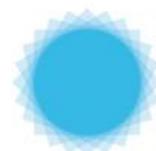# Democratization of Culture, Cultural Democracy and Governance

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Note to the Reader from the CPAF Secretariat

Please note that the following document was presented at the Canadian Public Arts Funders (CPAF) Annual General Meeting, Future Directions in Public Arts Funding: What Are The Shifts Required?, on November 16-18, 2011, in Whitehorse, Yukon and was intended to serve as information for a discussion on the theme of the meeting.

The views expressed by the author(s) are based on their interpretations from a variety of sources of information and do not necessarily represent all points of view, or the current program structures and policies of the membership of CPAF.

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Democratization of Culture, Cultural Democracy and Governance
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As a 'snap shot think piece', this document aims to clearly, succinctly – and with any luck, provocatively – probe the relationships between democratization of culture/cultural democracy and governance. It does not profess to have the last word on these matters, but rather, to identify the most compelling issues and questions related to this cluster of concepts in light of the contemporary opportunities and challenges of public arts funding in Canada.

To begin, a few definitions. Democratization of culture and cultural democracy comprise two complementary but often contending perspectives on the primary focus and aims of government intervention in the cultural sector. **Democratization of culture**, dominant in post-war Europe and Canada up to the 1960s, *focuses on the 'civilising value of the arts' and prioritizes access of the general public to mainly European forms of high culture* (Matarosso and Landry, 1999; Baeker, 2002). Through this lens, the government's role is to extend access to cultural works to mass audiences who do not have ready access to them for lack of income or education (Evrard, 1997). A measure of success of this policy approach would be statistics demonstrating socio-economic and demographic representativeness of attendance of major cultural works (Ibid). **Cultural democracy**, meanwhile, emerged in European cultural policy debates in the 1970s, largely as a critique of democratization of culture, which was seen as a 'top-down' elitist homogenizing approach to culture that ignored *cultural expressions and practices outside of the mainstream canon* (Matarosso and Landry, 1999; Baeker, 2002). Cultural goes beyond a focus on *access to cultural works* to incorporate *access to the means of cultural production and distribution* (Ibid). It has informed cultural policy approaches in Canada and bears important implications for policy and programming: it also calls for recognition and inclusion of diverse cultures in public decision-making processes.

In contrast to the first two terms, the concept of **governance**, which emerged in academic research in the 1990s (Krahmann, 2003), is not specific to the cultural sector, but rather, is applied across many policy fields and issue areas at the local, national, regional and global levels. One of the challenges of the term is that it can have multiple definitions – everything from good governance, to corporate governance, to networks, to global governance, and the like (see Rhodes, 2000). What ties many of these various uses together is their focus on societal decision-making processes in the contemporary period, a period characterized by fragmentation and dispersal of political authority, the emergence of non-government actors (NGOs, corporations, individuals, etc.) as powerful actors in their own right, the accelerating pace of technological and societal change, growing complexity and 'wickedness' of policy problems, and reductions in the size of the state, its role and policy capacity in the wake of fiscal pressures and neoliberalism. In this context, scholars often draw the distinction between 'government' and 'governance', with the former referring to hierarchical, state-centric and state-dominated forms of policy-making, and the latter encompassing non-hierarchical, decentralized and collaborative policy-making approaches between interdependent public, private and civic actors alike (see, for example, Börzel, 1997; Kooiman, 2000; Krahmann, 2003). Governance, then, focuses on *coordination within and between government, business and societal actors to pursue shared or interdependent objectives when resources, power and information are widely distributed between them and no single actor can effectively pursue the objectives on their own* (see Krahmann, 2003; Paquet, 2003).

For purposes of this Think Piece, a second governance concept is also germane: **multilevel governance** (MLG). This concept also emerged in the 1990s and is a strand of the governance literature developed in response to the reconfiguration of political authority in Europe with the creation of the European Union (Peters and Pierre, 2002). Its focus is predominantly on government actors, specifically the ***relations between different levels of government in policy and programming and the means of achieving coordination between them*** (see Peters and Pierre, 2001). The concept of multilevel governance is particularly relevant to the cultural sector, given that culture is not directly mentioned in the Canadian constitution, all three levels of government intervene to greater or lesser degrees in the field and various levels and means of coordination prevail across the country (see Gattinger, 2008).

In sum, democratization of culture and cultural democracy are both, in essence, policy objectives: the first focuses primarily on access to the works of a single culture and the second focuses on inclusion, diversity and access to the means of cultural production. **Governance and multilevel governance, meanwhile, are concerned with policy processes** – the means by which policy objectives and approaches are identified, selected and implemented.

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With these definitions in hand, we can turn to the substantive 'thinking' of this Think Piece. What follows are **three main ideas for debate and discussion,** each focused on the inter-relationships between democratization of culture/cultural democracy and governance.

- First, for the foreseeable future, **democratization of culture and cultural democracy can be most effectively pursued by public arts funders if they do so through the lens of governance and multilevel governance, i.e., through collaboration and coordination**.

  The context for public arts funding is characterized by many of the factors underpinning the emergence of governance and multilevel governance: the presence of multiple actors – both business and civil society but also other levels of government – with the power to pursue democratization of culture and cultural democracy; increasingly diverse publics and cultural practices in a context of rapid social and technological change (both of which underscore the importance of democratization of culture and cultural democracy), and reduced policy and fiscal capacity of governments, particularly in the wake of the financial crisis and recession of 2008-2009 and beyond. In this milieu, ***it is difficult and even counterproductive for public arts funders to 'go it alone' or to proceed with hierarchical, centralized forms of decision-making***: the pace of change is too rapid, the players too numerous, power, knowledge and influence too diffuse and resources too scarce. ***The context both necessitates and can significantly benefit from collaboration and coordination***: superior allocation of roles and resources, better and more fulsome information and knowledge in decision-making, more nimble and flexible approaches, etc.

- Second, in so doing, **public arts funders should carefully analyze the possible repercussions for democratization of culture and cultural democracy of making fundamental changes to existing governance arrangements between business, government and society.**

  While there are many benefits to collaboration and coordination (see above), if public arts funders are contemplating major changes to the arrangements governing arts funding, they should take great care to explore the possible impacts of such changes for democratization of culture/cultural democracy. For example, ***a shift towards a much greater role for the private sector in arts funding***, while advantageous in many respects (e.g., access to additional funding sources, development of relationships between business and the arts,

etc.), ***may weaken democratization of culture and cultural democracy***. The United States' system of arts funding may be illustrative in this regard. The American federal government supports arts funding largely with tax credits for charitable donations. Questions of access, minority cultures and cultural practices may be insufficiently represented in this set of governance arrangements, which a leading authority in the field characterizes as 'cultural Darwinism' – survival of the largest, best resourced and most dominant culture(s) and the interests they wish to pursue (Mulcahy, 2010). As Mulcahy sums up, 'a largely privatized cultural sphere is less inclined to respond to aesthetic diversity, public accessibility and cultural representation' (author's translation of Ibid: 90). In contrast, ***an approach that sees a larger role for government may run the risk of reducing flexibility, responsiveness and incentives for non-government initiative, while one that leans more heavily on civil society may be vulnerable to insufficient levels of financial support and coordination*** (for a detailed discussion of the alternative approaches to cultural policy of the United States, the United Kingdom and France, see Gattinger and Saint-Pierre, 2011).

In light of this, ***it is imperative for public arts funders to identify*** not only the level of and balance between democratization of culture and cultural democracy they should seek to attain, but also, ***those aspects of democratization of culture/cultural democracy that necessitate a leading role for governments in order to be pursued effectively and those that might be feasible to pursue by business or civil society. Such analyses should be undertaken with meaningful involvement of business and civil society.***

- Third, **public arts funders would do well to identify the multilevel governance arrangements best suited to pursuing democratization of culture/cultural democracy.**

This involves, in the first instance, ***identifying the most supportive coordination arrangements*** for democratization of culture/cultural democracy. A number of such mechanisms already exist across the country between the federal, provincial, and, in some instances, municipal governments. This includes, obviously, the CPAF, but also the tri-level arts funders group in British Columbia, a long-standing pioneer of multilevel coordination for arts policy and funding (see Murray and Beale, 2011). ***A closer exploration of the strengths and limitations of existing arrangements would help to identify best practices and alternative approaches for the establishment of new arrangements or modification of current strategies. Appropriate arrangements will differ across the country***, with, for example, provinces where municipalities play a relatively lesser role in arts funding probably less suited to comprehensive tri-level approaches.

In the second instance, this involves ***identifying which aspects of democratization of culture and cultural democracy should be pursued by which level of government***. For example, federal arts funders, given their national mandate, may define and pursue democratization of culture and cultural democracy in ways that are different or even incongruent with provincial or local contexts. The scope and nature of cultural diversity and the particular aspects of culture to be democratized differ across the country and thus, in addition to federal support, require provincial and local involvement to ensure sensitivity to differing contexts.

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