

Culture versus algorithms: How much room for sovereignty?

October 22-24, 2025

Program

The 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* establishes sovereignty as an objective, a principle and a general rule to be respected. More specifically, the Parties reaffirm their sovereign right to maintain, adopt and implement the policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory. The reaffirmation of this sovereign right thus merges with the concept of cultural sovereignty, the concrete exercise of which is manifested both in the application of the provisions of this treaty and in the development of public policies aimed at achieving its objectives.

However, it must be acknowledged that for decades, even long before the 2005 Convention was adopted, cultural sovereignty was already considered a relative concept with variable meaning. On the one hand, states have always had limited ability to control cultural flows. On the other hand, the intensification of international exchanges and economic integration — encouraged particularly by the proliferation of free trade agreements — has gradually reduced states' autonomy to define and implement their cultural policies. This trend has been further accentuated by the power of transnational private actors, the profound transformations brought about by digital technologies, and the rise of artificial intelligence systems in the cultural and creative industries.

These developments are a cause for concern and raise numerous questions. Does cultural sovereignty still exist, or has it become a utopian ideal? If so, can it be exercised effectively in a digital environment whose rules are dictated by transnational actors who appear indifferent to cultural issues? Can — and should — cultural sovereignty be reinvented, for example through new legal and political instruments? What might these instruments be? What forms of cultural sovereignty remain possible in the age of artificial intelligence and algorithmic logics?

Organised in the context of the 20th anniversary of the 2005 UNESCO Convention, this event brings together experts and researchers from various disciplines, as well as representatives of civil society and decision-makers, to reflect on these issues and propose courses of action. The three-day program is structured around six workshops addressing the following topics:

Workshop 1: Sovereignty, Cultural Policies and Discoverability

Workshop 2: Digital Sovereignty and Cultural Concerns

Workshop 3: Digital Trade and Cultural Exemption

Workshop 4: Generative AI, Regulation and Copyright

Workshop 5: Linguistic Diversity of Cultural Content

Workshop 6: Digital Culture and Cultural Sovereignty in Indigenous Contexts



Each panel lasts two hours:
it includes **one hour of presentations** and
one hour of discussions.

The theme of each panel is introduced by a speaker (30 minutes). Two or three panelists then address specific aspects of the same theme (15 minutes per speech). These are followed by a discussion between the speakers and the audience.



Artists: Pinyao Liu and Keon Ju Maverick Lee Title of the work: ReVerie: Sense Photo: Martin Hieslmair



Pre-conference event

9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Student seminar (by invitation)

Six students selected following a call for applications will present their research on the theme of cultural sovereignty:

- **Solène Caridroit**, PhD Candidate in Law, Université de Bordeaux and ENS Paris-Saclay, « Le développement des droits de la nature : Quelles implications pour la souveraineté culturelle des peuples autochtones ? » (*The Development of the Rights of Nature: What Implications for the Cultural Sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples?*)
- **Carla Scalisi**, PhD Candidate in Heritage Anthropology, École Nationale des Chartes – Codirected with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), « La conservation comme expression de la souveraineté culturelle : l'exemple du Département des arts du spectacle de la BnF » (*Conservation as an Expression of Cultural Sovereignty: the Example of the BnF's Performing Arts Department*)
- **Charlotte Tessier**, PhD Candidate in Law, Université Laval, « L'articulation des conventions culturelles de l'UNESCO avec les accords commerciaux bilatéraux et régionaux à l'aune du concept de souveraineté culturelle » (*The Articulation of UNESCO's Cultural Conventions with Bilateral and Regional Trade Agreements in Light of the Concept of Cultural Sovereignty*)
- **Paliguewinde Martin Sawadogo**, Postdoctoral Researcher, Université Laval, « Sur une relation complexe : souveraineté numérique et préoccupations culturelles. Approches croisées Burkina Faso-Canada » (*On a Complex Relationship: Digital Sovereignty and Cultural Concerns. Cross-Perspectives: Burkina Faso-Canada*)
- **Yijie Sun**, PhD Candidate in Law, University de Montréal, « Gouverner l'intelligence artificielle : la place de la culture dans la diversité au Québec et au Japon » (*Governing Artificial Intelligence: the Place of Culture in Diversity in Quebec and Japan*)
- **David Mukulu Mukwabatu**, PhD Candidate in Political Science, Université Laval, « Souveraineté culturelle à l'ère des géants numériques : repenser les politiques publiques pour l'Afrique francophone » (*Cultural Sovereignty in the Age of Digital Giants: Rethinking Public Policy for French-speaking Africa*)

1:00 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. – Opening of the conference

Welcome remarks

Véronique Guèvremont, Full Professor, Chairholder of the *UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Faculty of Law, Université Laval

Nicolas Vermeys, Full Professor, Director of the Centre de recherche en droit public (CRDP), Deputy Director of the Cyberjustice Laboratory, Université de Montréal

Address

Blair McMurren, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of Cultural Affairs, Department of Canadian Heritage, on behalf of the Honorable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages

1:15 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Workshop 1: Sovereignty, Cultural Policies and Discoverability

Moderator: Destiny Tchéhouali, Professor of International Communication, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Chairholder of the Chair on French-language artificial intelligence and digital technologies, Co-Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair in Communication and Technologies for Development.

Speaker: Alain Saulnier, author of the book “Tenir tête aux géants du web” (*Standing Up to the Web Giants*) and media expert

Panelists:

Jérôme Payette, Executive Director, Association des professionnels de l'édition musicale (APEM)

Ariane Charbonneau, Executive Director, Société professionnelle des auteurs, compositeurs du Québec et des artistes entrepreneurs (SPACQ-AE)

Kanel Engandja Ngoulou, Project Coordinator, Direction de la langue française dans la diversité des cultures francophones (DLC), Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)

3:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. – Break

3:45 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Workshop 2: Digital Sovereignty and Cultural Concerns

Moderator: Nicolas Vermeys, Full Professor, Director of the Center de recherche en droit public (CRDP), Deputy Director of the Cyberjustice Laboratory, Université de Montréal

Speaker: Aude Géry, Researcher, GEODE, Institut Français de Géopolitique

Panelists:

Guillaume Beaumier, Assistant Professor in Political Science and International Studies, École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP)

Annick Charette, President, Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture (FNCC-CSN)

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. – Cocktail reception, Théâtre Le Diamant

Speeches

Hélène Messier, Co-Chair, Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE)

Zahra Kamil, Representative of the Organisation internationale pour la Francophonie (OIF) for the Americas

Jazz Trio: **Edmond Brousseau** (saxophone), **Sébastien Saliceti** (double bass), **Éloi LeBreux** (jazz guitar), students from the Faculty of Music of Université Laval

THURSDAY 23 OCTOBER 2025

9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Address by Mathieu Lacombe, Quebec Minister of Culture and Communications

9:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.

Presentation of the Database on Cultural Clauses in Bilateral and Regional Trade Agreements

UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Team: **Véronique Guèvremont**, **Charlotte Tessier**, **Charles Martin**

9:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

Workshop 3: Digital Trade and Cultural Exemption

Moderator: Jean-Frédéric Morin, Full Professor, Department of Political Science, Université Laval

Speaker: Gilbert Gagné, Full Professor, Department of Political and International Studies, Université Bishop's

Panelists:

Pascal Bruneau, Manager, Policy and Trade Policy Negotiations Division, Ministry of Canadian Identity and Culture

Hélène Messier, President and CEO, Association québécoise de la production médiatique (AQPM), and Co-Chair of the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE)

11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Lunch

12:45 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.

Workshop 4: Generative AI, Regulation and Copyright

Moderator: Marie-Julie Desrochers, Executive Director, Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE)

Speaker: Alexandra Bensamoun, Professor of Law, Université Paris-Saclay

Panelists:

Laurent Dubois, Executive Director, Société des auteurs.e.trice.s de radio, télévision et cinéma (SARTEC)

Stéphanie Hénault, Director of Legal Affairs, Association nationale des éditeurs de livres (ANEL)

2:45 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Break

3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Workshop 5: Linguistic Diversity of Cultural Content

Moderator: Véronique Guèvremont, Full Professor, Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Faculty of Law, Université Laval

Speaker: Francis Verreault-Paul, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

Panelists:

Sven Buridans, Director of Innovation and Digital Partnerships, Fédération culturelle canadienne-française (FCCF)

Denis Bouchard, Coordinator and Professor, Digital Media and Communications Program, Collège La Cité d'Ottawa, and former Senior Advisor to the CRTC



FRIDAY 24 OCTOBER 2025

9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Workshop 6: Digital Culture and Cultural Sovereignty in Indigenous Contexts

Moderator: Geneviève Motard, Full Professor, Faculty of Law, Université Laval, Director of the Interuniversity Center for Indigenous Studies and Research (CIÉRA)

Speaker: Karine Gentelet, Full Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), Scientific Director, CIERA-UQO, Scientific Director – Collaboration with Civil Society, Obvia

Panelists:

Joëlle Robillard, General and Artistic Director, Musique Nomade

Stéphane Nepton, NAD-UQAC and Digital Mediator – First Nations, Printemps Numérique

11:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. Break

11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Final Workshop: From Reflection to Action

Summary by Michel Lacombe, author of the book “Le jour où on a sauvé la culture. Le combat mondial de la diversité culturelle mené par le Québec” (*The Day We Saved Culture: Quebec’s Global Fight for Cultural Diversity*)

Exchange of views – Setting priorities for action in the coming years

12:15 p.m. to 12:30 p.m. Closing remarks

Scientific Committee

- Véronique Guèvremont
- Nicolas Vermeys
- Alain Saulnier
- Serge Joyal
- Marie-Julie Desrochers

Organisers

- UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
- Centre de recherche en droit public (CRDP)

UNESCO Chair Team

- Véronique Guèvremont, Chairholder
- Ivana Otasevic, Coordinator
- Laurence Cuny, PhD Candidate
- Iris Richer, PhD Candidate
- Charlotte Tessier, PhD Candidate
- Emma Tran Van Nhieu, PhD Candidate
- Clémence Varin, PhD Candidate
- Olivier Labbé, Master’s Student
- Jules Poulain-Welter, Master’s Student

CRDP team

- Nicolas Vermeys, Director
- Sylvain Lafleur, Coordinator

Partners

- Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE)
- Law Commission of Canada (LCC)
- Friends of Canadian Media
- Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec
- International Observatory on the Societal Impacts of AI and Digital Technologies (Obvia)
- Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)
- Canadian Heritage

Special 20th Anniversary of the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*.

Chaire UNESCO sur la diversité
des expressions culturelles



Patrimoine
canadien

Canadian
Heritage



LES AMIS
des médias canadiens

