



CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF THE ARTS

Report of the Forum
Canadian Municipal Cultural Network
Canadian Cities of Culture Program
February 25-26, 2000 (Ottawa, Ontario)

Exciting things happened by the end of the forum. There was consensus and a need to act. Raw material was quickly sketched into two important letters. A task force met immediately after to ...

But let's backup and see how this started.

Since 1944 the CCA has advocated for the rights of individual artists and artists' associations, as well as for arts, heritage and cultural education issues. Through research, forums and recommendations, it influences arts policy creation at all levels of government, while promoting the arts to the general public.

In 1998 the CCA's *Final Report of the Working Group on Cultural Policy for the 21st Century* provided the kernel for a February 2000 forum: "... that a Canadian City of Culture project be placed on the agenda of the next federal/provincial meeting of culture ministers for discussion and implementation. The Working Group also recommends that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities explore the feasibility of this project among its members." The time-frame was the year 2000.

The CCA co-hosted a forum with the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton in Ottawa on February 25-26, to promote a discussion among a high-profile group from across Canada of municipal cultural officials, members of municipal arts councils, elected councillors, and experts in municipal cultural policy.

Megan Williams, CCA National Director, welcomed the 26 delegates. Although many municipalities have cultural officers, there has been no sustained national municipal arts network. The CCA realized there was a synergy between a municipal network and a cities of culture program.

John Mahon, Executive Director of the Edmonton Arts Council facilitated the forum, as the expert group considered and discussed:

- A better networking system for municipal departments of culture (strengthening municipal involvement in culture)
- The proposal for a Canadian cities of culture program by the Department of Canadian Heritage

This report presents the major observations and actions from the forum's presentations and lively discussions.

A CANADIAN MUNICIPAL CULTURAL NETWORK

In his opening remarks, John Hobday, Executive Director of the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, reflected that “in a strange way, we are returning to where we started,” to the artists and community-spirited people from across the country. He quoted Jocelyn Harvey’s 1996 CCA report “The Arts in Transition II” for the simple phrase, “We need to create a culture of shared resources.”

“If you want the arts and culture, however we care to define it, to flourish in the communities across the country, then everyone must share the responsibility. The federal, provincial and municipal governmental departments and agencies, the private business sector and the individuals who truly, truly are the believers.” Think globally, but act locally, together.

Ten municipal cultural representatives from Newfoundland to British Columbia gave presentations and an overview of their municipality’s and province’s roles in the arts, heritage and culture sectors. The need for shared resources was evident, to empower artists and cultural leaders, and create links.

1. Representation

In a municipality, cultural networks can revolve around different groups such as: municipal cultural directors, professional artists, community arts (non-professional artists), and specialists in arts, heritage and cultural education.

Participants remarked on the historical misunderstandings between civic leaders and the cultural sector. In many communities, there are marked divisions among professional and non-professional groups, and the general public. Perceptions and relationships are being altered in innovative ways across Canada, in many cases by broadening the process to engage all stakeholders.

In Newfoundland, City Councillor Shannie Duff admitted to other cultural representatives that St. John’s has been “shamelessly picking your arts policies off the Internet and some directly — we are taking what we feel is the best and most applicable to us . . . to bring to our Council.”

In Saint John, a mayor with vision started a process that led to the appointment of a cultural affairs officer. Putting a network together, collecting all the resources available, opening Market Square in 1983: since 1985 there has been an explosion of new cultural groups, centres and events in all disciplines. These active groups are now requesting round table discussion to find ways to turn elected officials into cultural supporters.

In Quebec, Les Arts et la Ville’s annual colloquium allows artists, business people and politicians to share best practices, sign for multi-year funding, and initiate research and development on their cultural policies. They also meet to share their success stories from the investment in culture. “It’s a pressure on other cities. They want to share the benefits also. So it’s a good competition.”

Ottawa has a split personality, with municipal and federal governments living in the same body. Amalgamation challenges are balanced by the participation and spending of Ottawa residents on culture — the highest in the country at the time of a recent Statistics Canada report. The City of Ottawa is developing a new community art program to provide links and partnership with the community.

The Ontario Arts Council (OAC)'s *Arts in the Communities* program aims to make the links between arts education, creativity and thinking skills, and the school curriculum. The OAC and the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation (SSBFF) are conducting a joint task force on "Arts and Community" and have held consultations with 26 municipalities across Ontario. The objectives are for artists and arts organizations to broaden and deepen their relationships, and examine the need to integrate the public more fully in their operations (for capacity building and community building).

The 1996-97 amalgamation of Toronto process made the largely professional downtown artists and the community-based groups work for the arts together. Forming a critical mass, this effective lobby group was able to successfully recommend a new model for the city to adopt: an arms-length funding agency and a municipal culture division.

In Manitoba, to expose people to alternatives, this summer the Winnipeg Folk Festival's back-up band will be the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. And there are 90 arts organizations within four square blocks in downtown Winnipeg, forming the natural client base for the inner city.

Edmonton's new policy effectively forgives all property tax, business tax and school tax on non-profit arts organizations. This has effected friendly alliances with other non-profits such as the Edmonton curling club.

During the late 1990s, the city of Vancouver's Office of Cultural Affairs met with the 19 surrounding municipalities to create the Regional Cultural Plan Steering Committee. They developed the Cultural Information Network (an online service) which provides an inter-municipal forum for the sharing of knowledge, best practices and strategic planning.

Municipal cultural officers emphasized the importance of partnership with the tourism sector in improving their cultural and economic sectors. Cultural tourism can provide a common point of reference between the cultural sector and city council.

2. Objectives

Speakers and participants referred to *Arts and the Cities*, which Tom and Judith Hendry started in 1986. Thirty cities were involved nation-wide, effectively bringing the voices of the arts and heritage community into city government. During its six years, *Arts and the Cities* founded a database, a cultural inventory, standards and strategies (such as the 1% factor for art in public spaces, and the need for cultural policy).

After six years, *Arts and the Cities* survived only as an active Quebec-based group Les Arts et la Ville, directed by Sylvie Cameron, who noted that at the start of the network in Quebec 12 years ago, only two cities had cultural policies. Now there are 100 cities in Quebec that have cultural policies. The mission in Quebec is to connect people and projects. But unofficially the mission is to convince people to invest in culture and art. Ms Cameron noted that "We would like to give policy tools to politicians so that they can invest in culture."

3. Implementation and Sustainability

Before the use of virtual networks, *Arts and the Cities* found itself unable to financially maintain its nation-wide communication efforts. In the 1990s network funding was found through the Standing Committee on Arts, Culture and Heritage of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

Participants discussed the type of network needed for animated discussion, information sharing, and the influencing of cultural policies, such as virtual networks (e.g. CultureNet, Vancouver's list serve Culture-L) and forums (such as Les Arts et la Ville's annual colloquium). Suggestions were made for a pilot project of an association involving municipalities with strong cultural interest and resources.

A secretariat would be needed to operate the network, locate and coordinate existing networks, and sustain the ongoing activities and development of its members. The secretariat would require a home, dedicated personnel, and infrastructure investment — preferably self-sustaining.

Although the group initially asked the CCA to act as a temporary location for the network it was ultimately decided that the proper locus for the new network was within the existing municipal framework. The Quebec-based Les Arts et la Ville and Vancouver's Office of Cultural Affairs then proposed to pool their resources to initiate both an online network for information sharing and a forum for municipal cultural policy directors.

Other discussions centred on the involvement of FCM and other organizations and foundations for assistance. FCM's other municipal priorities were noted as reasons not to base the network there. FCM is the national voice of municipal governments, with a database that allows communities with member municipalities to communicate. FCM's potential involvement was considered valuable.

4. Evaluation

Participants identified criteria for network evaluation:

- Are municipal cultural directors (perhaps working in isolation) continually informed of other municipal cultural practices (through virtual networks or conferences)?
- Is there a forum for discussion and assistance?
- Can municipal cultural policy research and development be shared?
- Does the network provide cultural directors with the tools necessary for political use?

5. Recommendations (see ACTION 1)

That a task force/network planning committee be created to:

- establish interim communications
- establish a funding committee to seek diverse funding sources, e.g. FCM, foundations, other municipal and provincial organizations
- ask FCM to re-establish its Standing Committee on Arts, Culture and Heritage
- write letters to FCM and other elected officials for political support of the network

CANADIAN CITIES OF CULTURE PROGRAM

Recognizing the need to build a sustaining environment for artists which would improve the working lives of artists and sustain their organizations, the Canadian Conference of the Arts has pursued the idea of a cities of culture program, finding parallels with the experience of several European cities, particularly Glasgow.

European City of Culture

In 1983 the Greek Culture Minister, actress Melina Mercouri, promoted the idea of a European City of Culture. “The event should be the expression of a culture which, in its historical emergence and contemporary development, is characterized by having both common elements and a richness born of diversity.” She suggested that “it is time for our [the Culture Ministers’] voice to be heard as loud as that of the technocrats. Culture, art and creativity are not less important than technology, commerce and the economy.”

While the secondary aim of a European City of Culture is to promote the cultural distinctiveness of itself as a member of the European Community, the primary intent is to stress the unity of its shared European heritage. “It is generally accepted that culture provides the best way of bridging differences between societies; it is the prerequisite for understanding and, therefore, for effective cooperation between nations.”

DCH Proposal “Canadian Cultural Communities”

Encouraged by the CCA’s Working Group recommendation and its subsequent discussions with various stakeholders, and inspired by the success of the European model, the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) presented its “Canadian Cultural Communities” concept to the forum.

DCH representatives spoke of building a legacy to connect all Canadians, of capacity building, to promote and highlight the achievements of artists and their communities. They have been informally consulting national cultural organizations, and others, with positive results and suggestions.

Selection Process

The model proposed was an annual two-community designation — one larger, one smaller. The Minister would announce the federal program. Like the Canada Games, a not-for-profit host organization would apply, and present the bid on behalf of the community. Short-listed bids would be granted federal funds to be refined for final presentation to the selection committee.

Chosen by the Minister from experts in the arts, cultural and heritage fields, the selection committee would evaluate bids and announce the winners. The proposed selection criteria would include:

- strong community support for the event and the host organization
- capacity of the community to host the event
- indications of connectedness — exchanges, festivals, etc.
- multiplicity of funding sources
- national and international promotion and marketing facility
- development of a network secretariat to liaise with the selection panel

Funding

The host organization would act as the core funder. Funds would be received from a variety of sources, including federal, provincial, and municipal governments, the private sector and foundations.

Forum Recommendations to DCH (see ACTION 3)

Following the enthusiastic reception of the “Canadian Cultural Communities” presentation by Hubert Lussier and Kerridwen Harvey of the Department of Canadian Heritage, there was lively debate regarding the terms of infrastructure, funding, representation, and long- versus short-term cultural investment in the proposal.

1. With reference to key stakeholders, resources and a “shared vision” of this proposal, new types of partnerships should be explored for further collaboration and consultation to establish a program framework. An advisory group of representatives/taskforce from the interested parties (appropriate stakeholders) should be put in place to start elaborating the program and its details. (See ACTION 3)
2. The group preferred the title “Canadian City of Culture”, as the word “Communities” is less expressive, loses the identification with European City of Culture, and is too ambiguous.
3. The notion of designating a small and large city each year had mixed reviews. Some thought that designating only one city would be more effective in terms of dedicated media interest, sponsorship, tourism, and economic and social investment. Others realized that selecting two communities would offer an unprecedented possibility for cultural development to smaller communities.
4. Bidding process: municipalities will begin to mobilize themselves to draw their partners. Task force should examine ways to minimize competition and frustration. Adequate time to prepare and adequate seed money required.
5. Appointments to the selection committee should be non-partisan, done by a steering committee not a government department. The Chair should be a highly respected member drawn from the cultural community, designated by the Minister of Canadian Heritage.
6. Funding should be of the same magnitude as the Millennium Fund. Sources to be discussed.
7. Regarding the system to organize the event, be it the designated city, a private company, a non-profit “host” organization, or the government: assess the strengths and weaknesses, especially focussing on the bidding process, partnerships, post-event cultural capabilities, and political and corporate long-term objectives.
8. Regarding whether to house the secretariat at DCH: this may not be the best way to stimulate partnerships among the cities and provinces. Task force should examine this point.

ACTION 1 — Task force on a national municipal cultural network:

A task force was struck, and met immediately after the forum to pursue plans for a municipal cultural network with an electronic component for a collegial linking of the individuals who work in the area of municipal cultural policy. Their task was also to develop a funding plan and pay attention to interim communications.

RESULT: The Quebec-based group Les Arts et la Ville will be working collaboratively with the representative from the City of Vancouver, and Donna Cardinal of Cardinal Concepts, in establishing such a municipal cultural network, and has volunteered to move forward immediately with the development of the electronic component.

SSBFF offered seed money for the task force.

ACTION 2 — Letter re the involvement of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM):

Regional Councillor (Ottawa-Carleton) Al Loney offered to present the forum requests at the FCM Board meeting the week after the forum. Enthusiastic participants drafted a letter to be sent by the CCA to Mr. Loney, briefing FCM on the forum and making these points:

1. A request that the FCM board reinstate its arts and heritage taskforce
2. “The arts and heritage taskforce could provide expert advice regarding the cities of culture initiative which the Department of Canadian Heritage is looking to develop in partnership with provinces, municipalities, cultural organizations and the private sector.”
3. An outline of the forum taskforce plans on a municipal cultural network

RESULT: FCM responded positively to the CCA forum letter, and agreed to establish a Subcommittee on Arts, Culture and Heritage, part of FCM’s Standing Committee on Economic Development.

ACTION 3 — Letter re the Canadian cities of culture proposal by the DCH:

All participants endorsed the draft of a letter by the CCA to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. After briefing the Minister on the plans for a municipal network, the letter emphatically expressed the forum’s support for the concept of a Canadian cities of culture program, that “stands to have a major impact on the cultural life of Canada, through its artists and producers and among its institutions and infrastructure.” Given the timing of the forum, as the federal budget was announced, there was a sense of urgency to directly communicate three main points:

1. The cities of culture initiative would certainly be successful in achieving its goals if provincial governments, municipal governments and the private sector contribute their energy and enthusiasm from the outset. However we believe there are several points in the current iteration of the plan which may cause these key partners to withhold or delay support.

2. We further believe the selection committee for cities of culture should be transparently non-partisan and arm's length. We suggest a composition of representatives from organizations such as the Canadian Tourism Commission, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Chambers of Commerce, the Canadian Conference of the Arts, and the Canadian Museums Association, together with a representative from your Department. We also feel a high profile cultural figure, who could embody and personify the goals of the program, appointed by yourself, would be appropriate as chair.

3. Therefore we would urge you to call together a group of key stakeholders for a consultation before any further announcements regarding the proposal are made. Among the groups we suggest for inclusion at such a consultation would be: the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Big City Mayors Caucus, the Canadian Tourism Commission, the Canadian Museums Association, private foundations and the Canadian Conference of the Arts. The consultation would afford the opportunity for input on some of the complex and potentially problematic aspects of the proposed program while eliciting buy-in from the key group of partners."

The letter emphasized the timing of DCH's announcement, and expressed appreciation for the collaborative and interactive approach that the Department's staff used to build a solid foundation for the cities of culture concept.

RESULT: Due to the urgency expressed by forum participants, the CCA managed to send the letter and meet with informed DCH officials within two days — an example of the energy sparked by the forum.

Report written by K.J. Watson

The Canadian Conference of the Arts wishes to thank the participants at the February 2000 forum, with special thanks to John Mahon as facilitator, and to the following speakers:

Sylvie Cameron, Directrice générale, Les Arts et la Ville, Quebec City, Quebec
Steven Campbell, Director, Arts Education & Arts in the Community, Ontario Arts Council
Donna Cardinal, Cultural Consultant
Bernie Cormier, Cultural Affairs Officer, City of Saint John, New Brunswick
Rita Davies, Managing Director of Culture, City of Toronto, Ontario
Shannie Duff, Municipal Councillor, City of St. John's, Newfoundland
John Hobday, Executive Director, Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation
Georgette Houle, Manager, Arts Programs, Region of Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario
Ernest Labrègue, Canadian Tourism Commission
Hubert Lussier, Director General, Arts Policy, Department of Canadian Heritage
John Mahon, Executive Director, Edmonton Arts Council, Alberta
Louise Roy-Brochu, Chief of Arts & Heritage, City of Ottawa, Ontario
Trudy Schroeder, General Manager, Winnipeg Folk Festival, Manitoba
Burke Taylor, Director, Office of Cultural Affairs, City of Vancouver
Sue Welke, Policy Analyst, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Megan Williams, National Director, Canadian Conference of the Arts

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