

Quebec Declaration on Social Innovation

APRIL 2011



QUEBEC DECLARATION ON SOCIAL INNOVATION

For a social innovation system in Quebec

A society's development increasingly depends upon its capacity for innovation. Of all types of innovation, social innovation is one of the most crucial.

The Réseau québécois en innovation sociale (RQIS) [The Quebec Social Innovation Network] has formed a community of interest composed of roughly twenty representatives from organizations who have demonstrated leadership in social innovation in Quebec. The RQIS is backed by a community of practitioners, social innovation theorists and liaison officers stemming from institutions and civil society, and who work in the economic, social, cultural and educational sectors. Fortified with this support, the RQIS lobbies the government of Quebec and other stakeholders to recognize, reinforce and add coherence to the Quebec system for social innovation, thus furthering Quebec's development.

These measures are designed to reinforce those taken by the Stratégie québécoise de la recherche et de l'innovation (SQRI), where social innovation is addressed only minimally.

Poverty, inequality, the isolation of immigrants and the marginalization of certain youth or First Nations communities, illiteracy, school dropouts, violence, disease, the decline of rural communities: these are all issues that take a toll on our society's development.

Given the impact of these issues on the economy and public finances, they are major cause for concern. Displaying a shameful waste of human potential, they condemn entire communities to failure.

Over the past few decades, Quebec has proven innovative on the social level. The creation of daycare centres and youth employment centres, the initiation of dialogue with First Nations communities or psychosocial intervention, and in addressing rural living and the social economy—all exemplify shifts in the policy framework.

Our successes are significant. Yet practices developed over the past fifty years are being rendered obsolete due to the growing complexity of certain issues.

The demographic shift in Quebec calls for a new social contract between generations. Climate change and attacks on biodiversity demand that we redefine our relationship with natural resources. Globalization is shaking the very foundations of social and economic relations. And though digital technology increases mobility and access to information, it also has the potential to further break the social fabric be deeply divisive, creating new forms of social inequality.



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What is social innovation?

Quebec has been socially innovative for quite some time. Yet, it wasn't until recently that the term "social innovation" came in to use to describe this way of revamping practices. Several definitions exist, but we could summarize this concept in the following way:

Social innovation refers to new ideas, strategies or interventions; new services, products or laws; new types of organizations that meet specific social needs in more effective and sustainable ways than before; solutions that have been championed within institutions, organizations or communities, producing measurable results for everyone, not just select individuals. The scope of social innovation is transformative and systemic. Inherently creative, it breaks away from what came before. [Translation]

Social innovations are "social," both in their processes and end results. They meet social needs while forging new relations between people and groups that may not otherwise collaborate. Social innovation can only be born in a spirit of openness. In this sense, social innovators were precursors to what institutions and corporations are seeking more and more of today: accelerated technological innovation through what is referred to as open innovation.

In other words, social innovations are good for society in and of themselves, as well as through their implementation and creation processes, which enhance society's ability to act.

Need we remind ourselves that, when it comes to implementing innovation, the main pitfalls to success are rarely technological? Usually they

are by nature organizational, social or cultural. Governance, set democratic processes, the organization of work and the exercising of leadership all influence an organization or community's ability to renew itself, meet needs, and either support competition or promote cooperation—especially within the context of globalization.

Key factors

The RQIS has identified 12 key factors with regards to enabling the emergence and sustainability of social innovation projects:

- Social innovation is triggered by a combination of factors: an unresolved social issue, a context that is conducive to a new solution (crisis, government policy, etc.) and the willingness of stakeholders to work together in search of a solution to a specific problem.
- Solutions stem from the collaborative work of several stakeholders in society, and since problems are multi-faceted, often even stakeholders who wouldn't normally collaborate.
- Innovation projects combine experiential knowledge with scientific and technical knowledge, and take into account the given cultural context. Combining these different fields of knowledge leads to joint production of new knowledge.
- Projects are transformative in scope, and aim for systemic change.
- Partners are at once daring and capable of coping with the element of the "unknown."

1. See appendix 1 for the list of members of the community of interest.

2. Translation of an amalgam of definitions from Camil Bouchard, du RQIS, du CRISES, the Stanford Center for Social Innovation and the Young Foundation.



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They recognize the inherent risk involved in an innovation project and are able to deal with it until the end of the process.

- Three forms of leadership are necessary for the project to succeed: 1) The individual leadership exercised by the project initiator(s); 2) The organizational leadership characterized by the support of organizations involved in an innovative practice that surpasses their usual practices; 3) The collective leadership that emerges in the community implementing the project.
- Long-term commitment on the part of the sponsors is crucial.
- Time is a fundamental issue. Time is needed to conceive and carry out the project, and to establish bonds of trust between partners. Additional time is required to evaluate the project and to ensure its dissemination, replication and appropriation by the involved communities, guaranteeing a shift in practices.
- The project needs to have impact in order to be recognized and eventually institutionalized.
- Stakeholders must adjust to various contexts and to the shifting environment in which partners operate.
- The project's transfer, appropriation and sustainability are essential components of its ultimate success. It needs to be espoused by its target group and meet its pre-established goals.
- Established bonds of trust between the stakeholders, expressed through shared governance, are the project's glue.

A system to reinforce

There are many reasons to support social innovation.

- Social innovation enables the implementation of more effective, just and sustainable solutions to increasingly complex social problems;
- It benefits all of society rather than a few select individuals;
- It enhances communities' ability to act;
- It favours the development of expertise in open innovation, which is attractive to institutions and companies who wish to speed up technological innovation.

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Recommendations

The community of interest established by the Réseau québécois en innovation sociale (RQIS) recommends:

- 1. Taking steps to reinforce the Quebec social innovation system;*
- 2. Preserving acquired expertise by lending adequate financial support to the RQIS. Presently, the RQIS is backed by the l'Université du Québec (UQ) and the Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation (MDEIE);*
- 3. Maintaining and expanding the social innovation community of interest created by the RQIS (ministries, institutions, municipalities, foundations), giving it the means to pursue its mandate;*
- 4. Establishing a permanent and independent board to advise the government on social innovation;*
- 5. Producing and updating reports on social innovation and its contributions to Quebec's development;*
- 6. Highlighting Quebec social innovations and publicizing them locally and abroad;*
- 7. Nurturing a culture of social innovation;*
- 8. Fostering the spirit of experimentation that feeds social innovation within public institutions and civil society;*
- 9. Promoting a supportive environment for social innovation, including modes of financing (public, philanthropic and private), training, research, knowledge transfer and assessment;*
- 10. Assigning the SQRI's last structuring project to the realm of social innovation;*

in order to consolidate, recognize and add coherence to the Quebec social innovation system, fostering development in Quebec.



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