

Canadian Provinces' International Relations in North America

Roberto Zepeda*



Andy Clark / Reuters

This article examines Canadian provinces' international relations in North America and particularly the dimensions of the international activities of Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia, looking at the number of offices and their objectives abroad. Although Quebec continues to be the Canadian province with the greatest international activity, over recent decades, the others have gradually increased their efforts beyond their borders.

*Researcher at CISAN; rzepeda@unam.mx.

PARADIPLOMACY

The participation or involvement of sub-national governments in international affairs has been dubbed paradiplomacy. Sub-national governments like those of Canada's provinces or the United States' states establish international relations in different ways: sending trade missions abroad, creating international offices, and signing cooperation agreements with international actors like countries, private companies, international agencies, and their counterparts abroad.

All Canada’s provinces have established direct relations with states in the United States and other countries to resolve common problems, manage resources, promote economic exchange, attract investment, and foster exports. Quebec has the most prominent international relations program in terms of the funds and personnel dedicated to these activities; Alberta and British Columbia, for their part, have high levels of international links and I will be reviewing their experiences later.

QUEBEC

Quebec has been the province most active in paradiplomacy. It has a department staff of about 500 and an annual budget of Can\$100 million to deal exclusively with these activities. Since 1964, it has signed more than 700 international accords, 370 of which continue in effect, with 79 different countries. I should underline that Quebec has considerable presence abroad, with a network of 28 offices distributed in 17 countries of Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the United States.¹ Factors like the scope of its governmental jurisdiction and its unique identity inside Canada and North America have motivated Quebec to take on an international role for several decades now.²

Its activities are diversely focused: they promote Quebec’s economic interests, defend its constitutional attributes, and participate in the defense of the environment. They also

Canada’s provinces and U.S. states establish international relations in different ways: sending trade missions abroad, creating international offices, and signing cooperation agreements.

defend the province’s identity by promoting identity paradiplomacy, through which it strengthens its standing as a nation within Canada.³

It has signed more than 200 accords and arrangements with U.S. state and city governments, as well as with other public organizations. It also actively cooperates with the states along its border and with other regions of its neighbor to the south. For example, it is a member of the Council of Great Lakes Governors (CGLG), of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers’ Annual Conference (NEG/ECP), and the Southeastern United States-Canadian Provinces Alliance (SEUS-CP).

Its need to reaffirm itself on the international scene has intensified as a result of the changes in the global context. For the Quebec government, the dynamics of North American integration include dealing with transnational problems like security, energy, and the environment.⁴

Its international offices pursue different objectives, offering services and counseling, and organizing activities adapted to the characteristics of the countries they are in, as well as the companies, creators, researchers, and institutions of Quebec.⁵

TABLE 1. QUEBEC’S OFFICES WORLDWIDE

North America	Europe	Asia	South America	Africa	In International Bodies
• Atlanta	• Barcelona	• Beijing	• São Paulo	• Dakar	• Francophone and Multilateral Affairs Delegation, Paris
• Boston	• Berlin	• Hong Kong			• UNESCO
• Chicago	• Brussels	• Mumbai			
• Houston	• London	• Seoul			
• Los Angeles	• Munich	• Shanghai			
• Mexico City	• Paris	• Tokyo			
• New York	• Rome	• Qingdao			
• Silicon Valley	• Stockholm				
• Washington, D.C.					

Source: Developed by the author using data from <http://www.gouv.qc.ca/FR/Pages/Accueil.aspx>.

The province has seven general delegations, located in Brussels, London, Mexico City, Munich, New York, Paris, and Tokyo; four delegations, in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Rome; nine departments, in Barcelona, Beijing, Dakar, Hong Kong, Mumbai, São Paulo, Shanghai, Stockholm, and Washington, D. C.; six trade offices, in Atlanta, Berlin, Houston, Qingdao, Seoul, and the Silicon Valley (see Figure 1); and finally, two representations in multilateral agencies, the Francophone and Multilateral Affairs Delegation and the UNESCO.

ALBERTA

Alberta has its own Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations, whose main functions are domestic, but which also has important resources and personnel dedicated to international affairs. The province's main aim is to strengthen good relations with the United States, because that is where 80 percent of its exports go. In recent decades, Alberta has been very involved in Canada's international relations and has consistently attempted to influence Ottawa's negotiating position on energy policy, climate change, trade liberalization and agriculture. While maintaining this relatively positive relationship with the federal government, Alberta seeks to establish its own identity and represent its own interests internationally.⁶

The province has gradually increased its activities beyond the border over the last two decades. We can surmise that this increase is related to different factors and has different motivations. Alberta's prosperity stems mainly from oil and

TABLE 2. ALBERTA'S OFFICES WORLDWIDE (2016)

North America	Europe	Asia
• Mexico City	• United Kingdom	• Beijing
• Washington, D.C.	• Munich*	• Guangzhou
• Chicago*		• Hong Kong
		• Japan
		• South Korea
		• New Delhi
		• Shanghai
		• Singapore
		• Taiwan

*Note: Closed since 2015.

Source: Developed by the author using data from <http://www.albertacana.com/business/international-offices.aspx>.

In 2016, Jalisco and Nuevo León were the Mexican states with the greatest number of inter-institutional agreements with Canadian provinces.

natural gas earnings since it is the world's third producer and exporter of gas, surpassed only by Russia and Norway, and more than 60 percent of its oil is exported to the United States. In addition, its energy companies have a presence in 118 countries.⁷ On the other hand, its oil reserves, in the form of tar sands, are surpassed worldwide only by Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. And between 2010 and 2014, high crude oil prices sparked an explosion of investments to develop its deposits.

The province also has extensive international relations, with offices in Mexico, the United States, Europe, and Asia (the vast majority), and over the last 20 years, their number has doubled.

In mid-2016, this network was made up of 12 offices in 9 countries. In 2014, the province had 12 Canadian employees working abroad and 31 local residents working to promote its interests in the world.⁸ These offices play a vital role in strengthening the province's presence abroad and establish important relationships through the promotion of trade and initiatives for attracting investment. In addition, they advise Alberta-based companies to be able to reach their business objectives.

Clearly, Alberta continues to look beyond North America. Its international accords cover a broad spectrum of fields, including trade, education, culture, research, and development. From 1998 to 2010, it signed nearly 175 international agreements, of which 43 (24 percent) were with Mexico and the United States.⁹

It also participates actively in regional cooperation conferences with states of the United States and other Canadian provinces, for example in the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER), which brings together Canada's British Columbia, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and Northwest Territories, and the United States' Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Washington.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

This province merged its trade and international affairs departments; that is, paradiplomacy has been subordinated to trade interests. The province has 11 trade missions on three continents, coordinated by a central office in Vancouver,

whose main objective is to promote international exports. British Columbia's exports are higher than the national average: in 2011, Canada's total exports grew an average of 10 percent, while BC's (notably lumber and wood products and those derived from coal and copper) rose almost 14 percent.

British Columbia's paradiplomatic activity focuses on a variety of topics, ranging from trade and fiscal issues to social and cultural questions. Although at times it fosters social or cultural issues internationally, the need to protect its economic position in an increasingly competitive global economy provides the most political impetus for participating in international activities.¹⁰

The province's international activities have increased considerably in recent years, focusing on setting up links with neighboring states in the Pacific Northwest; for example, with its U.S. neighbors like Washington and Alaska in the framework of the PNWER. Other examples are California, Oregon, and Washington with regard to issues like climate change and clean energy.

In general, British Columbia's paradiplomatic relations with states in the U.S. continue to be very important, although it seeks to expand its trade along the whole Pacific Coast. From 1992 to 2010, British Columbia signed 52 international agreements with different countries; the main country is the United States, with which it signed 24; but in the same period it also signed 12 cooperation agreements on educational issues with China and Korea.¹¹

COOPERATION AGREEMENTS WITH MEXICAN STATES

In early 2016, the specific cooperation agreements between states of Mexico and Canadian provinces came to 25.¹² The main areas of interest are health, education, science, technology, training, sports, the environment, pollution, the economy, industry, trade, tourism, culture, and agriculture. Jalisco and Nuevo León were the Mexican states with the greatest number of inter-institutional agreements signed with Canadian

provinces, while the most active Canadian provinces were Alberta and Quebec.

Jalisco has agreements with Alberta and Manitoba that include a temporary worker program as well as other, safe, well-structured accords on migration.¹³ The Jalisco government highlights cooperation projects in the area of fire-fighting. It has also set up the Center for Value Added, a modern, experimental plant with labs and company incubators to position agricultural products on the national and international markets, which has saved the state government more than 20 years of research. This state in Western Mexico also signed a cooperation agreement in 2009 covering diverse topics such as education, cultural industries, animation, the economy, tourism, and information technologies.

Nuevo León is another of the most dynamic states in Mexico; it has agreements with British Columbia on technology and forestry and with Quebec on education, culture, and the economy.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, nation-states are no longer the predominant actors in international relations; a variety of actors compete to make decisions, creating spaces for governance. Sub-national governments have become some of the increasingly important actors in global and regional governance.

International relations of Canada's provinces have increased not only in North America, but also in other regions. Along these lines, a very important network of relations exists between Canadian provinces and U.S. states. Cooperation between these sub-national governments has become institutionalized through conferences, forums, and alliances that meet regularly to make public policy decisions. Canada's paradiplomatic activity is most evident in Quebec, although this trend has been followed by other provinces, outstanding among which are Alberta and British Columbia.

Canadian provinces' international activities mainly center on economic interests like promoting exports and attracting foreign investment. However, they also include close cooperation with states in the United States, promoting solutions for common environmental, fishing, water management, health, transportation, security, educational, and science and technology issues.

For its part, some states in Mexico like Jalisco and Nuevo León have developed numerous international activities. How-

All Canada's provinces
have established direct relations
with states in the United States and other countries
to resolve common problems.

ever, it is clear that Canadian provinces have established more international relations, earmarking more resources to them than their counterparts in the United States and Mexico have.

The integration of North America has been threatened by Donald Trump becoming U.S. president. However, other forms of integration can move ahead through the activities by sub-national governments on several fronts that can foster economic integration through sub-national networks. ■■

NOTES

¹ Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie, "Rapport annuel de gestion 2014-2015," Gouvernement du Québec, 2015, <http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Publications/Rapport-annuel-gestion>.

² Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie, "Quebec's International Policy 2006," http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/Content/documents/en/Politique_en.pdf.

³ Kim Richard Nossal, Stéphane Roussel, and Stéphane Paquin, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Montreal and Ontario, Canada: McGill-Queen's Press/MQUP, 2015).

⁴ Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie, 2006, op. cit.

⁵ Gouvernement du Québec, "Quebec offices abroad," 2015, <http://www.international.gouv.qc.ca/en/accueil>.

⁶ Richard Vengroff and Jason Rich, "Foreign Policy by Other Means: Paradiplomacy and the Canadian Provinces," in Patrick James, Michaud Nelson, and Marc J. O'Reilly, eds., *Handbook of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2006), pp. 105-130.

⁷ A. S. Kuznetsov, *Theory and Practice of Paradiplomacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁸ Government of Alberta, "Alberta International Offices 2013-14," *Alberta International Offices Business Report*, 2014, http://economic.alberta.ca/documents/InternationalOfficesBusinessReport_2013-14.pdf.

⁹ James P. Allan and Richard Vengroff, "Paradiplomacy: States and Provinces in the Emerging Governance Structure of North America," in Jeffrey Ayres and Laura MacDonald, eds., *North America in Question: Regional Integration in an Era of Economic Turbulence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Andrew Petter, "Canadian Paradiplomacy in Practice: Confessions of a Paradiplomat," presentation made to the 2006 "International Relations of the Regions: Sub-national Actors, Para-diplomacy and Multi-level Governance" conference in Zaragoza, http://www.unizar.es/union_europea/files/documen/conferencia%2010.2006/Petter-english_final.pdf.

¹¹ James P. Allan and Richard Vengroff, op. cit.

¹² Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, "Coordinación política," 2016, www.coordinacionpolitica.sre.gob.mx/, accessed in March 2016.

¹³ Gobierno de Jalisco, *Relaciones internacionales de Jalisco. La estrategia de la Dirección de Asuntos Internacionales del despacho del C. Gobernador* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Gobierno de Jalisco, 2013).