



# 7

# Québec

## Learning Objectives

- To describe the physical and historical geography of Québec as a basis for understanding the region's social and economic position in Canada
- To reveal two Québécois: (1) a highly urbanized and industrialized south, and (2) a remote, resource-producing hinterland in the north
- To outline the central role played by Hydro-Québec in the economic and social transformation of Québec
- To outline the traditional lands of the Cree and Inuit within northern Québec, the impact of hydroelectric megaprojects in this region, and the signing of the first modern land-claim agreement, the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement in 1975
- To reveal the growth of a knowledge-based economy in Québec, centred on economic spearheads in transportation and engineering.

## Chapter Overview

Chapter 7 outlines the geographic dimensions and importance of Québec. There are five key themes in this chapter:

1. Economically and demographically, Québec trails behind Ontario; both are in decline relative to the rest of Canada.
2. Québec society features a cultural conflict that is the basis for the English/French faultline.
3. Like Ontario, there are two Québécois—an urban, industrialized south and a remote resource-producing north.
4. Québec's economy and society were transformed through an industrial development strategy centred on Hydro-Québec.
5. Québec is moving towards a knowledge-based economy, as demonstrated by two economic spearheads in transportation (Bombardier) and engineering services (SNC-Lavalin).

### Québec's Place within Canada

Québec economic and political position continues to grow, but its growth is less than the national average. Québec's population growth depends more now on immigration leading to benefits as well as challenges.

### Québec's Culture, Identity, and Language

The French language, **Québécois** culture, and a **francophone** identity have generated a strong sense of belonging among the majority of Québec citizens. In northern Québec, Cree, Inuit, and Innu (Naskapi) form the majority in most communities.

### Québec's Physical Geography

Québec's climate ranges from continental arctic across four physiographic regions: Great Lakes–St Lawrence Lowlands, Hudson Bay Lowlands, Appalachian uplands and Canadian Shield. In Arctic

Québec, a number of Inuit settlements are found along the coasts of Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait.

### **Environmental Challenges**

Most environmental problems within Québec stem from the discharge of agricultural, industrial, and mining wastes into the atmosphere and water bodies or from the construction of huge hydroelectric dams.

### **Québec's Historical Geography**

Québec's historical geography helps to explain the province's position within Canadian society, as well as the critical English/French faultline. From the establishment of the first French settlement in Québec in 1608 until the defeat of the French by the British on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, Québec evolved as part of New France. With surrender of New France to the British with the Treaty of Paris in 1763 lies the origin of the English/French faultline.

Québec's history since Confederation has been one of territorial expansion, cultural struggle, and political unrest. The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and growing concerns over the preservation of francophone culture contributed to a separatist faction, followed by two referenda on Québec's separation. Today, attention is focused more on economic and social concerns, and Québec nationalism has shifted somewhat to be more inclusive of immigrants and bilingual anglophones.

### **Québec Today**

Compared to other regions of Canada, economic growth lags in Québec but still the economy ranks third in the country. Manufacturing has faced competition yet this has been offset by growth in high-tech exports in aerospace production, biotechnology, information technologies, pharmaceuticals, and rail transportation.

### **Technical Spearheads**

For Québec, aerospace (Bombardier) and engineering (SNC-Lavalin) serve as global spearheads, while Hydro-Québec dominates the provincial economy.

### **Québec's Economic Anchor: Hydro-Québec**

Hydro-Québec, a provincial Crown corporation, played a fundamental role in shaping the provincial economy. In addition to stimulating economic growth, Hydro-Québec's megaprojects have necessitated important agreements between the federal and provincial governments and Indigenous peoples, among them the first modern land-claim agreement: the 1975 James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA).

### **Québec's Core**

Québec's population and economic core is in the St Lawrence Lowlands, extending from Montréal to Québec City. Rail, road and waterway transport play a key role in Québec's economic activity in the south.

### **Québec's Northern Hinterland**

In Québec's north, the main economic pursuits are forestry and mining, characterized by single-industry towns interspersed with traditional Indigenous communities.

## Challenge Questions

1. What is the nature and basis of Québec's cultural identity?
2. What is Québec's position within Canada and why has its position declined since Confederation?
3. How does Québec compare to Ontario?
4. What physiographic region is considered the homeland of the Québécois?
5. What natural advantages are present in the Canadian Shield found in northern Québec that allow the region to produce hydro-electric power? Do these advantages exist in Ontario's portion of the Canadian Shield?
6. What are the political implications for Québec if its share of Canada's population and GDP continues to decline?
7. Hydro-Québec exports much electricity to New England. If the price of natural gas increases, will this play to Hydro-Québec's advantage or disadvantage?
8. Why was the *Paix des Braves* so fundamental to continued development of the James Bay Project? Why did the Cree support this agreement?
9. What types of industrial firms have established factories in the St Lawrence Lowlands as a result of Québec's strategy to offer low electrical power rates?
10. Why might the definition(s) of Québec as a "nation" upset Canadian First Nations and the Inuit, and Canadians in other provinces?
11. If Nunavik gains its desired form of self-government, will this political development result in a new level of government within Québec and therefore within Canada's other provinces?
12. Consider the distinctive position Québec occupies within Canada in the context of the nation's history and geography. As Canada becomes more demographically diverse, can Québec retain its unique cultural position in Canada?

## Key Terms

**Allophones** Québec residents whose mother tongue is neither French, English, nor one of the Aboriginal languages. (p. 216)

**Anglophones** Those whose mother tongue is English. (p. 216)

**Commercial forest** Forested lands able to produce commercial woods within an acceptable time frame. (p. 219)

**Demography** The scientific study of human populations, including their size, composition, distribution, density, growth, and related socio-economic characteristics. (p. 214)

**Estrie** An administrative region that overlaps most of the area formerly called the Eastern Townships. (p. 219)

**Francophones** Those whose mother tongue is French. (p. 215)

**French Canadians** Canadians with roots to Québec and who likely still speak French. (p. 223)

**Kativik Regional Government** The administrative organization for Inuit in Nunavik. (p. 239)

**Makivik corporation** A non-profit organization owned by the Inuit of Nunavik. (p. 239)

**Nunavik** Homeland of the Inuit of northern Québec and a semi-autonomous political region within that province. (p. 219)

**Québécois** A term that has evolved from referring only to French-speaking residents of Québec to referring to all residents of Québec. (p. 218)

**Restructure** To make economic adjustments deemed necessary by fierce competition, whereby companies reduce costs by reducing the number of workers at their plants. (p. 241)