Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance

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Abstract: Toronto is experiencing a building boom, with eight major cultural construction projects in the works. These new monuments, part of what the City of Toronto calls its “Cultural Renaissance,” are intended to bolster the city’s reputation as an international economic and cultural capital. Albeit architecturally important, these buildings are better understood in the context of contemporary patterns of global economic competition and the changing role of culture in capitalist production. They also assert national identity and reflect a reorientation of Canadian cultural policy. This paper analyzes Toronto’s “Cultural Renaissance” in light of changing cultural policies at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels, examining the role these new buildings will play in terms of promoting cultural tourism, city “branding,” and nationalism.

Résumé : La ville de Toronto connaît actuellement un boum immobilier comprenant huit projets culturels majeurs. Ces nouveaux monuments, qui feront partie de ce qu’elle appelle une « Renaissance culturelle », visent à accroître la réputation de la ville en tant que capitale économique et culturelle internationale. Ces immeubles sont importants du point de vue architectural, mais leur fonction se comprend mieux dans le contexte de la concurrence économique mondiale actuelle et du rôle changeant de la culture dans la production capitaliste. Ils affirment en outre l’identité nationale et reflètent une réorientation de la politique culturelle canadienne. Cet article analyse cette « Renaissance culturelle » torontoise à la lumière des politiques culturelles changeantes aux niveaux municipal, provincial et fédéral, examinant le rôle que ces nouveaux immeubles joueront dans la promotion du tourisme culturel et du nationalisme et dans la mise en valeur de la ville en tant que « marque ».

Keywords: Cultural industries policy; Globalization; Cultural studies

The skyline of Toronto will change dramatically over the next five years, with eight major cultural construction projects in the works that will alter the city’s streetscape forever. Four of these new buildings—the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts (the Opera House), and the Ontario College of Art and Design—will be signature buildings designed by architects with international reputations. Icons of a global

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cultural economy, these new monuments are part of what the City of Toronto calls its “Cultural Renaissance” and are intended to bolster the city’s reputation as an international economic and cultural capital. They will confirm Toronto as the Canadian entrant in the symbolic power pageant for international cultural prestige, thus conferring the mantle of genuine “global city.” If all goes as planned, they will attract hordes of cultural tourists and their attendant (preferably American) dollars. For there is no doubt, these buildings will be beautiful, dramatic, ecstatic (Jencks, 1999). They are the new aesthetic of global economic competition.

Toronto is not alone in this quest for global cultural status. In the United States, at least 40 museums have recently announced plans to build new or significantly altered buildings. Between 1998 and 2000, more than 150 museums were built or expanded in the United States at a cost of U.S. $4.3 billion (Zukin, 2001). In Europe, the list of new or revised cultural buildings is also lengthy: in London, there is the new Tate Modern, along with a renewed Victoria and Albert Museum. Berlin boasts the Jewish Museum (not to mention new designs for the Reichstag and Potsdamer Platz, Frank Gehry’s DG Bank headquarters, Rem Koolhaas’ Dutch embassy, and Santiago Calatrava’s Kronprizen bridge). Spain hosts the Bilbao Guggenheim, which can arguably lay claim to have re-energized the whole “museum envy” process in the first place, as well as the largest cultural building project in Europe, Valencia’s City of Arts and Sciences. In Vienna, an entire museumquartier has been redeveloped (Evans, 2001). Japan has also entered the fray, with the new Mori Arts Centre in Tokyo. Most of these buildings are designed by “star” architects with international reputations. Daniel Libeskind (who designed the new World Trade Center in New York and the new ROM) and Frank Gehry (the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Disney Performing Arts Center) are the current mega-superstars, with Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid, Tadao Ando, Santiago Calatrava, Norman Foster, and the Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron following closely behind.

What explains this burst of museum building? Unquestionably, there is architectural importance to these buildings, but this is mostly a fortunate byproduct of more fundamental processes afoot. These buildings are better understood as both participants in, and reflections of, contemporary patterns of global economic competition and the changing role of culture in capitalist production. In the Canadian case, they are particularly remarkable in that the $257 million the federal and provincial governments will pour into the Toronto projects follows years of devastating cuts to arts funding. From this perspective, Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance marks a reorientation of Canadian cultural policy and a new approach to marketing Canada’s national identity abroad.

New cultural buildings are simultaneously national symbols, “brands,” and integral players in what Zukin (2001) has labelled the “Artistic Mode of Production.” In Toronto’s case, cultural policymaking at all three levels of government involved in the Cultural Renaissance tends to focus on different aspects of this complex phenomenon. For the federal government, these buildings are symbols of
a “banal nationalism” (McNeill & Tewdwr-Jones, 2003) intended to maintain the delicate balance the federal state must maintain between protecting national identity and ensuring international trade opportunities for cultural exports. Using cultural infrastructure to tout your nation’s vibrancy and creativity is an ideal compromise to address these often competing mandates. From the perspective of the Province of Ontario, the new edifices will serve as “brands” that can be used to attract visitors in line with its cultural tourism strategy. The City of Toronto, while also interested in cultural tourism, sees these buildings as a way to enhance Toronto’s economy and develop and attract the kinds of industries and workers necessary to compete as an effective global city. Finally, for the arts organizations themselves, these new buildings are a bid for survival in a context where culture is a business and cultural organizations compete for scarce public and private dollars. In general, developing cultural amenities in the city is an essential element of the “global entertainment economy” that seeks to lure consumers out of their homes to participate in the burgeoning markets for leisure and entertainment (Hannigan, 2002). As such, Toronto’s cultural building spree presents an interesting opportunity to discuss the inseparable issues of identity, art, and commerce.

If you build it, they will come…

The international burst of museum building is a reflection of the widespread recognition by policymakers that culture is a rapidly growing and highly desirable sector in “post-fordist” economies. Especially since the mid-1990s, the cultural economy literature has heralded cultural industries as a fertile source of jobs, exports, technological innovation, and tourist dollars with multiple economic spinoffs. As Scott (1996, 1997) argues, in the mid-1970s the “fordist” mode of production based on mass production and economies of scale began to decline, owing to the inability of large firms to adapt to the more flexible supply and demand strategies needed to service a global economy. Increasingly, the ability to focus on niche markets and respond rapidly to technological change and product differentiation became more important than cutting costs through product standardization.

Although the industrial cities that based their economies on fordist modes of production (such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Chicago) definitely had their own distinctive cultures, the cultural element of production itself was limited by the strategies of standardization and economies of scale dictated by mass production. The cultural aspects of consumer goods produced in fordist economies tended to be subservient to function and cost-cutting, resulting in the “eternal sameness” criticized by the Frankfurt School (Scott, 1997).

The economic restructuring of the 1970s, the argument continues, led to a decline in the importance of mass production strategies and a rise in post-fordist industries that focused on a more differentiated consumer culture. Vibrant new industries comprised of small and medium sized enterprises, often found in regional clusters, rose alongside larger companies to fill the demand for “flexible specialization.” Cultural industries such as film, television, haute couture, publishing, and even art restoration became the focus of studies highlighting the rapid growth and job-creating capacity of the mostly small firms that dominated these
sectors (Lazeretti, 2003; Scott, 1996; Storper & Christopherson, 1987). In these post-fordist industries, whether cultural or high-technology, many of the goods produced are largely symbolic, meaning a product’s image is key to its value. Consequently, design becomes a more important element of the product than material components, and the “look” of the product is central to its marketability (Zukin, 2001).

During this period, culture also began to figure prominently in urban redevelopment strategies, leading to a greater focus on museums and heritage. As large cities based on declining mass production industries faced economic crisis, they turned to culture as a way to revitalize their economies. The result was the rise of what Zukin labelled the “Artistic Mode of Production,” an economic strategy defined by the following:

1. revalorizing the built environment around cultural consumption and historic preservation, symbolized by the heritage industry;
2. restructuring the labour force by using art work to absorb youth unemployment; and
3. nurturing a new set of cultural meanings that value both urban space and labour for their aesthetic rather than productive capacities (Zukin, 2001, p. 260).

For cities that have embraced the Artistic Mode of Production, business in the summer months in particular is dominated by cultural events such as theatre and music festivals, blockbuster art shows, and restaurants offering gourmet food and wine. So popular are these cultural events that they now attract more visitors to cities than do sporting events (City of Toronto, 2003; Evans, 2003). In fact, what has been labelled the “global entertainment economy” has become a central plank in urban redevelopment schemes across Europe and North America. Entertainment and leisure facilities such as large shopping malls, theatres, and urban theme parks are attracting growing amounts of consumer spending. In the United States, consumers spend more on entertainment than they do on clothing or health care, while in Canada the consumer market for entertainment services grew by almost 50% between 1986 and 1996 (Hannigan, 2002).

Art galleries and museums figure prominently in this strategy in two ways. First, they serve as a focal point to attract tourist dollars and help promote a city’s image as a dynamic cultural destination. Museums and other cultural amenities are important because of their potential for attracting tourist dollars and the associated spinoff effects related to tourist industries. The global cities (Sassen, 1991) that dominate the international finance and business networks of the world (such as New York, London, Paris, and Tokyo) remain the biggest beneficiaries of cultural tourism. Particularly in Europe, however, a number of second-tier cities, such as Barcelona, Bilbao, Glasgow, Manchester, and Cardiff, have been vying for the European Union label of “Cultural Capital” by using a cultural renaissance as a way to jump-start their ailing heavy industrial economies.
In order to draw attention to your cultural renaissance, however, it is necessary to “brand” your city as a significant international cultural attraction. This “branding” may focus on cultural attributes such as multiculturalism or on specific cultural icons. For example, cities vie for the honour of having the largest Chinatown or label their various immigrant neighbourhoods as “Banglatown” (in East London) or the “Curry Triangle” (in Birmingham) (Evans, 2003). As Hoffman (2003) notes in her examination of Harlem’s tourist renaissance, multiculturalism and diversity can be a competitive advantage in a global economy where the search for new economic frontiers in the form of non-traditional markets and populations is a central aspect of flexible specialization. Cultural icons make equally good city “brands,” hence the attraction to architecture as a high profile way to grab attention. MacIntosh’s Glasgow and Gaudi’s Barcelona have recently been joined by Gehry’s Bilbao, not to mention the various Grands Projets of Paris that attracted so much tourist attraction in the 1980s (Evans, 2003). In many ways, Paris’ Centre Pompidou (designed by Rogers and Piano in 1977) was the model for the cultural centre–cum–architectural icon. Pei’s ultra-modern pyramid in the centre of the Louvre’s courtyard, as controversial as it was, attracted considerable tourist attention and contributed substantially to Pei’s international reputation.

Second, in addition to attracting tourists, these cities are seeking to provide the kinds of cultural amenities necessary to attract highly skilled and educated workers to their urban communities. In an argument that is drawing growing attention, Florida maintains that a vibrant cultural scene is key to attracting the workers necessary to run the “creative industries” that characterize post-fordist production (Florida, 2002). Adapting an argument made by Jacobs in the 1970s, Florida maintains that diverse, culturally vibrant communities have the greatest success in attracting members of what he calls the “Creative Class”—high-tech workers, architects, engineers, computer scientists, and other professionals who make their living creating the symbolic capital so essential to post-fordist economies. A solid base of these Creative Class workers, he argues, is in turn essential to attracting investment on the part of the high growth industries that scour the globe for such workers. For Florida, cultural amenities and dynamic street scenes in music, art, or theatre are part of the urban fabric necessary to attract Creative Class workers. His Composite Diversity Index, a measurement combining the extent of a city’s gay population, racial diversity, and number of “bohemians” or artists, shows a positive correlation between a city’s diversity and culture and its ability to attract high technology industry (Florida, 2002).

Of course, all of these claims are contentious. For every study hailing the benefits of using cultural institutions as an economic development strategy (Carmichael, 2002; Hoffman, 2003; Plaza, 1999) there are those that dispute such claims. The practice of building flagship monuments such as Olympic stadiums or museums seems particularly risky as a branding strategy, since the immediate attention associated with a new building such as the Bilbao Guggenheim seems to dissipate when a new, equally iconic building emerges in a competing culture.
capital (Evans, 2003; Gómez, 1998). The result is a trend toward attention-grabbing, flashy buildings, or what has been labelled karaoke architecture—it doesn’t matter how well you sing, as long as you do so with gusto and verve (Biswas, 2000). Levine (2003) argues that the city of Montreal’s aspirations to cultural tourism (including Expo 67 and the 1976 Olympics) have cost the city billions of dollars with little but massive debt to show for it. As for Florida’s claims, although culturally vibrant cities seem to have an advantage in attracting high-tech industries, he also notes that “big ticket” attractions are less effective in attracting Creative Class workers than more organic kinds of cultural activities such as a vibrant street scene (Florida, 2002).

Studies focusing on the economic advantages or disadvantages of cultural industries, however, ignore another key benefit in icon or monument building that can overshadow economic considerations. Big, flashy, expensive buildings are crucial to the kinds of national identity building so hard to come by at a time when the pressures of globalization seem to challenge the very essence of national states. In fact, they make excellent standard bearers for “banal nationalism”—not overt flag-waving or xenophobia, but everyday symbols of national identity (Billig, 1995; McNeill & Tewdwr-Jones, 2003).

At a time when national sovereignty appears to be ebbing into obsolescence, architecture is an excellent means for elites to “re-narrate” their nations. To state the obvious, national identity is central to the very existence of the national state, and Canada has always struggled to maintain a distinct national identity in the shadow of its neighbour to the south. For a country with a small domestic market that is highly dependent on international trade (particularly with the United States), xenophobia or nationalistic flag-waving is not necessarily the most fruitful way to assert national identity. In contrast, iconic cultural buildings that announce Canada’s social dynamism and cultural refinement to the world fulfill the dual tasks of promoting economic competitiveness and establishing a national reputation for knowledge-intensive creativity.

In the case of Toronto, this kind of banal nationalism seems to be a factor in at least the federal government’s involvement in the museum-building binge. As the national government moves its cultural policy away from a defence against American imperialism toward a posture of greater cultural internationalism, big, flashy buildings that advertise Canada’s cultural dynamism provide an ideal semiotic tool.

Of course, nationalism had little influence on the directors of the cultural organizations who are seeking to expand or rebuild. In an era of devastating government spending cuts to the arts, museums and art galleries have had to become more and more entrepreneurial to survive. Museum directors are increasingly picked for their business acumen and social connections, and the museum store is taking up more and more square footage of cultural buildings. Museum stores have proved enormously successful and have become an integral part of museum funding. Although the huge success of these stores makes them a bit of an outlier, retail sales per square foot are higher in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
museum stores than they are in Wal-mart (Evans, 2003). Flashy new buildings may be expensive to build and run, but ultimately they may be the best form of advertising available to arts organizations that depend on drawing in large numbers of people to support both their exhibits and their stores. In this light, cultural organizations are only too happy to oblige in the quest for branding and national identity.

All of these factors are central to understanding Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance. The three levels of government involved are responding to the siren song of cultural tourism, cultural status, and the Artistic Mode of Production heard around the world, while cultural organizations see this renaissance as their only chance for survival.

**Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance**

In May 2003, the federal and provincial governments announced that they would be investing up to $233 million in cultural infrastructure in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) through the Canada-Ontario Infrastructure Program. After a call for funding applications, seven cultural institutions were chosen to be the fortunate recipients of this money: Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Canadian Opera Company, Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), National Ballet School, Royal Conservatory of Music, George R. Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, and Roy Thomson Hall. I have added the Ontario College of Art and Design to this list, although it received only provincial funding, since its new building will serve as a major architectural attraction in its location near the AGO. Table 1 shows how these monies will be allocated.

**Table 1: Funding for cultural infrastructure in Toronto**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Government Investment (C$ million)</th>
<th>Fundraising Required (C$ million)</th>
<th>Total (C$ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Royal Ontario Museum</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Gallery of Ontario</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Opera Company</td>
<td>25 (31)*</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Conservatory of Music</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Ballet of Canada</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy Thomson Hall</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>202 (233)*</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario College of Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>226 (257)*</td>
<td>488.5</td>
<td>714.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes the provincial government’s donation of land to the Canadian Opera Company, valued at $31 million.

Source: Adapted from the *Globe and Mail*, December 7, 2002.

Table 1 also reveals that in every case, the joint government investment involved comprises only 35-40% of the money necessary to complete these
projects. That means a total of $488.5 million must still be fundraised from private donors, far more money than has ever been donated by private individuals in Toronto’s history. Individual cultural institutions will have to organize these fundraising drives on their own. This transition to increased reliance on private donors reflects the neo-liberal arts funding strategy that has become dominant in Canada at both the federal and provincial levels since the 1990s. In a move toward the “American” model of arts funding, state contributions to arts spending are increasingly contingent on arts organizations finding matching contributions from the private sector (DiCenzo, 1998; Wu, 2003).

Nonetheless, both governments’ contributions to these building projects are unusual in the context of major cuts to cultural funding evident at both the federal and provincial level in the 1990s. Federal funding to the Canada Council, for example, fell from $105.5 million in 1991-92 to $88.8 million in 1997-98. The Ontario Arts Council was even harder hit, with provincial funding dropping from $42.6 million to $25.3 million in the 18 months between 1995-96 and 1996-97 (DiCenzo, 1998). The sudden state interest in Toronto’s cultural landscape, therefore, must be understood in the context of the issues raised above.

Primary among these is the economic potential of these new buildings. In the 1990s, Canadian governments at both the provincial and federal level awoke to the fact that the business of culture (broadly defined) constituted a $22 billion business that was growing more rapidly than other sectors of the economy.² Between 1989-90 and 1994-95, the cultural sector in Canada grew by 14%, faster than other key sectors of the economy such as transportation and agriculture. Between 1990 and 1995, the cultural labour force increased by 5.6%, at a time when overall employment in Canada decreased by 0.5%.³ From 1996 to 2000, Canadian cultural exports grew by 50%, with average annual growth rates of 14% per year for cultural goods and 7% for cultural services and intellectual property.⁴ Although museums contribute only minimally to trade growth through exports of curatorial services and exhibitions, they do attract foreign exchange into the Canadian economy through cultural tourism. More importantly, they are part of the cultural infrastructure that helps to foster a culturally vibrant economy.

Largely due to their economic importance, culture and cultural production have come under increasing scrutiny at all three levels of government in Canada, although for slightly different reasons.

The City of Toronto
In April 2003, the Toronto City Council passed a cultural plan developed by the Culture Division of its Department of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism. Entitled Culture Plan: For the Creative City, the plan cites the work of Richard Florida in arguing that in order to maintain the city’s role as a key competitor in a globalized economy, increased emphasis on culture and heritage is necessary to “attract the educated, mobile newcomers we want, keep our best and brightest at home and make our economy among the strongest anywhere” (City of Toronto, 2003, p. 6). The report identifies Toronto as one of the major Creative Cities that drive the world’s economy, arguing that Canada’s largest city has
already entered the ranks of the dynamic global cities that compete with one another for economic dominance. It also recognizes that the growing knowledge-based component of contemporary economies means that attracting educated people is a central part of being globally competitive. Noting that the battle for economic dominance used to be regional, the report maintains that the economic competition between cities stretches from “Seoul to London,” and argues it is time Toronto recognized its membership in this elite club.

We used to think of London, New York, Paris, Rome and San Francisco as places that existed in another realm from Toronto. But now Toronto is much like these cities we once envied. These cities work with their minds. Their populations display a potent mix of high education and cultural diversity. But none of them can claim the combination of high educational and diversity levels of Torontonians (City of Toronto, 2003, p. 7).

The Culture Plan cites a report by Florida and Meric Gertler of the University of Toronto, which concludes that arts and culture, ethnic diversity, and cultural openness are magnets for high-technology industries largely because they attract the kinds of people these industries seek to employ. The Plan notes that Toronto is falling behind its continental “competitors” (including Montreal and Vancouver or U.S. cities of comparable size such as Chicago or San Francisco) both in terms of cultural spending and in marketing the city’s cultural attributes. According to the report, Toronto spends $14.64 per capita on arts, culture, and heritage compared to $17.71 per person for Vancouver and $26.62 per capita for Montreal. In the United States, Chicago spends $21.85 per person, while San Francisco spends a whopping $86.01 per capita (p. 23). The Culture Plan recommends that Toronto up its per capita cultural spending to $25 per capita over three years.

Toronto is also remiss in marketing its cultural assets, according to the report, and as a result is not competing effectively with other cities. While Vancouver, with a much smaller population, spends $10.1 million a year on marketing and Montreal spends $17.8 million, Toronto spends only $9.3 million per year on marketing. The report argues that Toronto has lost about $750 million per year in tourist spending due to this lack of advertising, causing Toronto to be the only major city in North America to experience a decline in tourism since 1996. Again, one of the reasons for this is the lack of marketing dollars targeted on cultural institutions, which, according to the report, now attract larger audiences to Toronto than do sporting events (p. 40).

In this context, the report maintains that Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance offers a perfect opportunity to reverse Toronto’s tourism plunge, using the “branding” strategy outlined above. Six of the institutions receiving money from the SuperBuild fund (the ROM, the Royal Conservatory of Music, the Gardiner Museum, the AGO, Roy Thomson Hall, and the new Opera House) are located on or near University Avenue between Bloor and King Streets, resulting in a “spectacular boulevard of creativity” that can successfully be “marketed as an entity, an Avenue of the Arts.” As another marketing ploy, Toronto plans to make 2006 the
“Year of Creativity” in order to further capitalize on the wave of Cultural Renaissance (2003, pp. 10-11).

In sum, the City of Toronto has clearly identified culture as a central plank in its platform to increase its competitiveness as a global city. The reasons for this are almost entirely economic, however. Although the city’s Culture Plan contains a few sentences alluding to the fact that culture is the “heart and soul” of Toronto, the primary motivation for increased attention to Toronto’s cultural amenities is economic. Not only does culture attract the kinds of workers the city needs to lure globally competitive companies to its community, it is also an important source of tourist dollars.

The provincial government
In 2001, the federal and provincial governments signed the Canada-Ontario Infrastructure Agreement, in which Ottawa allocated $110 million specifically for cultural infrastructure and recreation projects in Toronto. In tandem with this, the Ontario government announced its SuperBuild infrastructure program, which designated $300 million for culture and recreation infrastructure throughout Ontario. The provincial government clearly identified its SuperBuild expenditures as an element of its economic and cultural tourism strategies. In the Ministry of Culture’s business plan for 2002, former culture minister David Tsubouchi remarked that the culture sector contributed more than $8.6 billion to the province’s coffers and generated 230,700 jobs (Ontario Ministry of Culture, 2002, p. 1). He noted that it was with the “full social and economic value of Ontario’s culture in mind” that the province gave its portion of the SuperBuild funds to support Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance (p. 1). Similarly, former premier Ernie Eves noted that the province’s investment in these cultural institutions will “serve as a catalyst for job creation and will provide a significant boost for tourism in Toronto and Ontario” (Industry Canada, 2002, p. 1). In addition to its contributions through the SuperBuild Fund, in 2002 the Government of Ontario also initiated the $20 million Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund to sponsor new cultural attractions that would increase provincial tourism. In July 2003, it announced a $128 million Cultural Tourism Marketing Fund to help recover tourism that was lost due to SARS and other issues.

A Travel Attitudes and Motivation Survey financed jointly by the provincial government and various other institutions found that 9.3% of Canadian urban travellers and 12.2% of American urban travellers were considered to be “Culture Seekers.” Affluent and well-educated, this group was identified as not only key to cultural tourism, but also as more likely to indulge in other local amenities such as fine dining, casino gambling, and enjoying nightlife. The report recommended trying to attract these “mature, affluent Culture Seekers” by promoting Canadian cities as “offering numerous opportunities for learning and cultural enrichment in concert with opportunities to enjoy fine cuisine and wine, luxury setting and nightlife” (Lang Research, 2001, p. iii).

This finding illuminates the Ontario government’s 2002 decision that all allocations to cultural institutions through the SuperBuild Fund would be decided
according to how each institution “fit into the cultural tourism framework” (Adams, 2002a). At the time, culture and tourism were in part of the same ministry, headed by Niagara MPP Tim Hudak, although subsequently separate ministries for tourism and culture were created under the Eves government. Since the cultural tourism framework appeared to be the result of a cabinet directive, there are no policy documents outlining the specificities of this strategy. Broadly, however, the province’s plan under the neo-liberal governments first of Mike Harris and then Ernie Eves was to create a concentrated area of cultural attractions that would lure visitors to Toronto. Toronto would then act as a “gateway” to tourist attractions in the Niagara region and the Muskoka cottage area.

The “Avenue of the Arts” strategy so central to the City of Toronto’s cultural plan was also integral to the province’s cultural tourism strategy. Indeed, the interests of the municipality and the province clearly overlapped, given that Toronto is the provincial capital. It was the Province of Ontario that financed the Florida and Gertler study cited in the City of Toronto’s Culture Plan, and the two governments also jointly financed consultant reports on tourism. Nonetheless, the provincial government’s fixation on its cultural tourism strategy did set it at odds with the City of Toronto on at least one occasion. So dedicated was the province to its strategy of using Toronto as a “gateway” to the rest of Ontario that it originally declined to support the National Ballet of Canada’s request for SuperBuild funds because it did not fit into the cultural tourism strategy. Tagged for expansion in the Jarvis Street area, several blocks east of University Avenue, the new ballet school’s development was seen as too far away from the core culture area (Adams, 2002b; Rusk, 2002). As an educational institution, it also was presumably less appealing from a tourism perspective, although the City of Toronto welcomed it as a way of revitalizing the Jarvis Street neighbourhood. Only after the federal government later announced its own funding to the National Ballet did the province change its mind and decide to support the project.

The federal and provincial governments also clashed over funding for the Canadian Opera Company’s new building. Although the Harris government had offered to sell the Opera Company a parcel of provincially owned land on the corner of Queen Street and University Avenue for $16 million in 1997, the provincial government dragged its feet on making a final commitment to selling the land, apparently because it was unsure how the future Opera House would fit into its cultural tourism framework (Adams, 2002a). Although the Ontario ministry ultimately did donate the land (valued at $31 million) to the Opera Company, an agreement between the federal and provincial governments was reached only after Premier Mike Harris retired and was replaced by Ernie Eves, and the newly created Culture Ministry led by David Tsubouchi took over the negotiations from the former Ministry of Culture and Tourism led by Hudak.

In sum, the province saw these cultural institutions primarily as a means of luring tourists via Toronto into the rest of Ontario. So dedicated was it to this strategy that it found itself at odds with both the municipal and federal governments over the funding of projects such as the National Ballet and the Opera
House. In contrast, the federal government’s support of these projects reveals its perception of culture not only as an economic stimulus, but also as a symbol of Canadian national identity.

The federal government

It is important not to downplay the federal government’s emphasis on the economic role of culture and its importance both to the domestic economy and to international trade. Indeed, both the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) have produced volumes of economic data examining the dollar value of cultural industries both at home and abroad (DCH, 2002; DFAIT, 2001). DFAIT in particular has paid specific attention to the marketability of Canadian cultural commodities, offering marketing services for cultural exporters and organizing a sectoral advisory group to examine the changing role of cultural policy in the context of Canada’s trade-dependent economy (DFAIT, 1999).

National cultural policy, however, must be understood not only within the contemporary context of international economic interdependence and trade obligations, but also within the historical and intellectual legacy of cultural protection inherent in Canadian policy since the 1950s. In particular, the link between culture and the creation and maintenance of Canadian identity underlined in the Massey Report of 1951 still resonates in cultural policy initiatives at the national level. Obviously, for any national government, developing and maintaining a distinctive national identity is a *sine qua non* of the state’s very existence. Thus, even DFAIT’s document emphasizing the trade worthiness of cultural commodities begins with the recognition that culture is integral to national identity (DFAIT, 2001).

Interestingly, the federal government’s contemporary emphasis on identity formation differs significantly from the discourse of anti-Americanism prevalent in the Massey Report’s dark warnings regarding the dangers of American cultural hegemony. In 1951, the authors warned:

> It cannot be denied, ... that a vast and disproportionate amount of material coming from a single alien source may stifle rather than stimulate our own creative effort; and, passively accepted without any standard of comparison, this may weaken critical faculties. We are now spending millions to maintain a national independence which would be nothing but an empty shell without a vigorous and distinctive cultural life. We have seen that we have its elements in our traditions and in our history; we have made important progress, often aided by American generosity. We must not be blind, however, to the very present danger of dependence. (cited in Boucher, 1995)

The apprehensive, defensive tone of the Massey Report contrasts markedly with the current federal stance on culture. As Berland (2000) argues, Massey proposed to defend the nation through high culture. As such, Canadian cultural policy up to the 1970s had a distinctly defensive edge to it: an internally oriented state building element intended to defend Canadians from the crass commercialism of American popular culture. Central to this was state support and encouragement of the development of culture in Mathew Arnold’s sense: a culture that is “the best
that can be thought and made” (Berland, 2000, p. 23). This cultural policy also had a distinct neo-mercantilist tinge to it, reflecting an interventionist, bureaucratic rationality that was far less prominent in the United States. Subsidies, foreign ownership controls, and domestic content requirements became prominent tools in the Canadian cultural policy repertoire.

As Dorland (2000) suggests, Canada’s movement away from neo-mercantilist economic policies and its subsequent embracing of neo-liberal trade policies was in turn reflected in Canadian cultural policy. Although the transition has been a slow, painful one and the legacy of neo-mercantilist cultural policy remains, there has been a distinct movement “away from internal, prescriptive policy to external, more legalistic forms of inter-state rationality” (Dorland, 2000, p. 148). Thus, DFAIT’s sectoral trade group on cultural industries, which contains numerous culture industry executives, argues that cultural policy must be more integrated into Canadian trade policy. Specifically, the group suggests negotiating an international instrument on cultural diversity that would in turn acknowledge the role of the state in maintaining diversity. State involvement in culture is still there, but gone is the defensive, national security discourse of the Massey Report. Instead, an international diversity instrument will “ensure that Canadian cultural content is available to all Canadians without limiting their access to foreign cultural products” (DFAIT, 1999, p. 7).

Contemporary federal government discourse on Canadian cultural identity speaks of culture and identity almost as a source of international competitiveness—noting that the success of Canadian artists abroad not only brings commercial gain to the cultural industries involved, but also benefits Canada as a whole. Similar to the way in which cities have sought to “brand” themselves, the federal government sees culture as a potential marketing tool in the quest for global competitive advantage. Cultural survival becomes less of a defensive game of content regulations, subsidies, and foreign ownership limitations and more of a proactive attempt to promote “cultural diversity” (albeit through state intervention to ensure this diversity). Cultural policy becomes internationalist as opposed to nationalist and is discussed more in a global context than in a continental one, and with a decided neo-liberal twist: culture is perceived as the nation’s logo, so to speak. Culture is important as a source of national identity, but it should also reflect on Canada’s status globally.

Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance fits perfectly into this strategy of cultural internationalism. As former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien noted when federal government support for the building initiatives was announced, these cultural institutions will “support Toronto’s position as a modern, world-class city” (Industry Canada, 2002, p. 1). In doing so, they will also reinforce the Government of Canada’s attempt to brand itself as a cutting edge, culturally vibrant society. They constitute an excellent tool for the exercising of banal nationalism—supporting Canada’s international image through cultural building while averting any rabid flagwaving. This in part explains the federal government’s support of less “tourist-sexy” institutions like the Canadian Opera company and
the National Ballet—they are national institutions that exhibit Canadian cultural refinement and bring cultural cachet. In contrast to the municipal and provincial governments, the federal government’s game is more about national reputation than attracting tourist dollars. Like the City of Toronto, the federal government is most interested in promoting Toronto as a legitimate “global city” that reflects an autonomous, modern nation.

**Pitfalls**

Flashy new buildings are great for Toronto’s global image, but how sustainable are they in the long term? Notably absent in any discussion on the part of the federal and provincial governments is any mention of the increased operating costs necessary to run these shiny new buildings. Only the City of Toronto’s *Culture Plan* reveals any concern about this lack of funding, noting that municipal funding to arts organizations, which had been cut throughout the 1980s, remained at 1990s levels despite the fact that the city’s economy had grown 40%. It also cites Statistics Canada data showing that government support to 625 performing arts organizations dropped by 13% over the 1990s, with the National Ballet of Canada and the Canadian Opera Company witnessing 25% cuts (City of Toronto, 2003).

With operating funds from all levels of government reduced to pre-1990 levels, these new institutions will have to rely on private funds, either through increased attendance or from private donors. The ROM, for example, is seeking to double its attendance to 1.6 million visitors per year in order to finance the expanded facility (Rochon, 2002). As noted above, the building drives alone will require fundraising efforts of $470 million from private donors, much more than has ever been fundraised in the history of the city’s art institutions. Fundraising operating funds is notoriously difficult, since they are a much less “sexy” kind of donation than capital donations, which often offer to name a room or a wing of a building after the donor. Only Kenneth Thomson’s donation to the AGO involves any kind of stipulation that a portion of the funds will be reserved as an endowment for operating costs.

The transfer of responsibility for arts funding from public to private donors is part of a larger neo-liberal project that stretches beyond Canada’s borders (Wu, 2003). As mentioned above, however, the reliance on private donations to finance the arts in Canada is unprecedented. As such, it marks a transition to the American model of arts funding, where private patrons have long supported individual arts institutions. Whether private donors will rise to this challenge remains to be seen. Again, only the City of Toronto seems to be willing to consider increases in public support of arts organizations, but even its suggestions are based on “user pay” formulas. For example, it advocates strategies used in many American cities, such as setting specific levies on tourist and building activities that can then be funneled toward arts spending. It also suggests adding ticket surcharges and a 3% visitor levy on hotel occupancy tax that could then be used for arts funding. Finally, it notes that portions of the federal and provincial sales taxes on admissions to places of amusement should be reinvested in cultural development (City of Toronto, 2003).
The branding strategy popular with all three levels of government also has its drawbacks. Using an exciting new building as a marketing ploy works fine in the short term—until someone else builds an even flashier building to lure tourists there. This was the case with the Bilbao Guggenheim, where associated employment, tax revenues, and value added generation have all decreased approximately 30% since the museum’s opening in 1997 (Gómez & González, 2001). With so many cities engaging in the cultural tourism game, the competition is destined to become even fiercer. On the other hand, given this competition, can Toronto afford not to enter the fray?

The consumerist orientation of these buildings also limits the broader economic benefits they bring. The service-oriented jobs associated with museums tend to be insecure and low paying. The economic pressures on cultural institutions noted above only encourage downward pressure on wages and less job security. Not surprisingly, the growth of the Artistic Mode of Production elsewhere has been associated with labour strife. In New York, for example, there have been 30 strikes by cultural workers since 1990 (Zukin, 2001). In Rio de Janeiro, an initiative to open a new Guggenheim “branch” was rejected when local artists feared that Brazilian culture would be overwhelmed by the global museum’s culture juggernaut. One can only hope that Florida’s findings are correct and that more substantial “Creative Class” jobs will be associated with Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance.

**Conclusion**

Toronto’s Cultural Renaissance must be understood as a complex, global phenomenon that is being replicated around the world. The attempts by all three levels of government to “brand” the city/province/country through cultural icons are being matched in Europe, the United States, and Japan, for both economic and political reasons. Economically, cultural institutions are seen as a way to revitalize flagging depressed industrial-based economies through cultural tourism and increased spending on leisure and entertainment. Culture and cultural diversity are also seen as attractions that will draw “Creative Class” workers to a city, accompanied by the kinds of high value-added industries that employ such workers. Politically, flashy cultural icons symbolize a dynamic, modern polity, and reflect the city’s and the country’s global status.

How successful these new cultural buildings will be in achieving these goals remains to be seen. Not only are they competing with museums in other cities, they will be competing amongst themselves. Witness the fray in Vienna’s Museumsquartier, where many museums have experienced a decline in attendance after the reopening of the revamped Albertina Museum and the opening of the new Liechtenstein Museum (Bailey, 2004). In the absence of new operating funding from all three levels of government, Toronto’s newly expanded cultural institutions may find themselves struggling with the high costs of their redevelopment. Architecturally, Toronto will surely benefit from some very attractive buildings. Ironically, however, in the final analysis this building extravaganza appears to have very little to do with art or architecture.
Notes
1. All figures are in Canadian dollars unless indicated otherwise.
2. Culture industries are defined as broadcasting, performing and visual arts, festivals, heritage institutions (museums, galleries, libraries, and natural areas), and associated professions (architecture, design, photography, and advertising).
3. Figures provided by the Department of Canadian Heritage (N.D.).
5. See, for example, Cameron Hawkins & Associates (2001).
6. Note also former Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps’ successful effort to push UNESCO to commit to developing a Convention on Cultural Diversity that would attempt to draw cultural trade issues away from the World Trade Organization (WTO).

References


