

The Geographic Dispersion of Aboriginals in Quebec and Its Economic Limitations

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the state of economic activity in Aboriginal Quebec, Canada, focusing on the size of settlements both on-reserve and off-reserve. Size is an important variable in understanding the economic possibilities of a community. Data is also presented for off-reserve Aboriginals living in big cities and in smaller towns.

Findings show there are relatively few Indigenous people in Quebec and that they are scattered across many distinct nations. Most Indigenous people on-reserve live in very small settlements. Most towns in Quebec hold an Indigenous community, albeit not necessarily visible. Most Indigenous people off-reserve live in larger centres (Greater Montreal, Gatineau, Quebec City). The Outaouais region, on the north-shore of the Ottawa River, is a unique part of Quebec with its high percentage of Indigenous populations living off-reserve.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the geographic dispersion of the Aboriginal nations of the province of Quebec and discusses some of the economic limitations caused by the small size of many of these communities. The focus on this particular province comes from the author's own professional situation. Teaching economics at Kiuna Institution, a pre-university college,¹ led me to search for data relevant for my students, whose Aboriginal backgrounds include Kanienkehaka (Mohawk), Anicinabe (Algonquin), Abenaki, Innu (Montagnais), Atikamekw, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Wendat (Huron) and Eeyou (Cree).²

¹ Kiuna is a "centre d'études collégiales", a satellite school affiliated to Dawson College and the Cegep d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue. It is run by the Conseil en éducation des Premières Nations (CEPN), and is located in Odanak, an Abenaki community settled along the Saint-François river, near the mouth of the Saint-Lawrence.

² For the time being, our school has not had the pleasure to enroll Inuit students from Nunavik, or elsewhere.

Aboriginal cultural diversity is quite broad in Quebec. This diversity may be somewhat unique to Quebec, one of Canada's provinces with the highest variety of Aboriginal nations (11), whilst having a very low count of Aboriginals overall (1.8 percent). The portrait of Aboriginals in Quebec is also unique in that many speak their native languages, which cover three distinct language groups (Algonic, Iroquoian, Inuit). Many also speak French and/or English, and are not covered by the "numbered" treaties of Ontario and Western Canada.

The economic situation of Aboriginals in Quebec is also very broadly diverse. Some of the poorest living conditions are found here, along with some of the highest living standards. The scale of the variation is impressive, and allows clues into the proper policies needed to fix some of the long-standing development issues Aboriginals face in Canada.

The first section will cover a short description of the populations of Aboriginals in Quebec. The second section presents the size of each First Nations/Inuit community. The third section will present data for off-reserve Aboriginals living in big cities. The fourth section presents data for smaller towns. Finally, the discussion and conclusions are presented in the fifth section.

1. IDENTITY FIGURES

The most important resource of any economy is its labour force, which conversely also acts as the most important force of consumption. The labour force is however contingent on demographics. For this reason, we start with a look at how many Aboriginals live in this country. Aboriginal populations are not absent of the Canadian labour market.

According to Statistics Canada's 2011 Census, Aboriginal population was 1,400,685 in 2011. They accounted for 4.3 percent of the total population of Canada. In Quebec, Aboriginals count for 141,915 people, which is 1.8 percent of the province's population.

This obviously means that the economic and political clout of Aboriginals vary from province to province. Their demographic weight is higher in the Western Provinces.³ Aboriginals are a majority population in Nunavut (86.3 %), and Northwest Territories (51.9 %). They are very present in Yukon (23.1 %), Manitoba (16.7 %) and Saskatchewan (15.6 %).

| Aboriginal Group | Quebec | Percentage | Canada | Percentage |
|------------------|---------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Inuit | 12,772 | 8.9 | 59,115 | 4.2 |
| Metis | 35,478 | 25.0 | 418,380 | 29.9 |
| First Nations | 93,664 | 66.1 | 923,190 | 65.9 |
| TOTAL | 141,915 | 100.0 | 1,400,685 | 100.0 |

³ Tables and graphs from <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1370438978311/1370439050610>

2. COMMUNITIES AND RESERVES

Aboriginal communities in Quebec range in size but would usually be termed the size of a village or small town. Their population ranges from as little as 306 (Wôlinak) to 10,336 (Kahnawake) according to 2012 data collated by the Quebec government, from the federal Registry of Indians. (See Tables 2 and 3.)

One must consider that both Cree and Inuit are officially not considered “Indians” under the Indian Act. Neither nation refers to its settlements as “Indian Reserves”. The Cree were removed from the Act when they signed the Northern Quebec and James Bay Agreement in 1975. Their villages are termed Category I land. The Inuit were never considered “Indians”, their settlements are termed municipalities under Quebec law (Code municipal).

Graph 1 shows that half of the communities (29 out of 60), are inhabited by less than a thousand people. This is the case of places like Pakuashipi, Mingan, Kuujjuarapik, Eastmain, and Ouje-Bougoumou.⁴ When villages have 300 or so inhabitants, it becomes difficult to provide basic economic services such as schools, health centres, sanitation and public utilities. Even with a village size of 2000 people, it is difficult to sustain a high school, a trade college, and a competitive marketplace for groceries, gas and pharmacy.

Graph 1 also shows that a good third of the communities are between 1,000 and 2,000 in population. These “mid-sized” communities are such as Inukjuak, Wemotaci, and Gesgapegiag. A few communities are large enough to be considered large villages (between 2,000 and 5,000 population). These are places like Waswanipi, Odanak, Kanasatake, Manawan, Waskaganish, Kitigan Zibi, Listuguj, Mistissini, Betsiamites, Wendake, Chisasibi, and Uashat-Maliotenam.

Only a handful of communities are larger than 5,000 people. These are Akwesasne (5,528 on the Québec side), Mashteuiatsh (6,176, but only a third live on reserve), and Kahnawake (10,336).

⁴ Keep in mind that on one hand, some of these numbers may even be over-estimating populations. Many Aboriginals live off-reserve, but when time comes, they may declare themselves to live on reserve for various reasons. Their presence off-reserve may be temporary (studies, health, etc.). On the other hand, the data might also under-estimate populations. Many non-Aboriginals live in these communities and are not included in Table 2 — Population of First Nations communities, and Table 3 — Population of Inuit communities.. These numbers come from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the North, Indian Register.

TABLE 2
Population of First Nations communities, according to Nation, 2012

| First Nation | Communities | On-Reserve | Off-Reserve | Total Aboriginal Population |
|---|----------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Abenaki | Odanak | 337 | 1,934 | 2,271 |
| | Wôlinak | 74 | 232 | 306 |
| | TOTAL | 411 | 2,166 | 2,577 |
| Anicinabe (Algonquin) | Hunter's Point | 10 | 212 | 222 |
| | Kebaowek | 276 | 675 | 951 |
| | Kitcisakik | 407 | 62 | 469 |
| | Kitigan Zibi | 1,593 | 1,428 | 3,021 |
| | Lac-Rapide | 571 | 141 | 712 |
| | Lac Simon | 1,583 | 329 | 1,912 |
| | Pikogan | 553 | 443 | 996 |
| | Timiskaming | 641 | 1,285 | 1,926 |
| | Winneway | 456 | 361 | 817 |
| | TOTAL | 6,090 | 4,936 | 11,026 |
| Attikamekw | Manawan | 2,227 | 361 | 2,588 |
| | Obedjiwan | 2,254 | 443 | 2,697 |
| | Wemotaci | 1,396 | 351 | 1,747 |
| | TOTAL | 5,877 | 1,155 | 7,032 |
| Cree | Chisasibi | 4,090 | 43 | 4,133 |
| | Eastmain | 684 | 32 | 716 |
| | Mistissini | 3,563 | 128 | 3,691 |
| | Nemiscau | 720 | 51 | 771 |
| | Oujé-Bougoumou | 753 | 67 | 820 |
| | Waskaganish | 2,290 | 481 | 2,771 |
| | Waswanipi | 1,768 | 411 | 2,179 |
| | Wemindji | 1,413 | 68 | 1,481 |
| | Whapmagoostui | * | * | 921 |
| TOTAL | 15,281 | 1,281 | 17,483 | |
| Huron-Wendat | Wendake | 1,494 | 2,351 | 3,845 |
| Innu | Betsiamites | 2,907 | 937 | 3,844 |
| | Essipit | 198 | 441 | 639 |
| | La Romaine | 1,055 | 43 | 1,098 |
| | Mashteuiatsh | 2,082 | 4,094 | 6,176 |
| | Matimekosh-Lac-John | 783 | 112 | 895 |
| | Mingan | 553 | 26 | 579 |
| | Natashquan | 969 | 79 | 1,048 |
| | Pakuashipi | 347 | * | 349 |
| | Uashat-Malotienam | 3,258 | 934 | 4,192 |
| | TOTAL | 12,152 | 6,668 | 18,820 |
| Maliseet | Cacouna et Whitworth | 0 | 1,102 | 1,102 |
| Mi'kmaq | Gespeg | * | * | 643 |
| | Gesgapegiag | 672 | 740 | 1,412 |
| | Listuguj | 2,086 | 1,586 | 3,672 |
| | TOTAL | 2,758 | 2,326 | 5,727 |
| Kaniienkeha'ka (Mohawk) | Akwesasne (Qc only) | 5,423 | 105 | 5,528 |
| | Kahnawake | 7,745 | 2,591 | 10,336 |
| | Kanesatake | 1,383 | 938 | 2,321 |
| | TOTAL | 14,551 | 3,634 | 18,185 |
| Naskapi | Kawawachikamach | 857 | 313 | 1,170 |
| Status Indians Not Affiliated With a Nation | | * | * | 124 |
| Total First Nations Population | | 59,471 | 25,932 | 87,091 |

Source: Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec. http://www.autochtones.gouv.qc.ca/nations/population_en.htm

3. OFF-RESERVE IN THE BIG CITIES

What about Aboriginals living off-reserve? According to census data, most of them live in the larger cities. Table 4 shows the population of city dwellers in Quebec who declared being from Aboriginal “ancestry”.⁵

The largest group of these is in Montreal, but they only represent 2.2 percent of the population. With Laval and Longueuil, there are 51,855 Aboriginal people in the metro area. Quebec City, Gatineau, Sherbrooke and Saguenay also have larger Aboriginal populations.

Keep in mind here that these data are coded as “Aboriginal ancestry”, which is a way to self-identify as Aboriginal, if you have some lineage.

The census also defines “Aboriginal identity” in a much more strict way. For example, in Montreal, Aboriginal population drops to 9,510 when measured as “identity.” This includes only those who have a federally recognized status as First Nations, Inuit⁶, or Métis.

Again, Laval and Longueuil are at the top of the chart. Quebec City and Gatineau, both government towns, are in high standing. Among the Aboriginals, the First Nations usually outnumber the Métis and Inuit. Exception in Saguenay, where the Métis are the majority.

TABLE 4
Aboriginal Ancestry Populations in Quebec Cities, Ranked by Size of City, 2011

| Location | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Total | Percent Aboriginal |
|--------------------------|------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Montreal | 36,270 | 1,576,375 | 1,612,645 | 2.2% |
| Quebec City | 14,300 | 488,295 | 502,600 | 2.8% |
| Laval | 7,450 | 385,270 | 392,725 | 1.9% |
| Gatineau | 19,910 | 241,755 | 261,665 | 7.6% |
| Longueuil | 8,135 | 219,835 | 227,970 | 3.6% |
| Sherbrooke | 5,920 | 144,330 | 150,255 | 3.9% |
| Saguenay | 5,755 | 135,580 | 141,335 | 4.1% |
| Lévis | 3,130 | 132,700 | 135,835 | 2.3% |
| Trois-Rivières | 3,620 | 123,355 | 126,975 | 2.9% |
| Terrebonne | 3,385 | 102,225 | 105,605 | 3.2% |
| Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu | 3,685 | 86,695 | 90,380 | 4.1% |
| Repentigny | 2,275 | 79,090 | 81,370 | 2.8% |
| Brossard | 1,355 | 77,430 | 78,790 | 1.7% |
| Drummondville | 2,300 | 67,025 | 69,325 | 3.3% |
| Saint-Jérôme | 2,770 | 63,735 | 66,500 | 4.2% |
| Granby | 2,115 | 59,365 | 61,480 | 3.4% |
| Blainville | 1,475 | 51,590 | 53,070 | 2.8% |
| Saint-Hyacinthe | 1,555 | 49,440 | 50,995 | 3.0% |
| Shawinigan | 1,530 | 46,500 | 48,035 | 3.2% |
| Châteauguay | 1,750 | 43,400 | 45,150 | 3.9% |

⁵ The census data was downloaded by the author who proceeded to table the data.

⁶ Doubts may be raised about the accuracy of the data, especially concerning the Inuit in Montreal. The figure here seems very low.

TABLE 5
Aboriginal Identity Populations in Quebec Cities, Ranked by Size of City, 2011

| Location | Inuit | Metis | First Nations | Total Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Total Population | Percent Aboriginal |
|----------------------|-------|-------|---------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Quebec City | 100 | 1,770 | 2,430 | 4,630 | 497,960 | 502,590 | 0.9% |
| Laval | 55 | 820 | 1,265 | 2,330 | 390,395 | 392,725 | 0.6% |
| Gatineau | 110 | 4,025 | 4,625 | 9,065 | 252,605 | 261,670 | 3.5% |
| Longueuil | 45 | 645 | 1,330 | 2,225 | 225,745 | 227,970 | 1.0% |
| Sherbrooke | 0 | 480 | 765 | 1,350 | 148,905 | 150,255 | 0.9% |
| Saguenay | 20 | 2,235 | 1,120 | 3,545 | 137,785 | 141,330 | 2.5% |
| Lévis | 0 | 310 | 345 | 745 | 135,090 | 135,835 | 0.5% |
| Trois-Rivières | 0 | 565 | 805 | 1,425 | 125,550 | 126,975 | 1.1% |
| Terrebonne | 0 | 130 | 555 | 740 | 104,865 | 105,605 | 0.7% |
| Saint-Jean-Richelieu | 0 | 235 | 555 | 855 | 89,525 | 90,380 | 0.9% |
| Repentigny | 0 | 235 | 300 | 570 | 80,800 | 81,370 | 0.7% |
| Brossard | 0 | 125 | 165 | 310 | 78,480 | 78,790 | 0.4% |
| Drummondville | 0 | 240 | 265 | 585 | 68,745 | 69,330 | 0.8% |
| Saint-Jérôme | 0 | 290 | 355 | 680 | 65,820 | 66,500 | 1.0% |
| Granby | 0 | 145 | 245 | 425 | 61,055 | 61,480 | 0.7% |
| Blainville | 20 | 120 | 255 | 415 | 52,660 | 53,075 | 0.8% |
| Saint-Hyacinthe | 55 | 60 | 250 | 390 | 50,605 | 50,995 | 0.8% |
| Shawinigan | 0 | 190 | 370 | 585 | 47,450 | 48,035 | 1.2% |
| Châteauguay | 70 | 140 | 525 | 740 | 44,415 | 45,155 | 1.6% |

4. OFF-RESERVE IN THE SMALL TOWNS

Some smaller cities in Quebec have a high proportion of Aboriginals, and usually hold a strategic geography concerning these populations. Using ancestry data, a small town like Fort-Coulonge, in the Outaouais region, shows a surprising level of Aboriginal population at 53.7 percent. It seems to be the only city in Quebec where a majority of the population is of Aboriginal ancestry.

Most of the cities listed in the Table 6 are neighbouring Aboriginal reservations, such as Maniwaki, Oka, Chandler, Les Escoumins, La Tuque, Sept-Îles, Roberval, Port-Cartier, Rouyn-Noranda, and Chibougamau.

Using identity data, the percentages fall as shown in Table 7. However, Fort-Coulonge still merits attention. With a share of 32.6 percent Aboriginal identity, it is really a unique town in Quebec demographics. The cities of the valleys of the Ottawa and Gatineau rivers (Outaouais region) stand out. Maniwaki, Pontiac, Cantley, La Pêche, Val-des-Monts, and finally Gatineau, are in the top 20 list of Quebec cities. This is a testament of the presence of Anicinabe in the Ottawa Valley. One manifestation of this is the Alliance autochtone du Québec, whose main office is in Gatineau. This federally recognized organization represents the interests of off-reserve Aboriginals who may not be included in the Indian Registry, or be self-identified as Métis. On the Ontario side, this presence was recognized recently by the inclusion of off-reserve Aboriginals in a 2012 land-settlement deal between the province of Ontario, the federal government and Algonquins. On the Quebec side, the absence of

TABLE 6
Aboriginal Ancestry Populations in Quebec Towns,
Ranked by Share of Aboriginals, 2011

| Community/City | Aboriginal Population | Non-Aboriginal Population | Total Population | Percent Aboriginal |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Fort-Coulonge | 650 | 560 | 1,210 | 53.7% |
| Maniwaki | 955 | 2,810 | 3,765 | 25.4% |
| Rivière-Rouge | 665 | 3,690 | 4,360 | 15.3% |
| Pontiac | 805 | 4,815 | 5,615 | 14.3% |
| Chandler | 870 | 6,700 | 7,570 | 11.5% |
| Oka | 405 | 3,400 | 3,805 | 10.6% |
| Val-des-Monts | 1,095 | 9,320 | 10,410 | 10.5% |
| Les Escoumins | 180 | 1,795 | 1,980 | 9.1% |
| La Tuque | 965 | 10,160 | 11,125 | 8.7% |
| Cantley | 800 | 9,080 | 9,880 | 8.1% |
| Mont-Laurier | 1,075 | 12,320 | 13,395 | 8.0% |
| La Pêche | 600 | 6,885 | 7,480 | 8.0% |
| Gatineau | 19,910 | 241,755 | 261,665 | 7.6% |
| Sept-Îles | 1,920 | 23,420 | 25,335 | 7.6% |
| Roberval | 710 | 9,015 | 9,720 | 7.3% |
| Port-Cartier | 450 | 6,075 | 6,530 | 6.9% |
| Dolbeau-Mistassini | 885 | 12,805 | 13,690 | 6.5% |
| Rouyn-Noranda | 2,355 | 37,635 | 39,990 | 5.9% |
| Chibougamau | 430 | 7,050 | 7,480 | 5.7% |
| Salaberry-de-Valleyfield | 2,225 | 36,505 | 38,725 | 5.7% |

TABLE 7
Aboriginal Identity Populations in Quebec Towns,
Ranked by Share of Aboriginals, 2011

| Location | Inuit | Metis | First Nations | Total Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Total Population | Percent Aboriginal |
|--------------------|-------|-------|---------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Fort-Coulonge | 0 | 290 | 65 | 395 | 815 | 1,210 | 32.6% |
| Maniwaki | 0 | 340 | 215 | 565 | 3,200 | 3,765 | 15.0% |
| Les Escoumins | 0 | 210 | 70 | 290 | 1,690 | 1,980 | 14.6% |
| Pontiac | 0 | 490 | 140 | 685 | 4,930 | 5,615 | 12.2% |
| Oka | 0 | 30 | 290 | 330 | 3,475 | 3,805 | 8.7% |
| La Tuque | 0 | 315 | 475 | 960 | 10,160 | 11,120 | 8.6% |
| Rivière-Rouge | 0 | 265 | 80 | 355 | 4,010 | 4,365 | 8.1% |
| Roberval | 0 | 315 | 375 | 720 | 9,000 | 9,720 | 7.4% |
| Sept-Îles | 50 | 990 | 495 | 1,560 | 23,775 | 25,335 | 6.2% |
| Port-Cartier | 40 | 220 | 60 | 370 | 6,155 | 6,525 | 5.7% |
| Dolbeau-Mistassini | 0 | 580 | 125 | 725 | 12,960 | 13,685 | 5.3% |
| La Pêche | 0 | 215 | 130 | 350 | 7,125 | 7,475 | 4.7% |
| Gaspé | 0 | 420 | 220 | 650 | 14,085 | 14,735 | 4.4% |
| Cantley | 0 | 225 | 190 | 425 | 9,450 | 9,875 | 4.3% |
| Val-des-Monts | 0 | 175 | 225 | 415 | 9,995 | 10,410 | 4.0% |
| Chibougamau | 0 | 155 | 100 | 295 | 7,185 | 7,480 | 3.9% |
| Chandler | 0 | 220 | 50 | 285 | 7,285 | 7,570 | 3.8% |
| Gatineau | 110 | 4,025 | 4,625 | 9,065 | 252,605 | 261,670 | 3.5% |
| Saint-Félicien | 0 | 215 | 75 | 305 | 9,700 | 10,005 | 3.0% |
| Val-d'Or | 0 | 395 | 405 | 850 | 30,370 | 31,220 | 2.7% |

reserves near Ottawa-Gatineau, or upstream the Ottawa River, should not lead one to believe in the absence of Anicinabe peoples in the area.

Another trend is the Métis-First Nations issue. In the smaller cities, there are generally more Métis, than First Nations (Status Indians). This was not the case in the larger cities, where First Nations were the majority of Aboriginals.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Those who are interested in furthering the economic development of Indigenous peoples in Canada will find it interesting to see that we can sum up a few facts for the case of Quebec.

- There are relatively few Indigenous people in Quebec, and they are scattered across many distinct nations.
- Most Indigenous peoples on-reserve live in very small settlements.
- Most towns have an Indigenous community, albeit not necessarily visible.
- Most Indigenous peoples off-reserve live in the three larger centres (Greater Montreal, Gatineau, Quebec City).
- The Outaouais region, on the north-shore of the Ottawa river, is a unique part of Quebec with its high percentage of Indigenous populations living off-reserve.

What can these findings be helpful to understand? Firstly, any local authority should be interested in the demographics of his or her locality. Indigenous peoples have needs in terms of public services such as health care, education, and justice, which have long gone underserved, both on, and off, reserves.

Secondly, those in charge of economic development may find it beneficial to see that opportunities lay where numbers warrant activity. One may be tempted to recommend that the size of settlements be increased to allow for the implementation of public services on a feasible scale. When villages grow to 3,000 people or more, it becomes much easier to provide schools, health care, and justice services.

For example, it is not usually possible to provide a local high school in a community where the student body population, aged 12 to 17, is less than 400. This means that most villages of fewer than 3,000 people cannot sustain a high school, and therefore forego the employment opportunities in the education sector, to say nothing of the social and economic benefits of a locally determined and culturally appropriate education. The same reasoning applies to health care provision, courts of law, and private-sector services such as Internet services, grocery stores, restaurants, and auto mechanics.

Thirdly, those in charge of urban issues should appreciate the information. Authorities in Montreal and Gatineau should recognize the importance of setting up projects of all sorts which could benefit Indigenous peoples already living in these cities. The cities must also find ways to allow Indigenous cultures to thrive, for example with restaurants, hotels, tourism facilities, cultural centres, Indigenous-run museums, etc. Such initiatives are already underway in many places, these numbers can maybe help convince authorities of the relevance of such projects.

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