



# Bringing Researchers and Resources Together: The Atiku Northern and Arctic Studies Portal

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## Abstract

The goal of this presentation is to introduce a new bilingual information portal for Northern Studies in Quebec, Canada, and describe the challenges and opportunities that arose from the creation of this multidisciplinary, multi-institution web portal. This project has brought together not only the library resources of the three institutions supporting Northern Studies but also the librarians who support these diverse and interdisciplinary researchers across Quebec. Collaboration between the members of the Institut nordique du Québec (INQ)--a research centre bringing together more than 150 researchers from three universities (Institut national de recherche scientifique, Université Laval, McGill University), and representatives from Indigenous groups and the public and private sectors--led to the creation of this project.

The portal was created to facilitate collaboration between INQ members and for anyone interested in Northern Studies by bringing together multidisciplinary content from a variety of sources and modes of access (paid and open). It reflects a transdisciplinary approach that is increasingly required in Northern Studies, an approach that seeks to harness the resources and expertise associated with several different fields of study in order to understand a complex issue. The problem of access for non-university users will be addressed, particularly for Indigenous communities and the Quebec government. The librarians supporting Northern Studies at these three universities had not previously worked together, and the project allowed for a new collaboration between libraries and librarians. The flexible way in which the project has been developed allows for new institutions and librarians to join.

## Introduction

In Québec, the field of northern studies has grown considerably in recent years, spurred on by a trans-disciplinary approach to research that sees the necessity of combining various areas of expertise to better account for the complexity of many issues in the North. *Institut nordique du Québec* (INQ) is part of that movement. Established as an interuniversity and interdisciplinary alliance, its mission is to “keep its partners at the forefront of knowledge development and its application with respect to northern and circumpolar development.”<sup>1</sup> Confident that they could make a significant contribution, the libraries of INQ’s three member universities offered to develop an innovative interdisciplinary and interuniversity portal for INQ researchers, students of northern studies, members of northern Indigenous communities, and anyone with an Internet connection interested in the search for scientific information in the Arctic and the North. This paper describes the creation and characteristics of this new resource, the Atiku Northern and Arctic Studies Portal.

## About INQ

Founded in 2014, INQ is a testament to the dynamism of northern research in Québec, which dates back to the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> With over 150 researchers from the *Institut national de la recherche scientifique* (INRS), McGill University, and *Université Laval* as well as partners from the public and private sector partners and many northern Indigenous communities, INQ is a product of *Plan Nord*, the government’s development plan for Northern Quebec. As such, it has an official commitment for funding from the Government of Québec.<sup>3</sup> INQ has five research priorities, all indicative of the Institute’s transdisciplinary approach and its determination to bring together various branches of northern expertise in Québec. These are: societies and culture (1), health (2), ecosystem functioning and environmental protection (3), infrastructure and technology (4), and natural resources (5).

## The role of the three university libraries

After the INQ was founded, the discussions between the Institute’s member university libraries made it clear that collaboration would be beneficial to all. The university libraries have the collections and the professional expertise to manage and disseminate scientific information on the North. They could thus greatly contribute to the success of INQ’s mission. As for INQ, it has become an essential platform for students, researchers, and professors working in northern studies—a platform that links those users directly to the three university libraries. The INQ’s interuniversity structure played an instrumental role

1. INSTITUT NORDIQUE DU QUÉBEC, *Vision, Mission and Objectives*, Québec City, Institut nordique du Québec, [Online] <https://inq.ulaval.ca/a-propos/vision-mission-objectifs> (retrieved May 9, 2018).
2. Université Laval and the Government of Québec created the pioneering Centre for Northern Studies (CEN) in 1961. CEN brings together researchers from a number of Québec colleges and universities and has actively contributed to the development of INQ.
3. This commitment is presented in *The Plan Nord 2015–2020 Action Plan*: “The government will [...] create the Institut nordique du Québec. [...] The institute will bring a range of expertise in the natural, social, health and engineering sciences to bear on the question of sustainable development in the North, in an interdisciplinary, inter-institutional centre for research and innovation.” PLAN NORD SECRETARIAT, *The Plan Nord toward 2035: 2015–2020 Action Plan*, Québec City, Government of Québec, 2015, p. 87, [Online] [https://plannord.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Long\\_PN\\_EN.pdf](https://plannord.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Long_PN_EN.pdf) (retrieved May 9, 2018).

in facilitating the partnership between the Université Laval, McGill, and INRS libraries and the pooling of their northern collections.

## Portal hosting and structure

The Atiku portal is hosted on INQ's website. The portal enjoys good visibility on the site—users can access it directly from the main menu. To meet the needs of the francophone and anglophone clientele at member universities as well as Indigenous communities and external users, the portal is available in both French and English. The documentary resources available online include databases, reference works, archives, maps and geospatial data, statistics, and videos. The portal also has a section listing resources that clarify the issues and overarching themes of Northern and Arctic research, including issues surrounding research ethics and practices in Indigenous communities. The portal has a searchengine interface that allows users to search the collections by resource type (databases, dictionaries and encyclopedias, maps and geospatial data, statistics, archives, films, and information on studying in the North), as well as an interface using facets for finding resources by resource type (see above), access type (INRS, McGill University, Université Laval, Free Ressource or Print Format), and subject (see below). The multidisciplinary coverage of the resources is reflected in the subject facets, which are adapted from the OECD's classification scheme for science and technology fields<sup>4</sup> and are as follows: Natural Sciences, Engineering and Techonology, Health Sciences, and Humanities and Social Sciences.

## Resource selection

The portal resources were selected by the portal's three coordinating librarians: Jill Boruff from McGill University's Schulich Library of Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, and Engineering; Joë Bouchard from Université Laval's geographic and statistical information centre (*GéoStat*); and JeanDaniel Bourgault from the specialized document and information centre at INRS's *Eau Terre Environnement* Research Centre. They were assisted by colleagues specializing in the many areas related to northern studies at their respective universities, meaning over twenty specialists contributed to the selection of the portal resources.

Resources were selected on the basis of librarian recommendations. To be recommended, a significant portion of the resource's content had to be relevant to northern studies. This explains the selection of a number of multidisciplinary resources. The process reflects the portal's intended vocation: providing an exhaustive account (as much as possible) of resources relevant to the study of the North. Another criterion taken into consideration in the selection process was the very definition of "North"—the territory north of the 50th parallel—as put forward by geographer LouisEdmond Hamelin, who first developed the concept of "nordicity."<sup>5</sup>

4. DIRECTORATE FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY. COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL POLICY, *Revised Field of Science and Technology (FOS) Classification in the Frascati Manual*, [Paris], OECD, 2007, [Online] <https://www.oecd.org/science/inno/38235147.pdf> (retrieved May 9, 2018).

5. See: LOUIS-EDMOND HAMELIN, *Le monde circumnordique* [geographic map] [Online] <http://lehamelin.sittel.ca/> (accessed May 9, 2018), and: LOUIS-EDMOND HAMELIN, "Boundaries Dimensions and Variations," *Canadian Nordicity: It's Your North Too*, Montréal, Harvest House, 1979, p. 15–46.

## Free and restricted access resources

Two different types of resources were identified based on the form of access, either as an electronic document in one of the university's collections or free (including open access) on the Internet.

### Licensed resources

Some 20% of the documents available through the portal are restricted access resources (also known as licensed resources or subscription resources). These include the *Arctic and Antarctic Regions* and *Web of Science* databases, numerous digital dictionaries and atlases, and digital archive platforms, such as *Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters*.

Users from the three member universities do not have access to all restricted resources, since the collections of the three university libraries are not identical. This difference in resource availability according to the user's home university is made apparent by the links provided with each resource; the name of the university will appear if that university has access. The difference in availability has served as a tool for comparing the northern studies collections of the three universities, which has led the librarians to acquire resources unavailable in their own collection but available at another INQ member university.

## Free and open access resources

The Atiku portal exists to meet the needs of researchers and students at the three member universities, but also to serve as a valuable and attractive resource for northern Indigenous communities, Québec government civil servants working on northern issues, and anyone with an Internet connection looking for scientific information on a topic related to the North or the Arctic. Due to licensing restrictions, the users in these last three categories do not have access to the licensed and subscriptionbased resources of INQ member universities, but they still need access to a wide variety of documents, some of which are highly specialized. To address these needs, there has been a significant effort to identify free resources and put them front and centre on the portal.

### Free resources

Access to free resources is unrestricted. Users can search these resources and view results, but may not be able to access the full content of the documents, except if it is an open access resource. Many free bibliographical resources provide access to document summaries and references, but not their actual content. The free bibliography database on the ASTIS/SISTA platform and the list of films on the North on the National Film Board's website are both examples of these types of resources.

### Open access resources

More and more scientific content is being shared through open access resources on the Web, and resources wholly or partly dedicated to northern studies are no exception. The portal has an important selection of open access resources, included in the free resources shown on the portal, allowing nonuniversity users to access specialized documents to meet their needs. The University of Tromsø library's *High North Research Documents* database, Statistics Canada's statistical resources for the North, and the geospatial data available from Natural Resources Canada are just a few examples of open access resources available to everyone and promoted on the portal.

## Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity

Atiku can be seen as a dashboard designed to meet the information needs of northern researchers across all disciplines. It is a virtual space devoted to furthering collaboration between researchers from different disciplines. It is, in other words, a tool to promote interdisciplinarity, a concept presented as a [trans.] “means of creating a space for the production of new and original knowledge through collisions between the views of different disciplines regarding the same research object.”<sup>6</sup> Atiku is also a transdisciplinary space that reflects the conception of northern studies as a field of research in itself, a now-independent domain of study in which various perspectives coexist and feed off of each other. This position is particularly evident in the “Studying the North” section of the portal. The resources in this section address the major scientific and theoretic questions surrounding the North (the Overall Perspectives subsection), the history of the North (the Historical Perspectives subsection), and cultural analysis of the North (the Imaginary Perspectives subsection). The section also includes a selection of texts that address crossdisciplinary research practices and ethics when working with Indigenous peoples.

## The role of First Peoples and resources for Indigenous studies

Atiku was developed in collaboration with northern Indigenous peoples by way of a consultation with INQ’s First Peoples Working Group.<sup>7</sup> The consultation confirmed that First Peoples members were interested in having access to documentary resources on northern research issues, particularly those that concern Indigenous peoples. Databases for searching out articles and platforms for disseminating and viewing historical and heritage archives were identified as being of great interest to these users. The fact that they are not members of the university communities and thus do not have access to the subscription resources was identified as a significant irritant. This is one of the main reasons that the portal’s free and open access resources are clearly identified and showcased.

Atiku presents a large selection of documentary resources related to northern Indigenous studies. The resources were selected for their relevance to First Peoples as well as to researchers in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, literature, and so on. Through these resources, users can find databases, atlases and maps, statistics, and archive and film platforms with valuable content on northern Indigenous life. There is also a selection of open access dictionaries of northern Indigenous languages, many of which are surprisingly difficult to find on the Internet. In the future, we hope that the Portal will serve as a place to gather links to other historical and cultural archives that might otherwise be difficult to locate.

## Interuniversity Collaboration

This project was a unique opportunity for the librarians from the three member institutions to collaborate on a common project. Although *Université Laval* and McGill University are peers, and their librarians have similar roles at their respective institutions, their physical locations (about 250 km between Laval in Quebec City and McGill in Montreal) and different language communities (Laval is francophone and McGill is anglophone) are often barriers to collaboration. The librarian from McGill welcomed the

6. ANNE VIANIN, THIBAUT LACHAUT, “Quand l’interdisciplinarité naît de la croisée des regards,” *L’interDisciplinaire*, no 10, hiver 2016, p. 1.

7. Members of the First Peoples Working Group represent the Naskapi, Innu, and Inuit Nations, among others.

opportunity to work in French with her colleagues from *Université Laval* and the INRS and to learn more about the area of northern studies, a subject area she had not specifically worked in before. For his part, the librarian from Laval appreciated the sharing of expertise and collections between librarians and institutions, and the openness shown by his colleagues at McGill and INRS to develop a new form of portal. The project even opened up communication between the authors on other issues affecting librarians at both institutions. Going forward, both authors hope that there are opportunities for other collaborations between librarians at *Université Laval* and McGill University.

## Conclusion

It is our hope that Atiku will be used by researchers, students, and members of the public across Québec, Canada, and even the world, to access quality information resources about the North and the Arctic. We also hope that this collaboration between *Université Laval*, McGill University, and the INRS is only the beginning of the ways that this portal can bring research partners together. Other universities and research institutes could join the project and assist their communities in accessing the wealth of northern and arctic information available to them. We look forward to that future.

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