



Locally Vibrant/Globally Engaged The Bloor St. Culture Corridor and Cultural Diplomacy

// REPORT 2021



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**CULTURAL PRACTITIONERS AND
THOSE WORKING IN THIS SECTOR
EMBRACE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE
RELATIONS AND LONG-TERM
SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS
AND FOCUS ON THE NON-
GOVERNMENTAL NATURE
OF GLOBAL ACTIVITIES.**

ON THE COVER:

Royal Ontario Museum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reflecting the broadening landscape of diplomatic actors from the “club” of nation states to networks of non- and sub-state actors, this report makes the case for understanding a cultural district – the Bloor St. Culture Corridor (BCC) – as a diplomatic actor in its own right. Cultural districts, such as the BCC, have the potential to be effective diplomatic actors as they are principally concerned with conducting relations to build bridges between groups. The BCC is a consortium of 22 arts and cultural organizations in downtown Toronto including a cinema, museums and art galleries, concert halls, performance theatres, multipurpose event spaces, and national cultural institutes libraries. The BCC’s member organizations collaborate on local audience development and cross-pollination, tourism marketing, neighbourhood branding, and programming.

Unlike many of its member organizations, however, the BCC itself does not currently possess a distinct global profile or recognition. Cultural districts are not a

new phenomenon. They are rooted in a city’s geography and regularly tied to the creative city and creative economy narratives embraced by many cities, including Toronto, which formally designated the BCC as a cultural corridor in 2016. Because the creative economy narrative is often marred by economic reductionism, this report foregrounds a cultural economy framework as an alternative, which highlights the role of culture, and also of cultural districts, in “individual and collective expression and identity building, celebration, tradition, aesthetic pleasure and entertainment, social cohesion, democratic citizenship, self-development and education.”¹

This approach tallies with the potential of conceiving of the BCC as a diplomatic actor. As the diplomatic field broadens, the “new” diplomats now include cultural organizations, cultural workers, and artists. Cultural practitioners and those working in this sector are already engaged in diplomatic activity. They embrace people-to-people relations and

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TYING THE CHALLENGE OF REBOUNDED FROM THE PANDEMIC TO THE DIPLOMATIC POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL DISTRICTS WOULD BENEFIT DEEPER GLOBAL CONNECTIONS.

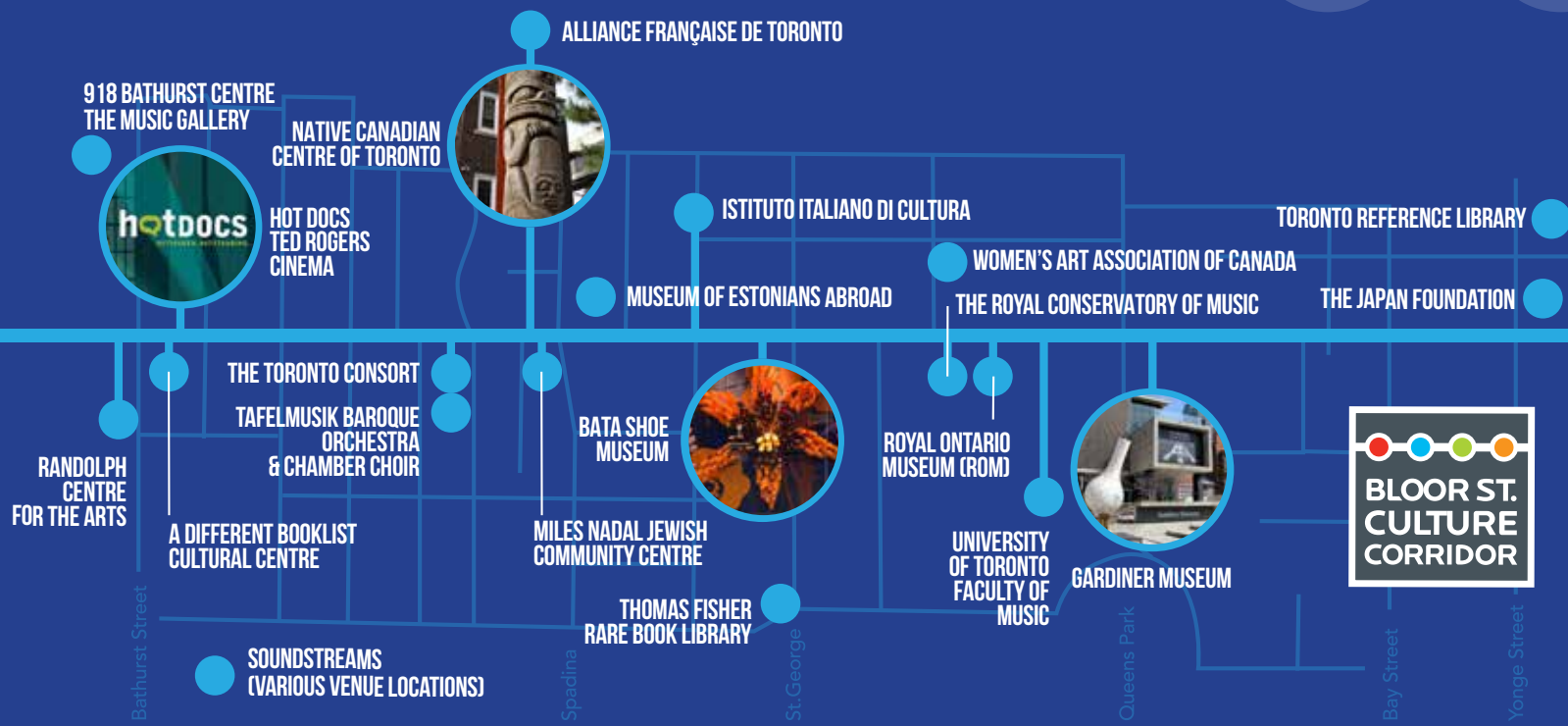
long-term sustainable relationships and focus on the non-governmental nature of global activities. However, these organizations, institutions, and groups are not traditionally considered diplomatic

actors by those who study and practice international relations, nor is this how people in the sector tend to view themselves and their global activities. This report outlines a framework for viewing the BCC as a diplomatic actor and argues for its diplomatic engagement.

Cultural districts can increase social cohesion and collective resilience to not only generate collective healing from the pandemic but also create bonds and networks between organizations, and between organizations and their audiences, their cities, and more, as we face the next challenge. Tying the challenge of rebounding from the pandemic to the diplomatic potential of cultural districts would benefit deeper global connections. In the age of COVID-19, with increasing nationalist retrenchment and a growing rejection of certain aspects of globalization, maintaining and deepening global connections is vital, especially for a place like Toronto - a global city that is shaped by and shapes global relations. Across borders, cultural districts can push the benefits of culture and reap them for its many constituents.



ABOUT THE BLOOR STREET CULTURE CORRIDOR



THE BLOOR ST. CULTURE CORRIDOR IS A CONSORTIUM OF 22 ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance Française de Toronto
Bata Shoe Museum
A Different Booklist Cultural Centre
Gardiner Museum
Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema
Istituto Italiano di Cultura
The Japan Foundation
Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre
Museum of Estonians Abroad
The Music Gallery
Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
The Randolph Centre for the Arts
The Royal Conservatory of Music
Royal Ontario Museum (ROM)
Soundstreams
Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra & Chamber Choir
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
The Toronto Consort
Toronto Reference Library
University of Toronto Faculty of Music
Women's Art Association of Canada
918 Bathurst Centre for Culture, Arts, Media and Education



Located in Canada's global city, the Bloor Street Culture Corridor (BCC) is a consortium of 22 arts and cultural organizations centrally located in Toronto's downtown core along a 1.5 km stretch of Bloor Street from Bathurst Street in the west to Yonge Street in the east, and within two blocks north and south. The consortium's member organizations encompass great diversity and include a cinema, museums and art galleries, concert halls, performance theatres, multipurpose event spaces, and national cultural institutes libraries. Many of these organizations offer educational and other forms of public programming, while some also offer training in languages and cultures. Founded in 2014, the BCC brands itself as "Toronto's most diverse arts and culture district."

Historically, the area encompassed by the BCC is legendary as a centre of 1960s hippie subculture and the "home of Toronto's original indie music scene."² In the 1970s, however, developers began buying up housing in the area, which, combined with the building of a subway line under Bloor Street from the 1960s, elevated property values and led to the development of this stretch of Bloor Street into the high-end retail mile that it is now. In the early 2000s, the area underwent another momentous change in the form of a "cultural renaissance" when several cultural institutions transformed themselves through major architectural projects. These included a significant expansion of the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art in 2006, the high-profile addition to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) known as the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal in 2007, and the construction of Koerner Hall, a major performance venue for the Royal Conservatory of Music in 2009. It was on the heels of these changes that the BCC was created in 2014 to harness the energy of an already vibrant cultural area.

CITY OF TORONTO CULTURAL CORRIDOR RECOGNITION

Culture corridors such as the BCC are recognized in the official plan for Toronto's downtown core.³ Prior to the 2020-21 global pandemic, the BCC attracted about 3 million combined visitors to its member organizations per year, creating an annual economic impact of CAD \$629 million. In recognition of the BCC's significance, the City designated the consortium an official City of Toronto cultural corridor in 2016. The City has afforded this designation, which does not come with any financial obligation for the City, in recognition that it "will help the promotion and development of the area as a cultural destination that enhances Toronto's position as a creative city regionally, nationally and internationally."⁴

The City's emphasis on both the projection and attraction facilitated by such cultural districts is reflected in the initial and current set of activities undertaken by the Corridor. These include creating a forum for partnerships and collaboration between BCC member organizations, local marketing and audience development, tourism marketing, neighbourhood branding, and special projects. In its strategic planning process, the BCC is strengthening its relationships with the Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) that encompass the Cultural Corridor as well as with elected and non-elected City officials. This plethora of activities has been carried out despite the BCC not currently receiving funding from any level of government, though it should be noted that individual member organizations are supported by government in a variety of ways. The BCC styles itself as a network of equals.



BATA Shoe Museum

GOING GLOBAL

The BCC is keen to develop its profile both within the city and globally. The member organizations jointly advance this ambition through a variety of marketing efforts that also promise to increase Toronto's global presence. Yet, at this point, the BCC does not possess a distinct global profile, even though many of its member organizations are internationally engaged and receive global recognition.

As a consortium, a network, and a cultural district, why should the BCC also "go global"? In a study of cultural hubs and districts in Canada conducted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, OCAD University President and Vice-Chancellor Ana Serrano made the case: "A [cultural] hub is only good if it is actually connected to other hubs internationally. [...] Unless they are also somehow connected to other spaces abroad,

their impact is likely limited."⁵ Achieving this connectedness would allow the BCC to fulfill its diplomatic potential to deliver on the cultural values of culture. But how can the BCC as an organization increase its global engagement beyond what its member organizations are accomplishing already?

Before answering this question, it is first necessary to discuss the notion of the cultural district (or cultural quarter, creative district, arts district, etc.) within and beyond the creative industries/economy discourse. We suggest stepping beyond this admittedly limited narrative and the view that cultural districts are merely "urban areas with a high concentration of artistic activities that are viewed as a catalyst of economic and social development,"⁶ to embrace a cultural economy perspective that foregrounds the social and cultural benefits of culture. Doing so facilitates the development and recognition of the BCC and other cultural districts as diplomatic actors.

+ HOW BCC ORGANIZATIONS ENAGAGE GLOBALLY:



- The Royal Conservatory of Music and Koerner Hall launched KUNÉ - Canada's Global Orchestra - an ensemble developed to explore and celebrate Canada's cultural diversity and pluralism through cross-cultural collaboration and the presentation of global musical traditions. The ensemble has engaged with Global Toronto, a Toronto-based platform for connecting export-ready artists and professionals from across the country and around the world through showcase performances.
- The Royal Ontario Museum has extensive global ties in research, and through its collections and its public engagement portfolio, including sending travelling exhibitions to partner museums. For example, in 2019 the *Christian Dior* exhibition was shown at the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou. ROM curators conduct field research in many countries, including Sudan, India, Peru, the US, and more. The ROM brings international exhibitions, such as *Treasures of a Desert Kingdom: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India*, to Toronto audiences, and convenes global museum summits.
- National cultural institutes such as the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, the Alliance Française, and the Japan Foundation deepen relations between Toronto and various countries of origin through cultural events, and some also offer language courses. The Museum of Estonians Abroad (VEMU) anchors Estonian culture in Canada and promotes cultural exchange and memory.
- Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival (Hot Docs) is the largest documentary film festival in North America, presenting approximately 200 Canadian and international documentary films annually. In addition to its regular programming, Hot Docs engages in interdisciplinary offerings with Canadian academics, journalists, and cultural leaders through the online streamed Curious Minds speaker series and through the digital Podcast Festival, which features 30+ live and on-demand sessions.
- Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra toured Australia in 2018, presenting the multimedia program *Bach and His World*. In 2018, the orchestra also toured Chicago and Versailles with Opera Atelier's operatic production of Charpentier's *Actéon & Pygmalion*, followed by the US Tour of The Leipzig-Damascus Coffee House project in 2019 and a European Tour with soprano Karina Gauvin.
- Soundstreams fosters cultural conversations through artistic programming. This mission drives international touring operations, currently with three productions: *Musik für das Ende* by Claude Vivier; *Hell's Fury, The Hollywood Songbook* with music by Hanns Eisler; and *Two Odysseys: Pimootewin / Gállábártnit*, designed for the purpose of sharing Canadian creation regionally and internationally.

ON CULTURAL DISTRICTS



Gardiner Museum



IMAGE: GARDINER MUSEUM



IMAGE: TAFELMUSIK & CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra & Chamber Choir

DEFINING CULTURAL DISTRICTS

Cultural districts are not a new phenomenon and their rootedness in a certain geography highlights the “saliency of ‘space’ as crucible of development.”⁷ In his book *Cities and the Cultural Economy*, Thomas Hutton discusses cultural districts and outlines their development as follows:

(1) “The early establishment of areas in the city as sites of traditional cultural performance, notably in music, drama and dance, as well as complementary entertainment districts, encompassing cafés, restaurants, bars and pubs and the like; (2) the formation of urban artists’ colonies that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s following the decline of

working class communities within the inner city terrains of the metropolis, representing an early facet of gentrification as well as culture-led regeneration; (3) synergies of culture, technology and place observed in the ‘dot.com’ era and the growth of multimedia industries (circa 1995–2000); (4) the rise of an ebullient ‘creative city’ script popularized by Charles Landry and Richard Florida among others in the first decade of the present century; and (5) more recently the increasingly insistent infiltration of financial institutions, IT businesses, and upscale housing within the revalorized terrains of the city – serving to inflate property values and to weaken the tenure of the arts and other cultural industries.”⁸

TORONTO'S CREATIVE CITY NARRATIVE

Bloor Street arts and culture organizations formed the BCC as a cultural district within the creative city narrative embraced by Toronto in the early 2000s. Although the formation of the consortium was not a result of City policy, it must be seen within the context of the cultural policies championed by Toronto. It should be pointed out, however, that the BCC is not a typical district as defined by scholars of such districts: an area featuring “representative industries and firms (film and video production, music, graphic arts and design); galleries and studios, and community art centres; coffee houses, Internet cafés and restaurants peddling organic food and artisanal beverages, and other consumption amenities; lofts and live-work studios; and bicycle pathways and food

trucks.”⁹ Rather, the BCC is a network of cultural institutions all located in an area characterized by their very existence, as well as high-end retail, post-secondary institutions, and upscale residences. Within Hutton’s analysis, the BCC, as embedded in the fabric of the city, reflects the “rich vein of difference and even uniqueness” that characterizes cultural districts across the globe.¹⁰

As with many cities around the world, the City of Toronto has embraced the creative industries paradigm, including the creative city concept that foregrounds culture and creativity as drivers of urban development and renewal. The City’s 2003 culture plan included the creative city notion, calling for “a spectacular Cultural Corridor, an Avenue of the Arts, along University Avenue, connecting the Cultural Renaissance projects from the new Opera House to the Royal Ontario

LIST OF TORONTO CULTURAL CORRIDORS

NO. CULTURAL CORRIDOR	FROM	TO
1 Bloor Street West	Bathurst Street	Yonge Street
2 Yonge Street	Davenport Road	Queens Quay West/East
3 Jarvis Street	Bloor Street East	Queens Quay East
4 John Street	Stephanie Street	Front Street West
5 Queens Quay West/East	Bathurst Street	Parliament Street
6 Front Street West/East	Bathurst Street	Bayview Avenue
7 Bayview Avenue	Front Street East	Rosedale Valley Road

Koerner Hall of the Royal Conservatory of Music



IMAGE: ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

Museum.”¹¹ This was not realized. The 2011 Creative Capital Gains report recommended the development of creative clusters arguing for culture’s competitive advantage: “Toronto’s cultural and creative capital creates businesses, attracts new residents from around the world, draws in tourists, increases quality of life for its current residents, and gives commuters from the suburbs a reason to stay in the city after office hours.”¹² As already mentioned, the downtown plan recognizes the importance of cultural districts. Toronto now has a number of designated cultural corridors as well as “cultural precincts” that function within this more conventional understanding of cultural districts.

Toronto has had its successes: culture is an important economic driver of the city; Toronto is one of the leading media cities in North America and draws large numbers of cultural tourists; and for many Torontonians, culture has become a defining feature of the city.¹³ Yet, it should be acknowledged that the cultural economy is also underpinned by pre-

carity as many artists and arts workers struggle to make a living.¹⁴ Artists are committed to their work and believe in the social and cultural value that their creations contribute to the city, though it remains to be seen how long their sacrifice can be maintained in a city in which inequality is on the rise. So, while the city has been generally successful when measured in terms of creative economy metrics, “the conceptual framework and narrative provided by the creative economy is no longer a viable guide.”¹⁵

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The BCC and its members have been hit hard by the pandemic, as is generally the case for the cultural sector. Organizations closed their doors, performances and entire seasons were cancelled, millions fewer audience members attended shows, including tourists, so that millions of dollars were lost in ticket sales and other revenues, artists lost salaries and production fees, there was



THE COVID-19 IMPACT ON TORONTO'S NON-PROFIT ARTS SECTOR:



25,000

public performances cancelled/postponed

\$183 M

in lost ticket sales

\$65 M

required for facility operating costs with no offsetting trevenue

20 M

fewer audience members

\$145 M

in lost artist and production salaries/fees.¹⁶

a slowdown in philanthropic support, and for some organizations the pandemic has threatened their very existence.

On a global scale, the cultural and creative sectors, especially venue-based sectors, are among the most affected by the current crisis. And the cultural sector will take the longest to recover from the pandemic. In the wake of COVID-19, the sector's financial sustainability, artistic vitality, and recognized public value is threatened by an increasingly unpredictable landscape for cultural organizations. According to the OECD:

- The structural fragility of cultural organizations and precarity amongst cultural workers is of concern, and not all public support schemes are adapted to cultural business models and forms of employment.
- Cross-sectoral partnerships, especially with education or health sectors, may drive

future innovation. There is a particular role for the arts and culture to play in mental health and wellbeing.

- Accelerated digitization is the "new normal." The cultural sector will need to address digital skills shortages within the sector, consider jobs associated with digital work, and improve digital access beyond large metropolitan areas.
- Cities and regions may consider cultural and creative sectors and cultural participation as a driver of social impact, specifically, to address societal challenges from new angles, favouring resilience and recovery, skills creation, and prosocial behavioural changes.¹⁷

REFRAMING THE BENEFITS OF CULTURE

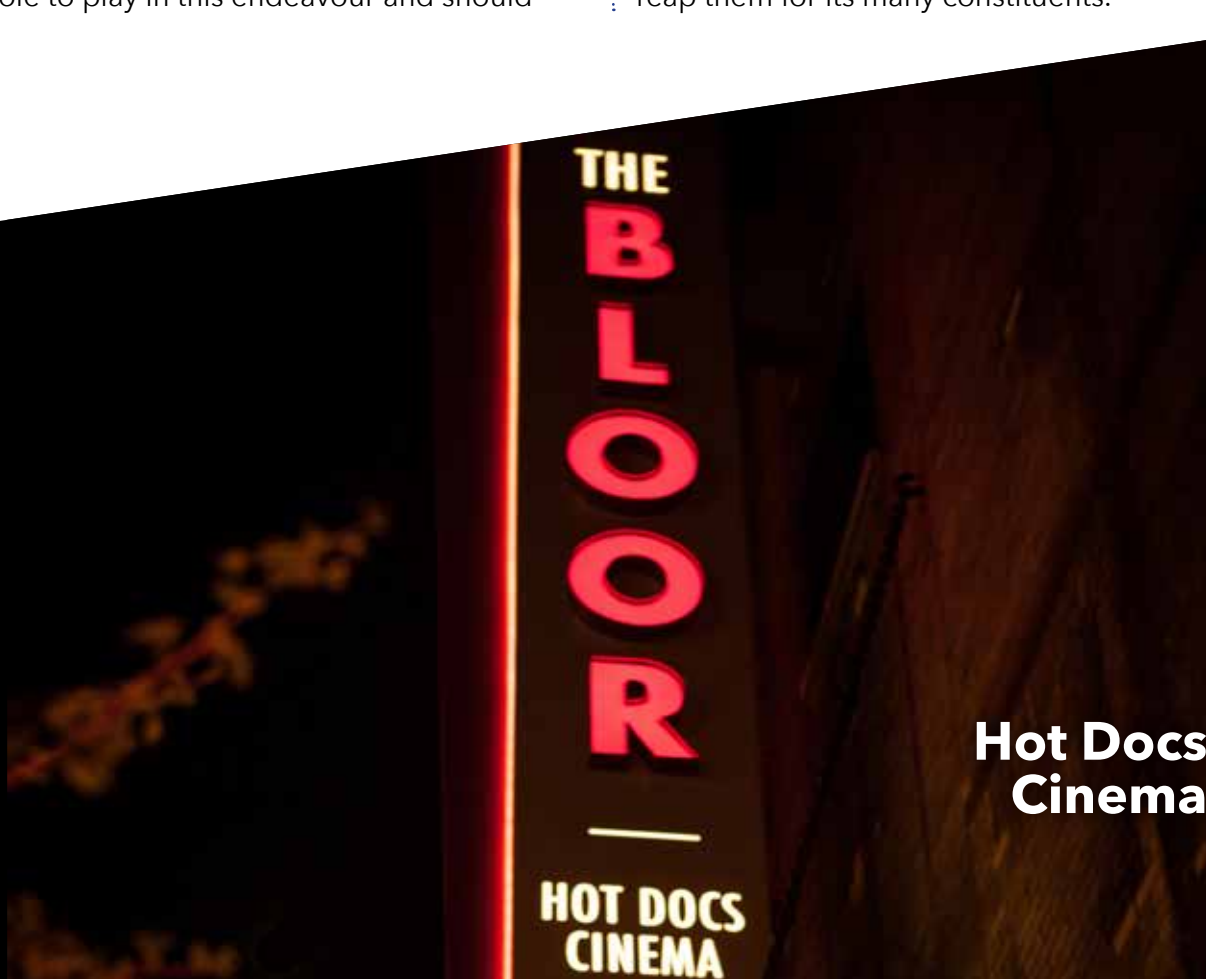
Drawing on recent work on the cultural economy, we suggest bringing to the centre those "core benefits of culture" that have been side-

lined by the economic reductionism of the creative economy model. Culture should not simply be reduced to the economic benefits it might bring, though they are undoubtedly important, but ought to be recognized as a site that fosters “individual and collective expression and identity building, celebration, tradition, aesthetic pleasure and entertainment, social cohesion, democratic citizenship, self-development and education.”¹⁸

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for our future wellbeing, social cohesion must be foregrounded. Social cohesion is, as Rodin explains, the “glue that bonds people to one another, in families, groups, organizations, and communities. It consists of genuine commitment and caring, shared values and beliefs, engagement, common purpose, and sense of identity, and it makes all the difference in building resilience.”¹⁹ Cultural districts have an important role to play in this endeavour and should

work toward meeting this challenge. The Global Cultural Districts Network, which is an international network of creative and cultural districts and similar formations, has shown that cultural districts deliver social impact in the form of equity and inclusion, urban vibrancy and the public realm, neighbourhood and community, targeted social interventions, cultural and social impacts, and innovation.²⁰

Tying this work to the diplomatic potential of cultural districts would provide benefit through deeper local-global connections. In the age of COVID-19, increased nationalist retrenchments, and a growing rejection of certain aspects of globalization, maintaining and deepening global connections is vital, especially in a place like Toronto – a global city that is shaped by and shapes global relations. Across borders, cultural districts can push for the benefits of culture and reap them for its many constituents.



**Hot Docs
Cinema**

**HOT DOCS
CINEMA**

THE BCC AS DIPLOMATIC ACTOR



Soundstreams

So, how can the BCC increase its global engagement? The BCC is uniquely situated to become a diplomatic actor in its own right. This perhaps ambitious idea is not outrageous and is compatible with the mounting realization that the diplomatic landscape has been slowly shifting from “club” to “network” diplomacy.²¹ The building and management of global relations is no longer the exclusive domain of a privileged “club” of nation states as it was in the Cold War era. States now vie for authority and influence with non- and sub-state actors, such as non-governmental and non-profit organizations (NGOs and NPOs), cities and regions, transnational institutions, and activist groups – the so-called “new” diplomats. This lineup also includes cultural organizations, cultural workers, and artists. Cultural practitioners and those working in this sector are already engaged in diplomatic activity. These “new diplomats” embrace people-to-people relations and long-term sustainable relationships and focus on the non-governmental nature of global activities. However, these organizations, institutions, and groups are not traditionally recognized as diplomatic actors by those who study and practice international relations, nor is this how people in the sector tend to view themselves and their global activities.

EMBRACING DIPLOMATIC AGENCY

In order for a cultural practitioner or organization to embrace diplomatic action nothing short of a “loss of innocence” is required to go beyond conventional stereotypes of who is a diplomat and what counts as diplomacy. Alongside nation-states and their governments, non-state actors are now diplomatically active in a diverse network environment. The possibilities unleashed by information technologies and the growing web of global connections have led to an increasingly net-

worked diplomatic landscape and will enable it to thrive and reveal its full potential.

Diplomacy in the 21st century is not only occupied with advancing the foreign policy of the nation-state, it is also principally concerned with conducting relations to build bridges between groups. For cultural organizations, acting diplomatically means aiming for “greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between people and cultures, shaped through engagement and attraction, rather than coercion.”²² These approaches dovetail with the social and cultural values of culture discussed in the previous section. Moving away from reductionist economic rationales to embrace other key values of culture is foregrounded yet again. These are the values advanced by the cultural sector, and in advancing them at the network level cultural entities would increase the impact of the diplomatic activity in which they are already engaged.

The BCC’s member organizations must be understood as diplomats in their own right – a given for those that are national cultural institutes – and this also means the possibility for the BCC to see itself as a diplomatic actor.

In a place like Toronto, navigating complex relationships between groups is part and parcel of what organizations are doing already, or at least are aspiring to do, with the urgency of this effort underscored by the work of the Black Lives Matter movement and the tenacious engagement of Indigenous communities in effecting change. If the BCC were to embrace the cultural economy premise and promise of the benefits of culture (in addition to its current priorities) and invest in building communities, which its members are already

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THE BCC'S MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS NETWORK APPROACH TO BOLSTER THEIR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT, INCLUDING:



The capturing of new audiences and markets.



The development of greater reach and reputation.



Learning from other cultural districts and their experiences.



The generation of synergies and joint gains achieved with other local, provincial, and national organizations.



A greater emphasis on and incentive to collaborate locally between BCC member organizations.



The generation of greater global awareness and the conscious linking of local activities to global trends and vice versa.

committed to doing, then adding this diplomatic and global dimension is a small but significant next step. Working collaboratively as the BCC could be beneficial not just for the network itself, but also for its member organizations, their audiences and communities, and for the City of Toronto.

Jointly, the BCC and its member organizations could help to elevate, and benefit from, cultural diplomacy as a priority for the City by demonstrating that diplomatic engagement can achieve and strengthen the

benefits of culture. Not only is there ample room for the City to expand its approach to culture in city diplomacy but also for cultural organizations and their networks, such as the BCC and related groups, to sit at the core of city-based approaches to cultural diplomacy. Initiatives that embrace a deeply collaborative mindset to increase social cohesion, and thereby collective resilience, especially have the promise to not only generate collective healing from the pandemic but also to create bonds and networks as we face coming challenges.

+ FRAMING THE BCC'S DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT

How could the BCC structure its global and diplomatic engagement? The following illustrates three levels of cultural diplomatic engagement that build on each other and are inevitably entangled as well. These levels are monologue, dialogue, and collaboration.²³

LEVEL 1

"MONOLOGUE" is concerned with one-way communications that create opportunities to project oneself to others as well as to attract them. The BCC is already doing this work through its commitment to tourism and other marketing efforts, work that will become even more important as the Corridor rebuilds its local and tourist audiences lost due to the pandemic. How could these efforts be ramped up globally? How could the BCC brand be built globally?²⁴



LEVEL 2

"DIALOGUE" is a form of engagement concerned with two-way communications. Communications of this sort are concerned with exchanging information and ideas, with listening and learning from one another. Dialogue often occurs in networks of similar organizations, such as the Global Cultural Districts Network. What networks could the BCC get involved in? What networks are individual BCC organizations already members of that could be leveraged for the benefit of the entire Corridor?



LEVEL 3

"COLLABORATION" is the most intense form of engagement as it requires combining forces to achieve a joint project. This is the most time and labour-intensive form of engagement yet promises the greatest rewards in terms of achieving diplomatic aims and the benefits of culture. In this scenario, the BCC could partner with other cultural districts, perhaps ones located in cities that Toronto is already partnered with, to move beyond dialogue and learning from one another to advance joint activities. The list of possible partners for an organization such as the BCC is long and not limited to those "abroad." They could include diaspora networks in and beyond the city, various levels of government (foreign and domestic), and more.



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