Municipal World

Arts and Culture
Key to Building Belonging

It stands to reason that the shared experience of the arts provides a common ground for social interaction. One also could claim that art programs and facilities contribute to building a greater sense of belonging to our communities, to our country, and to each other. But, do we know for sure?

A national report, released in April by Community Foundations of Canada and the Canadian Arts Presenting Association, shored up this widely-held belief with hard evidence and provided a roadmap to deepening sense of belonging through arts and culture.

Vital Signs: Arts & Belonging looks closely at how arts and culture, in all forms, make our communities better places to live by helping people to better understand their identity and connect through shared arts experiences. The report draws on community knowledge, a range of social science, government and local data sources, and a deeper analysis of responses from a 2015 cross-country survey conducted with the Angus Reid Institute that asked Canadians what it means to belong and be involved community activity.

What is belonging?

Simply put, belonging is being part of a collective "we." It's about fitting into a place or group, and how much that place or group welcomes and includes us. A sense of belonging is important to build safe, vibrant communities, and it brings purpose to our lives. Belonging also directly impacts our health. People who report a strong sense of belonging to their community are significantly healthier.
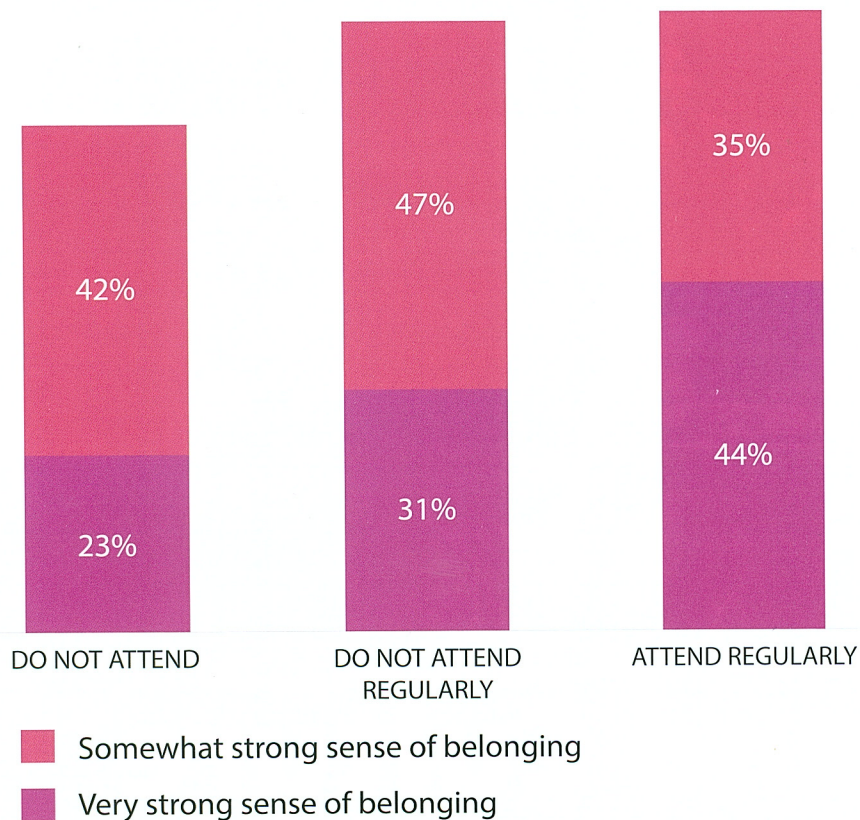
On the opposite end of the spectrum, loneliness is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Currently, 38 percent of Canadians report a weak sense of belonging to their community, due in part to the persistence of discrimination and social isolation.

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Figure 1
Attendance at live music & sense of belonging to city/town

	DO NOT ATTEND	DO NOT ATTEND REGULARLY	ATTEND REGULARLY
Somewhat strong	42%	47%	35%
Very strong	23%	31%	44%

■ Somewhat strong sense of belonging
■ Very strong sense of belonging

Recent Findings

Here are a few of the report's positive findings:

Seventy-seven percent of Canadians agree or strongly agree that arts experiences help people feel part of their local community. This is especially true for newcomers and people in minority-language communities. Regular arts attendees are three times more likely than non-attendees to feel this way.

Canadians who regularly attend live music have a much stronger sense of belonging to their city or town. The same is true of frequent library goers.

Canadians who rate arts, culture, and leisure in their city or town as "excellent" are nearly three times more likely to report a "very strong" sense of belonging. This link is particularly strong in rural areas and small villages. The quality of cultural and recreational programs is also a predictor of sense of belonging among Canadian-born and immigrant populations in mid-size cities.

The report also highlights some areas for improvement. While almost all Canadians say that performing arts facilities are important to wellbeing and economic development, more than half suggest that arts facilities in their community could use an upgrade, both in quantity and quality. These sentiments are especially pronounced in Indigenous, rural, remote, and minority-language communities. The good news is that phase two of the federal government's infrastructure plan provides municipalities with the means to make up for the shortfalls. The 2017 budget invested $300 million over 10 years for the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, as well as $1.3 billion for cultural and recreational infrastructure as part of the bilateral agreements.

Recommendations for Municipalities

The report also outlines a number of recommendations to help people of all backgrounds feel more connected to the arts and build bridges between communities. The following recommendations may be of particular relevance to municipalities.

Strengthen public policy, planning, and funding

Municipal planners and policy makers must understand and value the many benefits that artists, arts organizations, and events bring to the community. Recognizing that a vibrant arts community is key to attracting and retaining people in the community – and in building belonging – arts and culture need to be fundamental components of city planning. Arts vision, strategies, priorities, and programs must be developed

with community experts and practitioners. Long-term funding is needed to sustain high-quality arts programs and facilities. Finally, municipalities should collect data on arts activities and outcomes at a local level. As noted by the Conference Board of Canada in a 2008 report on the creative way:

> ... culture [should] be elevated from its undervalued, peripheral role in urban planning to a central force in shaping the growth of cities ... the existence of culture clusters or niche concentrations of culture industries are generally considered to be important indicators for creative cities ... [and] viewed as magnets for talent. (from, "Valuing Culture: Measuring and Understanding Canada's Creative Economy.")

Support high-quality arts experiences

This research establishes a clear relationship between excellent arts and culture in the community and greater belonging. It suggests the need to focus not only on attendance or number of activities, but also on the quality of the experience. Objective indicators of quality are regularly used by arts funders, but they may not be easily accessible to municipalities. Short of such indicators, municipal authorities may defer to grant decisions by provincial and federal funders as an assurance of the quality of local artists and arts organizations.

Offer participatory arts programs

Community-engaged arts foster interpersonal connections between participants, with lead artists, and with the community. When community-engaged arts programs beautify the community through murals, mosaics, or installations, pride of place can also flourish. The <artbridges.ca> and <artsengage.ca> websites are two good resources to explore the range of community-engaged arts practices in Canada. Associations such as the Creative City Network of Canada and Les arts et la ville regularly explore community-engaged practices in their publications and at their national events.

Porch View Dances, by Kaeja d'Dance, is a particularly holistic example of a community-engaged offering. Taking dance out of the theatre and into neighbourhoods, Porch View Dances engages real people, in real spaces, making dance accessible to the families who perform in it, as well as the audience members who come watch.

Community-engaged arts programs deliver profound benefits to participants. These programs, however, offer few earned revenue possibilities for artists and arts organizations, and they can't be scaled without financial support. This is an area where municipalities could step in.

Use the city as a stage

Site-specific performances, art walks, and neighbourhood arts impact how people relate to familiar spaces, create a sense of place, and foster a sense of attachment and belonging to the community. These activities are most often not ticketed, and cannot be sustained without public support. Municipalities should collaborate with local artists and arts organizations to program arts activities outside of traditional facilities.

Open arts facilities to the community

The foyers of performing arts venues are often underused during the day and could be used for non-arts programming provided by community and neighbourhood associations, or offered as co-working space. Libraries have made this shift and are becoming even more important community hubs.

Catalyst for Renewal

As the research in this report shows, whether on stage, in the audience, or in the community, we now know for certain that participation in the arts leads to a greater sense of belonging. The arts are a catalyst for renewed cultural connection and understanding in communities across Canada.

Municipalities may use this new knowledge in a transversal manner to inform policy development in multiple areas: public health, settlement, social development and, of course, culture. **MW**

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – colloquially known as "drones" – similarly threatens to outstrip the pace of regulation. UAVs will be integral to last-mile delivery, particularly in cities with a dense and built-up urban core. They are also at the core of many of the more futuristic delivery schemes – Amazon was recently awarded a U.S. patent for an "airborne distribution centre" that would hover at 45,000 feet, and use UAVs to make deliveries within minutes. However, UAVs are federally regulated. Although Transport Canada is currently developing new regulations for UAVs, at the moment, they cannot be flown higher than 90 metres above ground, must be in line of sight, and may be flown no closer than 75 metres from people, animals, buildings, structures, or vehicles. Obviously, these regulations serve to prevent the use of UAVs for delivery. Going forward, cities will require discretion to tailor UAV regulation based on local urban landscape and needs; this is a likely source of friction based on division of powers.

Disrupting the Configuration of the City

Beyond challenging existing legal frameworks, the rise of AVs will disrupt the very configuration of the city, to a degree unseen since the development of the motor vehicle a century ago. To begin with, AV delivery will exacerbate the decline of brick-and-mortar retail already in process. As a result, zoning practices based on the traditional assumptions about the amount of retail space required will need to be re-evaluated.

In addition, development is occurring to use AVs as mobile points-of-sale or manufacture, which will challenge the traditional delineation between commercial and non-commercial zones. Amazon has applied for a patent for a truck that would carry raw materials and a large 3D printer. Instead of delivering finished goods, the goods would be finished enroute, allowing a dense cargo of

raw materials. If that truck is creating products (an industrial use) in an area zoned for residential use, is that a zoning violation?

Perhaps most significantly, the decline of brick-and-mortal retail will significantly reduce municipal property tax income, depriving cities of a crucial source of revenue. Any revisions to municipal taxation must occur at the provincial level.

In terms of personal transportation, companies such as Uber are attempting to shift to a model of decreased vehicle ownership, in favour of inexpensive and easily available hiring of AVs. Such a shift could drastically reduce the need for parking spaces in the urban core, but would increase the need for road capacity, including separate lanes for AVs. This conflicts with the increasing shift toward, and investment in mass transit. If current AV trends continue, the future city could be characterized by a dense urban core, with significantly less retail and parking space, surrounded by a suburban ring of distribution centres, warehouses, and massive parking lots.

Municipalities Are Not Prepared

AVs will challenge numerous elements of local governance, including: planning, zoning, and regulation of space; revenue; transportation; and by-law enforcement. They constitute perhaps the most significant disruption to the configuration of the city since the motor vehicle. It is impossible to predict what specific challenges will be faced by individual municipalities. Yet, as demonstrated by the challenges faced by municipalities when dealing with technologies such as Uber and AirBnB, the law and municipal regulations are often ill-equipped to deal reactively with the challenges of new technologies.

Public officials must immediately look forward in a way they never have before, in order to prepare to incorporate AVs into the fabric of municipalities. If they don't, they will find themselves forever playing catch-up to rapid change. **MW**