



Abitibi-Témiscamingue in 2027 :



A region that is welcoming, characterised by a diversity of cultures and talents



A region where two peoples co-exist in a spirit of sharing and respect for the land



A region with a sense of solidarity and justice, responsive to its citizens' needs



A region that is eager to learn, knowledge-oriented and open to the world



A region that is healthy and responsible, with a concern for its natural environment



A region of prosperity and brainpower economy



A region that is self-reliant, controlling its destiny and development

WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear partners in regional development,

It is my pleasure to introduce the Regional Strategic Development Plan of Abitibi-Témiscamingue 2007-2011 that reflects the concerns, challenges and hopes of some 2000 stakeholders from all sectors who participated in this extensive operation involving reflection, consultation and collaboration.

This Strategic Plan carries our vision for the future and demonstrates a clear determination to develop Abitibi-Témiscamingue in a cooperative manner, based on shared and recognised concerns. This mobilising exercise, which lasted over 18 months, around fundamental challenges and major issues for the region, will guide our development decisions for the next five years. It is primarily based on respect for the mission and mandates of the local, territorial and regional partners and is aimed at a joint action to achieve the priorities and objectives that we have collectively set forth. The Strategic Plan's seven development axes reflect our vision for the future and promote the essential conditions for creating wealth for the region's people and communities. The proposed vision is certainly ambitious but I am convinced that our region has the necessary resources, potential, creativeness and solidarity to achieve its goals.

The challenge facing us right now consists in carrying out the actions identified in the Strategic Plan. Each one of us in our own communities and organisations must take ownership of these objectives and incorporate those relevant ones in our respective work plan, while respecting each organisation's and territory's responsibilities. Our region has proven that people from all walks of life could come together around a common vision of development. I am convinced that achieving the priorities we have established will be done in the same spirit of collaboration and partnership.

Abitibi-Témiscamingue's main asset is without any doubt its human capital. It is therefore essential to make sure that its citizens have the necessary tools to adapt to change, develop their full potential and open up to the world. Among these tools, access to education and training is crucial. Furthermore, harmonious relations with Aboriginal communities and strategic linkages with neighbouring regions is, from now on, a key concern. Finally, the regionalisation project should provide us with the opportunity and capacity to act upon our own development.

In closing, we wish to thank all citizens, organisations, businesses and government departments who participated in the consultation activities, whether it be the focus groups, the vision development exercise, the territorial consultation or by presenting submissions. I also wish to thank the Strategic Plan Follow-up Committee, the CRÉ Board members and staff, as well as the Observatoire de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, for their time and most valuable collaboration in the process.

Enjoy your reading,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Jean-Maurice Matte". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jean-Maurice Matte, Chairman

INTRODUCTION

This document is the third Abitibi-Témiscamingue Strategic Development Plan. It was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Conférence régionale des élus (CRÉ) (Regional Board of Elected Officials) on March 15, 2007 for the 2007-2011 period.

All the activities carried out by the CRÉ as part of the strategic planning exercise have allowed to identify a number of issues and challenges the region must take up to ensure its human, social, cultural, environmental and economic development on its territory.

The strategic planning process results from the efforts of a large number of people from the region over the past few months, which allowed to set forth the region's major development issues and to define the necessary action priorities and strategies to address them. The challenge was to highlight the orientations and principles that appear consensual, whether converging or diverging, with a view to defining a common interpretation of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region that builds upon its assets and unique advantages.

Following a general call to organisations and government departments in December 2005, the CRÉ received some fifty local and regional action plans and strategic plans that were used as the basis for discussion. About 2 000 people and organisations were consulted through various activities (sectoral meetings, individual interviews, group discussions, Regional Forum, public meetings, etc.). Of this number, close to 165 people participated in the regional consultation tour, in addition to some fifty submissions that allowed to enhance the content of the Strategic Plan.

Background

As a reminder, the objectives of the Regional Board of Elected Officials (CRÉ) of Abitibi-Témiscamingue are to mobilise, consult and foster the region's human, social, cultural, environmental and economic development. The CRÉ must play a role in favourably positioning the region at the provincial level, but also in positioning itself as an actor of regional development and a preferred interlocutor with the Quebec government.

To this end, the CRÉ is mandated to prepare a five-year development plan defining the region's general and specific development objectives from a sustainable development perspective. As a priority, it takes into account youth and women participation in the region's democratic life, based on principles of equality and parity, and with due concern for seniors and Aboriginal people.

Implementation and Scope

It is important to keep in mind that this Strategic Plan is that of the region and not of the Regional Board of Elected Officials (CRÉ) of Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The primary objective of the exercise is to define the priorities that will guide the region's development for the next five years. All actors concerned will need to profitably employ their resources to implement these priorities. Once completed, the Strategic Plan will be a reference document the different partners, including the CRÉ, can rely upon in developing or updating their own action plans.

An annual Regional Action Plan (RAP) supports the Strategic Plan and presents the action strategies, partners, timeframe and evaluation indicators. The Plan of Action's efficient implementation will depend on the involvement of all concerned local, territorial and regional partners. The RAP will be revised annually by a committee, which will allow to follow-up on and evaluate the progress made in achieving the objectives and priorities of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue Strategic Development Plan 2007-2011.

Definitions

For a good understanding of the Strategic Plan components, it is important to be familiar with the terminology used in the Plan.

- Axes: they are the region's major policy directions based on the development vision.
- Development priorities: they are the development objectives supporting the axes.
- Action strategies: they define how the development priorities will be carried out and identified in the Regional Action Plan (RAP).



VISION AND STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Vision

The vision developed in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue Strategic Development Plan 2007-2011 results from a collective reflection geared to the future. This process is the main thread for the actions to be taken over the next 20 years. It is by asking the following question: “In what region do we want to live in 20 years from now?” and under the theme: “Abitibi-Témiscamingue 2027” that many stakeholders involved in their community’s development as well as at the regional level have worked together to build a common vision for a promising future. At the beginning of each axis section, the related vision is presented.

Why a Vision Over 20 Years?

First because it is a matter of managing change and development in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. This requires the ability to identify and manage the necessary transitions to meet the region’s needs. Secondly, in order to successfully manage change, we need clear development objectives, sound planning and sufficient time to ensure consistency. A long-term strategy will allow to identify common goals for the whole regional community and to coordinate all levels of responsibility to achieve these goals. A region’s development is a long-range effort, so we need a long-term vision to ensure consistent development.

A shared vision is crucial because it allows to channel the efforts and provide the necessary energy to overcome difficulties. Its significance also derives from the fact that it represents a powerful motivational factor that fosters commitment.

This Strategic Plan is the first phase of a long-run process that will be carried out over a 20-year period. It will serve as the starting point for the next strategic planning, thus allowing to stay focused on our regional development in response to our vision. Furthermore, this will facilitate the implementation of evaluative indicators that will allow to measure progress.

The 7 Axes of the Vision

IN 2027, ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE IS:

1. A region that is welcoming, characterised by a diversity of cultures and talents
2. A region where two peoples co-exist in a spirit of sharing and respect for the land
3. A region with a sense of solidarity and justice, responsive to its citizens’ needs
4. A region that is eager to learn, knowledge-oriented and open to the world
5. A region that is healthy and responsible, with a concern for its natural environment
6. A region of prosperity and brainpower economy
7. A region that is self-reliant, controlling its destiny and development

Statement of Principles

A statement of principles consists in a number of intentions defining and justifying the goals to be achieved on the basis of human, social, cultural, environmental and economic considerations. These intentions are deemed essential for pursuing and achieving the region's development objectives. They guided the development of the intervention axes and will influence the ways and means. They occupy a broad cross-sectional area within the seven intervention axes agreed upon and they shall be constantly kept in mind by the Regional Board of Elected Officials of Abitibi-Témiscamingue (CRÉ) and its partners.

A DEVELOPMENT FOCUSED ON CITIZENS' NEEDS: a vision whereby generations benefit from each other

Citizens are placed at the centre of Abitibi-Témiscamingue's development. Therefore, development must take place by making it possible for all men and women to be involved, with due concern for the present and future generations.

YOUTH: our most valuable wealth

Creating the necessary conditions allowing young people to get involved at a very early age is an essential condition in the context of the population decline observed in the region in the past years. Today's young people will be tomorrow's leaders.

FAMILY: the main cell in the regional body

We must place the family at the centre of the regional community just as it is in the heart of each citizen, in order to build around it a region with strong values. This will allow to foster awareness of the families' importance and strengths, of the challenges they are faced with, as well as their structural, demographic, economic, cultural and social diversity.

GENDER EQUALITY: our way of conceiving social justice

Achieving gender equality, today and in the future, is an evident goal as, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, one person out of two is a woman.

ELDERLY PEOPLE: an invaluable source of knowledge and competencies

Population ageing in Abitibi-Témiscamingue can already be observed, although it is only beginning. We must understand today's elderly people while preparing to meet the needs of tomorrow's seniors. In this context, there is no doubt that the elderly people's contribution and participation in the region's development take a whole new meaning.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: our partners in regional development

Working towards a harmonious and peaceful coexistence between the region's Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people, in a spirit of sharing and respect for the land, is an essential condition for ensuring equitable development and true social cohesion.

EDUCATION: main driving force of our social and economic vitality

Education is the hub around which evolve all the actions that the citizens are invited to take in order to develop their region. Abitibi-Témiscamingue will become a knowledge-based living environment where a brain-power economy will develop while weaving a rich and attractive social fabric recognised for its quality cultural, social, scientific and educational life.

QUALITY OF LIFE: the backdrop of our local and regional actions

Quality of life refers to an attractive, dynamic and stimulating environment where community members can find many essential elements for personal growth. Quality of life is an essential component of regional development. It is based on this quality of life that people decide not only where they will take roots but also choose to play an active leadership role.

DYNAMIC LAND OCCUPANCY: a prerequisite to our long-term development

A dynamic occupation of the territory means the rooting of identity and cultural diversity. It also means a place where nature and the environment are put upfront. The territory is both an extension of who we are and something that makes us who we are. This is why we believe in a dynamic occupation of the land and, as a community, we must constantly care for it, with a particular concern for rural areas.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: a generous vision of land occupancy

Strategic planning has better chances to result in successful development when based on a long-term vision of sustainable development, i.e. “an ongoing process to improve the living conditions of the present generation that does not compromise the ability of future generations to do so and that ensures a harmonious integration of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of development.”

INNOVATION: doing things differently

Nowadays, innovation has become an absolute must. Innovation allows for development, adaptation, sustainability and, above all, enhancement. Innovation can be done in all activity areas (ex.: social, commercial, cultural, organisational, etc.), but this is done first and foremost on a daily basis through steady improvement.

THE COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE OF WORKING TOGETHER: essential tools for development

In this context, joint action means listening to and accepting other people’s views, showing respect for others and making decisions based on collective well-being while creating a climate of trust. Mobilisation and joint action with all regional actors around common development objectives and projects are essential conditions to promote and advance development in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

REGIONALISATION: the best tool for achieving our vision of the future

Having more autonomy to act upon our development, through regionalisation, is an essential condition for pursuing our development.

AXIS 2: A region where two peoples co-exist in a spirit of sharing and respect for the land

IN 2027... In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal communities coexist and cooperate in mutual respect. The Algonquins, key players and partners in regional development, form a healthy and proud society, within healthy communities, and enjoy a quality of life that ensures a promising future for the younger and unborn generations. They earn decent incomes and are financially self-reliant due to their involvement in the region's economic development. Young people are trained and hold gratifying jobs. The region has three recognised languages: French, Algonquin and English. Algonquin language and history are taught in several schools. The Algonquin culture is thriving on the territory.

1. ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: MAMAWI MIKOMOWITAN, WORKING TOGETHER

Recent history shows that Abitibi-Témiscamingue was developed without really taking into account the local Aboriginal populations. This can be explained by a number of factors such as the Indian Act, the Indian reserve system, the creation of Beaver Preserves, etc. This resulted in a significant underdevelopment and impoverishment of the communities.

In the past ten years, many regional Aboriginal and non Aboriginal stakeholders have worked at developing public awareness on the conditions and issues faced by the Algonquins. Many studies and research reports have addressed this subject. Among other things, we can observe that the Algonquin communities are struggling with serious social problems such as poverty, psychological distress, chronic unemployment, and overcrowded housing. So these communities must cope with a sluggish economy, low enrolment, qualification and graduation rates, in addition to infrastructures that no longer meet the needs of their people.

When considering Aboriginal demography, there is an increasing trend that cannot be ignored: the migration of people from the Algonquin communities to the cities. This means that the Aboriginal world is now made up of two realities: an Aboriginal population living in urban areas and another one living in the communities. Both are thus faced with very different economic and social conditions.

Today, many local and regional authorities are aware of the Algonquin communities' situation. The regional community acknowledges the importance and need of working together. The region is willing to collaborate with First Nation citizens in a respectful manner, to improve their living conditions and support different development projects. The challenge is to identify common grounds in order to learn more about Aboriginal culture and practices. The key factor in this process is to invest in sharing and mutual understanding of each other's reality.

Employment is the foundation stone of our standard of living. Given the regional population decline, maintaining our standard of living requires, among others, a dynamic context that is conducive to employment. The Aboriginal population growth is significant. The regional community must take into account this potential labour force and thus work in close cooperation with Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal knowledge is also an under-utilised resource in the regional development process. Learning about this culture, first by looking at what the Algonquin communities know and possess, would allow developing a better understanding of their local conditions and would provide a favourable context for dialogue and projects designed to assist the communities. Sharing between peoples can also help improving mutual understanding.

It is in the regional community's best interest to benefit from the Algonquin people's knowledge and expertise as this will allow for a better cooperation for a more respectful regional development. Presently, this cooperative and joint effort is progressing at slow pace. This is due, among others, to the many difficulties experienced by the communities, the various political agendas and the problems related to jurisdictional overlapping whereby the communities must deal with many authorities, thus making it more complex to advance the different issues.

In the past years, the region saw new migrations from the Cree and Atikamekw communities as a number of these people settled in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The increased patronage of First Nation people in businesses and services is certainly to be considered. We also need to take into account these newly arrived people when working at current and future projects.

PRIORITY 1.1:

To create opportunities for the development of common projects between Aboriginal people and the different non Aboriginal authorities of the regional community.

PRIORITY 1.2:

To help increase the Algonquins' graduation, enrolment and qualification rates in order to increase their level of autonomy.

PRIORITY 1.3:

To promote the development of an employment integration strategy, particularly for young people, in order to increase the number of available jobs inside and outside of the communities.

PRIORITY 1.4:

To support the Wanaki project for the construction of a village for the community of Kitcisakik.

PRIORITY 1.5:

To develop research and knowledge on the Algonquin people.

AXIS 1: A region that is welcoming, characterised by a diversity of cultures and talents.

IN 2027... Abitibi-Témiscamingue's demography is outstanding. The region manages to maintain and vitalise its population through increased youth retention and a growing number of immigrants motivated by the quality of social and cultural life, stimulating jobs and services that meet their needs. Culture is booming. The region values its artists. They are recognised within and beyond the region. Young people are proud of their region, they invest their energy and talents in it. The elderly people's knowledge, the Algonquins' millennium-old knowledge of the land and the immigrants' cultural diversity contribute to a large extent to the development of our competencies. The population forms a rich cultural and human mosaic.

AXIS 2: A region where two peoples co-exist in a spirit of sharing and respect for the land

IN 2027... In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal communities coexist and cooperate in mutual respect. The Algonquins, key players and partners in regional development, form a healthy and proud society, within healthy communities, and enjoy a quality of life that ensures a promising future for the younger and unborn generations. They earn decent incomes and are financially self-reliant due to their involvement in the region's economic development. Young people are trained and hold gratifying jobs. The region has three recognised languages: French, Algonquin and English. Algonquin language and history are taught in several schools in the region. The Algonquin culture is thriving on the territory.

AXIS 3: A region with a sense of solidarity and justice, responsive to its citizens' needs

IN 2027... Abitibi-Témiscamingue is a mobilised and united region with all its people working together. It builds upon its human and social capital, promotes sharing and networking opportunities for individuals, groups, activity sectors, communities of interests and territories while valuing differences. People and their quality of life are at the heart of development. The impacts of poverty are monitored and controlled. Men and women enjoy the same rights and opportunities in all areas of life, and they are equally and fairly represented in decision-making bodies. Small communities have access to a wide range of nearby services. Public transit serves urban and rural communities. The region has managed to develop a network of innovative family services consistent with the principle that a healthy society must provide quality services to its people, starting at an early age. Abitibi-Témiscamingue emphasises family health, well-being and growth as the essential basis of regional development. Health problems are decreasing thanks to a well integrated health system, based on prevention and health promotion. People of all ages and socio-economic conditions benefit from facilities and services that meet their needs. Social animation models that foster wellness and development are adopted by a large number of communities.

AXIS 4 : A region that is eager to learn, knowledge-oriented and open to the world

IN 2027.... Abitibi-Témiscamingue is an innovative and creative region, aware of its potential. Education and knowledge have become the main driving forces of its social and economic vitality. Its educational institutions offer a wide variety of study and research

programs, reducing school drop-out rates and youth out-migration and fostering immigration. The region is a model of inventiveness, creativity and originality, it encourages all forms of exchanges at both national and international levels. Its higher educational institutions develop and import brainpower and processes it for the benefit of regional development and communities. Its university is a key player in high-tech research and development at the global level. The First Nations' independent university trains its own researchers and specialists who contribute to a large extent to the region's development.

AXIS 5: A healthy and responsible region, with a concern for its natural environment

IN 2027... Abitibi-Témiscamingue is the greenest and healthiest region in Quebec. It is a preferred destination for those seeking a life in balance with nature. It has a clear and common vision on land occupancy and respectful use. Recognised for its interest for its natural capital, its forests are valued in both natural and processed state. Primary natural resources exploitation operates based on resource renewal capacity. The region practices integrated natural resources management. The actions of both individual and corporate citizens respect the integrity of ecosystems and biodiversity. Through research and innovation, the region has developed an expertise it exports across the world and which makes it a leader in environmental and sustainable development issues. The environment is no longer a constraint but an economic value. Its degraded sites are reclaimed and residual materials are recovered and recycled.

AXIS 6: A region of prosperity and brainpower economy

IN 2027.... Abitibi-Témiscamingue values natural resources development. The region has developed an expertise and exports it across the world and which makes it a world leader in terms of innovation and know-how in the fields of mining, forestry and scientific research. The region's wealth is better distributed and more people work for the region's growth. Cultural vitality has fostered the implementation of high-tech companies. The region has managed to develop efficient mechanisms that allow safeguard its interests with enterprises for the benefit of the whole community. Local entrepreneurship is thriving. The region's economy is booming thanks to its innovative companies and educational institutions. A well integrated and diversified agri-food sector, adapted to the territory, feeds the region and exports its surpluses, including a large quantity of value-added and organic products. Tourism, focused on people, culture, nature and outdoor recreation, warmly welcomes tourists from across the world. Harmonious development partnership agreements are signed with neighbouring regions.

AXIS 7: A region that is self-reliant, controlling its destiny and development

IN 2027... Abitibi-Témiscamingue enjoys a high level of autonomy in terms of its development decisions and the means to implement them. It is more self-reliant in the area of education, health care, culture, energy, agri-food and value-added products. Its public agencies have real and decentralised powers, as well as human and financial resources that allow to adapt national policies to local, territorial and regional conditions. The region exercises its new powers with good judgement. Businesses are well positioned in the global economy with due regard for regional development. Each citizen feels responsible, in his own way, for doing his share for development. People, now more politicised and united, act more in terms of public interest. The territory is dynamically occupied, each MRC, each town and village has a specific local economic mission, which is recognised and complementary.