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The Future of Quebec: Alternative Scenarios

A society is like a person; in order to cope with the present, it needs not only a sense of the past but also a vision of the future. In tranquil times, our vision of the future is essentially a projection of the past and present, and we look to history for guidance. In periods of rapid change we lose confidence in history and so we must look elsewhere for the development of our imagination — to newspaper columnists and astrologers, to market analysts and Eastern gurus, to artists and academics. We are forced to create new visions to give us a sense of direction and at least the illusion of control over our destiny. Because we live in a society that is more comfortable with data and theory than with faith and hope, we seek advice not from prophets but from futurists, we make pilgrimages not to cathedrals but to think tanks, and we find our inspiration not in scriptures but in scenarios.

A scenario is a description of some possible future, a projection of what may be, or a proposal of what should be. It may even turn out to be a prediction of what will be. Because there is no bank of hard data about the future, scenarios must rely more on fantasy than on fact, though in this they differ from other areas of study more in degree than in kind.

Scenarios may be helpful in a number of ways. By exploring different alternatives, they extend our appreciation of the range of what is possible. By projecting present developments into the future, they show us the implications of policy decisions. By speculating on insights from different disciplines, and by blending art and science, they force us to relate events and trends which we may be tempted to consider as separate. And they provide us with visions of the future.

Quebec is a challenging subject for scenario writing. It has undergone profound transformations during the past fifteen years, it is subject to all the pressures of North American society and, in its attempt to define its cultural identity, it is facing problems which are less sharply defined elsewhere. Here are three scenarios for the future of Quebec over the next twenty years.



Scenario One: Into the “GRID”

When Quebec began its Quiet Revolution in the early 1960's, many hoped that this would transform a traditional society into a modern industrial state. It is now clear that these expectations were unduly timid; due to a felicitous combination of external and internal factors, the changes in Quebec in the sixties and early seventies — expansion of Hydro-Québec, development of a competent civil service, reform of education — were more than a process of modernization. They projected Quebec beyond modernization into the post-industrial society of the twenty-first century.

During the seventies and eighties, North America increasingly assumed the characteristics of the post-industrial society: demand for energy, stress on the production and distribution of information, and a need for all forms of entertainment to occupy the growing leisure and wealth of the population. Through its scientific and technological explorations, the United States completely dominated the hardware and software market of the information society, but energy and entertainment were open for bids.

Thanks to enlightened leadership at both provincial and municipal levels, Quebec had strong hands to bid in both energy and entertainment. The six-phase development plan for James Bay and the one-a-year nuclear reactor project ensured that, by 1990, Quebec was the major supplier of electricity to eastern Canada and northeastern United States and would be, for the foreseeable future, one of the axes of the North American power grid. Hydro-Québec was now sponsoring research in solar energy in Joliette, was sinking a geothermal tap near Rimouski, and had prepared an offer-to-purchase for all the coal mines in Cape Breton.

If Quebec city was the centre for the power bid, Montreal was the focus for the entertainment bid. Here the initiatives of the sixties and

seventies laid the basis: Expo '67, Olympics '76, Mirabel, the Metro, Radio-Canada, Place Desjardins, Place des Arts, hotels, restaurants, boutiques. The facilities, the resources, the personnel, and the expertise were all in place. Other elements were added: the expansion of Loto-Québec into the European and Middle-Eastern markets, the opening of the huge Casino-Tadoussac, the largest facility of its kind outside of Nevada, the purchase by Québec-Air of vast fishing and hunting preserves throughout the Province. Only a master plan was needed; this was supplied by the \$2 million project of the Hudson (Canada) Institute which outlined a scenario for Quebec development into the year 3000, and by the creation of the Ministère des Loisirs which regulated all aspects of recreation, culture, sports, and tourism. One of the first initiatives of this Ministry was to open a service for religious affairs to encourage international pilgrimages to various shrines in the Province and to open ashrams, capitalizing on the renewed interest in religion which was sweeping the continent.

The master stroke was, of course, the opening of the massive \$1 billion Terre Disney at Lac Mistassini. Courageous in conception and imaginative in design, Terre Disney launched a new era in international cooperation and demonstrated a new symbiosis of sophisticated technology and sensitivity to the natural environment. Carefully designed wilderness conditions, artfully primitive facilities, expertly trained native facilitators, clean air and water, easy access by STOL and monorail — everything united to make Terre Disney the favorite playground for father-son adventure weekends, personal development and consciousness expanding sessions, folk festivals, and management training seminars.

There were, as may be expected, certain social dislocations as part of the price for this transformation. Agriculture and manufacturing declined sharply in importance; thousands of workers had to be recycled into jobs in the service sector; substantial internal migrations of population were necessitated by the installation of the extensive power and recreation facilities. Social analysts worried that, by the year 2000, over 75% of the work force in Quebec would be employed directly or indirectly by the Government; some older members of the clergy became incensed over the sex-dice-food-booze image of Quebec and videodiscs of their sermons sold well in suburban shopping centres; economists worried about the one-sided development of Quebec and the vulnerability of its almost total dependence on the rest of North America for food, clothing, manufactured goods, and patents, but this seemed a rather abstruse point in the face of practical prosperity.

A more serious concern was over the French language and culture. Obviously one important element in Quebec's attraction as an entertainment centre was its "difference;" French signs, French cuisine, and French clerks gave Quebec a competitive edge in the entertainment market. Although some purists (usually academics or artists, naturally) raged against the commercialization of culture and the prostitution of language (their videodiscs sold well also), the more serious problem of planners was to maintain a sufficient level of French. Francophones objected to compulsory English courses which deliberately cultivated accented English ("Preserve ze flavor of your mudder tongue" pleaded the advertisements in the Metro stations), and French appeared to be losing ground as a language of work even among francophones (pilots and teachers being notable exceptions).

The transformation of Quebec education into a post-industrial instructional grid turned out to be quite painless. Declining enrolments and decreasing job satisfaction prompted many teachers to convert to other occupations for which their training and experience prepared them: sports, public relations, security enforcement, entertainment, travel, and sales. Because the major employment opportunities were in the service industries which did not require a high level of training, and because of improvement in child care and entertainment facilities, the vocational and custodial functions of school became largely irrelevant; goals of intellectual development, information access, communication skills, and cultural enrichment were now being realized through Educare cards and by means of home television/computer terminals connected to central data banks called GRIDS (Grids for Research, Instruction, and Development) operated by multinational corporations (Xerox, Time-Life Books, etc.). There are now some teachers in practice as designers for individual learning programs, resource persons, social animators, and behavioral engineers; most schools, however, have been converted to community centres and twilight abodes for senior citizens. Serious consideration is being given to the abolition of school boards and to the union of the Ministries of Education and Recreation.

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Scenario Two: Getting a QUID

- 1970 October. A state of apprehended insurrection. The War Measures Act. Arrests in the night. Soldiers in battle dress in the foyers of apartment buildings. Three levels of government act decisively. Popular support. Calm and order restored.
- 1976 Summer. The Olympics. Men in green uniforms carrying attaché cases. Helicopter sweeps over the city. Armed forces billeted in schools. Intensive security checks of everyone entering the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. Thousands of people walking or hurrying or sitting or making love. With plastic identification plaques hanging from their necks on cords of regulation length. Picture, name, identification, status. Persona grata. The right of place is converted to the power of access.
- 1977 Journalists dub this the Year of the Scandal. Revelations and allegations continue to bubble from probes into violence in the construction industry and organized crime. The National Assembly passes the "Revised Inquiries Act" suspending normal judicial protections for witnesses in special government inquiries.
- 1978 M.U.C. police issue a report documenting record number of crimes of violence on the Island: murder rate doubled in five years, thefts up 300% during the same period, computer-based corporate fraud up 1000%. M.U.C. approves a special budget for recruiting and training of additional S.W.A.T. units. Minister of Education issues new regulations for the implementation of Bill 22; only children of Anglo-Saxon origin whose parents have been living in Quebec may attend English schools. Two hundred parents and children occupy the offices of the Montreal Catholic School Commission. While police are evicting them, a seven-year-old girl is accidentally shot and killed. The following morning, as police are examining a letter bomb addressed to the Minister of Education, the deputy minister is killed in a hit-and-run accident. Police refuse to speculate on any connection among the incidents.
- 1979 The unemployment rate in Quebec, seasonally adjusted, reaches 12.5% in February. Government spokesmen predict the economic situation will improve when the world monetary situation

stabilizes. One student in three is now attending a private school and the Government establishes a commission to study the public system. Parents' groups called BVD's (Basic/Values/Discipline) spring around the province and form an alliance with the new "Souvenir" Party.

- 1980 To curb the rising crime rate in apartment buildings and office complexes, doormen and security guards are sworn in as special peace officers and are given gun permits. Contract talks between the Government and teachers, hospital workers, Hydro employees and provincial policemen drag on with no agreement in sight. The Quebec Superior Council of Education publishes tough, new regulations entitled "Concerning Moral Education in Schools and the Personal Qualifications and Professional Behavior Required of Teachers." Teachers' Associations protest what they term as a "return to the Middle Ages."
- 1981 "Access to the social and educational resources of the society is a privilege to be earned, not a right to be assumed." This is the cardinal principle proposed in a special Government report on educational and social services in the Province. The Report recommends the reduction of the compulsory school attendance age to twelve years, apprenticeship programs in industry or in government service, and clear standards of personal and academic performance in all schools. Labor negotiations in the public sector break down completely, the Common Front of Public Employees goes on strike on December 1st and the Government calls an election for the 15th of January.
- 1982 Drawn by the vision of an organic society with all members contributing to the well-being of the whole and with a clear mandate to arrest the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Province, the Souvenir Party sweeps all but ten seats in the National Assembly. Swift approval is given to "An Act to Re-establish Order and To Ensure Security in the Province of Quebec." The self-enacting law requires all public servants — teachers, policemen, hospital workers, hydro employees — to return to work by 8 a.m. the following morning or begin a two-year prison sentence without further process of law. The Canadian troops that had been quietly assembled at Mirabel return to their bases across the country and the remainder of the year is quiet in Quebec.
- 1983 Results of a Gallup Poll taken in March show that 68% of the people believe that the Quebec Government is doing a good

job. Investment in the Province is up 14% over the same period last year and the unemployment rate continues to decline. Power brown-outs are occurring at the rate of one per month but, as Hydro officials point out, this is a far better record than that of Ontario or New York.

- 1984 The Ministry of Education suspends the teaching permit of 750 teachers for "conduct unbecoming an educator." The new Cumulative Record System for Education (CURSE) is now fully computerized and integrated into CITDAB (Citizen Data Bank) so that health, education, social security, criminal records and credit standing information are now fully automated to assure greater protection for individual rights.
- 1985 Violent crime is down 20% in Quebec over the past three years; this compares favourably with the 20%-50% increases in other provinces and in the United States. An opposition member of the National Assembly charges that a large number of suspects are being killed while supposedly resisting arrest; the Minister of Security regrets that there are no statistics on this matter but promises to look into the charge. The failure rate in the grade six provincial examinations has dropped to 25% and further improvement is expected over the next few years as standards of teaching the basics continue to rise.
- 1986 The premier, in his annual Christmas message, proudly announces that for the first time in the history of Quebec, no working hours have been lost during the past year due to strikes or work slowdowns; it is to this factor that he attributes the Province's very modest decline in the standard of living, despite the worsening economic situation elsewhere on the continent.
- 1987 To all Quebecers:
Within the next two weeks you will be receiving your new QUEBEC/IDENTIFICATION or QUID card.

This new card is

- (1) **SIMPLE:** it replaces your current driver's licence, medicare card, social security card, and credit cards. You now need *only one* card for every use.
- (2) **A PROTECTION:** it guarantees that you will obtain access to all the services to which you have a right.
- (3) **A RECOGNITION:** of your educational attainment, work experience, credit rating, competencies, and security access rating.

CHECK carefully the information on your QUID card to make sure it is accurate and complete.

CARRY your QUID with you at all times. It will facilitate your entrance to many public and private facilities, and is required for access to all **SOCIAL, MEDICAL, EDUCATIONAL, and ENERGY** services.

Many users find it convenient to keep their QUID card around their neck at all times. Special kid-size QUIDs are available for your children's comfort.

Remember:

Your QUID is your **IDENTITY**.
WEAR your QUID with **HONOR**.
SHOW your QUID with **PRIDE**.

This message has been brought to you by the Quebec Ministry of Social Well-Being and Security.

1992 "Now, boys and girls, please line up and I will give you your examination booklets for the grammar test. Please have your QUID's ready."

"Miss, I forgot my QUID at home, Miss. Miss, I'll bring it this afternoon."

"Oh, I see that Marie is not here today. It's too bad, she'll miss her test."

"Miss, I'm here, Miss. But, Miss, I forgot my QUID, Miss."

"Henry, what happens to boys and girls who aren't carrying their QUID's with them? Could you please tell the class?"

"Yes, Miss. Miss, they're not here. Miss, we don't see them and we don't hear them. Miss, they kinda evaporate."

"Very good, Henry. Now class, pay attention. On the first page, there is a mistake in the question on parsing."



Scenario Three: Becoming "CANADÉ"

I am not going to give you an instant history of Québec during the last twenty years. You can always use a ruler to join two points with a straight line. Me, I'm a person, not a pencil. I was born in Montréal in 1934, so that makes me sixty-two. What I'm going to do is to draw a few pictures for you; you can color them in as you like and connect them any way you please. You're following me? Okay.

Here is the first piece. I am lying on my back on a hill near Ste. Beatrix, north east of Montréal. I have been walking for an hour along a network of trails exactly six feet wide. In winter, people roar along the autoroute to get here so they can roar along these trails in their snowmobiles. But now it is summer. Last week I watched the closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games, the New Québec's version of a Eucharistic Congress. The sun is very hot and the sky is blue and unmarked by clouds, almost. From the corner of my eye I see a white thread slowly sliding across the sky; I can't see the plane, only what it exhales. My neighbor at the cottage tells me it's a SAC bomber from Plattsburg spinning its nuclear web of protection so that I can lie in peace on the hill. At first I'm irritated: snowmobile trails and vapor trails, intruding fingers of technology. But the plane is now high in the sky and I watch the white line carefully; for about an inch it is crisp, sharp, Euclidean, then it begins to fray a little around the edges, then it becomes fuzzy, and finally it is just a cloud. It reminds me of my car. And my house in the suburbs. And my job and wife and kids and my life. The exhaust for someone else's plane. We are not the consumers but the consumed. Yet why do we complain about the decline in quality in everything: workmanship, services, education, toys, gloves? But why worry about the quality of a vapor trail, because as the white line touches the trees on the right, the blue sweeps away the last whiffs of white on the left. "Maîtres chez nous," I think as I stand up and start home. I laugh out loud and hear a slight echo.

A second piece. The year of our Lord 1980. Some groups thought the dissolution of Canada would be an Event; journalists, media-people, and oracles were disappointed that it was not more dramatic. There should have been a little spontaneous dancing in Lafontaine Park, perhaps heavier-than-usual westbound traffic on the Transcanada from Sources Road to Ste. Anne de Bellevue, possibly an

alert for the National Guard in Vermont or New York. There should have been *something*. Civil servants had to reorganize their filing cabinets and churn out new organigrams and flow charts; politicians had to stay alert in their public utterances as their constituencies and responsibilities shifted beneath them; businessmen took an extra spoonful of Maalox before eating. But for real people, it was generally a non-event. Canada was too large and diffuse for them to identify with psychologically, and too small and dependent on the United States to rely on for security or economic development. This might not have led to any decisive action if similar trends were not in full flight in the United States as well. In both countries, issues were polarizing, not in terms of us-them, left-right, black-white, French-English, but in terms of system-person. Issues related to energy, resources, transportation, communications, planning, and security were continental in scope; other issues were related to life style, personal development, and quality of life, and these were regional in scope. No one in Québec seriously believes that the new political alignments will alter very much the political, cultural, or economic trends already at work: extensive participation in planning and decision-making at all levels, the enjoyment of style for its own sake, the recognition that diversity is a necessary condition for development. People are losing interest in ideological issues like constitutional rights. People and living and air and electricity and loneliness and oppression and consciousness are the immediate and real problems. As we say now in Québec: "First there were curés. Then there were fonctionnaires. Now there are just people." *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

A third piece. It is noon on a February day, 1984. Ah! This is a year to conjure with, but there is no Big Brother watching me, partly because there is telecasting only between the hours of sixteen hundred and twenty-four hundred. It snowed a couple of inches yesterday so the snow banks on Sherbrooke street are a little higher and a little cleaner; you can barely see across the street now. I feel quite melancholy as I lean over the railing looking north up the Decarie expressway filled with drifted snow in gentle dunes, completely silent and completely empty. You talk in the abstract about value shifts but you have to feel them in your stomach. The mandala of North America had a car in the centre; a value shift means taking the Chevy out for what you and the family know will be the last Sunday drive, ever; it means an old man being stabbed by some kids for a gallon of gas; it means reminders everywhere — gas stations, highways, advertisements in old magazines, TV reruns — everything rubbing your nose in the tradeoffs of value shifts; tractors for farm-

frame of mind, one may attain objective "B." Zen and the art of stitching sandals, that sort of thing.

So here we are back in 1996. I hope you are able to arrange these five pieces into some pattern that will reflect, imperfectly of course, the personality of Québec. In your travels to other regions you have seen other community-personalities, and among the regions there is a kind of harmony and balance, and yet a rich set of alternatives from which to choose a way of life. After you have seen a few more people in Québec, why don't you cycle over to Toronto (the inns along the way are exceptionally good). They think and speak in English there, but I am sure they will be as candid with you as I have tried to be.



Conclusion

The main purpose of scenario-writing is to propose *possible* futures, to extend the range of alternatives. But it is very hard for scenarios to remain neutral possibilities; we begin to identify *probable* futures and we begin to be attracted to *preferable* futures. It is in this way that value assumptions enter the field of futures studies. If we restrict ourselves to probabilities, forecasts, and extrapolations, we run the danger of colonizing the future with the values of the present, specifically of those who hold power in the present. As we design (plan?) preferable futures, then futurists become prophets.

The creation and criticism of scenarios may be one way in which the study of the future may be made more democratic and educational, alerting lay persons as well as experts to the need to create images of the future, so that we may have a more conscious part in translating the images to realities and the scenarios to histories.



ers or Pontiacs for commuters. For a lot of people, more than a value shift — a real loss of identity. Me, I don't give a damn; giving up cars is like giving up cigarettes. But some people committed suicide in their cars.

Fourth. Pointe Claire, 1988. The problem of establishing a quality of living in a society that is reconnecting itself. When some things are removed from the system — oranges in winter, meat every day, continuous access to electricity, “Will that be cash or Chargex?” Sun Flights to the Caribbean — everything else is affected, transformed. How easily we adjust to conspicuous non-consumption, how smoothly we transform necessity into virtue. Like rediscovering the extended family, only now it is a community, commune, condominium, cooperative. Street by street, circle by circle, crescent by crescent, the bungalows, cottages, and split levels are carefully taken down by teams of volunteer teenagers under the direction of senior citizens — two groups that the new social order has rescued from their mausoleums of irrelevance. Here and there new living clusters rise, not the anonymity of the apartment or the insulation of the private house. All the old English gardeners on the Lakeshore are organizing the planting and fertilizing. Cultivation, culture, cult. On the weekends we take the train to Old Montréal to sip cider and perhaps catch a Morality Play at the Place des Arts.

A fifth fragment. One morning in 1992 I go to meet my teacher. Other NARs (North American Regions) have different rules, but in Québec all citizens over five years of age have the right of access to the services of a teacher for the equivalent of twelve days a year. We may, of course, choose our own teacher. Sometimes you have to use two or three teachers and at other times you save up your days for a couple of years so that you can spend a couple of weeks with a teacher, full time. There are naturally many kinds of teachers. Everyone is a Something-Teacher: Scholar-Teacher, Doctor-Teacher, Artist-Teacher, Mother-Teacher. The one I am visiting is a Contemplative-Teacher; I find myself more and more interested in reflection as a counterpoint to my active life as a shoemaker. (That surprised you, didn't it? I'll bet you didn't have me figured for a shoemaker.) Although my teacher is only thirty-five, she has studied many approaches to philosophy and has practised different forms of meditation and consciousness-raising. I have only two hours with her, so I have read, studied, and thought a good deal in order to get the most out of the encounter. Our dialogue today is to be on oblique learning, how, if one learns “A” with the proper