

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

— Valérie Shaffer

The Anishnabeg¹ are the first inhabitants of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue territory. Although the contact with non-Indigenous people has left sequels that can still be felt today, notably at the cultural and socioeconomic levels, many examples demonstrate agency and closer links between peoples. Following is a profile of Indigenous peoples with specific emphasis on First Nations.

HISTORICAL ANISHNABE PRESENCE

For over 8,000 years, the Anishnabeg have been occupying a territory extending from the Ottawa River watershed up and beyond the northern limits of Abitibi. The Abitibis and Timiskamings gave their names to the region : Abitibi “where waters separate” and Témiscamingue “deep waters”. They were nomadic people living off hunting, fishing and gathering, among others. From the 19th century on, colonisation, Christianity, railroad construction and forestry changed their way of life. The creation of the first reserves led to their forced settlement.

The Indian Act, first passed in 1876 by the federal government, put the Indians under governmental tutorship and granted them with a status of pupils of the state. It is in this context that a broad assimilation project was elaborated, which caused significant harm. Indigenous people had to cope with the imposed reserve, educational (including residential schools), political, legal and cultural systems. Still effective, the Act was amended many times to abolish discriminatory provisions articles but still remains problematic. The cultural, social and economic repercussions can still be felt by Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, many examples demonstrate their capacity to implement solutions that take their own knowledge into account. In addition, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2007-2015) asked governments, institutions, groups and all Canadians to implement measures recommended in the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action.

THE COMMUNITIES

There are 11 Anishnabe communities in Quebec and Ontario, including 7 in Abitibi-Témiscamingue : Abitibiwinni (Pikogan), Kebaowek, Kitcisakik, Lac Simon, Long Point (Winneway), Timiskaming and Wolf Lake (Hunter’s Point). They each have a band council as political authority (local government) that provides all services. Band council members are elected pursuant to the Indian Act.

ABORIGINAL IDENTITIES

Over the years, members from other First Nations and Inuit communities migrated to the territory and there was some interbreeding. Statistics Canada defines the Aboriginal population according to Aboriginal identity, which includes three groups : First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Statistics Canada’s census data² are based on self-declaration. These data are used here to draw the Aboriginal people’s profile

(p. 2) with particular emphasis on First Nations (p.3).

ABORIGINAL POPULATION

In 2016, 8,165 persons declared an Aboriginal identity in the region, or 6 % of the region’s population. Among them, 68 % belonged to First Nations and 28 % were Métis. The region’s Aboriginal population accounted for 4 % of Quebec’s Aboriginal population. ■

Notes :

1. Various spellings exist, including Anishnaabeg, Anishnabeg, Anicinapek and Anicinabek. In this profile, we have chosen Anishnabeg (Anishnabe in singular form).

2. The census data must not be confused with those of the Indian Register of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC). The Register is an administrative database that includes registered members based on their community of origin. As of December 31, 2016, 7,929 persons were registered in either one of the 7 Anishnabe communities in the region, whether or not they reside in their community or in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Aboriginal population and non-Aboriginal population according to identity

> RCMs¹ of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2016

	Abitibi	Abitibi-Ouest	La Vallée-de-l’Or	Rouyn-Noranda	Témiscamingue	Region
Aboriginal identity²	1,105	485	3,590	1,065	1,920	8,165
First Nations	685	115	2,870	380	1,535	5,580
Métis	375	340	630	615	360	2,315
Inuit	0	0	15	15	0	30
Multiple Aboriginal identity and not included elsewhere	45	35	75	65	20	235
Non-Aboriginal identity	22,900	19,540	38,705	40,100	13,745	134,990
Total	24,005	20,025	42,295	41,165	15,665	143,155

1. Regional county municipalities.

2. ‘Aboriginal identity’ refers to whether the person identified with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. This includes those who are First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who are Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada), and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Source : Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, Target group profile, CO-1820.

FROM ONE CENSUS TO THE NEXT

In continuity with our prior publications, we draw a profile of Aboriginal people in relation to demography, education, labour market activities, main occupations and income of individuals. This process allows to follow the evolution of various indicators since 2006.

■ Demography

In 2016, the regional Aboriginal population, which includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit, included 8,165 persons. It increased by 25 % from 2006 (6,530 persons) to 2016. More specifically, the growth was 17 % for First Nations and 45 % for Métis. While First Nation women's high fertility rate partly explains the Aboriginal population growth, it should also be noted that Métis people are increasingly inclined to self-declare Aboriginal identity. La Vallée-de-l'Or area has the highest number of Aboriginal persons while Abitibi-Ouest has the lowest.

The Aboriginal population is characterized by its young age. The average age was 32 and 30 % were under the age of 15. The persons aged 65 years and over accounted for 8 %. In the Aboriginal population, First Nations tip the scales, with an average age of 30. In contrast, in the non-Aboriginal population, the average age was 42, and the age groups of 15 years and under and 65 and over both represented 17 %.

■ Education

Of the 3,800 Aboriginal persons between 25 and 64 years old, 2 out of 5 had no diploma. This rate is twice that of non-Aboriginal persons. The most preoccupying situation is found in the MRC de La Vallée-

de-l'Or (47 %). Compared with the overall Aboriginal population in Quebec, Aboriginal people in the region had a higher level of under-schooling (40 % against 27 %). Since 2006, the percentage of Aboriginal non-graduates decreased by 6 % in the region.

■ Labour market and occupations

In the region, the 5,735 Aboriginal persons aged 15 and over had an employment rate of 41.7 % in 2016, which is lower than that of non-Aboriginal persons (59.0 %). The rate is similar for Aboriginal men (41.7 %) and women (41.6 %). Since 2006, the men's employment rate has decreased (-3.1 percentage points), while that of women has increased (+2.1 percentage points).

Unemployment, which varies from one RCM [regional county municipality] to the next, affected 17 % of the region's Aboriginal labour force, as compared with 7 % for non-Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people's main occupations reflect a reality both inside and outside the communities.

Main occupations

1. Sales and service occupations
2. Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations

3. Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services

4. Business, finance and administration occupations

On the one hand, band councils provide jobs in a variety of areas, including education, health, social services, public works, housing, administration and management. On the other hand, when comparing the main occupations of the overall regional population, the order is the same except for the 3rd and 4th ranks.

■ Income

In 2015, the average total income of Aboriginal individuals was \$29,556. Significant variability exists in comparison with the region's non-Aboriginal personal income (\$44,080), Aboriginal people in Quebec (\$34,775) and between Aboriginal men and women in the region (\$24,740 against \$34,354). This latter variability has even increased in the last 10 years. It is to be noted that the region's income of Aboriginal people is driven upwards by that of Métis people, which is \$34,105. ■

Various indicators, Aboriginal¹ and non-Aboriginal

> RCMs² of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2016

	Aboriginal						Non-Aboriginal
	Abitibi	Abitibi-Ouest	La Vallée-de-l'Or	Rouyn-Noranda	Témiscamingue	Région	Region
Demographic trend (2006-2016)	+37.3 %	0.0 %	+27.1 %	+39.2 %	+16.7 %	+25.0 %	-0.3 %
Average age	29.9 years	39.6 years	27.1 years	36.8 years	35.7 years	31.5 years	41.6 years
Under-schooling rates (25 to 64 years)	41.2 %	37.0 %	46.7 %	31.7 %	33.3 %	39.7 %	20.0 %
Labour market (15 years and over)	750	390	2,260	860	1,470	5,735	112,370
Employment rate	47.3 %	44.9 %	35.6 %	47.7 %	44.2 %	41.7 %	59.0 %
Unemployment rate	13.3 %	7.9 %	21.4 %	11.8 %	18.9 %	17.3 %	7.4 %
Average total income of individuals in 2015 ³ (15 years and over)	\$26,286	\$32,655	\$27,674	\$33,816	\$30,675	\$29,556	\$44,080

1. For the definition of "Aboriginal identity", see note in Table on page 1.

2. Regional county municipalities.

3. Different traditional activities (such as trapping, arts and crafts, hunting and fishing) are not included in the census and therefore are not accounted for in the income.

Source : Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, Target group profile (CO-1820) and specific tables.

A LOOK AT FIRST NATIONS

Abitibi-Témiscamingue is the traditional territory of the Anishnabe Nation and its seven communities. It is therefore appropriate to take a specific look at First Nations. Although the Anishnabeg make up the majority of First Nation people in the region, the data also include other First Nation people (Cree, Atikamekw, etc.).

It should first be noted that the data presented below concern First Nations members, whether or not they are listed in the Indian Register, whether they live within or outside a community.

■ Demography

In 2016 in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the First Nations population was 5,580 persons. It increased by 17 % since 2006 (4,770). This growth rate varies from one RCM to the next, with a decrease in Abitibi-Ouest.

In comparison with First Nations across Quebec, the ones in the region are young, particularly in La Vallée-de-l'Or and Abitibi where the communities of Lac Simon, Kitcisakik and Pikogan are located.

■ Education

First Nations face significant under-schooling : 45 % of the population aged 25 to 64 has no diploma against 31 % for the First Nations population in Quebec. The situation in Rouyn-Noranda is more favourable but in La Vallée-de-l'Or, under-schooling affects more than 50 % of First Nations people. Proportionately, twice as many men have completed a vocational training (24 % against 12 % for women), and twice as many women have obtained a college or university degree (30 % against

15 % for men). With regards to First Nations in Quebec, 36 % of women and 23 % of men had a college or university degree.

■ Labour market

In 2016, in the region, the employment rate of First Nations people aged 15 and over was 36.7 %. This rate is lower than that of First Nations in Quebec (49.5 %). Rouyn-Noranda is the only RCM territory with a rate higher than the Quebec rate. In the region, First Nations women stand out from their Quebec sisters with a higher employment rate than that of men (38.9 % against 34.6 %).

The First Nations unemployment rate is higher in Abitibi-Témiscamingue than in Quebec (21.5 % against 14.3 %). Rouyn-Noranda stands out with an unemployment rate lower than the provincial rate. In the current labour shortage context, many consider higher First Nations labour integration as a promising avenue.

■ Income

In First Nations, the average total income for individuals was lower in the region (\$27,393) than in the province (\$33,071). Here as elsewhere, First Nations women's income is lower than that of men. In the region, it represents 85 % of men's income (\$29,718 compared to \$25,312).

■ Housing

The housing situation in First Nation communities is problematic : 9 % of the housing units were overcrowded and 32 % needed major repairs.



Over 50 % of First Nations members lived in a community, i.e. 2,955 persons

■ Languages

In 2016, 37 % of First Nations members could speak an Aboriginal language; 1,565 persons spoke Algonquin (Anishnabe), 490 spoke Cree and 90 spoke Atikamekw. While the Observatoire has no data allowing to follow the evolution of First Nations' Aboriginal language fluency, the regional profile for the overall population shows that since 2006, the number of Algonquin speakers has been decreasing, which poses a challenge for its long term viability. On the other hand, in 2016, 79 % of First Nations people could speak French and 57 % could speak English. Témiscamingue ranked first with respective percentages of 42 % and 96 %.

Various indicators, First Nations¹

> RCMs² of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Quebec, 2016

	Abitibi	Abitibi-Ouest	La Vallée-de-l'Or	Rouyn-Noranda	Témiscamingue	Region	Quebec
Demographic trend (2006-2016)	+3.0 %	-52.1 %	+22.9 %	+55.1 %	+18.5 %	+17.0 %	+42.3 %
Average age	30.2 years	46.0 years	26.2 years	37.3 years	34.6 years	30.2 years	34.8 years
Under-schooling rate (25 to 64 years) ³	47.2 %	19.2 %	54.2 %	27.3 %	39.1 %	45.4 %	30.7 %
Labour market (15 years and over)	475	95	1,765	310	1,145	3,790	70,450
Employment rate	37.9 %	42.1 %	30.0 %	51.6 %	42.4 %	36.7 %	49.5 %
Unemployment rate	21.7 %	25.0 %	25.0 %	13.5 %	20.5 %	21.5 %	14.3 %
Average total income of individuals in 2015 ⁴ (15 years and over)	\$27,393	\$33,071

1. In the 2016 Census, "First Nation" identity indicates whether or not a person declared being a First Nation member or Indian band member. This identity does not require residency in a community (on reserve). In the Census, First Nations include registered or treaty Indians, and non registered Indians.

2. Regional county municipalities.

3. The Abitibi-Ouest under-schooling data is based on small and rounded figures. Data interpretation must therefore be done carefully.

4. Different traditional activities (such as trapping, arts and crafts, hunting and fishing) are not included in the census and therefore are not accounted for in the income.

Source : Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, Target group profile (CO-1820) and specific tables.

INDIGENOUS AGENCY AND RECONCILIATION

■ INDIGENOUS AGENCY

Agency refers to a group's capacity to act on its own destiny despite living conditions they did not choose or want, so as to change the situation to its advantage. The following projects are examples of agency demonstrated by Indigenous people in the region.

In Val-d'Or, a joint initiative by the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre and the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre of Abitibi-Témiscamingue called Mino Pimatizi8in – Indigenous well-being and health aims to develop an innovative response to renew the service offer, increase its access and improve the health and living conditions of Indigenous people in urban areas.

In 2018, the Abitibiwinni First Nation Council in Pikogan adopted the Private Property Access Policy. This is a pilot project in partnership with the Aboriginal Savings Corporation of Canada (ABSCAN) that offers community members the possibility to become owners of their housing unit. Access to property vests owners with a form of autonomy.

In southern Témiscamingue, the Onimiki project involves the construction and operation of two mini hydro power plants. The project is led by the communities of Kebaowek and Wolf Lake and the MRC de Témiscamingue. The project is expected to create many jobs in the region and generate significant revenues.

■ RECONCILIATION

Various bridge-building initiatives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have been implemented. Here are a few examples.

One of the CULTURAT initiative's purposes is to foster enhanced coexistence between

✓ NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Native Friendship Centres are organisations dedicated to Indigenous people's well-being in urban areas. They promote Indigenous cultures, foster harmonious coexistence and enhanced relations between peoples. They offer a variety of services and organise different activities. There are two Friendship Centres in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, one in Val-d'Or, founded in 1974, and one in Senneterre, founded in 1978.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by creating opportunities for encounter, celebration and expression. Various Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors along with Tourisme Abitibi-Témiscamingue have carried out several projects in that respect.

Over the last few years, training programs and other initiatives at all academic levels have materialised with a view to furthering knowledge about Indigenous peoples' culture and realities. For example, the Obakwadan project (program DES-10) of the Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue is aimed at optimising Indigenous student success in high school and their access to college. Also, since 2019, in response to a request by the Cree Nation Government, the Cégep now delivers an attestation of collegial studies (ACS/AEC) in Indigenous Police Studies.

Since 2010, the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) through its Continuing Education Service has trained over 4,000 persons on Indigenous issues. In 2016, UQAT created the School of Indigenous Studies that offers undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs. UQAT has also developed an Action Plan 2019-2024 in relation to Indigenous people.

Sources :
Various websites, media articles and press releases.

✓ AFTERMATH OF OCTOBER 2015

The Val-d'Or events that occurred in 2015 following a report by Radio-Canada's Enquête program have accelerated the on-going social change. Reconciliation and bridge-building efforts have multiplied since then.

- > Creation of the Inquiry Commission on the relations between Indigenous peoples and certain public services in Quebec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress (2016)
- > Mutual Collaboration Agreement signed by the City of Val-d'Or and the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre (2017)
- > Adoption by the Val-d'Or Municipal Council of the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (2017)
- > Implementation of the Poste de police communautaire mixte autochtone/ Mixed Aboriginal Community Police Station in Val-d'Or (2017)
- > Adoption of the Action Plan 2018-2020 of the City of Val-d'Or's Committee against racism and discrimination (2018)



In the upcoming months, new tables will be added in the Statistics - First Nations section of our Website. Be on the watch.



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MISSION

The Observatoire de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue is an information and statistics hub for Abitibi-Témiscamingue. By sharing knowledge, it aims to develop a better understanding of regional issues.

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