

Cultural Diversity in Canada

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Canada is the second largest country in the world, encompassing about 10 million square kilometres of land across 6 time zones from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and from the U.S. border to the Arctic Ocean in the north. The country is officially bilingual, and federal government services are provided in English and French in all regions.

Nearly 200 other languages are spoken in Canada every day, though, including 61 aboriginal tongues. The population of about 34 million has been shaped by waves of immigration that began with French and British settlers in the 17th and 18th centuries. During the 20th century, over 13 million immigrants settled in Canada. The largest numbers arrived in the 1990s, mainly from non-European countries. Approximately 250,000 people now emigrate to Canada every year from all parts of the globe, and in recent years the population has been increasing more from immigration than from natural growth. According to the 2006 census, almost 1/5 of Canadians were born elsewhere. The long tradition of an open immigration policy has made Canada one of the most ethnically diverse nations on earth.

Canada's unique cultural mosaic led the federal government to declare the country a multicultural society in 1971, to entrench multiculturalism in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985, to pass a Multiculturalism Act in 1988, to create a Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship in 1991, and to organize an annual Canadian Multiculturalism Day on June 27 every year since 2003. The policy of multiculturalism acknowledges that all ethnic and aboriginal groups have the right to preserve their own cultures and identities within the Canadian society, and that cultural pluralism is a core Canadian value.

In general, Canadians feel that support for arts and cultural activities is essential to the expression of their country's identity, and that arts and culture directly influence social development. To help achieve these goals, Canada has developed a comprehensive approach to preserving and managing its cultural resources. The federal **Department of Canadian Heritage** is responsible for policies and programs related to arts and heritage, broadcasting, cultural industries, new media, multiculturalism, official languages, and sport. Those policies and programs are assessed in the context of the government's long-term goals relating to multiculturalism and diversity issues, such as equality of opportunity, social cohesion, citizen engagement, and positive impacts for cultural minorities.

The Department of Canadian Heritage administers numerous initiatives, including the National Arts Training Contribution Programme and the Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Programme, which monitor the arts-related results and evaluate the adequacy of the process for culturally diverse populations, including Aboriginal applicants. A Publications Assistance Programme is designed to improve access to ethno-cultural magazines and non-daily newspapers. And the Multiculturalism Programme encourages and facilitates fair representation of ethnic minorities in the media by initiating community projects and by collaborating with media associations to explore diversity representation and positive portrayal of minorities.

Let us explore in a little more detail the major categories I mentioned a moment ago, beginning with arts and heritage.

1) Arts

The **Canada Council for the Arts** encourages and promotes the study, enjoyment, and production of artistic works through financial support to artists and arts organizations in the performing, literary, visual, interdisciplinary, and media arts. In addition to providing sustaining grants to major national arts institutions such as the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Canadian Opera Company, and others, its funding programs also support individual artists in different disciplines, including aboriginal and ethnic artists and arts organizations, tours by performing artists, and travelling exhibitions of works by visual artists. The Canada Council annually distributes around \$12 million in direct and indirect funding to culturally diverse artists and arts organizations based on a peer-review process, allowing the works of visual artists such as Jean-Paul Riopelle, Alex Colville, and Paul-Émile Borduas to be exhibited from Paris to Tokyo. The stage plays of Michel Tremblay, Robert Lepage, and Tomson Highway attract audiences from Sydney to Rio, and performing companies like Le Cirque du Soleil, the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens tour around the world.

Since 1999, the Canada Council has administered two special programs dedicated to furthering cultural diversity in Canada:

- the Capacity-Building Program to Support Culturally Diverse Artistic Practices, which provides 3-year grants of \$90,000 to over 50 organizations to help consolidate their administrative infrastructure; and,
- the Program of Assistance to Culturally Diverse Curators for Residencies in Visual Arts, designed to expand the national pool of curatorial professionals who are of African, Asian, Latin American, or Middle Eastern origin, and to advance multicultural expertise in Canadian visual-arts institutions.

The Canada Council supports events like the 2003 Exposed Roots Festival, which showcased some of the best Canadian aboriginal and world-music artists. Sixteen musical ensembles and individuals were selected to perform during the Rendez-vous Folk Conference in Montreal to create greater awareness of Canadian aboriginal and ethnic musicians. The Canada Council also co-ordinated a Showcase of Culturally Diverse and First Peoples Music Artists in 1998.

I should point out that provincial arts councils, and regional and municipal governments also have programs to support artists from many disciplines and diverse cultural backgrounds. The growing impact of cultural diversity programs in Canada can be measured by the changing composition of the arts labour force. The 2006 census found over 130,000 artists in Canada, and noted a rapid increase of visible-minority artists, who are growing in number at a rate more than double that of all other artists.

The **National Arts Centre** develops and promotes the performing arts in the National Capital Region and elsewhere in the country, and assists the Canada Council in stimulating the performing arts throughout Canada. It is one of the country's largest co-producers of dance and of English and French theatre, and its resident orchestra tours nationally and internationally.

The federal government also pursues cooperative initiatives and partnerships with provincial and municipal governments, the private sector, and individual Canadians. It helps in the formation of meaningful partnerships between cultural producers themselves, and between cultural producers and the private sector. Tours by professional theatre and dance companies, orchestras, and other arts groups are supported by Canadian corporations and foundations. Museums enjoy ongoing partnerships with telecommunications companies, multimedia and software developers, and philanthropic foundations. Canadian businesses sponsor arts centres, artistic collectives, art exhibitions, and special events. These partnerships are encouraged by legislation, which provides tax credits to Canadians who donate money to non-commercial heritage, artistic, and cultural endeavours. As a result, private-sector support of Canadian arts and culture is becoming the norm, rather than the exception.

2) Heritage

Canada's heritage institutions play important roles in our country's cultural life. Libraries, archives, galleries, and museums are the custodians of Canadians' collective memory as well as their natural and cultural heritage. These heritage institutions enable the Canadian public and visitors to learn more about Canada, its history, its achievements, and the rich traditions of its aboriginal people. There are roughly 2,500 such institutions in Canada. Together, they welcome more than 58 million visitors per year.

Ensuring the vitality of both official languages is a key objective for the Canadian Heritage portfolio. Another is promoting the national symbols that strengthen our sense of collective history and multicultural heritage. Canadians are encouraged to visit parks, botanical gardens, historic sites, and other heritage institutions to better understand the sociological and cultural achievements of Canada's many peoples, and to learn more about their own place in Canada's rich cultural mosaic. I will mention only a few of our heritage institutions here but we will return to this topic a little later while discussing new media:

- The **Library and Archives Canada** acquires and preserves Canada's documentary heritage in all its forms, providing Canadians with access to the texts, photographs, and other documents that reflect their cultural, social, and political development.
- The **Canadian Museum of Civilization** exhibits Canada's human history collections, to promote greater understanding and appreciation of human achievement both within Canada and around the world.
- The **Canada Science and Technology Museum** exhibits information that fosters scientific and technological literacy throughout Canada.

- The **Canadian Museum of Nature** exhibits Canada's natural history collection, conducts research, and shares its expertise in the natural sciences within Canada and around the world.

3) Broadcasting

In a nation as large and diverse as Canada, electronic media – radio, television and now the Internet –enhance our ability to connect with each other and with the rest of the world. The Canadian government has long relied on communications media to foster a sense of togetherness and to promote cross-cultural understanding. As the pre-eminent public broadcaster in Canada, the **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio-Canada** (the CBC) has been the cornerstone of Canada's broadcasting system since 1936, providing an electronic stage for our writers, musicians, and actors. Today, broadcasting accounts for about three-quarters of all federal government spending in the culture portfolio each year, most of which goes to the CBC.

Upholding cultural diversity is a key goal of Canada's Broadcasting Act which, through programming and employment opportunities, strives to reflect the linguistic duality and the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society, as well as the special place of aboriginal peoples within our society. In addition to the CBC, over 600 private radio and television stations, educational TV channels, aboriginal radio and television services, third-language and multicultural channels, and community stations operate in Canada. Many local stations allocate a portion of their daily schedules to programming from around the world, and **Radio-Canada International (RCI)**, a shortwave radio service, broadcasts in eight languages worldwide.

Among the broadcasting-related initiatives of the Department of Canadian Heritage are the Northern Broadcast Access Programme and the Northern Distribution Programme, both of which assist the production and distribution of radio and television programming in Aboriginal languages in the three Arctic territories and the northern portions of seven provinces.

A member of both the British Commonwealth and La Francophonie, Canada is also a partner in the multilateral French-language television service, **TV5**, which provides an international showcase for the achievements of Canadian producers, directors, and actors, and offers the Canadian public an additional window into the richness and diversity of the French-speaking world.

4) Cultural Industries

Over half a million Canadians make their living in Canada's cultural industries, which inject more than \$40 billion a year into the country's economy. In recent years, Canada's cultural sector has grown faster than other key sectors, such as agriculture and the automotive industry. The \$3-billion-a-year Canadian film and television industry includes such innovative filmmakers as Denys Arcand, David Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan, and Deepa Mehta.

The **National Film Board of Canada** (NFB) produces and distributes films, videos, and multimedia products that interpret Canada to Canadians and to the world. In its 65-year history, the NFB has produced and distributed over 12,000 productions and received more than 5,000 awards, including 12 Oscars. NFB productions reflect the diversity of Canadian society, often exploring social issues such as human rights, cultural diversity, and immigration. Priority funding is routinely given to emerging filmmakers, minority participation, multiple distribution platforms, and improved links to the educational system. In a typical year, around 150 original films and multimedia titles are produced or co-produced by the NFB. 25 percent of all NFB productions are the work of aboriginal and ethnic artists, and about 20 percent are in languages other than English or French. The NFB supports numerous festivals that screen films representing diverse cultures, such as the First Peoples Festival, the *Journées du cinéma africain et créole*, the Toronto Hispano Film Fest, and the Toronto Reel Asian Film Festival.

Telefilm Canada is a federal agency devoted primarily to developing and promoting Canadian film, television, and new audiovisual media productions. Both it and the **Canadian Television Fund** (CTF), whose funding programs **Telefilm Canada** administers, ensure that funding is available for projects that tell a diverse range of stories. Both agencies offer assistance for dubbing and captioning services, to increase the exchange of ideas and stories among Canada's many ethnic communities, and the CTF manages a separate fund specifically targeted at aboriginal-language projects. The CTF is a joint initiative of the federal government, Telefilm Canada, Canadian satellite service providers, and Canadian cable-distribution companies to invest in high-quality Canadian TV drama, documentaries, children's and youth programming, and arts programs in English, French, and aboriginal languages. Over the past ten years, the CTF has contributed over \$2 billion to support almost 4500 productions that created over 23,000 hours of television viewing for Canadians.

The Government of Canada also has audiovisual co-production treaties with over 50 countries. Within the past 5 years, more than 60 co-productions generated economic activity valued in excess of \$371 million annually, representing roughly 20 percent of all Canadian productions. Some of the largest co-productions in recent years include: *Les Invasions barbares* (*The Barbarian Invasions*), a Canada/France co-production that won an Oscar for best foreign language film in 2004 and a César in France for best film; *Les Triplettes de Belleville* (*The Triplets of Belleville*), a Canada/ France co-production that was selected for the Cannes Film Festival and nominated for an Oscar in the best animated film category; and *Spider*, a Canada/UK co-production that was nominated for a Palme d'or at Cannes and awarded “Best Canadian Film” at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Turning to music, the **Canada Music Fund** (CMF) supports the production, distribution, and marketing of Canadian music. The CMF's various funding programs support creators, artists, entrepreneurs, industry associations, and joint initiatives. They also help preserve Canadian recordings for access by future generations. The CMF is designed to strengthen the Canadian music industry by:

- 1) enhancing access to a diverse range of Canadian music choices through existing and emerging media;

- 2) increasing opportunities for Canadian musicians and entrepreneurs to make a significant contribution to Canadian cultural expression; and
- 3) ensuring that Canadian artists and entrepreneurs have the skills and means to succeed in a global and digital environment.

Thanks to Canadian-content broadcasting regulations and other forms of encouragement early in their careers, musicians including Bryan Adams, Céline Dion, Garou, Diana Krall, Sarah McLachlan, Anne Murray, and Shania Twain have gone on to achieve international fame.

The cultural vibrancy at the grassroots level in Canada has led to a music scene that easily embraces new forms of expression. Beyond the traditional audiences for dance, theatre, opera, and symphonic music of the western European tradition, one can find Canadian artists searching for new means of expression by bringing together elements from disparate cultural traditions: for example,

- Musicians combining Celtic dance music from Newfoundland with Pakistani *Qawwali* music;
- a visual artist exploring his ancestral aboriginal roots using multimedia computer technology;
- an author comparing aspects of small-town life in western Canada to her youth in China;
- or a filmmaker examining the experiences of Japanese immigrants in Canada through the eyes of an ancestor.

There is an excitement about new discoveries in Canadian cultural circles today that lies in fusion, based on freedom of expression, and an inherent acceptance of, and interest in, the cultural traditions of others.

While electronic media are increasingly important tools for the distribution and consumption of cultural content in Canada, traditional print publishing continues, though one cannot say that it is flourishing. The Canadian **Book Publishing Industry Development Program** ensures the viability of the industry in Canada through its support to Canadian publishers. It provides the industry with tools to promote Canadian authors, to support projects that promote books in Canada, and to help Canadian publishers gain access to foreign markets and boost exports. Today the Canadian authors Margaret Atwood, Anne Michaels, Rohinton Mistry, Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje, and John Ralston Saul are read around the world.

The **Canada Magazine Fund** supports Canadian magazines that specialize in Canadian arts and literature, and projects designed to enhance the periodical industry. The **Publications Assistance Program**, together with the **Canada Post Corporation**, assures reduced postal rates for Canadian periodicals, such as community, ethnic, and agricultural magazines and newspapers.

5) New Media

More than two-thirds of Canadians report using the Internet every day, and over a quarter of them say they have more than one computer in their home. The Canadian government has moved quickly to create a strong Canadian cultural presence in cyberspace. In addition to its

national radio and television broadcasting services, which are predominantly Canadian in content and character, the CBC provides multi-layered Internet services that include special interactive platforms for children and youth.

Through the Canadian Culture Online Strategy, the Department of Canadian Heritage is stimulating the development and accessibility of Canadian digital content in both official languages. The Canada New Media Fund supports production of new cultural works, devoting one-third of its resources to French-language projects. As well, Canadian cultural collections and treasures are being digitized for on-line presentation with the help of programs such as the Canadian Memory Fund and other funds

The Internet is also being used to bring Canadian history and culture to life in the form of virtual tours, new information and learning products, and entertainment products. Canadian youth can discover the history of music, theatre, and dance in Canada through the National Arts Centre's ArtsAlive.ca. They can learn about Canada's colourful history through Library and Archives Canada's Confederation for Kids Web site. Canadians of all ages can relive their shared history with Canadian radio and television over the past 70 years through the on-line CBC Archives. They can visit Canadian museum sites, projects, and exhibitions through the Virtual Museum of Canada portal. Launched in March 2001, the Virtual Museum of Canada features countless stories and treasures from 1,200 museums across the country. It receives more than eight million visits per year.

Canadians can learn about the history and traditions of aboriginal peoples through the Aboriginal Canada Portal. They can also gain a new appreciation for Canada's ethnic and cultural diversity through a broad range of on-line resources, such as the Caribbean Tales Site and the Acadian Historical Village.

Canada is a leader in new media, with government-sponsored programs providing a springboard to success. For instance, Canadians have created an estimated 60 percent of the animation and other software used by the American motion picture industry. The work of Daniel Langlois is a good example. Building on his background as a filmmaker with the National Film Board of Canada, he founded the Montreal-based Softimage company which designed animation tools that were essential to such feature films as *Jurassic Park* and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*. Langlois received a Scientific and Engineering Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1998.

Conclusion

By encouraging and fostering Canadian content in broadcast, digital, and print media, by using the Internet to bring Canada's sociological, cultural, artistic, and scientific heritage to Canadians, by supporting film, television, and new media, and by awarding grants to individual artists and major performing arts organizations, the policies and programs of the Canadian government and its many public- and private-sector partners are helping Canadians of all cultural backgrounds to share their stories and find ways to come together.

Cultural diversity is viewed as an asset in Canada, and manifests itself in the acceptance of difference, in compromise, in peaceful resolution of conflict, and in openness to the different practices and values of others. Diversity of cultural expression promotes creativity and new ways of approaching issues and problems. Canada's official position on diversity reflect its multicultural population, its two official languages, and recognition of the special place of its aboriginal peoples, including their traditions, cultures, and languages. Many federal cultural policy initiatives are assessed in the context of the government's diversity goals.

In the international arena, Canada shares its vision with the world by signing international conventions, agreements, and protocols in the areas of culture and sport, by attracting foreign expertise and investment in its cultural industries, and by participating in a growing international network on cultural diversity. It also played a crucial role in the development of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which was adopted and proclaimed by UNESCO in 2001. We hope that many other nations will join us in taking similar steps to safeguard and celebrate their diverse cultural traditions.