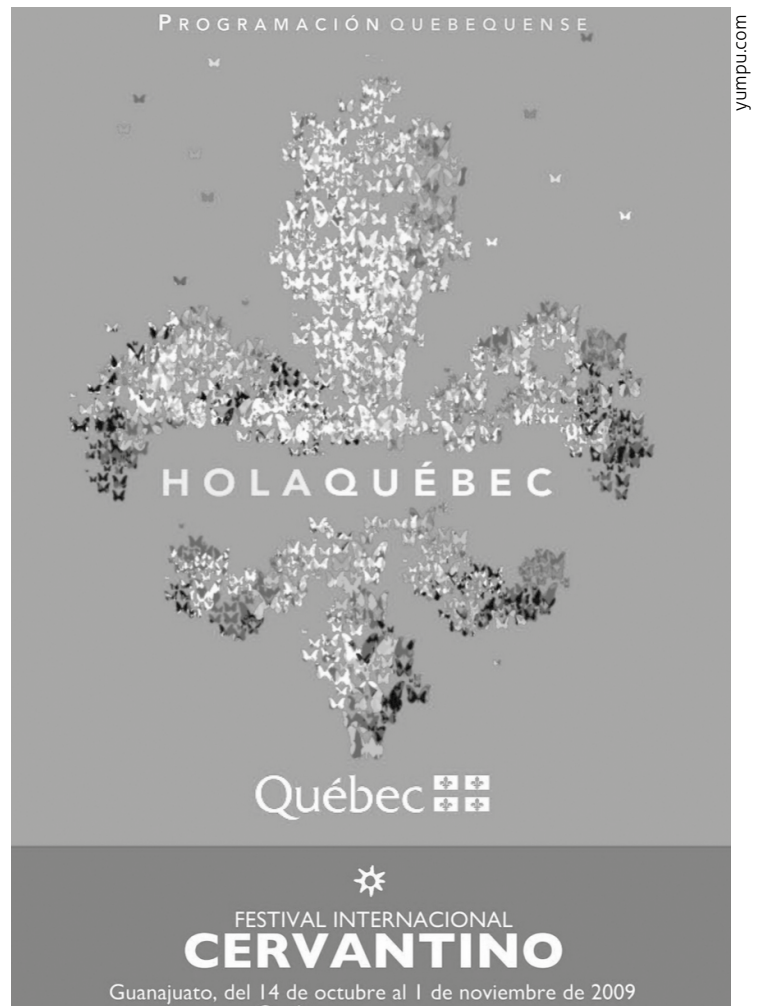


Roberto Zepeda\*

# Mexico-Quebec Paradiplomatic Relations



## Introduction

International relations between sub-national states and countries play a fundamental role in the configuration of contemporary global politics in different spheres. In this context, relations between the province of Quebec and Mexico are a noteworthy example of decentralized, paradiplomatic international cooperation that has deepened with agreements between institutions of higher education, characterized by student and academic mobility and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

This article explores and analyzes these relations in the economic, educational, and cultural spheres, among others. It examines their economic dimension, underlining the importance of trade links and bilateral agreements like the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

This accord, which follows on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), is an institutional framework for the exchange of goods and services. The article also underlines priority sectors of collaboration, as well as its impact on economic development and the regional integration of subnational spaces.

## Quebec's Paradiplomacy

Quebec can be considered one of the world's most active subnational governments on the international stage. For more than half a century, it has followed its own parallel policy to that of the federal government, a practice known as paradiplomacy. According to the province's Ministry of International Relations and La Francophonie (MRIF), it has a budget of more than US\$100 million and almost

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500 employees, 200 of whom work abroad. In 2022, it had thirty-three offices abroad in eighteen countries. It has signed almost 800 international agreements with sovereign or federated states in more than eighty countries, and half of these continue to be in force. Most are with sovereign nations like France, the United States, and Mexico, among others. The most important cover workforce mobility, education, social security, telecommunications, and the environment. Recently, the MRIF has been part of the Canadian delegations in many international negotiations, for example, in the free trade discussions between Canada and the European Union.

Quebec's paradiplomacy is motivated by three factors: federalism, nationalism, and globalization. The first drives its paradiplomatic commitment in the international community, basing its actions on the structure of the Canadian federation. The second basis for this activity can be linked to nationalism: a strong correlation exists between the speed-up and intensification of its international commitment since the 1960s and the evolution of its nationalism and political life. The third factor is globalization and the province's desire to occupy a place in the world. Its nationalism, previously protectionist and autarkic, has become a sustained, significant international commitment that argues for free trade and international expansion.

## The Quebec Government Office in Mexico

Quebec inaugurated its office in Mexico in 1980 to promote the province's interests with different Mexican institutions in areas like the economy, education, culture, and immigration. It has fostered a mature, productive, dynamic relationship, strengthened by both NAFTA and the USMCA. It is the only Canadian province with its own official rep-

resentation here. For these four decades, then, it has established interinstitutional cooperation agreements in different spheres and has opened regional offices in subnational states such as Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Querétaro and it also has collaborative links to Nuevo León.

The cooperation between Quebec and Mexico has also institutionalized through the creation of permanent mechanisms like the Quebec-Mexico Working Group (1982) and the Quebec-Jalisco Working Group (2009). These have served as platforms for dialogue and joint actions and made it possible to support more than 325 cooperation projects in key areas such as education, culture, research, and innovation. This has promoted the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices and has also contributed to the construction of permanent links based on trust and decentralized collaboration between states and regions.

Quebec's belonging to the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) underlines its commitment to the promotion and preservation of the French language and this community's cultural values. For its part, Mexico participates as an IOF observer state since November 2014. This status offers it opportunities to strengthen ties and collaborate with member states in sectors such as education, culture, and multilateral cooperation. In addition, learning French in Mexico creates opportunities for dialogue, cooperation, and cultural and academic exchange with Quebec.

Quebec has also shown outstanding commitment to protecting the environment, promoting an international agenda focused on the struggle against climate change. This has deepened its ties with Mexico because both countries recognize the importance of facing this global challenge jointly. In that sense, they are promoting the transition toward a more low-carbon, sustainable economy, with a shared approach to the search for innovative solutions for mitigating its effects.

Suffice it to remember that in October 2015, Mexico and Quebec formalized a commitment in this field, the Agreement of Understanding, that defines areas for collaboration, strategies, and programs. This instrument promotes the exchange of knowledge and best practices and emphasizes multilateral decentralized cooperation (subnational actions), recognizing the need at the same time for a global, coordinated response to the most urgent challenges, based on multilevel governance.

## Mexico-Quebec Economic Relations

Economic relations have evolved, becoming a fundamental pillar of this link. Mexico is Quebec's fourth largest trade partner worldwide and its main one in Latin America, playing a crucial role in its international strategy. All this is backed up by a network of more than 570 Quebec companies operating in our country. One significant piece of information is that in 2019, trade reached Can\$6.5 billion, of which Can\$1.8 billion were exports from Quebec and Can\$4.7 billion were Mexican exports to Quebec.

Since 1994, Quebec exports to Mexico have increased about twenty-fold, while its imports from Mexico have increased six-fold. We could say that the predominant sectors in this economic relationship range from the aerospace industry to tourism, including bio-food, energy, the environment, and information and communications technologies, among others.

Outstanding in the aerospace sector is Bombardier, headquartered in Montreal, but present in twenty-eight countries. It is one of the leaders in the rail industry, with more than 100,000 railcars and locomotives sold and installed around the world, including those currently being used in the Mexico City's subway system and in other Latin American and European countries. In 2010, it set up a manufacturing plant in Querétaro, from where it has expanded operations.

## Cultural Relations

Relations in the cultural sphere have been very dynamic. In 2018, more than 150 Quebec companies and artists performed in Mexico: on average, one production every other day. In addition, Quebec participates constantly in very important cultural events in Mexico. It has been the guest of honor at events such as the International Book Fair, the Cervantino Festival, the May Cultural Festival, and the Guadalajara International Film Festival, showing its commitment to cultural exchange and promotion of the arts and literature.

The Artists Residency Exchange Programme has been operating since 1999, promoted by the Quebec Council of the Arts and Letters (CALQ) and Mexico's National Fund for Culture and the Arts (FONCA). This program has made it possible for more than 100 Mexican and Quebecois

artists to participate in cultural exchanges, artists' residencies, and creative collaborations between the two. This has contributed to the enrichment of the cultural scenes in both places, facilitating the creation of new works, intercultural learning, and the strengthening of ad hoc communities.

All of this continues to be a fundamental pillar of paradiplomatic relations in an increasingly interconnected, globalized world.

## Educational Exchange

Educational exchange has consolidated in recent decades as more than 120 agreements about exchange and cooperation among institutions of higher learning have been forged to facilitate two-way academic and cultural flow. This has promoted student and teacher exchanges between Mexican and Quebecois institutions. Thanks to the support from the Quebec government and its educational institutions, Mexican students have the opportunity to enjoy academic and research stays and to do graduate work every year, enriching their training in a competitive international setting.

In 2019, Montreal was recognized as the best university city in the Americas and the sixth best in the world by the Quacquarelly Symonds Institute. This prestigious honor underlines the dynamism and quality of its educational offering, consolidating it as an attractive destination for international students. Its curriculum is strengthened by the creation of chairs specializing in topics such as contemporary Quebec, which promote research into the province's society, culture, and politics.

In addition, Quebec and Mexico promote scientific associations and technological cooperation among research institutions, the private and productive sectors, and strategic and/or cutting-edge areas such as artificial intelligence and biotechnologies, contributing to

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socioeconomic development in a globalized, competitive context.

Lastly, the Quebec Government Office in Mexico is supported by the National Employment Service to recruit temporary workers and is associated with fifteen branches of the *Alliance Française* in Mexico, allowing candidates to learn the language as they prepare for their stay in Quebec.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the paradiplomatic relations between Quebec and Mexico cover different spheres, from the economy and education to culture and migration. In the economic sphere, they have robust trade relations, as shown in the exports and imports of goods and services bolstered by the USMCA. Outstanding priority sectors in this trade and productive relationship include aerospace, transportation, energy, and tourism, which are incentives to economic development and innovation. In short, these

relations are characterized by actions that contribute to the strengthening of quite dynamic bilateral ties based on mutual respect, creating the basis for even closer collaboration in the future. **MM**

## Further Reading

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