



UQO

Equity, diversity and inclusion in the cultural sector

What is
the role
of cultural
organizations?

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Publications about this and other research projects can be found at julieberube.ca

THE CONTEXT

This document synthesizes the results of the research project entitled *Equity, diversity and inclusion in the cultural sector: What is the role of cultural organizations?* For this project, 65 semi-structured interviews were conducted with professional artists and cultural organization workers located in Gatineau-Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. This research focused on several cultural sectors, including literature, film, visual and media arts, music and performing arts.

This project responds to

1. the prominence of EDI issues in society and the cultural sector;
2. the need for public policy-makers to advance a more coherent approach (van Ewijk, 2011);
3. the lack of scientific and professional research on the role of cultural organizations in addressing EDI issues.

The importance of the cultural sector in Canada

The cultural sector represents a growing economic force in Canada.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2017 the cultural sector represented 2.7% of the Canadian gross domestic product (GDP) (\$53 billion). In 4 years, the GDP for these industries grew by more than 5%. In addition, these industries represented, in 2017, 3.6% (666,500) of total employment in Canada, a growth of 1.6% compared to 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

THE RESEARCH

The Role of Cultural Organizations: The Beginning

Acosta (2016) conducted research on the role of cultural organizations in cultural policy. The results clearly showed the importance of considering the role of cultural organizations regarding:

1. the definition and development of cultural policies,
2. the development of tools, and
3. the allocation of resources within the cultural sectors.

Consequently, it is important to better identify the role that cultural organizations play in EDI issues within the cultural sector because:

- they are important players in the arts ecosystem.
- their responsibilities are defined and evolve according to changes observed in society.

EDI: Polysemous Terms

Several definitions exist for the terms equity, diversity and inclusion. For the purposes of this research, the following are the definitions we have chosen to use.

Equity | Equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their characteristics (Koivusalo, 2006).

Diversity | Diversity includes all the ways in which individuals differ and includes all the characteristics that make an individual or a group of individuals different from others (Cuyler, 2013; van Ewijk, 2011).

Inclusion | Inclusion is a process and condition where individuals gain access to areas from which they were intentionally or unintentionally excluded (Dobush, 2014).

Summary of the project objectives

This research project aims to understand the role of cultural organizations as they address equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues within the cultural sector.

Two sub-objectives underpin the research:

1. describe the practices and perceptions of EDI issues among professional artists, and
2. describe the practices and perceptions of EDI issues among cultural organization workers.

Methodology

To achieve our research objective, we chose interview survey as our research strategy. Based on our participants' experience, we wanted to identify practices and perceptions of cultural organizations' role regarding EDI issues in the cultural sector.

The sampling strategy for this research targeted two groups of participants:

1. professional artists
2. cultural organization workers

Recruitment was concentrated in four Canadian cultural hubs: Gatineau-Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Participants were 18 years of age or older; worked in a cultural sector in one of the four targeted locations; identified as a professional artist or had worked for a cultural organization for at least one year in one of the four targeted locations.

A total of 65 interviews were conducted: 40 interviews with professional artists and 25 interviews with cultural organization workers. The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and were conducted via video conference between January and May 2021. Table 1 shows the number of participants by category/by city or region.

The interview guide was structured thematically. After the participants identified their own relationship vis-a-vis EDI, we discussed the policies and resources structuring EDI in the cultural sector. We also discussed the role of cultural organizations. The last topic investigated participants' practices in relation to EDI.

Table 1: Number of participants by category/by city or region

City/region	Professional artists	Cultural organization workers
Montreal	10	7
Toronto	10	6
Vancouver	10	5
Gatineau-Ottawa	10	7
TOTAL	40	25

Results and analysis

The interview results were consolidated into two main categories: the perceptions of professional artists and those of cultural organization workers. Table 2 outlines the conceptual framework and analysis structure which three unifying themes emerged:

1. grant programs,
2. education, and
3. cultural organizations.

Table 2: Conceptual framework and analysis structure

Research objective	Subthemes explored by the Interview Guide	Consolidation of results	Common themes (65 participants)
Understand the role of cultural organizations in addressing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues within cultural sector	Identity issues	Professional artists Cultural organization workers	Grant programs Education Cultural organizations
	Policies and resources that provide a framework for EDI in the cultural sector		
	Role of cultural organizations according to participants		
	Participant's EDI practices		



PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS PERCEPTION OF THE PREVAILING RESEARCH THEMES

This section summarizes the results of the research on professional artists' perceptions of EDI in the cultural sector, with a focus on the role of cultural organizations.

Grant Programs

The professional artists we interviewed recognize the merits of grant programs, especially those that promote diversity. However, they often perceive the program[s] criteria as hindering their creativity. They consider the grant programs to be complex and of limited range, and deplore the lack of or limited information available about the programs. They also feel ill-equipped to respond to the requirements of funding agencies in the event of acceptance of a project proposal.

Some artists mentioned that they feared losing some of their artistic integrity by accepting financial support from a granting agency. Others who meet the "diversity criteria" of agencies expressed discomfort with identifying themselves as different and preferred not to submit projects because they did not feel that they were experiencing discrimination. In addition, many mentioned the lack of clarity or the discriminatory nature of what granting agencies defined as a professional artist.

Education

Professional artists agree that EDI concepts should be integrated into schooling from an early age. They consider that if children are educated about the importance of EDI, all sectors of society will benefit.

The theme of EDI emerged most strongly in the interviews with professional artists when discussing the higher education sector. Many perceived that:

1. some arts education programs are not equitably accessible, which means that some groups have an advantage for entry;
2. certain groups are favoured when students are selected for retention in arts programs; and
3. conditions for student success in these programs also favour these groups.

Cultural Organizations

Some professional artists believe that one of the roles of cultural organizations is to promote EDI.

Several subthemes emerged from the interviews with professional artists regarding the role of cultural organizations:

- **Relevance of one-time programs compared to long-term or ongoing programs**
Professional artists sometimes felt that projects or initiatives had a pre-determined beginning and end. At the end of a project, little follow-up is carried out, and the relevance of such projects for a real long-term improvement of the situation was questioned. Artists were more in favour of permanent programs.
- **Be Better Informed About Successful EDI Initiatives**
Several projects are in place, but communication strategies to share and promote these projects do not always seem to be effective. In general, there was a sense of disappointment with the communication between cultural organizations and professional artists concerning EDI. Better sharing of initiatives among agencies could also have a positive knock-on effect.
- **Inconsistencies**
Several professional artists noted inconsistencies in relation to EDI. The intentions of organizations are laudable, but the means chosen to promote EDI are sometimes questionable. For example, some participants felt that some cultural organizations see diversity as a set of boxes to be ticked. Or that cultural organizations have approached artists to sit on a board of directors with the underlying message that they are looking for people with diversity characteristics.
- **Organizational Structure**
Cultural organizations generally have a classical top-down organizational structure. This kind of structure implies that decisions are made by a small group at the head of the organization. There are two possible problems with such a structure: 1) certain groups of people generally have easier access to leadership positions in organizations; 2) regardless of who heads the organization, if decisions are made by a small group, it necessarily raises EDI issues by excluding others.

In Conclusion

Professional artists consider that further reflections about the very basis of EDI are needed, because the understanding of these concepts is far from unanimous within the cultural sector.



WORKERS IN CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS PERCEPTION OF THE PREVAILING RESEARCH THEMES

This section presents the results of the research on cultural organizations workers' perceptions of EDI in cultural sector, with a focus on the role of cultural organizations.

Grant programs

The majority of the employees of cultural organizations who we interviewed reports being strongly encouraged to participate in formal training to increase individual awareness of the self and others. Some describe these initiatives as highly informative but they produce limited results. Not all the employees [interviewed] were familiar with their employer's existing EDI policies and programs.

Some respondents believe that funding programs that support EDI initiatives within cultural organizations do not reflect employees' needs. Others perceive their work environment as discriminatory.

Several participants who work in leadership roles claimed to be concerned with EDI in their hiring and practices, but many did not follow a clearly defined EDI policy. Numerous participants are skeptical of the EDI initiatives that cultural organizations put forward; these are often seen as "self-serving" initiatives to secure funding. Similarly, several workers talked about how cultural organizations are influenced by the dynamics of "political" factors.

Some shared similar views and admitted that discussions of EDI are not always honest and that people avoid sharing their views on difficult topics such as racial equality and discrimination. The relationship between EDI practices and what several participants perceived as political behaviour also highlights the complexity of distinguishing between interpersonal and institutional discrimination, a tension that lies at the heart of this study.

Education

Similar to the professional artists, there's a consensus among participants working in cultural organizations that more needs to be done to address EDI in their organizations. Several workers indicated a need for additional support if they were to undertake significant change themselves.

It should be noted that some minority cultural workers perceived that they were being informally asked to educate their colleagues, since cultural organizations aspired to become more aware of EDI issues but had few resources available to do so.

Cultural organizations

The participants' interpretation of the role of cultural organizations focused on the importance of increasing minority representation within the organizations (internal) as well as in the programming (external).

In response to these and other perceptions, cultural organization workers want:

- cultural organizations' EDI guidelines to be clarified;
- cultural organizations to minimize tensions between some employees by establishing clear policies;
- communication channels with cultural organizations to remain open;
- methods of listening to cultural organizations to be active;

- implementation of EDI to be based on social justice, instead of depending on the cooperation and efforts of people who are marginalized in a system that discriminates against them.

In general, EDI initiatives are said to be fostered by conversations and understanding with others. The role of audiences as a prior condition to fostering the dialogue emerged as an important finding from the research. Many participants emphasized the important organizational link between listening to communities and EDI efforts that elevate the social mission above mainstream profit-oriented strategies. Most participants perceived and clearly stated that cultural organizations should take the lead in EDI.

In Conclusion

Cultural organizations that aim to increase diversity need to be made aware of certain challenges and take steps to make minority employees feel part of a collective effort.

There is a need for more resources in order to document past EDI initiatives and implement existing EDI policies.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND PROMOTING EDI IN THE CULTURAL SECTOR: EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Table 3 summarizes the major initiatives in terms of acknowledgment and promotion of EDI that emerged from the research.

Table 3: Acknowledging and promoting EDI

What?	Who?	Expected Impact
Develop EDI training specifically for cultural organization workers.	Cultural organizations Artists	Cultural organization workers will have a better understanding of EDI concepts and how to integrate them into their organizations.
Organize events for cultural organizations to share best practices or initiatives to promote EDI.	Cultural organizations Professional artists	Create new initiatives to promote EDI and build a common perception of EDI among organizations.
Create discussion platforms on EDI for professional artists and cultural organizations.	Cultural organizations Professional artists	Promote a shared understanding of EDI concepts and issues and how to deal with them.
Provide grants to organizations specifically for long term EDI projects.	Governments	Enable organizations to truly integrate long-term projects to support EDI.

CONCLUSION

The first contribution of this research is to offer a better understanding of the role of cultural organizations in addressing EDI issues. The 65 interviews conducted in four Canadian cultural locations revealed, for the first time, many avenues that are currently sources of interpersonal meaning for professional artists and cultural organization workers but also sources of many concrete organizational learning processes and changes. While the majority of research participants believes that cultural organizations have good intentions in recognizing and promoting EDI, they sometimes find that the means of doing so are problematic.

In that regard, the results of the research tend to show that accomplishing EDI is a question of education and awareness to provide a better understanding of complementary concepts that are socially constructed. In other words, the interviews clearly showed that EDI is not just a challenge for promoting a better representation of diversity among cultural actors and publics. It is also a question of changing internal and external perceptions and views of artistic creativity to promote all types of arts through institutionalized education, training, and grant programs.

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