

# A new network of Digital Cultural Development Agents

Claire Dumoulin

Digital Cultural Development Agent, Conseil Québécois du Patrimoine Vivant, Canada



Still from “Les 33 voleurs – Complainte traditionnelle du Québec / The 33 Thieves – Quebec traditional lament” ©Charles-Étienne Brochu.

Video: <https://youtu.be/YnSeh4EuLpQ>

In April 2019, Quebec province government (Canada) has launched a network of Digital Cultural Development Agents (DCDA). These 47 agents are employed by 56 national, sectorial and regional cultural organizations, funded by the Ministry of Culture and Communications. The network emerges from Quebec’s Digital Cultural Plan, unveiled in 2014. The funding program is planned for 3 years, enough time to impulse an important digital turn within cultural organizations.

**Keywords:** video art, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Quebec, Canada, Digital Cultural Development Agents.

The Conseil Québécois du Patrimoine Vivant (CQPV) acts as the national umbrella organization the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Quebec. It is the only ICH organization in Canada to benefit financial aid intended for digital development. Having access to such human resource will help give online visibility to the artists and artisans keeping traditions alive.

The DCDA network functions as a community of professional practice. Its original format has no other model in Canada, or throughout French language countries. All Digital Cultural Development Agents seek new ways of digital collaboration within their activity field. Sharing technological challenges can bring mutual solutions.

### **Actions for digital development**

Digital Cultural Development Agents aim to stimulate synergy between actors in cultural, digital, communications and research sectors. They watch for specific expertise, inspiring digital practices, making sure to share knowledge. They work to promote training activities in order to enhance digital skills of the cultural actors. Finally, all agents wish to develop structuring projects combining culture and digital.

Concretely, what does a DCDA do? Agents can, for instance, look for digital strategies with online training. Many affordable LMS (Learning Management System) exist out there; DCDA can help organizations chose the right one. The CQPV develops an online course to learn traditional Quebec music.

Agents can also analyse needs and issues that cultural organizations have with data. In the ICH sphere, one can find structured data in inventories made by cities or regions. Linking those inventories could benefit the public's comprehension and appreciation of local intangible cultural heritage. Previous data are also found in the customers' information events collect with ticketing services (email, postal code, etc.) For instance, if all 35 Quebec festivals related to traditions<sup>1</sup> combined together their ticketing data, group marketing could be better planned in order to diverse audiences and benefit all the network.

Digital environment changes fasts, and living heritage artisans need support. Leading NGOs need to test models of digital development and take risks with audacious digital projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2017, the Conseil québécois du patrimoine vivant puts together a year-round listing of festivals linked to Quebec cultural traditions : [www.festivals-trad.quebec](http://www.festivals-trad.quebec). With such network, tradition fans can discover new venues in other cities than those they usually visit.



Figure 1 – Still from “Le Gardien – Meunerie traditionnelle du Québec / The Gardian – Traditional Quebec Milling” ©Josiane Roberge.  
Video: [https://youtu.be/aMQ5LRp\\_Fw0](https://youtu.be/aMQ5LRp_Fw0)

### Combining traditions, arts and video

In Quebec province, intangible cultural heritage practices are listed in the *Répertoire du patrimoine culturel du Québec*.<sup>2</sup> This website brings together records with textual information, photographs and videos on built, natural, domestic or intangible heritage. The CQPV has been mandated to add content to this repertoire. Why do it the conventional way? Classic documentary videos often show interviews with bearers of tradition and place the historical context following a continuum of events. Public are used to such, sometimes, static format.

The CQPV wanted to explore new representations, un-conventional narratives (fiction, animation, drama, experimental short films, etc.) The underlying intent was to bring new publics to connect with intangible cultural heritage. And so, improbable matches were made between visual artists or short-filmmakers with eight living heritage practices: traditional folktale, eel fishing, traditional mill, lament singing, step dancing, foot tapping, harmonica music and folk-art sculpting. Videos resulting of this original process offer surprising and creatives point of view on traditional culture.

Although the videos can be found in the repertoire, the CQPV chose, in addition, to scatter all short films throughout the organization’s social networks (mainly YouTube and Facebook). While exploring un-institutional channels for the project’s broadcasting, all videos are linked by an original branding: «Culture trad Québec».

<sup>2</sup> Source : <http://www.patrimoine-culturel.gouv.qc.ca/rpcq/>



Figure 2 – Logo of the video series “Culture Trad Québec”

Here are examples from the series. Charles-Étienne Brochu, illustrator and visual artist, has brought in images «Les 33 voleurs», an ancient lament long time sang in Quebec province. His drawings give life to the song’s plot in an original way. Jimmy G. Pettigrew, a filmmaker, chose to include special effects in his video featuring a folk-art sculptor in dusty studio. Zooming in textures and using rythm, video artist Josiane Roberge created an experimental film focusing on the miller’s gestures. Simon Rodrigue, a documentary filmmaker, has used various camera angles for his video about foot tapping.





Figure 3 - Still from “Le Gosseux – Sculpture d’art Populaire du Québec / The Gosseux” – Quebec Folk Art” (CC BY) Patrick Lavallée and Jimmy G. Pettigrew. Video: <https://youtu.be/PaUGFMUvL5U>

### Discoverability and ICH

Like local performing art events, ICH initiatives do not have a great discoverability rate throughout Internet. Organizations’ websites aren’t always well equipped to allow efficient referencing (it is actually the case for CQPV’s website). Search engines algorithms (such as Google) prefer structured and linked data. Wikipedia and Wikidata offer this kind of well-ordered data that artificial intelligence can understand. Thus, long-based organizations are encouraged to ask volunteers to write articles and feed Wikidata with ICH content. The CQPV holds Wikimedia workshops in order to give digital space to Quebec tradition bearers. Not all digital measures to foster cultural discoverability are expensive and elaborate. Some small actions (free) make a big difference!

### After production, comes evaluation

The video series «Culture Trad Québec» has been digitally launched late November 2019. Second step is evaluating the project’s impact and radiance within the cultural sector, and beyond. Then comes a transfer of learnings made to other organizations (sharing experiences make us stronger).

What’s next? In spring 2020, the CQPV’s traditional music online class will come to life. And stay tuned for a podcast pilot launching in May. We will get back to you soon!



Figure 4 – Still from “Le Trésor dans le coffre – Pêche à l’anguille au Québec / Treasure in the Trunk – Eel Fishing in Quebec Province” ©David Dufresne Denis. Video: <https://youtu.be/LhhF9BPJxgA>