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A current look at the situation of artists in the Canadian Francophonie

Summary of the study

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Introduction

This research is the result of the combined efforts of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française and the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities. Its purpose is to provide a current overview of the situation of Francophone Canadian artists working outside Quebec.

Who are Artists from the Canadian Francophonie?¹

In Canada, one artist in five is from the francophonie (Statistics Canada, 2006). This is not surprising, given that Francophones place great importance on their language, culture and artistic products. However, a lesser-known situation exists among those Francophones: some Canadian Francophone artists choose to practise their art outside Quebec. This report will offer a short description of this situation.

Nearly one million Francophones live outside *la Belle Province*. To this number we can add francophiles, an increasing number of immigrants with French as their first official language and many Quebecers. Francophone organizations and institutions make a constant effort to maintain the French fact² and give a strong specific identity to Francophone communities

spread across the provinces and the territories.

The choice to create and use artistic expressions in a Francophone minority situation refers to a specific reality. We will present that situation within the context of six artistic disciplines: 1) media arts, 2) visual arts, 3) music and song, 4) dance, 5) literature and publishing and 6) theatre, describing their "cultural and artistic ecosystem."

Canadian Francophonie Cultural and Artistic Ecosystem

The specific nature of the cultural and artistic ecosystem of the Canadian francophonie can only be explained through a combination of factors including language, geographic situation and artistic discipline. Taken in isolation, these factors do not have the same influence on Franco-Canadian artists' works and careers and on the cultural and artistic institutions in Francophone communities. The ecosystem also includes specific processes and dynamics related to art, social players, institutions and organizations of the various levels of government as well as funding and infrastructure.

Evolution of the cultural and artistic sector within the Canadian Francophonie

Artists can enhance the value of their art in large part through professionalizing their practices and improving distribution of their works as well as through creating artistic and cultural organizations that represent their interests at the national, provincial, territorial and municipal levels. Establishing

¹ Today, the term francophonie (with a lower-case 'f') means the ensemble of peoples or groups of speakers who use, partially or entirely, the French language in their everyday lives or communications.

² The "French Fact" (in Canada) is defined as the presence of French Canada as a distinct cultural force within the Confederation.



organizations and networks for disseminating art is a sign of the vitality of the artistic community, as it allows greater synergy among the members of Francophone artistic communities.

However, it must be understood that the scope of their actions varies with the specific mandates of these organizations; not all are involved in offering professional services to artists. Most importantly, they are not all the same size and do not all possess the same human and financial resources.

The demographic share of Francophones varies from 0.4% to 32.7% (Statistics Canada, 2006) from one province or territory to another. This severely limits artist training options as well as the education and broadening of a Francophone and francophile public that is sensitive to and knowledgeable of artistic productions. In a demographically narrow environment, providing physical infrastructures dedicated to the distribution of artistic works from the Canadian francophonie must also be justified. Artists' isolation is also mentioned as an obstacle to professionalizing their artistic practices and networking with other professionals. Due to a lack of critical mass, Francophone cultural and artistic organizations have had little success gaining interest from players outside the linguistic community who could help with professional development.

The social fabric of Canadian Francophone arts and culture

Despite the challenges mentioned above, Francophone cultural associations exist in every province and territory. There are also specialized artistic organizations in certain

artistic disciplines and a rather modest infrastructure ensuring the promotion of artists and dissemination of their work. The Fédération culturelle canadienne-française is the national organization that represents the interests of artists, promotes arts and culture in communities and facilitates networking among its members.

Artists and artistic disciplines in the Canadian Francophonie

Artists: some statistics

Educated more, paid less

In socio-demographic terms, 3,125 artists in the Canadian francophonie³ declared an income from their artistic profession in 2006, compared to 119,045 Canadian artists. Their average income was approximately \$25,000 while that of the Franco-Canadian labour force in general was about \$37,000. Over 40% of these Franco-Canadian artists had an income of \$10,000 or less, despite being much better educated than the rest of the labour force. Of these artists, 41.5% held a certificate, diploma or university degree equivalent to a B.A, while the rate in the Franco-Canadian labour force was 17.5%.

Greater numbers of women artists, higher level of education and paid even less

In 2006, 1,715 female artists in the Canadian francophonie declared an income from their artistic profession. They represent 54.9% of Franco-Canadian artists and many more of them have a certificate, diploma or university degree

³ Excluding Quebec.



equivalent to a B.A. (47.7%) than their male counterparts (41.3%). On the other hand, their average income is estimated at \$21,388 compared to \$29,265 for men.

Artistic professions

Among the artistic professions studied, there are a greater number of artists who are singers and musicians (25.6%), writers (21.4%), directors, producers or choreographers (17.9%) and visual artists (16%) than there are in other artistic professions such as actors (11%), dancers (6.6%) or orchestra conductor/composers (1.5%). Women artists are over-represented among dancers (78%) and slightly better represented in the second group of artistic professions, except for orchestra conductor/composer (32%).

Young people and the next generation of artists

If we add the first two age brackets of young Franco-Canadian artists, the 15- to 24-year-olds and the 25- to 34-year-olds, we note that they represent 32% of all artists. A greater number of the 15- to 24-age group earn an income as singers than in all the other age groups, but they are totally absent from the socio-professional category of composers and orchestra conductors. There is a fairly high proportion of 15- to 34-year-olds in dance (47.8%) and in theatre (46.6%).

Similar trends among francophone and Canadian artists

Most trends observed among Canadian artists in the francophonie are comparable to those of all Canadian artists and all Francophone artists, including those from Quebec. This finding points to the existence of common structural restrictions on the artistic professions above and beyond the effects of language.

Conclusion

The different artistic disciplines face many issues and challenges. Some stem from the cultural ecosystem of the Canadian francophonie. Others are connected to changes within artistic disciplines, no matter what language community the artist is from.

The Canadian francophonie ecosystem actually places many constraints on cultural production and artistic creation. Insufficient funding, and/or funding that is not renewed from one year to the next weakens the cultural infrastructure that supports artistic production, helps welcome and retain the public, and through all this, strengthens the collective identity forged through the common experience of art. The struggle for funding absorbs the human resources of organizations that then find it difficult to fulfill their mandate of providing favourable conditions for creating and disseminating works of art.

The size of artistic networks is rather small and Francophone communities are dispersed over a vast territory. This inevitably limits the opportunities for interactions between artists and audiences and among artists themselves. Access to training and professional development in French is problematic and is primarily concentrated in urban areas. Finding qualified staff in French for a sizable production requiring teamwork is therefore complicated. Network size also determines the capacity to generate reviews of the works and the artists, an essential part of recognition. Were it not for a few specialized publications and the work of the media, part of the Francophone artistic heritage would be completely unknown.

This report presents an overview of the situation of artists of the Canadian francophonie and their artistic ecosystem. This work has brought out the cultural vitality that exists within Francophone communities despite socio-demographic constraints. Artists and cultural

professionals work under sometimes-difficult conditions to express their sensitivity to their surroundings in a variety of artistic languages.

