collectif des partenaires en développement team member*

- **Starting from “what already exists” and valuing local expertise:** the *États généraux* used current territorial realities as its starting point to discuss specific issues, language, contexts, and needs, considering local actors as the experts in their own community’s development.
- **Embodying the principle of “meeting people where they are” with flexible animation and research strategies:** tools were developed and adapted to the contexts and needs of the territories, which has proven to be useful and constructive for intersectoral and territorial consultation approaches.
- **Creating a sense of belonging to the collective:** this approach helped to break down the silos between sectors, levels, and territories to promote collective societal reflection. In addition, each step of the process was designed and carried out collectively, thus involving many people in an organization and relying on shared leadership.
- **Trusting the process:** the action plans were not pre-defined in advance of the National Gathering.

They emerged from a significant collective process that continued even after the event, notably during the follow-up event in May 2023.

- **Having sufficient human and financial resources:** The Collective's approach benefited from the active and dynamic support of a small coordination team and the contribution of researchers to organize the different stages of the process, thanks to the commitment of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation as the process’s main financial partner. The viability of the projects is also covered for five years, which ensures stability and ongoing resources for the actions that will be put in place.

In conclusion, the ongoing work of connecting Quebec actors, including financial partners, creates a dynamic of trust that strengthens solidarity, cohesion and the depth of exchanges, encourages future-oriented work, and increases our ability to co-influence public policy.

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