



The International Centre of Art for Social Change

Presentation to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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[Audio File](#): Presentation timestamps: 10:00:45 – 10:08:05

Presentation Text

Good *early* morning, everyone! I am delighted to share perspectives and ideas about how arts and culture can become more truly integrated into the fabric of our country – and relate this to the creation of arts and cultural hubs or centres. An artist myself, best known previously as a producer and choreographer, I presently lead a \$3m, six-year national study on art for social change (or ASC) involving six universities, 45 scholars, artists and community-based organizations, the first study of its kind in Canada, which concludes in December. We've already made public over 100 results of this work, including information on its impact for individuals, communities and for systems change.

I work all over the world and know from experience that Canada is considered a leader in the field of art for social change. So, what do I mean by ASC? We define it as artmaking made collectively by groups of people about things that matter to them, this process facilitated by a specialized artist or group of artists. This work involves every arts discipline, performing, visual, literary, digital and urban arts, very often in partnership with community-based non-arts organizations in a wide swathe of diverse sectors - from health and justice to immigrant settlement, economic development, cross-cultural, cross-generational and reconciliation work, conflict resolution, with youth and elders, as well as for strategic planning in corporate settings, for the creation of public policy. **But at its centre is the artmaking; ASC is a form of art with its own, unique goals, pedagogy, methods and scholarship, a form of cultural democracy. It is about our own voices, the imaginative way we have to understand and address often-complex problems.**

There are over 400 organizations working in this sector with a history of over 50 years in our country; the field is growing exponentially as organizations, artists, and changemakers from every sector are seeing the profound impact of this work that brings the right brain into action. **Creative innovation is at the heart of these arts-based forms of dialogue as well as in the resulting action for positive change.**

So how does this sector relate to arts and cultural community centres or hubs? I will get to this very soon...but first an image: if we place the whole arts ecology on a vertical scale, we see, at the top what I will call high-end arts - institutions such as museums, music, theatre, ballet and opera companies and the for-profit cultural industries, such as film and music, and then the avant-garde/cutting edge arts. At the bottom is your daughter singing in the bathtub about her dog. And, in-between is a whole range of arts activities – from pottery classes at the local community centre, Sunday painting, story circles and

community choirs. I like to do this: flatten the vertical hierarchy to the horizontal and then make it a circle. **Every element of this circle is connected to every other element. If we are to create a healthier, more innovative and imaginative, creative, cohesive and engaged society, we need to be inclusive when thinking about policies to enrich our experience of the arts – not just consuming art but making it with others about what matters to us, making visible the diverse voices of our country in their voices.**

In the policy report before you - it's hot off the press as of one day ago - and translation is in process - you will see background information on ASC in Canada, including examples of the work and policy recommendations. The first series of recommendations are directed specifically to Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts. After decades of inclusion, the Council has eliminated community-engaged arts as its own field of practice; the sector is not present on the Canada Council's website. The absence of experienced ASC artists on juries and the absence of criteria for assessment are problematic as well. Despite two years of attempting dialogue, a national working group has not been able to engage in productive dialogue about these issues. The second set of recommendations are calls for action across all federal departments, based in part on meetings with some 34 federal officials in Ottawa over the last year.

Our research reveals that the federal government is far behind municipalities, provinces and foundations in its recognition and support for this arts sector, some 8% of the total. We are under the radar in Ottawa! In fact, many other jurisdictions have increased their support for this work as they see its profound, sustainable and positive impacts. The social innovation/social enterprise community is just the latest to integrate these arts practices into their own work.

Given all these realities, I offer possible approaches to the question of arts/cultural centres and hubs:

1. I very much endorse the perspectives of the Canadian Arts Coalition and those of the McConnell Foundation which truly represent attainable and positive directions for future hubs and centres.
2. I propose that Heritage mandate that community-engaged ASC activities be integrated into the policies and programs of new centres. (One could even use arts-infused dialogue to create the policies for these centres.) My experience is that the majority of many arts and cultural activities in this country presently take place outside of existing arts centres... and that, in particular, community-engaged arts tend to be isolated from the main stream and are constantly in search of community-based locations in which to do their work. Bring in the hundreds of experienced organizations and artists to run ASC programs that are relevant to their communities.
3. Create a new program within Heritage that, itself...a hub that amalgamates resources, both financial and programmatic, from a variety of ministries and departments in support of community-engaged arts practitioners and their many community-based non-arts partners. This would bring together some of the silos that currently create duplication and lack of exchange on change agendas across government silos. As we see more inclusion of arts-based approaches, these new programs could be delivered through the new hubs or centres, both within the bricks and mortar facilities and outside with people where they live. For example, to provide programs in isolated rural communities.
4. We heartily endorse previous presentations which have recommended much more collaboration with the provinces and territories, with municipal governments and with foundations. This

collaboration, despite all its challenges, guarantees better buy-in and sustainability of citizen engagement and participation in our arts and cultural activities...wherein all voices are welcome and innovative ideas fuel both creation through the lens of creative expression and action for positive change.

While I certainly recognize economic incentives, such as possible multiplier effects of centralized hubs, I also urge you to look at the multitude of possibilities that lie within the creation of places where all citizens will feel welcome to share their own stories. We are all the experts of our own lives and have much to share.

I look forward to your questions and comments.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

[10:38:25: NDP Member of Parliament Pierre Nantel, puts questions to Judith]

Nantel: What's obvious, from the witnesses we had the chance to hear, is that the cultural milieu wants to have access to better audiences, to better mitigation with the clientele. We want to create these sorts of communities, but what we hear as a principle, but not always accurately or concretely, is the social impact on the clientele, on the citizens, and this is why I want to speak to Ms. Marcuse about this.

[10:38:50] Would you be interested in being an adviser for these cultural projects so that the social impact is always effective and accurate?

Marcuse [10:39:12]: I think there is really a strong place for consultation from this perspective, through this lens. I would recommend, for example, that there be community consultations in the planning process for these cultural centres because so often they're beautifully designed, but they are not used by the full community; particularly, people newer to the community, new immigrants, youths, seniors. It feels to me that the possibilities for Heritage to do this convening... [must] also look at research that really proves the impact of social arts in various ways and how to integrate that better into a hub [that focuses on community-engaged arts].

I also really endorse the notion that Sarah Douglas Murray has just expressed, and others have too, to your committee, that there really needs to be profound consultation, despite all the vicissitudes of doing that: with cities, with the provinces, and also with private foundations who are increasingly involved in social practice arts; with universities as well, which are doing enormous amounts of outreach; not only in their arts, but connecting arts and health, reconciliation, the settlement of new Canadians, work with isolated seniors, and street involved youth. The range of the work of the arts really needs to be extended so that we see the full range and the integration of citizens into making art not just consuming it.

Nantel [10:41:10]: In the notes you sent us, you are referring to 'Wapikoni Mobile', and 'CITÉ DES ARTS' ... Please tell us more about these examples, because even though you weren't necessarily involved, you found them very good examples of the impact of art on people, on people practicing art which is a difference here.

Marcuse: Yes, exactly Monsieur Nantel. As I say we've done 6 years of research looking into these forms of art making and what it does for people. So, we see for example, in an organization called *Cirque Hors Piste* in Montreal, a program that works with street-involved youth, and what we see from our research, is that a very high percentage of them report back to us on returning to school, learning job skills, being more socially included, or... going to a state of better well-being. We see a group of breast cancer patients in a hospital in Ontario, unhappy with their treatment, create a play with an art for social change playwright. They performed it for the whole hospital, and as a result policy was changed for the better.

Nantel [10:42:39]: If I may jump in, would you see it appropriate to have the intervention and support from other departments, other ministers' departments?

Marcuse: Absolutely, in all my conversations in Ottawa over the last year, I keep hearing this term "lateral integration". And I can't stress largely enough how important it is that there be connection between the silos. If we're going to address really complex problems in our country, we really need to bring artists together with health practitioners, with people who are doing cross cultural work, building consensus around how best to use the arts to make Canada a healthier and more integrated and more creative place. Because so often the policies that come down reflect only a certain lens, and if we have these conversations across disciplines, across sectors, we stand a much better chance for [developing] sustainable resources, and also just basically inclusion of more people who are telling their own stories and in doing that creating policies and approaches for positive change.

Nantel: Absolutely, and I'm sure that the health ministers would see in these cancer patients very good, positive impact on their health through these art practice. Am I right in saying this?

Marcuse: Absolutely...

[Committee Meeting adjourned]