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Appearance before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage Study on Cultural Hubs and Cultural Districts

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Good Morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about cultural hubs and cultural districts in Canada.

My name is Frédéric Julien and I am the Co-Chair of 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. Collectively, we represent thousands of artists and hundreds of arts organizations from across the country.

Today we would like to highlight the need for affordable housing for artists in cultural districts, the need for greater coordination between the federal government and the provinces on cultural infrastructure, and the need for specific funding for the maintenance of cultural spaces, both old and new.

Last year, The Canadian Arts Coalition was reassured to see its Arts Day recommendation about the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund be included in Budget 2017. As you know, the Cultural Spaces Fund is an ideal mechanism at helping arts organizations renovate older infrastructure and initiate feasibility studies for new buildings. In addition, the Coalition was pleased to see the allocation of \$1.3 billion in dedicated funding to cultural and recreational infrastructure as part of the *Investing in Canada Plan*.

First, I would like to talk to you about the value of cultural districts in creative cities.

ARTISTS, CULTURAL DISTRICTS, CREATIVE CITIES AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Artists work in precarious conditions and are poorly remunerated – even at the peak of their career. Canada’s artists and cultural workers have much higher levels of formal education than the overall labour force. Yet, their average income is 32% lower than other workers. Artists are also much more likely to be self-employed and to hold multiple jobs. Economic challenges are particularly significant for retiring artists, most of whom have been unable to save any money for retirement.

In spite of these economic challenges, artists are broadly acknowledged as catalysts of revitalization and of place making. The advocacy body Americans for the Arts argues that cultural districts “help strengthen local economies, create an enhanced sense of place, and deepen local cultural capacity.” Indeed, a three-year study conducted by the Knight Foundation

and Gallup found that aesthetics and social offerings – which include vibrant nightlife, places to meet people, and arts and cultural opportunities – were among the strongest predictors of a feeling of attachment to one’s community. Similarly, Canadian studies conducted by the Canadian Arts Presenting Association and Community Foundations of Canada found that cultural spaces and programming contribute to a sense of pride and a sense of belonging in the local community.

When artists establish in a neighbourhood, they do contribute to its vibrancy and attractiveness. But this beautiful story is often short lived. Soon local business start to flourish, new businesses come in, land value increases, and artists are then driven out of the area because of sky-rocketing property value, municipal taxes, and rent. This gentrification story is all too common in large urban centres. But well-planned multi-function cultural districts could resist gentrification and sustain the pivotal role of artists in the creative city.

In response to these issues a few affordable housing projects for active or for retired artists have been built in the last decade: Performing Arts Lounge in Vancouver, Performing Arts Lodge and Artscape Triangle Lofts in Toronto, Coopérative Lézarts and Coopérative d’habitation Cercle carré in Montréal, as well as projet Sherpa in Québec are among them. These cities are recognizing the leading role that culture must continue to play in the development of downtown by supporting these housing projects. Affordable housing for artists however still only exists in large urban centres and the number of available units remains insufficient compared to the demand. Certain projects combine housing as well as studio/rehearsal/performance spaces, providing artists with affordable live/work conditions.

The Canadian Arts Coalition recommends the construction of more affordable housing, including mixed live/work infrastructure for Canadian artists in order to create more sustainable and vital cultural districts.

Next, I would like to ask Kate Cornell to speak on the importance of multiple levels of funding for cultural hub projects.

PROVINCES AND MUNICIPALITIES

As you have already heard from the Department of Canadian Heritage representatives, the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund has been successful in supporting small and mid-size renovation projects, but it doesn’t have the capacity to support large-scale capital projects. The Canada Cultural Spaces Fund can assist with the initial development of major capital projects, helping with their feasibility study and bringing them to shovel readiness. Then the bilateral agreements have the resources to take these major projects through to completion.

In consultation with our provincial colleagues at ArtsBuild Ontario, we have heard that trying to raise funds for cultural infrastructure is unpredictable and inconsistent based on region and province. With a significant absence of parallel programs to Canada Cultural Spaces Fund at the



provincial level, arts organizations are left in the compromised position of lobbying the provincial governments for discretionary matching funds for their cultural infrastructure projects. Currently, the bilateral agreements are the only regulatory indication that the provinces need to consider cultural hub projects.

Therefore, the Canadian Arts Coalition recommends that future provincial bilateral agreements are permanently required to include a broad consideration of new cultural projects.

In addition to challenges with the provinces, the federal government needs to better communicate with municipalities about cultural infrastructure. Many Canadian municipalities are acutely aware of the importance of culture in sustainable development. Some municipalities have designed municipal cultural plans or integrated culture within their land-use plans as a result. For example, many municipalities allocate 1% to public art commissions from each dollar spent on public infrastructure in order to enhance their built environment, make their cities more attractive for tourists, and improve citizens' quality of life. Municipalities play a vital role in the development of cultural districts, therefore it is essential for the federal government to communicate with municipalities about cultural infrastructure.

Unfortunately, municipal funding for cultural spaces is inconsistent, especially in underserved communities. In consultations with our colleagues, the Canadian Arts Coalition heard that there's a need for more arts spaces and cultural hubs in rural and remote communities, among Francophone minorities, and especially in Indigenous communities. For example on Tuesday, this Standing Committee heard from our colleagues at Qaggiavuut. A proposed performing arts centre in Nunavut is an excellent example of the urgent need that exists in underserved communities.

Therefore, the Canadian Arts Coalition encourages the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund to continue to prioritize applications from underserved communities.

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

Our colleagues who run cultural and community hubs contribute to the sense of belonging in many urban centres. But the Canadian Arts Coalition would like to draw attention to the fact that many of the existing hubs, like the Dance Centre in Vancouver, are struggling to remain open. Skyrocketing hydro and heating costs make it expensive to operate these vital centres, especially when the buildings include theatres, galleries, and studios which have specialized heating and/or lighting requirements. Currently, there is no funding program where cultural spaces can go for ongoing operating costs. This is a gap in the funding system that the members of the Coalition wanted to bring to the government's attention.



CONCLUSION

To conclude, the Coalition wants to thank the Standing Committee for the opportunity to speak on the complex topic of cultural hubs and districts. The Canadian Arts Coalition sees its colleagues at major arts organizations succeeding to build cultural hubs in urban centres, but a lack of opportunity for mid-sized and smaller arts organizations to develop innovative cultural hubs of their own. In practise, the funding from the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund cannot be fully effective, unless the municipalities and provinces come on board. The Canadian Arts Coalition respectfully suggests that the federal government consider cultivating cultural districts and creative cities whenever it invests in infrastructure.

Thank you.



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