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Reimagining the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts

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Reimagining the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts

Where are we now?

How has the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020/21 altered the outlook for the performing arts in Toronto and for under-represented populations in the city and surroundings of the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts? This environmental scan will be used as a starting point to frame the conversation for a more in-depth consultation with interested neighbourhood and sector stakeholders. The research identifies a series of challenges and emerging conditions that suggest a shifting landscape in need of strategic response to prepare STLC for a resilient future.

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Contextual Research Approach

Literature Review and Environmental Scan

We conducted research exploring the impact of the pandemic on the arts sector in general, and artists from equity-seeking communities in particular, to better understand the forces that might shape the sector in the coming years. We reviewed both scholarly and popular data sources and clustered findings into five groups of insights. First we wanted a better understanding of the impact of the past pandemic year on equity seeking communities throughout Toronto and in the neighbourhood specifically. We then examined three overarching arts categories: creating arts, receiving or consuming arts, and presenting or disseminating arts. For each category, we looked for evidence of change at local (Toronto in particular, and more generally in Ontario), national and international levels. Additionally, because the STLC Next project is ultimately about a space, we researched how spaces for the arts and in changing neighbourhoods have been evolving in recent years.

3 Horizons Workshop

Pioneered by UK foresighters Bill Sharpe and Anthony Hodgson, the 3 Horizons method enables participants to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of short- (Horizon 1), medium- (Horizon 2) and long-term (Horizon 3) potential future conditions. The foundation of this method is the recognition that "businesses, technologies, political policies and even whole civilizations exhibit life-cycles of initiation, growth, peak performance, decline and even death. These "cycles" can be viewed as waves of change in which a dominant form is eventually overtaken and displaced by another." ("Three Horizons", n.d.)

On April 29, 2021, we conducted a 3 Horizons online workshop with 14 stakeholders from the arts sector and the St. Lawrence neighbourhood. The event unfolded to follow the framework's procedural steps to ensure progressive and productive contributions. Over the course of 3 hours, participants were led through a series of exercises that explored the current challenges experienced by the arts sector and the area surrounding the St. Lawrence Centre (Horizon 1), their hopes for a thriving and vibrant future for the Centre and the neighbourhood (Horizon 3), and the actions necessary to achieve their aspirations (Horizon 2). Adhering to Toronto's public health protocols during the provincial pandemic lockdown, this session was conducted virtually. While communicating over Zoom, participants contributed their observations and insights using digital "sticky" notes on a specifically designed Miro board.

> **Over the course of 3 hours, participants were led through a series of exercises that explored the current challenges experienced by the arts sector and the area surrounding the St. Lawrence Centre (Horizon 1), their hopes for a thriving and vibrant future for the Centre and the neighbourhood (Horizon 3), and the actions necessary to achieve their aspirations (Horizon 2).**

Information Processing

Thematic Analysis: 3 Horizons workshop

After the workshop, we reviewed participants' noted contributions and grouped them into thematic clusters.

We compared the workshop clusters with those identified from the desk research, noting which were common to both sources or distinct to a specific information source. Analysis of this data revealed a series of insights in five key areas, which are outlined below: Equity, Creation, Receiving, Presentation, and Space.

Insights from the 3 Horizons Workshop

Exercise 1
Horizon 1: The Current Condition

How are people dissatisfied with the current condition? What are today's challenges for STLC and the neighbourhood?

Participants were able to identify specific challenges related to the functioning and physical infrastructure of the current St. Lawrence Centre. As well, they spoke to concerns about the changing nature of the neighbourhood and insufficient support and acknowledgment of underrepresented communities in Toronto overall.

STLC – Many felt that the current building is uninviting, turning a blank face to the neighbourhood, especially during the day when there are few lights on, and that the façade seems impenetrable. Several people noted that STLC does not have a strong identity and felt that it lacked a transparency of intent that was echoed in the dark and imposing building.

Many participants also did not have a clear idea of "who" the center is for: which audience, which community, which artists. There was an overall sense that the expensive experiences showcased in the building are exclusionary and that the centre is too costly for many in the arts sectors and the neighbourhood to enjoy or participate in. STLC has had little historic connection with racialized, indigenous and working class communities. The building is not accessible in spirit or in physical form and is a barrier to engagement.

The Neighbourhood – Rising gentrification of the area, and the increase in high-rent condominiums specifically, is challenging the sense of place here. The pandemic has exacerbated the differences between those who "have" and "have-not" and the gulf between those local residents feels even wider for many. There is a fear of people who are unhoused or using drugs and there is less tolerance as people of different economic circumstances rarely interact.

For many, STLC doesn't feel or appear to be connected or relevant to the surrounding neighbourhood or streets. With so many public arts experiences shut down over the past year, people felt that a once active neighbourhood was now quiet.

The City – There is a need to establish a more trusting relationship between artists, institutional arts organizations and the current power system that excludes many. Wider social inequities play out in the levels of access and types of programming that the arts represent. Will STLC be a safe place for the voices of those who are marginalized, experiencing poverty or otherwise separated from the wealthy ticket holders of the space?

> **Many participants also did not have a clear idea of "who" the center is for: which audience, which community, which artists.**

> **There is a need to establish a more trusting relationship between artists, institutional arts organizations and the current power system that excludes many.**

Horizon 3: The Vision for the Future

What is their vision for the future? How could tomorrow's STLC evolve to support a thriving and vibrant neighbourhood?

A dramatically different vision of STLC as a platform for creative participation in the city and in the arts was cautiously put forward by the participants. The notion of a full ecosystem that includes learning, performing and coming together inclusively was articulated. It should be noted that several people expressed frustration at being consulted "yet again" when their sense was that previous recommendations have not resulted in greater levels of inclusion or change.

STLC – Most participants yearned for a highly flexible, sustainable, inclusive space that would be suitable for multiple uses in both the arts and for civic purposes. The notion of a community and cultural hub was well received. People want a community gathering place that is integrated with, and complementary to, the local character. There is a desire for STLC to be a city magnet; distinct and representative of a wider portion of those who live and work there. There is a desire to use both the inside and outside of the building and its surroundings.

There was significant discussion of ownership and decision-making ability with respect to this location. Many stated that it was time for local artists and community to have a say in programming, in use of space, and in connection to guiding representative behaviour. Some hoped for programming that is inclusive of people of all ages and life stages and that there be room for learning and development as they might contribute to supporting local needs. Some participants were more explicit in their desire for a new business model that includes distributed ownership and leadership that is more reflective of the community and the city as a whole.

> " **Most participants yearned for a highly flexible, sustainable, inclusive space that would be suitable for multiple uses in both the arts and for civic purposes.**

Exercise 3

Horizon 2: Pathway to Change

How can we get there? What could an actionable pathway to change look like?

People felt a necessary step forward would be to create a new systemic vision in collaboration with a range of stakeholders. Eliminating barriers to participation would be a good first step.

Several people stressed the need to take the time and money to consult properly with a wider community, seeking to fully understand stakeholders' actual needs. Going beyond typical consultation by moving to participation requires some preparation for the process to take time and be difficult. There was also a recommendation that the STLC and the City cede some power and control with respect to use and development of an appropriate solution.

There was hope that the true carbon cost of re-imagining the space would be calculated. Some felt that not all spaces require elimination; perhaps a rework of current facilities for different uses could be part of the exploration. At a minimum, careful consideration of materials and building methods should be required in the next iteration of the building.

Rethinking the role of digital as a critical element of the reimagined Arts Centre is necessary. Some even suggested partnering with technology companies and using digital platforms to augment revenue generation as potential funding models.

Some hoped for an outdoor stage to link to the wider community. There was much discussion of how the exterior façades might be used as a presentation platform (ie: for film or visual art) and how the solid, uninviting structure could be perforated to allow viewers into the internal activities, both physically and metaphorically.

There is a desire for an educational team at STLC that would make learning a critical function of the ecosystem, for both front and back of stage, and for the benefit of people of different ages.

> " Rethinking the role of digital as a critical element of the reimagined Arts Centre is necessary.

Key Insights from Literature Review

1. Equity in the City

1.1 Racialized, Indigenous, Disabled and low-income Torontonians have suffered most

Even prior to the recent pandemic, Canadian society did not provide a level playing field to BIPOC, disabled and other equity seeking communities. Beyond income, inequality of opportunities includes lack of access to online and mobile technologies, healthcare, education as well as discriminatory treatment by authorities. The United Nations states that "rising inequality of income, wealth and access to opportunities discourage skills accumulation, choke economic and social mobility, and human development and, consequently, depress economic growth. Inequality also entrenches uncertainty, vulnerability and insecurity, undermines trust in institutions and government, increases social discord and tensions and could possibly trigger violence and conflicts."("Sustainable Development Outlook 2019: Gathering storms and silver linings", 2019)

The circumstances of COVID have only accelerated and exacerbated these challenges. "Real-time quantitative data from dozens of sources shows that racialized Torontonians, women, seniors, young people, residents with disabilities, and low-income residents have been ravaged by compounding challenges in safety, housing, employment, income and health." ("New Toronto Foundation report reveals devastating toll of COVID-19 ripple effects on Toronto", 2020) African, Caribbean and Black immigrant women in Toronto have been disproportionately hard hit as their social determinants of health and precarious employment often as essential workers put them at greater risk, while structural racism strains their ability to make progress. Although initial race based data was unavailable at the outset of the pandemic, a change in Ontario Government policy in June 2020 allowed the collection of socio-demographic specifics. Subsequent findings identified that racialized groups have been overrepresented, with Black and Latino populations exhibiting COVID case rates at 6-11 times that of white populations at the time of reporting in July (McKenzie, 2021).

Workers in the arts and cultural sector have long experienced both poverty and precarity in their work, with median incomes significantly below others in Toronto. Prior to the pandemic, the sector had already been characterized by low pay, poor benefits and high turnover (Cultural Human Resources Council, 2017) with BIPOC artists' median incomes even lower at 28% less than white artists (Toronto Foundation, 2020). Those working in the performing arts specifically have been enormously affected by the restrictions on operations over the last year. The Toronto Arts Council reported the following estimated impact of COVID-19 closures for non-profit arts in Toronto from March 2020 – March 2021 ("COVID-19 - Toronto Arts Council", n.d.):
- 12,000 public performances cancelled
- 10,000 public performances proceeded outdoors or online
- $58 million lost ticket sales
- $78 million required for facility operating costs with much lower offsetting revenue

> " Prior to the pandemic, the sector had already been characterized by low pay, poor benefits and high turnover.

- 17 million fewer audience members
- $16 million lost artist and production salaries/fees

all figures based on financial data in CADAC (Canadian Arts Data/Données sur les arts au Canada)

Women have also been more severely impacted by pandemic circumstances with a greater number affected by closures and layoffs in hospitality, retail and the arts. According to an analysis published by RBC in March, nearly 100,000 women have completely left the workforce since the pandemic started, 10 times as many as men (Desjardins & Freestone, 2021).

" Women have also been more severely impacted by pandemic circumstances with a greater number affected by closures and layoffs in hospitality, retail and the arts.

1.2 Representation vs True Power Shifting

There is a growing recognition that numeric representation of a diverse community is insufficient for equitable, inclusive change to occur and that tokenistic positioning in organizations distracts from efforts to establish true equality. For power to shift, decision-making capacity also needs to shift. Under-representation of racialized people at senior levels where influential decisions get made has a cascading effect throughout organizations and in society as a whole. "Power is the ability to impact and affect the conditions of your own life and the lives of others." (Garza, 2021)

Hiring efforts to ensure senior leadership positions are filled by more diverse candidates are necessary, however pay parity is also required. Recent data indicate that women executives earn 56% less than men and that racialized women make 32% less than non-visible minority women (Longpré-Verret & Richards, 2021). Inclusive governance and models of ownership are linked to accountability and trust for many. More transparency of operational activities and shared responsibility are seen as forerunners of true power sharing.

Calls for a systemic and institutional anti-racist perspective to be focused on all social policy domains are louder, with a demand for concrete measures to be enacted. Recognizing the intersectionality of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and ability, among other identity defining characteristics, puts focus on the whole lived experiences of those who face discriminatory behaviour. Measuring, tracking and reporting the outcomes of efforts and continuous, sincere consultation to ensure improvement over time must be incorporated into strategic and tactical planning.

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1.3 Potential impact of arts-driven gentrification

Much concern has been expressed about the potential for population displacement as local residents note increasing levels of inequity due to major development projects in the St.Lawrence/Esplanade neighbourhood. Although there is a diversity of overall personal circumstances, this area is classified as a middle-income neighbourhood according to City of Toronto information, with high income pockets directly to the north and south (City of Toronto, 2016). High value condo housing has attracted a larger wealthy population that longer-term area residents believe have not integrated into the existing community. There is a perception of lives segregated by income, where daily activity choices such as shopping for food, outdoor recreation and use of transportation are not integrated and reinforce a polarized community. Increased development of appealing arts venues is a factor identified by the community as a potential accelerator of this trend.

Is it possible to encourage investment in community and the neighbourhood and avoid displacement through the promotion of the arts? Recent research has fine-tuned the measurement of arts-driven change at the neighbourhood level. "The Arts have long played a role in debates around gentrification and displacement, yet their roles and impacts as change agents are not clear-cut. According to standard account, artists facilitate gentrification and ultimately engender the displacement of lower income households, but more recent research complicates the accepted narrative. This article seeks to untangle the relationship between arts, gentrification and displacement through statistical study of neighbourhood-level arts industry activity within large US regions. The findings indicate that the standard arts-led gentrification narrative is too generalized or simply no longer applicable to contemporary arts gentrification processes. Rather, the arts have multiple, even conflicting relationships with gentrification and displacement that depend on context and type of art. These results have important implications for how we study the role of the arts in neighbourhood change and for how governments approach the arts and creative industries in urban policy." (Grodach, Foster & Murdoch, 2016)

The research suggests that different types of arts activity result in different types of neighbourhood change. A strong link was found between commercial arts industries and gentrification, while the data suggests that fine arts, in particular performing arts companies, museums and fine arts schools are associated with greater neighbourhood revitalization and a measure of stability. Preservation of local rental housing at realistically affordable rates and establishment of developer incentives to increase desirable community offerings can help to limit the amount of displacement, especially racialized displacement, experienced (Richardson, Mitchell & Franco, 2019).

> **" The research suggests that different types of arts activity result in different types of neighbourhood change.**

1.4 Exclusion is systemic

The cost of participation in arts events can be highly exclusionary for many. Ticket prices were already mounting for live events prior to the interruption of performances due to lockdown. Average ticket prices for popular performances are unaffordable for lower income Torontonians and remain a luxury for many others. In an effort to lure patrons back to events in a post pandemic season, with reduced crowd density and additional cleaning protocols, will companies be able to offer accessible pricing? Production costs have the potential to rise in the near future as building materials, shipping fees, and insurance costs are rapidly escalating. Digital offerings may provide openings for sliding price scales to attract those previously unable to attend without detrimental impact on the business model of the venue.

Beyond affordability, education is also a contributor to access barriers. "Research data paints a consistent portrait of lower participation by people with lower incomes and less education (low-SES) in a wide range of artistic activities – including not just attending classical music concerts and plays but also less "elitist" forms of engagement like going to the movies or dancing socially. (Indeed, surveys show that education is the strongest factor in determining arts engagement rates – more so than income, race/ethnicity, geography, or other demographic variables.) This is despite the fact that low-SES adults, on average, have more free time at their disposal. While cost is sometimes a barrier to participation, it isn't the only one: if we could somehow make it so that low-SES adults were no more likely to decide not to attend an arts event because of cost than their more affluent peers, it would not greatly change the socioeconomic composition of audiences."
("Arts Participation", n.d.)

2. Arts Creation is Changing

2.1 Pandemic Trauma is taking an emotional toll
Aside from the physical consequences of COVID-19, the pandemic has taken an enormous emotional toll on society. With social isolation for extended periods, economic pressure, fear of exposure and the burden of caring for family while working from home, the effects have compounded and medical professionals believe they may have lasting impacts. "The emerging literature measures the impact of various traumatic stressors related to COVID-19, as well as the effects of less severe types of stress exposures. COVID-19 has already led to diverse mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other trauma- and stress-related disorders." (Tucker & Czapla, 2021)

For some, the experience of the past year can be classified as trauma which can be characterized as normal stress reactions to abnormal circumstances. "Initial reactions to trauma can include exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, agitation, numbness, dissociation, confusion, physical arousal, and blunted affect. Most responses are normal in that they affect most survivors and are socially acceptable, psychologically effective, and self-limited. Indicators of more severe responses include continuous distress without periods of relative calm or rest, severe dissociation symptoms, and intense intrusive recollections that continue despite a return to safety. Delayed responses to trauma can include persistent fatigue, sleep disorders, nightmares, fear of recurrence, anxiety focused on flashbacks, depression, and avoidance of emotions, sensations, or activities that are associated with the trauma, even remotely."(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014)

Repeated exposure to shocks and strains such as social unrest, environmental disasters and economic uncertainty affects resiliency. Artists experiencing oppression, over and above the continuous stress of a year of COVID-19, may be feeling incapable of envisioning a hopeful future. An Australian study of arts workers reported a high percentage of participants have become resigned to the devastating impact of the pandemic with many on the verge of giving up their practice. (Flore & Hendry, 2020) It remains to be seen how this will impact the nature of creation and performance.

> **Repeated exposure to shocks and strains such as social unrest, environmental disasters and economic uncertainty affects resiliency.**

2.2 More voices are wanted and needed
Despite its reputation as one of the most multicultural cities in the world, Toronto can still do better in terms of making room for representational narratives and building capacity across a wide population of creators and producers. Change is underway however. Major content funding industry drivers are supporting more diverse talent development. Telefilm, Netflix, the National Bank and Canada Media Fund have become partners in the Being Black in Canada Program - Canada's largest mentorship, training, and creation program entirely dedicated to Black filmmakers (Fabienne Colas Foundation, 2020). CBC's Creative Relief fund announced this year has targeted 43% of its $2.2 million in development and production funding towards self-identified BIPOC creators ("CBC Creative Relief Fund", 2021).

More experimental work is happening on a smaller scale as well. A multilingual operatic adaptation of Handel's Messiah, called Messiah Complex, is a collaboration between Banff Centre's Director of Indigenous Arts Reneltta Arluk and Against the Grain's Joel Ivany. Singers perform in Arabic, Dene, English, French, Inuktitut, and Southern Tutchone to provide a new contextualization of an historically well-known piece. While these initiatives show promise for broader representation of storytelling, not all communities are reaping the benefits. Deaf and Disability arts practices are still relatively underfunded and underexposed, although there is increasing support through arts councils.

3. Presentation and dissemination of the arts take new form

3.1 Emerging practices enable new ways of sharing performance as platforms shift

Performance has become more than a place based undertaking. Rather than seeing this as a temporary solution to the challenges of extended lockdown, many creators are embracing the possibilities of new "digital stages" as part of a spectrum of cross platform offerings. Artistic disciplines have blurred, with boundary breaking practices emerging to expand the perception of what form creative works might take. The intersection of digital and live performance in particular has encouraged struggling theater companies to reimagine storytelling through alternative delivery platforms. Factory Theater is presenting a series of radio dramas to connect to audiences remotely. Sequential podcast informed plays by the Parsnip Ship are available on Spotify. Japanese playwright and director Kuro Tanino has created immersive VR dramas that are timed for online viewing. Finnish composer Esa-Pekka Salonen and his team's new interactive work, Laila, incorporates audience action as part of the unfolding narrative. Virtual gaming site Fortnight's Party Royale stage has featured rapper Travis Scott and electronic dance music act Kaskade, with audiences in the millions.

Each of these examples challenge the dominance of fixed location based productions and are likely to remain as part of the spectrum of performance delivery options that appeal to a wider audience. Digital productions can incorporate captioning and audio description to improve accessibility for Deaf, blind and non-English speaking audiences. Arts companies are incorporating media production skills into the mix of necessary competencies and are forging alliances with digital platforms such as Audible, Twitch and powerhouse Netflix.

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As creators work to survive the circumstances, the economic output of entertainment districts in cities is severely curtailed. Destination based facilities that pull a share of their audiences from tourist attendance or broader regional traffic also impact the surrounding business community. Nearby shops and restaurants that symbiotically benefit from scheduled events remain under-utilized if a significant portion of programming moves to digital distribution.

3.2 Consolidation and closure will likely continue

Despite the emergence of such innovative practices, not all arts organizations have managed the transition. Several smaller live theater companies have closed permanently due to the economic impact of extended lockdowns in Toronto, as they have around the world. Prior to this year, several independent arts companies had already been affected by the loss of rehearsal and performance space due to sales for condominium development and high commercial rents. Community based companies that provide culturally specific programming have been particularly impacted resulting in a loss of ecosystem vibrancy.

The results of a survey conducted by the Canadian Live Music Association estimated that Toronto has lost "$99 million in Gross Provincial Production (GPP) and the equivalent of 1,480 full time jobs" since last March from the closure of live music venues (Nordicity, 2020). The report also noted that rising insurance costs and escalating property taxes connected to increased property values are contributing factors that add to the economic woes of struggling enterprises.

> **"The venue-based sectors (such as museums, performing arts, live music, festivals, cinema, etc.) are the hardest hit by social distancing measures. The abrupt drop in revenues puts their financial sustainability at risk and has resulted in reduced wage earnings and lay-offs with repercussions for the value chain of their suppliers, from creative and non-creative sectors alike. Some cultural and creative sectors, such as online content platforms, have profited from the increased demand for cultural content streaming during lockdown, but the benefits from this extra demand have largely accrued to the largest firms in the industry."("Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors", 2020)**

3.3 Funding mechanisms are likely to be challenged over time

"Organizations in the arts, culture and recreation sector have been devastated by the pandemic. And, although some online alternatives have emerged, they cannot replace the breadth and depth of creative and recreational offerings previously available. Two-thirds of arts and culture organizations reported a decline in revenue, with a median decline of 50%." (Toronto Foundation, 2020)

The sector has received support from various levels of government. In March 2021, $181.5 million in funding for live arts and music sectors through the Canada Council for the Arts and Department of Canadian Heritage was announced as part of the federal fall economic statement roll-out (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2021). Attention was focused primarily on digital innovation initiatives, and funding of short-term worker contracting. The Ontario Government made a one-time investment of $25 million in arts organizations and artists that have been hardest hit and have had to adapt their operations due to lockdown restrictions (Government of Ontario, 2021). Artscape initiated an online portal to link creative workers to financial resources and other supports in order to navigate through the storm. More focused funding bodies have targeted communities directly. SEARA (Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts) launched POWER SHARE: a COVID-19 Relief Fund for Black, Indigenous and Racialized Artists specifically to address ongoing barriers and inadequate funding experienced by BIPOC artists ("Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts", 2021).

Philanthropic giving has changed, as evidenced in the volume and pattern of donations over the past year. Foundations and corporate donors have been asked to dig deep to support Canadians throughout the pandemic and, for the most part, have done so, but individual large gifts have significantly dropped as a portion of the charitable funding pie. Overall, more than half of Canadian charities have reported decreased revenues with an average decline of 43% and arts and culture organizations are struggling to make ends meet (Imagine Canada 2021). Individual large gift donations have been reallocated primarily to health and community service-related recipients while charitable giving to arts and culture declined quite significantly (Bannon, 2020).

In the not-to-distant future, overall budget cuts are likely, as the after effects of massive public spending begin to translate to enormous federal deficits and debt. Although long-term interest rates currently remain low, prolonged economic growth post-pandemic is not a certainty. Although immediate economic resurgence of pent up demand for goods and experiences may swell, the aftermath of COVID could be grim in the longer term. Fiscal retrenchment is already being considered in some quarters. Possible new taxation strategies may emerge as means to increase government revenues.

> **"Going forward, cities and regions could consider cultural and creative sectors as well as cultural participation as a driver of both economic and social impact in its own right and throughout the economy. COVID-19 is providing many communities, whether metropolitan areas or rural regions, to reconsider their growth models to be more inclusive and sustainable, and culture can play an even greater role in these new local visions. For this potential to be realised, it is important to address several challenges, including the viability of many CCS (Cultural and Creative Sector) firms and workers to survive the crisis and its impacts, and build on the opportunities that have emerged. Expanding the quantitative evidence base as well as documented learnings from experimentation and innovation will help to achieve these additional benefits."**
> **("Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors", 2020)**

3.4 Competition is everywhere

All local performances now are competing with institutions and companies around the world. During a year of lockdown, museums, orchestras, theaters and festivals that had never previously maintained a digital presence took to online distribution of their offerings. Innovative and engaging visitor experiences include artists' talks, digital catalogues, curated virtual tours, and interactive infographics. The British Museum's digital timeline "History Connected" allows viewers to dig deep into a comprehensive tour of their collections. The Royal Opera House in London is experimenting through its Audience Labs to advance new multisensory experiences of opera and ballet. Broadway HD offers a subscription based streaming portfolio of musicals, drama and humour as well as movies, concerts and dance. NewNormalRep brings together diverse theater artists to perform over Zoom.

Although multi-jurisdictional offerings now compete directly with local productions for attention, there are also opportunities for expansion of audiences here as well. "More than one in five adults have increased their use of audio streaming services due to the pandemic, and one in four listens to podcasts in an average week. YouTube actually has the most reach in podcasts at 22%, with Spotify at 19%, streaming from AM or FM radio stations at 15% and Apple Music at 8% – all of which have experienced an increase in reach over the last two years.

In an average week, 93% of Canadian adults watch TV on any screen or device, spending an average of 22 hours per week. Broadcast schedules are still important, with 65% of adults watching TV according to one broadcast schedule, with 54% watching through a subscription service and 36% on a catch-up on demand service from a broadcaster (Summerfield, 2021). According to 42% of adults, their use of subscription services has increased due to the pandemic, and binge watching has become a habit for 30% of Canadians, compared to 23% last year. binge watching on any screen. Second-screening is still popular, with 35% of adults browsing social media while watching TV, though this jumps to 51% among Gen Z and 48% among Gen Y."(Summerfield, 2021)

Statistica.com reports that "In 2020, 87.4 percent of the Canadian population accessed the internet. This share is projected to grow to 88.3 percent in 2025 ("Canada: internet user penetration 2025", 2021). Canada's online audience currently measures 33 million internet users." ("Canada: number of internet users 2025", 2021)

"In 2019, Canada had an estimated 34.56 million internet users. That year it was calculated that online services reached almost 96 percent of the population. " ("Number of internet users in Canada 2019", 2021)

4. Audiences are consuming and receiving the arts differently

4.1 Streaming may be forever

A trend that had been building momentum before extended lockdowns kept the wider population at home, on demand viewing of performance of every type expanded significantly over the past year. Live streaming of music, theater, and dance is now a standard delivery platform and audiences expect access. High quality virtual productions, whether distributed through broadcast platforms (FacebookLive, YouTube) or mobile services (Periscope, InstagramLive) more regularly fill the ticket.

Rather than cannibalizing box office revenues, overall attendance may be boosted by supplemental livestreaming (Bakhshi & Whitby, 2014). However, the question remains whether audiences will be willing to pay for culture at a sustainable rate; the current model of fee revenue for online programming is not equal to amounts that can be generated through live performances. In its recent report on the implications of COVID, the Toronto Foundation found that "only 4% of Canadians indicated they would pay full price for digital performances, and the majority were unsure or expected to pay a quarter or less of normal ticket prices." (Toronto Foundation, 2020) The National Arts Centre is currently streaming performances for free.

> " Rather than cannibalizing box office revenues, overall attendance may be boosted by supplemental livestreaming.

As redevelopment progresses, equipment, technical expertise and bandwidth requirements for large audience participation must be calculated. As Toronto's 5G network coverage increases, more data heavy productions will be readily available, although access may be unequally distributed to those unable to afford service. Rights management for performers must be addressed if ongoing access to content is anticipated.

Beyond convenience for those who desire viewing with time-based preferences, there are potential opportunities to extend the reach of performances more widely. Livestreamed events can offer more equitable access to disabled or physically distanced audiences, as long as the cost of participation is not prohibitive. The Toronto Fringe festival has positioned its online offering as an opportunity to improve involvement of Deaf and disabled artists and to implement recommendations of their recent Equity, Diversity and Inclusion audit ("Our Accessibility Manifesto", 2021). High Participatory videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom and CrowdCast are being used to link distributed groups of performers and encourage interaction. Synchronization through free audio software such as JackTrip reduces latency and has potential to support distanced rehearsals and learning . (Hadhazy, 2020).

4.2 Targeted preferences build different audiences

Critics and influencers have long been taste-makers with tremendous power to boost or diminish the success of offerings. Today the use of predictive analytics through advanced artificial intelligence offers selective and accurate targeting to "connect micro-cultures with content users crave." Human filtered news media once acted as gatekeepers of information; now algorithmic data modelling can micro-target users of media platforms and influence choice profiles.

This has direct implications for marketing and operations, especially as younger audiences make their preferences known. Data analytics can assist with theater seat inventory planning, campaign management for upcoming events, and targeted development of offerings for specific demographics that can be filtered to reach their attention. As more performances are made available through data rich streaming services, clearer pictures of audience preferences emerge and can be harvested to reduce risks for expensive programming decisions.

Issues of privacy protection are entwined with access to increased precise audience identification. As opportunities to collect data expand, the requirement for definitive policy regarding capture and use of information must be established and vigilant adherence to stated privacy procedures followed.

4.3 Co-produced, co-authored, collaborated

The roles of audiences and performers are shifting, with real-time computer mediated interactions making a greater impact and closing the gap between onstage and off. Audiences increasingly seek performers as partners in experience creation, with many looking for greater levels of involvement as a means of cultural gratification. Validation of performances has grown beyond applause as a measure of admiration of excellence and now includes user-generated content in the form of remixing, reinterpretation, viewing, sharing and commenting on favoured events. For younger audiences in particular, amplification of the original act extends beyond the event through such social media appreciation such as dance moves on TikTok and Instagram. Far from fans believing they are "sitting too close", a sense of collective criticism of theatrical, musical, dance and film presentations (Bury, 2021) brings audiences into a sense of intimate connection with the content and creators that builds community.

In the local context, more desire for authorship as a part of the spectrum of performance experience is challenging pre-determined perspectives. The co-existence of professional and amateur productions makes room for culturally specific events that are of value to the community, but may also interrupt the flow and planning of commercial events.

> " The Toronto Fringe festival has positioned its online offering as an opportunity to improve involvement of Deaf and disabled artists and to implement recommendations of their recent Equity, Diversity and Inclusion audit.

> " Data analytics can assist with theater seat inventory planning, campaign management for upcoming events, and targeted development of offerings for specific demographics that can be filtered to reach their attention.

4.4 The Arts Provide Mental Health Benefit to Society

While there has been significant damage caused by the direct and indirect impacts of COVID -19 over the past year, there has also been widening recognition of the role that the arts play in maintaining wellbeing for society at large. Future assessments of the cost of maintaining publicly funded performing arts venues and programming may benefit from evaluation of the systemic contributions to overall societal health.

"In 2019, the WHO (World Health Organization)'s Regional Office for Europe released a report by University College London (UCL) researchers Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn that synthesised 3,500 academic studies published since 2000 on the health benefits of the arts. Their review found that participation and engagement with visual and performing arts, cultural events and other creative pursuits have a "robust impact" on both mental and physical health. Documented mental health benefits include enhancing wellbeing, reducing stress and trauma, and helping people experiencing mental illness." (McGivern, 2021)

"Additional new strategic complementarities can be pursued between culture and policies to promote health and well-being. The lockdown has made evident the importance of culture for people's well-being and mental health. What is more, the emerging link between arts and culture production and participation with health and well-being could provide opportunities for prevention of illness and treatment of diseases for health systems. ... The documented effectiveness of arts and culture participation in improving the health and well-being of the elderly could become a pillar for a new active ageing approach that could contribute to decreasing hospitalisation and medicalisation rates, as well as preventing or delaying the emergence of age-related health problems. The resulting economies both reduce health costs and free up capacity and resources for the treatment of other conditions. In addition, arts and culture participation helps to improve the neuro-cognitive and affective development in children." ("Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors", 2020)

5. Making space for culture and community

5.1 Mixed use reduces boundaries

Blending commercial, residential and institutional spaces into the physical manifestation of a cultural and entertainment space alters the use of a neighbourhood and potentially provides benefits to local communities. The current site zoning allows for a range of uses that could intersect with existing structures and planned insertions more fluidly but requires considered evaluation of potential impacts on the character of the area.

Placemaking is an approach to create and revitalize public space, with and for community interaction. The intention is to authentically envision accessible, functional, context specific space with room for community gathering. Bringing residents into a consultative process to create a shared vision of place will enable holistic solutions and has the potential to reintegrate development into an urban dialogue.

> **Blending commercial, residential and institutional spaces into the physical manifestation of a cultural and entertainment space alters the use of a neighbourhood and potentially provides benefits to local communities.**

> "The spaces in between the buildings of mixed-use projects are key to creating a sense of place. These spaces or voids may be the most difficult to quantify, but they matter the most, because that's where people gather and experience community...We identified six elements — nature, community, human scale, culture, connectivity, and art — that can be blended into developments to create places with spirit and energy. When applied effectively, these elements can unlock project potential, generate higher revenues, and create more soulful spaces and, ultimately, more soulful cities." ("Can China create better cities?", n.d.)

Intentional programming of space to include multiple uses beyond performance can make a building into a hub that resonates for those who live nearby and for the city as a whole. Affordable and accessible spaces serve artists, cultural workers and the community at large. The American Planning Association outlines key questions to consider in order to ensure beneficial outcomes (American Planning Association, 2019):

- Does it reflect the community's local character and personality?
- Does it foster social interaction and create a sense of community and neighborliness?
- Does it provide a sense of comfort or safety to people gathering and using the space?
- Does it encourage use and interaction among a diverse cross-section of the public?

5.2 Flexibility of physical spaces is critical

As the STLC is reimagined, new approaches to internal space use are possible. In order to maximize productivity, more flexible performance spaces that enable variable audience sizes for productions are necessary. If community production spaces are to be offered, there must be consideration of how functional adaptation can be encoded into the building program. Flexible architecture that is designed to be malleable and multipurpose and that can be adapted over time provides responsive opportunities.

> **Flexible architecture that is designed to be malleable and multipurpose and that can be adapted over time provides responsive opportunities.**

> "The Matsumoto Performing Arts Centre in Japan is an exemplar of flexible architecture. Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Toyo Ito, the Centre is beautiful and responsive. In a paper, Kronenburg noted the myriad flexible qualities that the Centre boasts. He broke these qualities down into three key categories: changeable spaces, multipurpose spaces, and freedom of operation. For example, the Centre's largest theatre features a ceiling that can be raised or lowered to change the space's acoustics or even shrink the space for more intimate performances. These sorts of changeable spaces are essentially modular design taken to the next level." ("Here's Why Flexible Architecture is Taking Over the A&D World", n.d.)

Beyond performance spaces, the building may have the potential to be adapted for a wider range of functional applications such as voting venues, pop-up clinics, or emergency shelter supply, thereby integrating more fully into the civic life of Toronto.

5.3 Demand for environmental accountability is high

This year's Pritzker prize in architecture, one of the most prestigious marks of accomplishment in the field, was awarded to Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal for their body of work that rejects demolition and advocates for social justice and sustainability. It marks a turning point that is worth noting as attitudes to architectural development shift and focus on considered transformation becomes normalized. Increasingly, there is an expectation that the full carbon cost of redevelopment will be calculated as part of any future planning undertaking. Materials, energy use and consideration of the entire lifecycle of any component of the building will be scrutinized and may play a part in determining the extent of tear down that is acceptable for the redevelopment.

Beyond conscientious material selection, ongoing operating implications should be considered as the STLC building is prepared for its next iteration. Regenerative design principles and adaptive planning could guide the space towards net zero energy and water use and low waste best practices, while preparing for the strains of future climate conditions in Toronto that are expected to be hotter and significantly wetter. To ensure tenant and audience health and well being, neighbourhood integration and positive impact for the community a thorough assessment of the environmental impact of redevelopment may be required.

Conclusion & Next Steps

The issues raised by workshop participants and supported by broad literature review represent important parameters to be considered in the redevelopment of the St.Lawrence Centre for the Arts. These concerns will be cross-referenced to the more detailed survey conducted in the arts sector and local community. The process will note any emergent details to be included in the design brief to be crafted collaboratively with a representative stakeholder working group.

That group will meet for four 3-hour sessions using online engagement techniques. On June 17 we will craft a vision for the project together. On July 6 the group will work through key design principles to guide the design brief. On July 27 the building program will be determined and on August 12 all deliverables from the stakeholder working group will be finalized for distribution to specialist project consultants.

About the Authors

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