



*Study on cultural hubs and cultural districts in Canada*

## **Supplementary brief to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage**

May 8, 2018

Prepared by:

Frédéric Julien

Co-Chair, Canadian Arts Coalition

Director of Research and Development, Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA)

With input from members of the Coalition's Research and Policy Committee and members of the broader arts community

This brief provides answers to questions raised by Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage members at the March 29, 2018 hearing on cultural hubs and cultural districts. It also offers supplementary views on topics raised by other witnesses and/or by members of the arts community during Coalition-led consultations.

## Answers to Questions by Committee Members

### On the community hub model

**Mr. Martin Shields: “You talked about gentrification, the process that happens when they move in, it's cheap, and they move out. I hear about multi-use. If they become community hubs, not cultural hubs, somebody else in that hub has got skin in the game and wants them to keep it alive. Would that make more sense than calling it strictly a cultural hub? It would be a community hub and draw other pieces to it.”**

#### Answer

Community hubs and cultural hubs are part of a continuum in which focus can be given either to community value, or to arts, culture and/or heritage value, or to both. When focus is placed more heavily on cultural aspects, the hub will aim to create synergies between cultural organizations and will attempt to stimulate high-quality creative output. When focus is placed on community aspects, hubs will seek to foster social interactions (among participants and with artists) and to create a sense of belonging. The two models aren't mutually exclusive. On the contrary.

The community benefits of cultural hubs are directly dependent on their availability and quality. According to an Angus Reid Institute survey, people who rate arts, culture and leisure in their city or town as excellent are 2.5 times more likely than those with poor arts, culture and leisure to report a very strong sense of belonging to their city or town.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, an Environics survey commissioned by Canadian Heritage found that people who rate the quality of arts and cultural events and facilities as good or very good are significantly more likely to attend more than two different event types. In turn, those “cultural omnivores” are almost two times more likely than non-attendees to say that “arts and heritage experiences help [them] feel part of [their] local community.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Angus Reid Institute, [Canadians and their Communities: A National Survey on Citizen Engagement and Attitudes](#) (2015), as reanalyzed in [Vital Signs: Arts and Belonging](#), by Community Foundations and CAPACOA, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Environics Research Group, [Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey 2016-2017](#), commissioned by Canadian Heritage in partnership with Canada Council for the Arts, 2017.

The associations between quality arts experiences and community-oriented benefits are strong, and it would be unwise for arts organizations and policy makers to ignore them. Soon to be published Culture Track Canada report will confirm that core principles and associated values that guide Canadians in their choice for arts and cultural activities include community – belonging, and connections/togetherness – empathy.

In order to fully realize these community benefits, the Coalition articulated in its 2016 Infrastructure brief<sup>3</sup> that new cultural facilities configurations – as well as community-oriented programming for youth, families, seniors and participants of all age and background – may be required. During recent consultations led by the Coalition, we heard this point of view reiterated, along with messages stressing the need for ongoing support towards traditional facilities and their operations.

“Performing arts centres need to be designed and built differently than even 10 years ago. The mandate evolved to have a deeper relationship with the community, and the infrastructure has to respond. They have to be designed in such a way that they engage the community in multiple ways. ... In our new building design, the lobby will be large enough to program in it: it will not be just a lobby, but a public space. We will have multi-purpose rooms for creation and for community activities. The federal government should think of contemporary, forward-thinking use of space.”

“With new demographics, the kind of work that can sell 2,300 seats has changed and will change - but let’s not consign ourselves to modest audience sizes in new venues, without recognizing that there are high profile events and performers across the international spectrum that still want to play in a purpose-built venue.”

Speaking of changing demographics, Ontarians for the Arts articulated a need for cultural renewal in our cultural infrastructures and affirmed:

“The need for Indigenous spaces (or Indigenizing existing spaces) cannot be understated. Existing infrastructure may reinforce institutionalized colonialism and/or be unsuitable for specific cultural practices such as smudging. Workspaces and institutions that understand, reflect and honour Indigenous worldviews can be safe places for cultural expression.”<sup>4</sup>

Although this may not represent a definitive answer to the question raised by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, it does provide a sense of the multiple expectations that are placed on cultural hubs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Arts Coalition, [The Pillar of Culture](#), written submission prepared by the Canadian Arts Coalition, as part of the government of Canada’s consultation on Phase 2 of the Infrastructure Plan, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ontarians for the Arts, [Connections and Resilience through the Arts: A Policy Discussion Paper](#), 2018.

## Allowing for organic development of hubs

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: “How do we, as a government, get out of the way to allow for this organic development of hubs? We need to make sure we're out of the way to allow them to happen. My whole area has completely evolved because the artists got together and started their own development of the area; but then how can we be there to support its continued development once it's actually been formed? It's a bit of a case of ‘get out of the way to allow for it, but then be there when they actually need us to be there.’”**

### Answer

Other witnesses have expressed how municipal regulations and designations can make a profound difference on the emergence of a cultural hub or district. Among them, Music Canada published a report that concluded:

“Government policies have a direct impact on the ability of music businesses such as live performance venues, recording studios and rehearsal spaces to operate sustainably. Business licensing, liquor licensing, transportation planning and parking, as well as land-use planning all have an impact on the health of the music economy.”<sup>5</sup>

These recommendations equally apply to arts-focussed culture hubs. We will speak to some of these recommendations in more details in the last part of this brief.

During our March 29 testimony, we mentioned the need for federal support towards ongoing operating costs of cultural hubs. As we led further consultations in preparation for this supplementary brief, this point of view was reiterated in reference to the emergence and ongoing operations of the Bloor Street Cultural District:

“Cultural hubs and districts require effective leadership. For there to be collaboration, as well as things like public art and cultural activation in the public realm, and cultural district management and branding, someone needs to instigate, coordinate, and manage that. In some cases this is not the artists and not the participating cultural organizations (renters, tenants, consortium partners etc.), but a collaboration between all of them that is the glue of the ecosystem. Right now that is a very difficult thing to formalize and almost impossible to get funded from any level of government – especially in its formative years (it’s not an arts service organization, nor a business improvement area, nor a charity or other established structures.)”

---

<sup>5</sup> Music Canada, [The Mastering of a Music City](#), 2015.

## Cultural hubs in rural setting

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: “I'm always very city oriented, but this country's large. We have a lot of small cities, and we have a lot of rural areas. How would your response differ for any of those areas?”**

### Answer

Cultural hubs and districts are characterized by a high concentration of cultural facilities and organizations that serves as an anchor of attraction. By virtue of this definition, cultural hubs and district are an inherently urban concept.

In a rural or remote setting, it is entirely possible for a single arts facility (possibly run by a single arts organization) to be the anchor of attraction for the entire local arts community, as well as for local residents. This single facility can serve an equivalent function as an urban cultural hub, provided it is equipped with mixed-use spaces that can accommodate a range of artistic practices and community activities.

This reality has been and must continue to be taken into account in the delivery of federal programs which support cultural hubs, namely the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund and the Canada Arts Presentation Fund.

In addition, we must highlight the peculiar challenges of leading a capital project in a small community. Among many things, raising funds can be very difficult: the number of potential corporate and individual donors is limited in a small centre and their financial capacity follows that of the local economy. Consequently, programs such as the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund must adapt their expectations for matching funds when applications originate from a rural or remote area.

Finally, regardless of the setting, the idea of cultural hubs being “local” is important. Even in urban areas, a cultural hub must be connected to the local arts community, must be integrated with its natural and built environment, and must be welcoming and relevant to residents of its immediate neighbourhood. For larger urban centres that have many different local realities, this may mean having more than one cultural hub responding to different needs in different parts of the city.

## Supplemental information

There may be opportunities for the federal government to create synergies between cultural infrastructure funding and other priority areas.

In our testimony, we stressed the need to integrate affordable housing in order to increase the sustainability of cultural hubs. Music Canada expressed a similar point of view and also highlighted the importance linking music hubs with public transit:

“Many of the cities cited in this report have explicitly recognized the importance of city infrastructure. A baseline level of transportation infrastructure, including public transit and parking near venues, is necessary to connect audiences with artists and venues, and thereby facilitate the growth of music scenes. Affordable housing is necessary to attract and retain artists, many of whom earn limited incomes.”<sup>6</sup>

We also heard considerations for public transit as we conducted our own consultations on cultural hubs:

“attendant services (good food, near public transit) are key to the attraction of people, and that a place that encourages “hanging about” due to these attendant services will always be superior as a place of rich ideas of interaction.”

The new Quebec *Politique de mobilité durable*<sup>7</sup> could provide an interesting framework for creating synergies between cultural and public transit infrastructure. One of the premises of this policy is a call for a better integration of public transit planning and land-use planning. Among many things, the policy proposes to attach public transit funding to the development of municipal mobility plans that would encourage densification of neighbourhoods and a concentration of economic activities and other services along public transit lines. Such considerations are fully compatible with the Canadian Arts Coalition’s recommendation regarding cultural hubs and affordable housing, as well as with the necessity to make cultural hubs accessible via public transit.

## About the Canadian Arts Coalition

The Canadian Arts Coalition is a collaborative non-partisan movement spearheaded by a group of national arts service and membership organizations, with a volunteer Steering Committee comprised of artists and arts administrators. We are united in the belief that a strong arts and culture sector contributes to economically vibrant, liveable, and innovative communities, and that strong federal cultural policy and investment frameworks leverage arts and culture’s contribution to the Canadian economy, Canadian communities, and Canada’s standing internationally.

The full list of [Coalition members](#) can be found on our website.

---

<sup>6</sup> Music Canada, [The Mastering of a Music City](#), 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, [Politique de mobilité durable](#), 2018