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**Canadians Assess Arts and
Culture in Their Communities**

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Executive Editor

The findings of the recent Ipsos Reid / Municipal World survey on Canadians' attitudes about arts and culture in their communities reinforces that they attach a great deal of value to the cultural amenities and public space in their communities.

As Catherine Knaus discusses in the article on page 5, Canadians recognize the important work of local governments in delivering on those values: in providing and maintaining cultural facilities; preserving historic and heritage buildings; supporting local arts and cultural initiatives, artists, and performers; informing residents of upcoming arts and cultural festivals or events; celebrating diversity; and enhancing public space with public art.

Although Canadians recognize the very real limitations of local government budgets – the reality that choices must be made about where to expend resources – they also overwhelmingly recognize the potential for arts and culture to drive tourism and economic development in the community.

And so, our annual arts and culture issue attempts to “dig deeper” at some of these issues. In particular, the idea of arts and culture creating a “destination” emerges as a complex concept. It is true that cultural initiatives may possibly become destinations for tourists – but

not necessarily. (As noted in the articles on branding, a successful strategy will take considerable effort, time and money to even get off the ground.)

So, it is important to remember that culture has an important intrinsic value as a destination for citizens *within* the community as well, which is above and beyond any economic considerations. Public art projects, for example, such as Dorsey James' Home Place (featured on our cover and in the article on page 13 of this issue), aim to transform spaces into places – into destinations that are rich in meaning and context for the people who live in the community, conveying a sense of their identity and past, as well as their future.

This role of culture in engaging citizens is an important one – it is the thing that makes civic life meaningful; that brings people out to community festivals; that causes them to sign up for workshops at the local community centre; that motivates them to serve as volunteers in a local, civil society.

It seems that culture is really the glue that holds communities together. If culture can be a magnet for economic prosperity as well, so much the better ... but that cannot be the only reason for local governments to make investments in their communities' arts and cultural initiatives.

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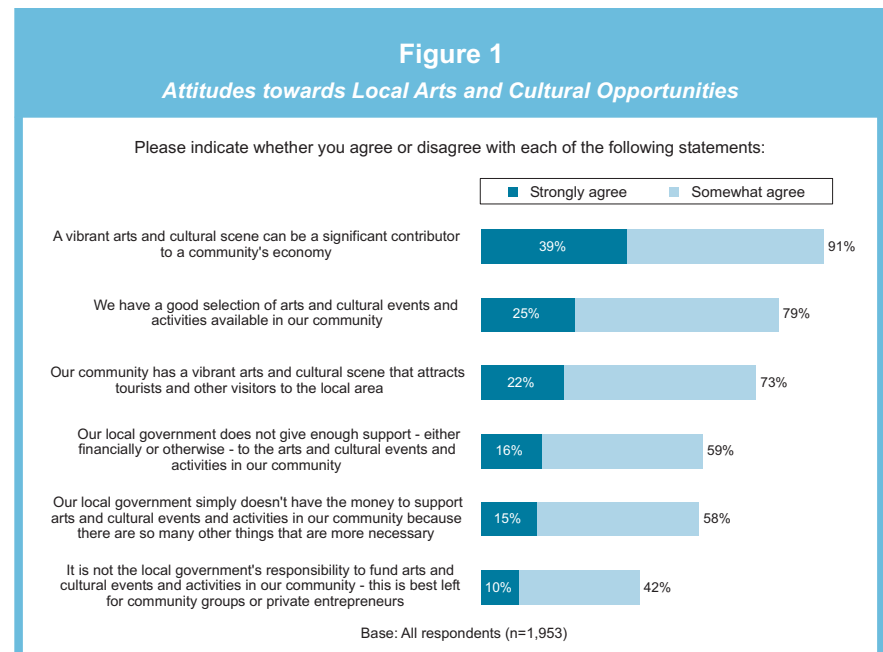
Canadians Assess Arts and Culture in Their Communities

Catherine Knaus

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests regular cultural participation helps citizens forge stronger relationships with not only their personal heritage, but also the larger community in which they live. Furthermore, a vibrant arts and cultural scene has also been shown to provide important economic benefits to local communities. These findings have spurred many Canadian municipalities to take a closer look at the arts and cultural opportunities available in their community to ensure these are meeting the needs of increasingly diverse and sophisticated populations.

For many local governments, the question now is: How do citizens view the arts and cultural opportunities available in their community? Furthermore, how do citizens rate the performance of their local government when it comes to supporting arts and culture?

To answer these questions, Ipsos Reid, in partnership with *Municipal World*, conducted a survey aimed at better understanding Canadians' atti-



tudes towards arts and culture in their local community. The survey was conducted between June 28 and July 3, 2007 among a sample of 1,953 adult Canadians randomly selected from the Ipsos Reid Internet Household Panel. Results based on a sample size of 1,953 are considered accurate to within ± 2.2

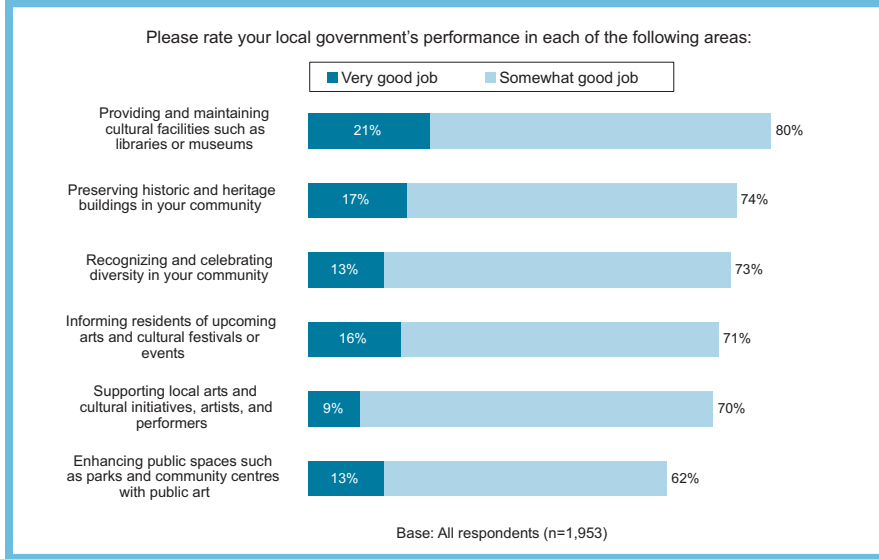
percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The data has been statistically weighted to ensure the composition of the sample by region, age and gender reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 2001 Census data.

Canadians Recognize Economic Potential of the Arts

Overall, the survey finds that Ca-

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Figure 2
Perceptions of Local Governments' Performance
in Supporting Arts and Culture



Canadians believe the arts can play an important role in bolstering a community's local economy. In total, 91 percent of Canadians agree with the statement "a vibrant arts and cultural

other visitors to the local area."

However, while overall perceptions of local arts and cultural opportunities are favourable, the majority of Canadians only "somewhat agree"

with the statement "our local government does not give enough support – either financially or otherwise – to the arts and cultural events and activities in our community." Meanwhile, a similar proportion (58 percent) disagree with the statement "it is not the local government's responsibility to fund arts and cultural events in our community – that is best left for community groups or private entrepreneurs." This indicates the majority of Canadians think local governments have at least some responsibility to provide financial support to local arts and culture initiatives.

However, even though the majority of Canadians see a role for local governments in supporting community-based arts and cultural initiatives, many also acknowledge that financial constraints may be limiting what municipalities can realistically do in this regard. Overall, 58 percent of respondents agree with the statement "our local government simply doesn't have the money to support

Arts and culture are seen as playing a role in local tourism, with 73 percent of respondents agreeing "our community has a vibrant arts and cultural scene that attracts tourists and other visitors to the local area."

scene can be a significant contributor to a community's economy."

How Do Canadians Perceive Local Offerings?

Not only does the Canadian public acknowledge the importance of a strong arts and cultural sector, but many also perceive their community's offerings in this area positively. Overall, eight in 10 Canadians (79 percent) agree "we have a good selection of arts and cultural events and activities available in our community." Arts and culture are also seen as playing a role in local tourism, with 73 percent of respondents agreeing "our community has a vibrant arts and cultural scene that attracts tourists and

with the above statements (much fewer say they "strongly agree"), pointing to a more moderate view of local offerings.

Local Governments Should Do More to Support the Arts – But Only if Financially Feasible

What role, if any, do Canadians see local governments playing when it comes to the delivery of arts and cultural services? Overall, the survey shows Canadians do assign at least some responsibility to local governments in this area; in fact, many would like to see their local government do even more to support the arts than what is currently being done. In total, six-in-10 (59 percent) agree

arts and cultural events and activities in our community because there are so many other things that are more necessary." This suggests that, while many citizens would like to see their local government invest more heavily in arts and culture, they do not believe this should be done to the detriment of other more pressing priorities.

Local Governments Get Good, But Not Great, Marks For Support of the Arts

For the most part, results looking at Canadians' assessment of municipal governments' support of local arts and cultural offerings are favourable. This suggests that, despite a desire to

see municipalities do more (should resources allow), citizens generally perceive their local government as doing a relatively good job in this area overall. However, further analysis of the data shows that local governments' performance is more likely to be rated as merely "somewhat" rather than "very" good. While the lower proportion of "very good" responses suggests room for improvement, this may also be indicative of an overall lack of awareness regarding what local governments are doing to support arts and culture in the community. A summary of Canadians' assessment of local governments' performance in supporting arts and culture can be found in Figures 1 and 2.

Overall, local governments receive the highest marks for "providing and maintaining cultural facilities such as libraries or museums," with 80 percent of Canadians saying their local

government is doing a good job in this regard.

While rated slightly lower than the above, at least seven-in-10 Canadians also believe their local government is doing a good job when it comes to preserving heritage buildings, celebrating diversity, communicating about local festivals, and supporting local arts and cultural initiatives.

- ▶ "Preserving historic and heritage buildings in your community" (74 percent good job);
- ▶ "Recognizing and celebrating diversity in your community" (73 percent good job);
- ▶ "Informing residents of upcoming arts and cultural festivals or events" (71 percent good job); and
- ▶ "Supporting local arts and cultural initiatives, artists, and performers" (70 percent good job).

Meanwhile, slightly fewer – but still the majority (62 percent) – believe their local government is doing

a good job "enhancing public spaces such as parks and community centres with public art."

Lessons Learned

There are three key findings municipal leaders should take away from this research. First, Canadians recognize the economic potential of the arts. Second, municipal governments are generally seen as doing a good job when it comes to providing and supporting arts and cultural opportunities; and, although many Canadians would like to see local governments do even more in this area, they also recognize municipalities' efforts may be limited by more pressing priorities. Third, despite a desire for local governments to do more in support of the arts, overall perceptions of local arts and cultural offerings are positive, indicating these are still meeting the needs of most citizens. *MW*

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