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Divided Together: Can municipalities define 'Canadianess' better than national cultural policies?

In 1989 while at *The Spectrum* in Winnipeg, I saw *The Tragically Hip* perform live for the first time. The club held about 300 people and the stage was about a foot-and-a-half off the floor. The experience was visceral, since the audience could literally reach out and touch the performers (although no one ever did). I had seen other bands perform at this club before, but as an 18-year-old I knew something was different with these guys and that I was taking part in something significant. Although I couldn't catch all of the words, I was picking up on bits and pieces about things that I had read about in local and national newspapers, or had studied in history class: *Canadian* things. And here was a rock band singing about them! For me, it was probably my first encounter with what I consider a sincere Canadian cultural experience.

In the face of increasing globalization, there is, more than ever, a need for countries to protect culture. Yet international agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the Trans-Pacific Partnership seem to be undermining nations' abilities to protect their individual cultures. These agreements increasingly target culture and cultural industries and remove them from domestic 'protectionist' legislation. In the face of this development, the question must be asked whether it is worthwhile for nations to pursue or promote a national cultural identity at all. Perhaps their now needs to be more emphasis based on the many micro-cultures that comprise nations, lending credence to the idea that municipalities will play an ever-increasing role in developing culture through policy. The key issue surrounding national cultural policies acting in contradiction to international trade agreements is highlighted in course material from Athabasca University:

> Trade disputes about culture generally concern the issue of "national treatment," which requires that a country treat imported products no less favourably than domestic ones. Canada has negotiated a "cultural exception" to the this rule in both the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States and the subsequent North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which expanded the FTA to include Mexico, but the United States has always viewed these exceptions as protectionist and discriminatory (Lemieux & Jackson, 1999). (Athabasca, Unit 8)

At the same time, there exists an argument for cities to stand as cultural bastions against increasing global cultural homogenization. More importantly, policies and frameworks are already in place to accommodate the concept of the municipality as a cultural incubator. Again, we see the evidence of this in Athabasca's course material:

Within Canada, the "four-pillar" approach to sustainability (which includes cultural, social, environmental, and economic dimensions) was adopted by the federal government in 2005 as a framework for the transfer of Gas Tax money to the provinces (Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, 2005). Receipt of Gas Tax money by municipalities was made conditional on the production of local Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs) that included all four elements and engaged residents of the community in sustainability planning. (Athabasca, Unit 10)

Moving forward, perhaps the best level for creating meaningful cultural policy is on the micro level, or in other words, at the municipal level. The mechanism, as stated above, already exists to further develop this model, as culture is included as one of the four pillars of sustainability. Federal policy documents on the agreement explain how these payments work to help municipalities:

The gas tax agreements that are currently being negotiated and signed with the provinces/territories, municipalities and municipal associations include a commitment to develop ICSPs at the local level. The agreements permit municipalities to use a portion of their gas tax allocation to develop the plans by the end of the agreement. (Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, p . 5)

This same report acknowledges that culture is a pillar of sustainability and identifies it as such, and highlights how culture can, and will, play an increasingly important role in municipal affairs:

When compared to the other three dimensions of sustainability, cultural sustainability objectives are probably the least defined and, to a large extent, are the least resonant with decision-making leaders facing more immediate pressures such as infrastructure, transit and housing. Despite increasing diversity in communities, the longer-term benefits of culture in terms of promoting community identity and cohesion are difficult to quantify and therefore less evident to municipal decision-makers.

Many cities and communities have invested in arts and heritage as an important element of their revitalization and renewal strategies. Cultural tourism is also on the rise and is increasingly linked with community branding and economic development initiatives. (Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, p . 15)

However, it is important to distinguish between 'real' culture and cultural activities created with the intention of furthering economic development. Steven Thorne, in a presentation at the 2009 Creative City Conference, touched on this point:

The essence of cultural tourism is about encountering a destination's history and heritage, its stories, its people, its landscape, its townscape, its culture. It is about discovering what makes a destination distinctive, authentic, and memorable. It is about the experience of "place". (Thorne, p. 5)

Because of this, it is in a municipality's best interest to strive towards authenticity when developing cultural policy. As M. Sharon Jeanotte explains in her essay *Just Showing Up: Social and Cultural Capitol in everyday Life,* the exploitation of a local culture solely for economic gain may help with economic development initiatives, but may be harmful to the health of a community as a whole:

In his book on "fantasy cities," John Hannigan examines the growth of Urban Entertainment Destinations (packaged and sanitized leisure and tourist attractions in cities). He also analyzes the linkages between

tangible and intangible cultural capital in postmodern cities, suggesting that themed venues, which blend entertainment, fashion, sport, technology, and food represent the only truly global cultural capital. Like Naomi Klein in her widely-read book No Logo and Chatterton and Hollands in their book on Urban Nightscapes, Hannigan believes that the primary value of corporatized themed environments lies not in their tangible bricks and mortar, but in their ability to generate intangible cultural capital in the form of brands which can be replicated in locations throughout the world. This form of cultural capital is aimed primarily at generating economic rather than social benefits, leading to questions as to the sustainability of local cultures within such an environment. [60] (Jeanotte, 2005; p. 132)

In accordance with this idea of developing a unique and authentic local cultures, Thorne touches upon the authenticity of the experience and warns against the pitfalls of becoming just another tourist trap. He explains that:

Place interpretation is the art of branding, imaging, and messaging as part of the marketing campaign to help communicate a destination's cultural character and sense of place. It is an art that is rarely seen in attractions-based approaches. (Thorne, p. 13)

If it is best for a municipality to develop policy in pursuit of fostering authentic cultural development in both economic and social terms, it then stands to reason that national policy should strive to achieve a concept of Canadian identity at the grassroots level. This is at odds with a national concept of Canadian identity which has always been difficult to define and emerges as somewhat insincere due to the country's history of cultural hegemony. Canada has an ethnically diverse population and yet representations of Canadians have primarily showcased our Anglocentric roots. Susan Ashley, in discussing the national museum system in her essay *State authority and the public sphere: Ideas on the changing role of the museum as a Canadian social institution* explains this tradition:

The nationalistic imagining of Canada was surprisingly monolithic outside of Quebec. Permanent exhibits in national, provincial and regional institutions reflected a similar mix of displays about Anglo settlement history. Until the 1970s the treatment of First Nations and non-Anglo cultures was either anthropological or non-existent. (Ashley, p. 9)

Columnist Kate Taylor in a 2015 article from the *Globe and Mail* echoes this sentiment and makes the case against attempting to develop a cultural identity crafted at the national level:

in truth, there are many Canadian identities, and individual cultural creations are never the best servants of political policies. To this day, critics of the CBC express squeamishness about what they clearly view as an attempt at social engineering. If you determine that culture is supposed to be moulding or shaping citizens, or even just reflecting some particular theme or place, you tend to limit its scope and its imagination. (Taylor, 2016)

A further case an be made that artificial cultural identity really doesn't satisfy anyone's needs. It doesn't achieve its policy aims, but more importantly, doesn't resonate with the audience it is meant to connect with. Keith Acheson, in *Canadian foreign direct investment policy and the cultural industries* explains that:

The goal of cultural industry policy is to provide and deliver more Canadian content; however, the link to Canadian culture is tenuous as the number of Canadians who prefer to read, watch and listen to what is officially designated as their cultural products is relatively low. (Acheson, p. 1)

Added to the pressure of presenting and packaging an artificial "Canadian" product that consumers are not necessarily interested in, national cultural organizations and companies are facing increasing external economic pressures. Thus, it becomes even more important for these entities to produce cultural products that are authentic and therefore marketable. To force Canadian cultural industries to produce a product that reflects a Canadian identity that no one can identify with puts these producers of culture at a disadvantage in the global market at a time when it is most important to ensure they can remain competitive. As Dwayne Winseck explains in *The state of media ownership and media markets: Competition or concentration and why should we care?*:

Media workers in the USA, Canada, Britain and many other countries report that bottom-line pressures now have a greater impact on their work than in the past, that the influence of owners, managers and advertisers is increasing and that their trust in media executives is declining (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). (Winseck, p. 45)

As producers of national cultural products face the challenges associated with globalization, so does the notion of national culture itself. Sarah Armstrong in *Magazines, Cultural Policy and Globalization: The Forced Retreat of the State*? explains, "Economic globalization is posing some new challenges for preservation of cultural diversity." (Armstrong, p. 370). She also points out that globalization is redefining traditional ideas about national cultures, stating that "Globalization, then, can be referred to as a compression of space and time, as a result of which the movement of global phenomena transcends borders and is much less bound by physical location than ever before." (Armstrong, p. 371)

Armstrong then discusses the homogenizing effects of globalization, but in doing so highlights the role that cities play in the production of culture:

Many people equate these homogenizing processes in the sphere of cultural production with Americanization, and speak of the emergence of a homogenized or globalized monoculture, steered by trends determined in Hollywood and New York (Armstrong, p. 372)

In this statement she makes clear that what much of what the world perceives as American culture is actually the result of cultural products created by specific American cities, not of the nation as a whole. The Hollywood blockbuster says very little about life in Des Moines, Iowa. And Des Moines is rarely represented in American cinema originating from Hollywood. As such, the argument for municipalities as the best-suited incubators for culture becomes even stronger.

Armstrong then discusses the importance of strengthening Canadian culture in the global melee, building on Winseck's observations:

Thus, the process of globalization, including the globalization of media firms, has made domestic cultural production more essential than ever for the survival of Canadian culture and, more broadly, for the survival of global cultural diversity. (Armstrong, p. 372)

Finally, she highlights the difficulty nations face in fighting cultural hegemony from the large players in the

global market, stating that Trade liberalization has further narrowed the options available to countries such as Canada who argue that government has a role to play in fostering and protecting their domestic cultural industries. (Armstrong, p. 378)

So Canadian producers of cultural products are facing an external threat from limitations introduced through international trade agreements, and internally by policies that force them to represent a contrived notion of 'Canadianess'. National cultural policy, with its goal of creating a unified concept of Canadian culture, is ironically forcing national cultural producers into extinction through content limitations. For these reasons, the concept of creating culture at the micro level seems to be an obvious, and positive, direction in the creation of new cultural policies. Columnist Will Straw, PhD, points out in an article hosted on *Huffington Post*, discusses that this is already the case:

> Canadian cities, large and small, are where the action is these days in the cultural policy field. Much of the credit for this goes to the activists, creators, politicians and thinkers who have thought in richly stimulating ways about the place of culture in urban life. The Federal government, which has largely vacated the realm of significant policy-making in the cultural sector, can only watch all this activity from the sidelines. (Straw, 2016)

And the Gas Tax fund may provide the avenue by which the federal government can get out of the cultural policy game altogether. Nancy Duxbury & M. Sharon Jeanotte, in *Including culture in sustainability: an assessment of Canada's Integrated Community Sustainability Plans* explain:

> Infrastructure Canada (responsible for cities and communities) introduced a policy requiring municipalities to develop long-term ICSPs reflecting this model, which were tied to Gas Tax Fund (GTF) Agreements signed in 2005–2006 with each province and territory. Municipalities can use a portion of the GTF funds to undertake community-based sustainability planning, which has helped finance these processes. (Duxbury & Jeannotte, p. 7)

Duxbury & Jeanotte then explain that although this mechanism for cultural development already exists, it is most often underutilized:

> Since about 2000, a four-pillar model of sustainability has emerged internationally, rooted in ideas from a range of international agencies and researchers and encompassing four interconnected dimensions: environmental responsibility, economic health, social equity, and cultural vitality (Hawkes 2001). However, if the social dimension of sustainability has often been missing from sustainability discourse and practice, the inclusion of culture within conceptual and planning frameworks for long-term community wellbeing and sustainability has tended to be even more vague and fractured. As a result, cultural considerations tend not to be integrated into sustainability initiatives in a widespread or consistent way. (Duxbury & Jeannotte, p. 1)

So, though it is generally understood that the concept of a national culture is now taking a back seat to more localized representations, and manifestations, of culture, there seems to be a lack of direction and action. It is only when culture can be commodified that it seems to rise to the forefront of discussion. Deborah Leslie & Norma Rantisi, in *Governing the Design Economy in Montreal, Canada* explain that:

For Kong (2000), a shift in thinking comes about in the mid-1980s, when national, provincial, and local governments begin to recognize the role of cultural industries in economic development and urban renewal. For local governments in particular, cultural-industrial policies become a vehicle for generating revenues in the context of neoliberalism and the gradual withdrawal of the nation-state. (Leslie & Rantisi, p. 313)

The potential of culture and cultural industries as a contributor to the economic vitality of municipalities is thus established, but both play an important part in the *overall* well-being of the community as well. Susan Bagwell in *Creative clusters and city growth* builds a case for this, explaining:

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the creative industries and their potential role as a tool for addressing a number of key government policies and concerns, particularly those concerned with our towns and cities. This interest stems from the significant size of the sector as well as the rapid growth it has reportedly experienced. (Bagwell, p. 31)

Policy creation then faces the challenge of balancing these seemingly opposing objectives of culture as economic generator and culture as social asset:

Consequently, the role of the state in protecting and promoting culture is at issue, not only for Canada, but for other countries as well. At stake are two competing models for cultural policy-making: the local culture model, which defines culture as a way of life and deserving of state support and the global market model, which defines culture as a commodity to be treated like other commodities. (Armstrong, p. 370)

But he potential for organic economic growth, as previously established through Thorne, most often comes come as a result of authentic cultural development at the local level. Simon Brault, in T*he arts and culture as new engines of economic and social development*, reconciles the opposing outcomes posited by Armstrong through an example of a cultural event conceived of and hosted at the municipal level:

Last year, for instance, almost 3.5 million people, including a large number of young people, converged on the city of Barcelona for a novel event that is likely to be repeated in years to come. Thousands of artists and intellectuals from Spain and around the world were invited to present hundreds of shows, exhibitions and conferences dealing with three main themes: cultural diversity, sustainable development and conditions for peace. During the 141 days it lasted, visitors were immersed in an atmosphere of festivities, reflection and dialogue aimed at making them aware of what they can accomplish at the dawn of this new century. A huge debate on the meaning and future of culture became the object of a popular demonstration. (Brault, p 2)

There is evidence to support economic growth and authentic culture development do not have to be mutually exclusive, but it is important to remember that there must be buy-in from stakeholders at all levels in order to create an environment conducive to the organic growth of culture on a local level. In a 2007 edition of *Creative City News* produced by the Creative City Network emphasizes that:

The key to cultural sustainability is fostering partnerships, exchange, and respect between different streams of government, business, and arts organizations. Culture as the fourth pillar promotes these partnerships and is quickly gaining currency in policy and planning initiatives in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. (Creative City Network of Canada, p. 2)

As is often stated, culture can difficult to define and be more broadly interpreted as what is just traditionally

considered 'the arts'. If we expand the definition of culture to include any community activity that encourages participation and fosters social capital, we can include a number of different activities into the fold. For example, sports and health-related activities can be included as a part of a community's culture, as Jon Hawkes points out in is essay *The fourth pillar of sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning* where he explains that "What we do in the breaks between the struggle to survive is profoundly important to our wellbeing, our sense of belonging and connectedness, our understanding of ourselves and our relationships – our culture." (Hawkes, p. 31). He follows this with a discussion specifically about sport, where he states that "Equitable community access to public facilities, both as participants and as spectators, appears to be an overlooked area. As does the availability of proficient training opportunities for community-based activities." (Hawkes, p. 31)

A recent Canadian example where federal, provincial, and civic funds – used to create a cultural experience – where put in the hands of a local group operating at the municipal level, exists in central Alberta. In 2019, Red Deer hosted the 2019 winter *Jeux de Canada Games*. This event, occurring every four years and meant as a primer for young Canadian athletes poised to compete at the Winter Olympic Games, changes location for each individual set of games. However, each of the 'games' creates a unique identity based upon the host city in which it takes place. Already positioned as a sports-minded city, having hosted other events like the *Telus Cup* and the *Scotties Tournament of Hearts*, Red Deer was able to leverage substantial community buy in to build on existing facilities and create a legacy to foster future culture growth in the community:

> RD Mayor Tara Veer said she's extremely proud of the legacy that was created as central Albertans pulled together to host the event.
>
> "Honestly, it's been absolutely incredible. it's hard to believe that' it's been a year, but I will say the 27th edition of the Canada games proved to set a new standard for all Canada games to come," Veer said.
>
> "Our local host society and a group of 5,000 volunteers, sponsors and donors really came together and used the Canada Games as a catalyst to transform our community. And we continue to see the legacy of that in the community that we are becoming today."
>
> In communications with the Canada Games Council, Veer said they have heard high praise for Red Deer's hosting and have been recognized for all the hard work put forth to bring the games to life.
>
> "Everywhere our community goes - certainly I see it myself as I represent Red Deer throughout the province - we continue to hear about the games and what it means to individual athletes or teams that came here, or volunteers who came from different parts of western Canada to come here. I don't think we can underestimate the economic impact, but the social impact as well."
>
> "As a result of hosting the 2019 Games, Red Deer and central Alberta benefited from multiple sport, cultural, facility and social legacies across Red Deer and central Alberta," said Lyn Radford, 2019 Canada Winter Games Board Chair.
>
> "While 2019 was our moment, these legacies help to cement Red Deer as an event hosting destination. Now, it is up to Red Deer and central Alberta to decide what their moment will be."
>
> Radford was also recognized for her dedication to leading the volunteer base and has been nominated for the Sport Volunteer of the Year through the Prestige Awards.

Highlights of key legacies from the Games include:

- Supporting $110.3 million in economic activity in Alberta
- Investing $14.5 million in five capital projects, as well as facility and equipment upgrades for sport and cultural facilities, to support the hosting of the Games
- Donating over $500,000 in sports equipment and assets to over 40 local and provincial sport organizations and not-for-profits
- Sourcing goods and services from 391 businesses in central Alberta
- Planting over 2,019 trees across central Alberta
- Training a volunteer workforce of over 4,600 individuals.

"Not only do we have new sport and cultural facilities, but our community also found a renewed sense of pride and came together to rally around a shared love of sport and belief in the promise of Canada's youth," Mayor Veer said. (Mendosa, 2020)

What this event, and its success, highlights is the importance of the need to have cultural activities executed at the municipal level. Although municipalities don't have the funding to undertake such endeavours, they are best suited to recruit the volunteers and garner the required participation from the community. Christopher Walker, in *Arts & culture: Community connections – Contributions from new survey research* echoes this sentiment and supports it with empirical data:

Social and family connections are particularly important to people who participate in arts and culture occasionally. The reason most frequently given for participation, by 59 percent of those responding to the survey, was "to get together with friends or family" and the second most frequent reason, cited by 49 percent, was "to support friends or family." (Walker, p. 3)

The development of cultural activities, therefore, is best dealt with on the local level where government has the closest contact with its citizens. A national government may not have the ability to mobilize the community as effectively as a municipal government can. It then begs the question 'why should a national government fund cultural activities in individual communities if there is no direct benefit to the nation as a whole – what's in it for them?'. Jeanotte answers this question in *Singing alone? The contribution of cultural capital to social cohesion and sustainable communities*:

We do not yet understand why people who participate in cultural activity also seem to have higher rates of participation in their communities, but if this connection proves to have a robust link to social capital and the quality of community life, it may signal a role for cultural capital that goes far beyond "opera tickets for the elite". The evidence so far seems to suggest that cultural participation helps to connect individuals to the social spaces occupied by others and encourages "buy in" to institutional rules and shared norms of behavior. Without this "buy in", individuals are unlikely to enter into willing collaboration with others and without that cooperation, civic engagement and social capital—key components of social cohesion—may be weakened. (Jeanotte, 2003; p. 47)

And, Hawkes argues, the responsibility to build strong citizenry through cultural framework resides with government:

In a vital society, the meaning we make of our lives is something we do together, not an activity to be left to others, no matter how skilled, or representative, they may claim to be. It is within the power, and a primary responsibility, of government to address this problem. (Hawkes, p. 16)

Hawkes also contends, as do others, that the most effective way to achieve this is at the municipal where governments are best suited to this task:

It may be that local government is best placed to address this issue. It is the tier of governance closest to the citizenry, and therefore (at least theoretically) the one most in touch with, and capable of being responsive to, its constituency. It is probably the best governance level at which to develop new methodologies of participatory democracy and cultural action. It is ideally placed to stimulate community debate on the values and aspirations that should inform our future, and to plan its actions in direct response to the visions of the community. (Hawkes, p. 16)

Duxbury, et al. connect the dots between this participation at the local level back to the idea that it serves the greater good of the nation:

Local governments occupy a strategically important space between global developments and forces and geographically broader-scope governments, and citizen-driven movements, innovations, and energies. Local governments form a vital bridge between citizens and communities, on the one side, and national governments and the international frameworks, on the other side. (Duxbury et al., p. 17)

Jeanotte furthers this sentiment for the need to develop cultural policies at the local rather than at the national level. She strongly ties together the idea that policy is not just meant to create economic results, but is intended to create increased social capital:

So, what does this mean for cultural policy? For cultural policy as currently formulated, visions of dollar signs often spring to mind when the words "creative" and "cities" are used in the same sentence. However, the real meaning may lie in the more mundane and, paradoxically, more profound sphere of everyday life as lived by citizens in their communities. A first step in understanding the significance of social and cultural capital in the formulation of cultural policy may consist in applying, as Mercer suggests, a Cultural Capital Assessment Tool at the level of the local community. (Jeanotte, 2005; p. 140)

There is even evidence that it is not a matter of speculation. Municipal governments in isolated cases, at least in a Canadian context, have already begun, through the ICSP, to take the lead in developing effective cultural policy:

Within this diverse and somewhat vague guidance framework, a few municipalities/communities are emerging as "conceptual leaders." In the communities that we describe below, significant efforts were made to engage citizens in a discussion of the contents of the ICSPs, which gave a good deal of local resonance to the plans. Each community described a comprehensive, holistic view of a sustainable community and put forward its own distinct view on culture and sustainability, explicitly highlighting culture in the ICSPs and attempting to conceptualize this inclusion. The three examples we highlight are Kingston, Ontario; Powell River, British Columbia; and the Ottawa-Gatineau Region, straddling the Ontario/Quebec border. (Duxbury & Jeannotte, p. 10)

And as national policy develops and creates new frameworks for collaborative cultural development, strong

cultural leadership at the municipal level may become even more important by informing the policies at higher levels of government:

> Due to the influence of intermunicipal networks that facilitate and encourage learning from one another's experiences, these types of bottom-up conceptual contributions should be influential in helping shape the next wave of ICSPs and similar plans. They may also inform the next wave of provincial and national guides for municipalities, when/if these are redeveloped. (Duxbury & Jeannotte, p. 11)

Yet in the interest of creating a cohesive national identity, federal policy may overlook the importance of municipalities in creating the cultural identity of the nation. As stated earlier, in the Canadian context, we have traditionally seen a top-down policy approach defining a national identity based on what may be false ideas, rather than drawing upon the organic realities of municipal micro-cultures and using them to contribute to the national identity as a complex network of unique cultures sharing similar aspirations and objectives. As Hawkes points out, it is not only higher levels of government that overlook municipalities in terms of cultural production. The same national cultural institutions that are struggling economically due to the effects of globalization, often completely overlook municipalities as the drivers of cultural production:

> Clearly, the major engines of cultural production (along with the family and peer groups) are the education system and the media (including the advertising industry), neither of which take much notice of local government (which is not to say, that if it so chose, local government couldn't develop a quite gingery relationship with these monsters). But, notwithstanding local government's separation from these behemoths, there remains the fact that an essential element of cultural production (perhaps the essential element) occurs at the local, day-to-day, street, face-to-face level. Identities are fundamentally forged, tested and developed through visceral human interaction – and it is here that local government can be enormously effective. (Hawkes, p. 31)

This may perhaps be a large error on their part. In ignoring cultural participation at the local level, national organizations are missing the target, attempting to represent a fictional, national cultural identity rather than focussing on the real cultural identities familiar to their target audience (and revenue base!). It is through these local identities and the day-to-day production of culture that citizens become fulfilled and feel a part of a greater, common community:

> Local government is not the branch office of some central bureaucracy, not just the place you go to get your card stamped or your plans approved. It represents, at the closest level, the aspirations of its constituency. Local government's constant and direct interaction with the communities it serves is why its key function is community development; that is, the enhancement of the social connections, interactions and support systems that allow us all to become fulfilled and engaged citizens. At the heart of community development is cultural vitality, for it is only through knowing that we belong and that we share values that we can wholeheartedly get on with our lives. (Hawkes, p. 31)

Duxbury speaks of this and further and suggests that municipalities full potential as cultural generators is still often overlooked in terms of cultural policy, especially in the face of increasing globalization:

As many reports have documented, cities and towns are hubs of innovation in the economic, cultural, and social realms. The goal of re-humanizing the city through culture-sensitive urban strategies is underpinned by principles and inclusive processes of access, representation, and participation. In the context of defining a new people-centred and planet-sensitive sustainable development agenda, cities are transformative platforms. However, the transformative potential of cities has not yet been fully harnessed by international agencies, national governments, or local authorities. (Duxbury, et al, p. 6)

This concept is not new, and yet somehow it continues to be realized to its full potential:

In 1996, Habitat II, the "City Summit," brought culture into global debates on urbanization. Culture was recognized as an integral part of people's well-being, and local development and equity were linked with acknowledging diversity in cultural heritages and values. (Duxbury, et al, p. 7)

As suggested earlier, the key point is that citizens must feel a genuine connection to representations of their culture. This in turn creates a sense of well-being and connectedness to the community. That is why it is important for culture to be authentic. The municipality provides the best environment to develop this complex interrelationship:

Local cultures allow citizens to gain ownership of the city, and to meet and learn from one another – in short, culture is a means through which citizens feel they belong to their city. In particular, a culturally sensitive and gendered approach can empower marginalized individuals and communities to participate in cultural and political life. (Duxbury, et al, p. 8)

At the heart of the debate lies the question as to whether a national manufactured culture can be forced upon citizens in the digital age and in the face of increasing globalization. Even in European examples, ideas of nationhood take a back seat to local aspirations. Perhaps the nineteenth century ideal of a unified national culture has outlived its usefulness. The concept of national cultures can and should give way to local cultures, and national cultural policies can cultivate this by supporting cultural development at the municipal level. It is an effective way for national governments to circumvent global obligations to neoliberal economic agreements that target culture by commodifying it. I have also shown that it is also an effective way to foster an engaged and active citizenry. And, the development of authentic local cultures can lead to enhanced economic development opportunities at the local level. All three of these points, in concert, create a strong argument for national and provincial cultural policies to allow municipalities to take the driver's seat in the development of cultural policy. It will then be from this grassroots approach that a national cultural identity will organically emerge, and in turn will strengthen Canadian culture on the world stage. As Duxbury et al. emphasize in *Why must culture be at the heart of sustainable urban development?*:

One thing is clear: the struggle for global sustainability is played out in cities. As a consequence, local governments occupy a strategically important space between global forces and citizen-driven movements, innovations, and energies. (Duxbury, et al., p. 35)

As for my experience with *The Tragically Hip*, we went on to develop a decades-long relationship, mostly with me buying their CDs and going to their concerts, and them having no idea I exist. However, over those decades they became an essential part of Canadian culture for people of my generation, so much so that *Alberta Ballet* in 2018 created a performance based solely on their music. I'm sure that national cultural policies, such as those

governing Canadian content on radio stations, helped the band develop its following. But it was my personal experiences with the band that made me a lifelong fan. This is true for myself, and for many others whom I have known. We talk about the number of times we have seen "The Hip", wearing these experiences like badges of honour. I see this as a perfect manifestation of the organic cultural experience, and this happened in the various cities in which I have lived. That is why I see municipalities as the perfect incubators for Canadian culture – they are, for the majority of Canadians, where culture *happens*.

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