

Quebec's International Activity In North America

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The theoretical framework for the study of the international activities of sub-national governments like Quebec's is the debate between political realism and Robert Keohane's paradigm of interdependence. The former sees the sovereign state as the only actor in diplomacy, while the latter posits the existence of other political and economic entities that play an important role by influencing the global context, modifying it through their "paradiplomatic" participation, a neologism coined in 1988.

Keohane's arguments leave no room for doubt in thinking of Quebec as an international actor, taking into account com-

plex interdependence as an ideal type and describing a world with three characteristics: 1) multiple channels between societies, with diverse actors, not limited to states; 2) the existence of issues not framed in a clear hierarchy; and 3) the irrelevance of the threat of use of force between states connected through complex interdependence.¹

While this historic debate has not arrived at definitive conclusions since the 1970s, the existence of sub-national governments that plan and establish international relations using foreign policy and diplomatic tools traditionally used exclusively by central governments cannot be denied. In addition, international law does not categorically or decisively negate their international character either.

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HISTORIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ANGLOPHONES AND FRANCOPHONES

With the Quebec Act of 1774, the English government recognized rights of inhabitants of the former New France colony, conquered in 1759, such as managing their lands, practicing Catholicism, applying the Napoleonic Civil Code, and speaking French.

In 1867, the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick passed the British North America Act, creating the Dominion of Canada, a territory under the aegis of the English Crown. There, the Anglophones had a well-defined capitalist national project, whose political strategy was to concentrate federal economic power in Ottawa, with the Quebecois reaffirming their cultural difference from the Anglo-Saxon remainder.

From 1867 to 1960, Anglophones and Francophones co-existed. The former consolidated their national project and the Francophones, the *statu quo* giving them the space of their province, where the Catholic Church determined to a great extent education, political decisions, and the feeling of Quebec belonging as a distinct society.

That coexistence was broken in 1960 with the Quiet Revolution. At that time, a political and cultural Francophone awareness emerged that questioned the province's historic place in Canada and Quebecois sought more attributions and autonomy. Among the new strategies was opening offices throughout the world, signing agreements, and consolidating and exploring new international spaces, such as the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and Mexico in the 1990s.

The province's basic doctrine is based on Gérin-Lajoie's premise, which dealt with the possibility of acting abroad based on the internal jurisdictions guaranteed to the province by the Constitution. This gave rise to a huge debate about who should be in charge of developing Canadian foreign policy, given the different needs and objectives of Anglophones and Francophones.

In 1982, the Canadian Constitution established equality among the provinces, despite the fact that, historically, clear differences had existed between the two founding societies, the Anglophones and the Francophones. The Constitution sought above all to shore up the new national project in the face of the reconfiguration of economic relations with the United States and the emergence of the free-trade paradigm. To counter this new set of norms, in 1987, Quebec held a referendum on the Lake Meech Accord, seeking constitutional

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recognition of its status as a distinct society, in order to make decisions about the future of its territory and its new role in the global context.

However, since the rest of the provinces refused to give it that recognition, Quebec consolidated its own "legitimacy" based on political, economic, and cultural elements. This is when the Bélanger-Campeau Commission was created to investigate the province's situation in order to become sovereign and an independent state through a possible referendum after 1990.

Quebec emphasized geography, since its location is strategic in North America with regard to traditional trade with the United States. It expressed interest in moving into the rest of the continent, in regions beyond its traditional sphere of influence.²

QUEBEC'S INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOR: OVERALL REASONING

The study of geography, foreign policy, diplomacy, cooperation, and international relations after World War II was defined by sovereign states, recognized by political realism as rational entities operating in line with considerations of power and security. Naturally, this does not mean that regional or local studies were unimportant, but their impact was measured as a function of what was decided by the central government: local territory was pushed into the background.

After the 1970s, churches, cities, banks, municipalities, and sub-national governments began to have increased weight in the world. This was contrary to the orthodox supposition that all organization of international relations and all formulation of objectives took place in the secretariats and ministries of sovereign states for their implementation as foreign policy or diplomacy.

Robert Keohane's complex interdependence paradigm was not counterposed to political realism, but began to operate as a complement to it; it made it possible to explain the way in which sub-national governments create optimal geographical conditions outside the strict regulatory framework



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While Quebec's international activity is based on an element of identity that seeks to project the province beyond its local space, Mexico's states are trying to break with their historical link to the central government.

of central governments for exchange, agreements, cooperation, and development.

The historical logic of the behavior of international geography, foreign policy, and diplomacy is fragmented and operated to benefit local objectives and needs; this took place in regional structures represented very often by sub-national entities that had a government, a territory, and a population, all elements needed to implement cooperation strategies.

Quebec is an example of a sub-national government that, due to its geographical location, is part of Anglophone Canada's historical interest in wanting to create a unified state and not allowing in to be absorbed by the United States. This was the main objective of the British North America Act of 1867. After the break in 1960, Canada's federal government did everything in its power to keep the country together despite the 1980 and 1995 referendums.

On the other hand, Ontario continues to be Quebec's political, cultural, and economic adversary as the seat of the federal government that has implemented foreign policy since the 1940s. As mentioned above, with the Quiet Revolution, the Francophones defined their status, in which politics and economic, culture, and the French language became an impor-

tant reference point that served as the basis for establishing their objectives: separating themselves from their peripheral position *vis-à-vis* Ottawa and the challenges implied in their relationship to the United States, whose intention has never been to see Canada divided.

Another stakeholder that strengthens the province's cultural identity project is France, helping it become an international actor since 1965. This gave rise to a power game in the face of Canada and the United States, who do not want a European country interfering in local affairs. Despite this, the French fostered Quebec's diplomatic career at the expense of their own interests, which were to achieve a position of influence in North America.

Thus, the province's battleground is its relationship with its traditional interlocutors with an eye to being recognized as an economic actor in the dynamics of regional trade and as an autonomous society. For its part, Canada allowed it certain leeway in coming to agreements with other actors and delegations abroad. It even allowed Quebec to participate in international bodies like the International Organisation of La Francophonie 1989 summit or the 2007 UNESCO meeting, with the certainty that its peripheral geographic position and its indissoluble relationship with the rest of Canada would be broken only if the United States recognized its independence.

Based on this premise, Quebec put forward a new strategy with regard to the trade opening in North America: relating to sub-national governments beyond its natural geographical space, the United States.

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From 1969 to 1978, Quebec established a presence in Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Atlanta, and Washington, D. C., spaces “won” above all due to economic considerations. Later, Quebec saw the possibility of positioning itself in new local markets that could foster its identity objectives and then translate into economic and cultural interests. Thus, in 1991, it began taking a marked interest in Mexican states like Querétaro, the State of Mexico, and Mexico City’s Federal District; later, after 2006, this extended to the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Nuevo León.

This was naturally done cautiously in order to not challenge the central government, with which agreements were established in sectors like electrical energy, the environment, and technology. The Mexican government was an interlocutor that had to be respected, given its relationship with the Canadian government; that is why the establishment of a General Delegation in 1980 clearly was done along the lines of relations of cooperation without including the political aspect. This gave Quebec advantages in 1991 when the Mexican government allowed its states to establish inter-institutional accords with other entities or governments abroad.³

Thus, the similarity between Quebec and Mexico’s states is that in both cases the idea is to break the barrier created by geography, although at the same time, that same geography allows them to explore possibilities in which international cooperation becomes a key tool for achieving their objectives.

While Quebec’s international activity is based on an element of identity that seeks to project the province beyond its local space, Mexico’s states and municipalities are trying to break with their historical link to the central government, decentralizing foreign policy decisions, diplomacy, or cooperation, without challenging the federal government’s sovereignty, since neither sub-national government can take territorial control of the countries they belong to.

While Mexico’s foreign policy principles continue to be in line with the new relations created, its states have created areas of regional influence located in strategic spaces like the North American SuperCorridor (Nasco). This has become a model and regional example of economic integration

in which Quebec, Jalisco, Nuevo León, and Guanajuato have gotten out from under the sphere of strong, centralized dependence to more dynamically manage trade, logistics, and common problems arising from borders where conflicts exist due to migration and crime. The sub-national governments, then, have achieved this by passing local laws to make the movement of goods more dynamic, continuing to create possibilities for cooperation.

Quebec and Mexico’s states thus occupy the North American space as stakeholders, as a result of the very same processes of integration that create an advantage for anyone with the real, operational capability to negotiate and harmonize local policies.

Finally, for the government of Quebec province, understanding its geography and all its elements for development has been important historically, both before and after the advent of free trade. But this is of key significance: North America makes it possible to obtain more advantages when Quebec’s partners’ strategies, such as investment, technology transfer, governors/prime ministers meetings, concretizing accords, and the proposal of new ideas for fostering new forms of cooperation, continue to improve.

For Quebec, the evolution of the space of North America continues to allow it to reinvent itself as a sub-national government in the context of the relations with its interlocutors in order to seek the best advantages. This poses important challenges, whether as an “independent country” or an autonomous province. ■■■

NOTES

¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 240.

² “According to our basic hypothesis, the effects of economic integration, set out in the trade agreement between Canada and the United States, and possibly through the North American Free Trade Agreement, will change Quebec’s economic space, rerouting its inter-provincial trade flows abroad, accentuating their North-South direction, particularly with certain regions far from North America or where large social conglomerations are to be found.” Pierre-Paul Proulx, *L’ALENA, le Québec et la mutation de son espace économique*, Cahier 9328, Université de Montréal-Département de Sciences Économiques, September 1993, p. 6.

³ Article 2, Subsection II, “Inter-institutional Accord,” deals with a written agreement according to public international law between any decentralized body of the federal, state, or government and one or several foreign governmental bodies or international organizations regardless of name and whether it/they derive from a previously approved treaty. The sphere of the inter-institutional accords must be limited exclusively to the attributions of the decentralized bodies of the levels of government that sign them. “Ley sobre la celebración de tratados,” *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (Mexico City), January 2, 1992.