



CRITICAL FEEDBACK FOR THE AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE DRAFT

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Generally, Agenda 21 for culture was positively received by the citizens and actors in the city of Vaudreuil-Dorion. It was recognised as an important framework, capable of mobilising and ushering collectivity into the integration of culture as a motor for sustainable development. They unanimously recognise that cultural action and the population's active participation in cultural creation activities have changed the environment. They have strengthened social cohesion, senses of belonging, and helped to rebuild a proud, cohesive community. By contrast, the participants have emphasised that the text may be overly complicated and "academic". Therefore, the text is difficult to understand and be appropriated by citizens, local officials, and territorial actors alike.

The major contribution of Vaudreuil-Dorion to A21C has undoubtedly been the approach established by the "I am..." program since 2010. The city of Vaudreuil-Dorion has experienced a massive and rapid increase in population from 17,000 to 37,000 people in 20 years. This is the result of a significant influx of people from different cultures and backgrounds. This situation has created inter-community tensions, compounded by a considerable erosion of social cohesion and senses of belonging. Out of this situation was born the "I am..." program, an important cultural mediation program. Each year it boasts 600 public workshops under an umbrella of 50 flagship activities. Their objective is to recreate and strengthen senses of belonging and social cohesion by generating meaningful cultural activities and new social bonds. The program takes a very innovative approach to cultural mediation, actively involving the population in creative and cultural activities. It enables them to become genuine cultural actors and citizens in their city. It simultaneously facilitates their expression, interaction, and improved recognition of one another and their differences. Overall, what is created is a better community environment for everyone.

The "I am..." program provides a practical application of cultural rights. It enables **citizens' active participation in cultural creation** and offers a concrete way for **real cultural democracy**. These themes should be more present in A21C. The "I am..." program also gives **an important new role to artists**. It helps them engage in co-creation with citizens, and become creators and facilitators of shared knowledge for everyone. Artists thus become vital agents for rebuilding social bonds and effecting social change. Participants stressed that A21C did not leave enough room for artists, and should emphasise the importance of this role for society.

In Vaudreuil-Dorion, a place where many cultural communities are present, participants highlighted the significance of asking how each group can assert its culture and heritage, without conflict or offending one another. Through the "I am..." program, the city seeks to actively involve all citizens in **new common values**, and the development of **new common meanings and symbols**. These serve to bring together and unite the community. Everyone has the right to participate in cultural life within the capacity of citizenship, as opposed to the ghettoisation of society, **to reinvent both meanings and common meanings underlying a society's collective identity**. The culture here is not passive or neutral; it participates in, and forms part of a social project.

With regard to culture and social cohesion, the "I am..." program shows that it is **active participation** in cultural creation which enables reconstructing social links, opening new spaces for interaction and exchange, as well as the creation of community values and meanings.

With respect to governance, participants stressed the importance of **partnerships** among territorial actors, municipalities, and all sectors of society. They are essential elements of integrated action for the city. In addition there is a new, more horizontal, cultural governance model in which the municipality works with partners on the ground who magnify the impacts of their own, direct actions.

Given the philosophy of the "I am..." program, the sections on ecology and territory must further integrate the importance of citizens as **actors** in their own territories and environments. It must also fortify their **capacity to create** a harmonious space that reflects their values and identity and where they recognise and assert their identity.

In terms of culture and economy, the participants identified culture as an important part of **economic development**, and must be valued. They also stressed the importance of not just discussing the social economy, but also the economy in general. In terms of culture and technology, participants were critical of the term "smart city", believing it to be merely fashionable and unclear. For participants, this section was difficult to understand the text and was not accessible. One challenge is also to establish a **digitally accessible culture**.