

Go away, we're closing! When land administration closes off territories instead of supporting their development. A story of a Quebec wound

Francis Roy (Canada)

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SUMMARY

In the 1960s, the Quebec government was living an upheaval. The state apparatus was undergoing a major technocratic modernization. All sectors of government intervention were affected by this "Quiet Revolution": health, education, economic and energy development, and so on. Land administration was no exception. Based on a nascent rationale for the practice of planning, the Quebec government, in conjunction with the Government of Canada, launched a vast centralized regional planning project affecting the Eastern Quebec region, which was then considered to be in decline and lacking development. This initiative, known by the acronym BAEQ (for Bureau d'aménagement de l'Est du Québec – Eastern Quebec Planning Bureau), had ambitious objectives: to review the structure of territorial organization considering real potential (primarily related to the exploitation of natural resources). Extensive characterization studies have thus been carried out to support the planning of a rational development of Eastern Quebec, with the aim of reversing the dynamic of economic decline.

However, the findings and proposed solutions were extremely harsh, showing no regard for the communities, families, or individuals living on and for the land. The prevailing planning rationale of the time dictated that several communities (villages and parishes) would be dissolved and their populations relocated. More than a hundred of these communities were targeted. An ultimatum was issued, after which the state would clear the land and reclaim land rights, converting them back into public ownership.

A strong popular reaction arose in several locations, giving rise to the "Dignity Operations" movement. Demonstrating a fierce determination to inhabit and live in their region and on their land, the populations affected by the threat of eviction sent a clear message to the government, one that still resonates today: regional and land-use planning is first and foremost done by and for the

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people. This principle remains central to current planning practices.

Finally, a dozen villages and parishes were closed around 1970, resulting in traumatic displacements for the affected populations. The inhabited lands were abandoned and left to nature, while still bearing traces of human presence. Paths, cleared areas, ruins, and cemeteries remain important reminders of this past. More than 50 years after the eviction orders, this experience continues to be a valuable source of lessons for current land administration and planning practices. And the memory of this territory is now being preserved through exhibitions, conferences, and theater. In this way, the wounds are being healed.

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