



Creativity, economy
and place: creating
a culture plan
for Niagara

discussion
paper

Niagara  Region

1
culture

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Photo Credits:

A special thanks is given to those who have taken the many fabulous pictures throughout the Niagara Community and submitted to the Niagara Photo Gallery on the Region's website. Special thanks is also given to the Shaw Festival Theatre and Niagara Folk Arts Festival for images of past events.

Contributions to this Document:

Thanks also to the Culture Plan Advisory Committee for their many suggestions on ways to improve this document and content suggestions from Dr. Greg Baeker and Kat Runnalls.



PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

Culture is not an easy term to define, and planning for culture is not simple. The Region is engaged in the process of creating a Culture Plan for Niagara that will provide substantial opportunities that we can build upon to coordinate our many cultural assets and activities to become a destination of choice for businesses, residents and visitors. The Niagara Culture Plan will be sensitive to our two-tier municipal structure, not duplicating efforts already underway locally, but will provide opportunities for communities to work together.

The purpose of this discussion paper is multi-fold:

- create a common understanding of what is included in the term culture and where Niagara is currently positioned;
- generate thought and conversations about opportunities that could become available if we all work together; and
- inform the community of the process we will be following before we hold a forum designed to gather input on these issues.

This paper is formatted to provide some background information, followed by strategic directions that can help focus the discussion. Each direction is followed by a series of questions meant to generate thought and conversations.

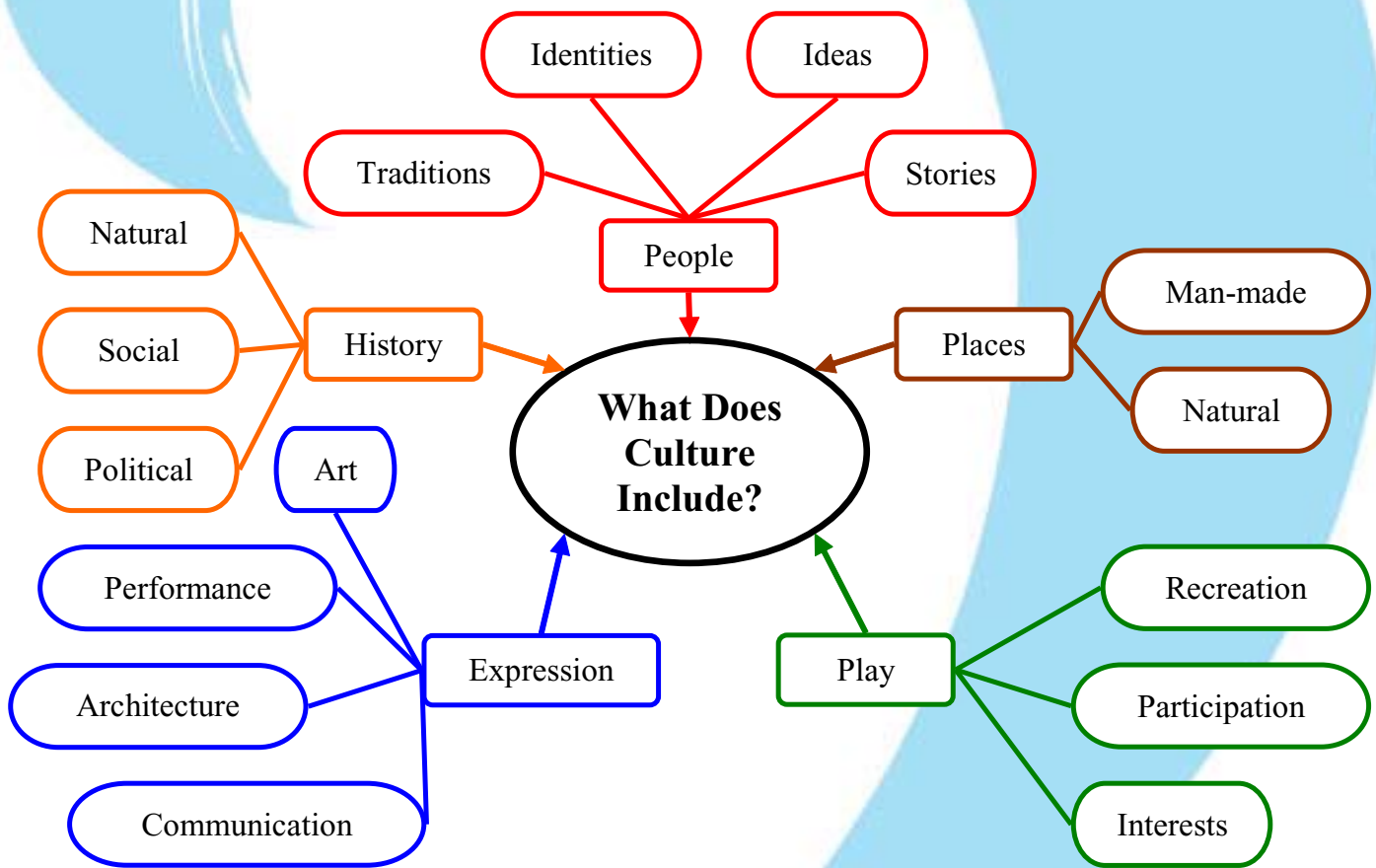




WHAT DOES CULTURE INCLUDE?

Culture is a multi-dimensional idea and can be defined in many ways. For the purposes of creating the Culture Plan, the Niagara Region Culture Committee has determined that the term culture includes five elements: people, places, history, expression, and play.

As this diagram illustrates, culture is an inclusive term that relates to many aspects of our everyday lives and experience. The interconnections between each of these elements help to create a sense of community and can enhance our overall quality of life.



Culture is both a set of objects (art, music, theatre, buildings) and a set of processes. Culture is not just the pictures and books produced by regions or communities or nations; it is also their beliefs, their behavior and how they develop and express them. It is this latter sense of culture that is most important for creativity and sustainability in the long-term.

Quote

Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee On Cities and Communities (2006)

A CULTURE PLAN FOR NIAGARA

Ontario, and Niagara, is in the midst of an economic transformation. Niagara is well poised to succeed under these new circumstances, but it will require a different set of assumptions and new strategies.

One such strategy that the Region has adopted to ensure resilience in these changing times is a more integrated form of planning that strives for economic viability; social equity; environmental responsibility and cultural vitality. Further, the Region is working to create an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) that will help Niagara tap into monies from gas tax revenues. The ICSP is a long-term plan, developed in consultation with community members that provides direction for the community to realize sustainability objectives, including environmental, cultural, social and economic objectives. The Niagara Culture Plan is a critical component of this work that will not only benefit the cultural community, but the economy, and our overall quality of life. The Niagara Culture Plan must establish new planning and policy assumptions but it must be as much about progressive practice as progressive thinking.

The 2007-2011 Regional Council Business Plan acknowledged the importance of the Culture Plan by including it under the strategic objective for Community and Social Well-Being. This objective indicates: 'Niagara Region will support a safe, healthy, diverse, culturally rich community where people of all ages and incomes enjoy a high quality of life.'

The Niagara Region Culture Committee initiated the process of developing a policy in 2006, and conducted some initial workshops as well as gathered information on Niagara's many assets. The process that will be followed for the Niagara Culture Plan is one advocated by the Province called 'Municipal Cultural Planning'. It is hoped this process will help: integrate culture in community planning; strengthen and support our creative industries and cultural resources; showcase Niagara's vibrant beauty and wealth of cultural attributes; and embrace leading cultural planning practice.

A Culture Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) is providing guidance to the Niagara Culture Plan process with representation drawn from Regional Council, municipal staff, the cultural sector, business and community interests. It is chaired by Dr. Rosemary Drage Hale, Dean, Faculty of Humanities at Brock University.

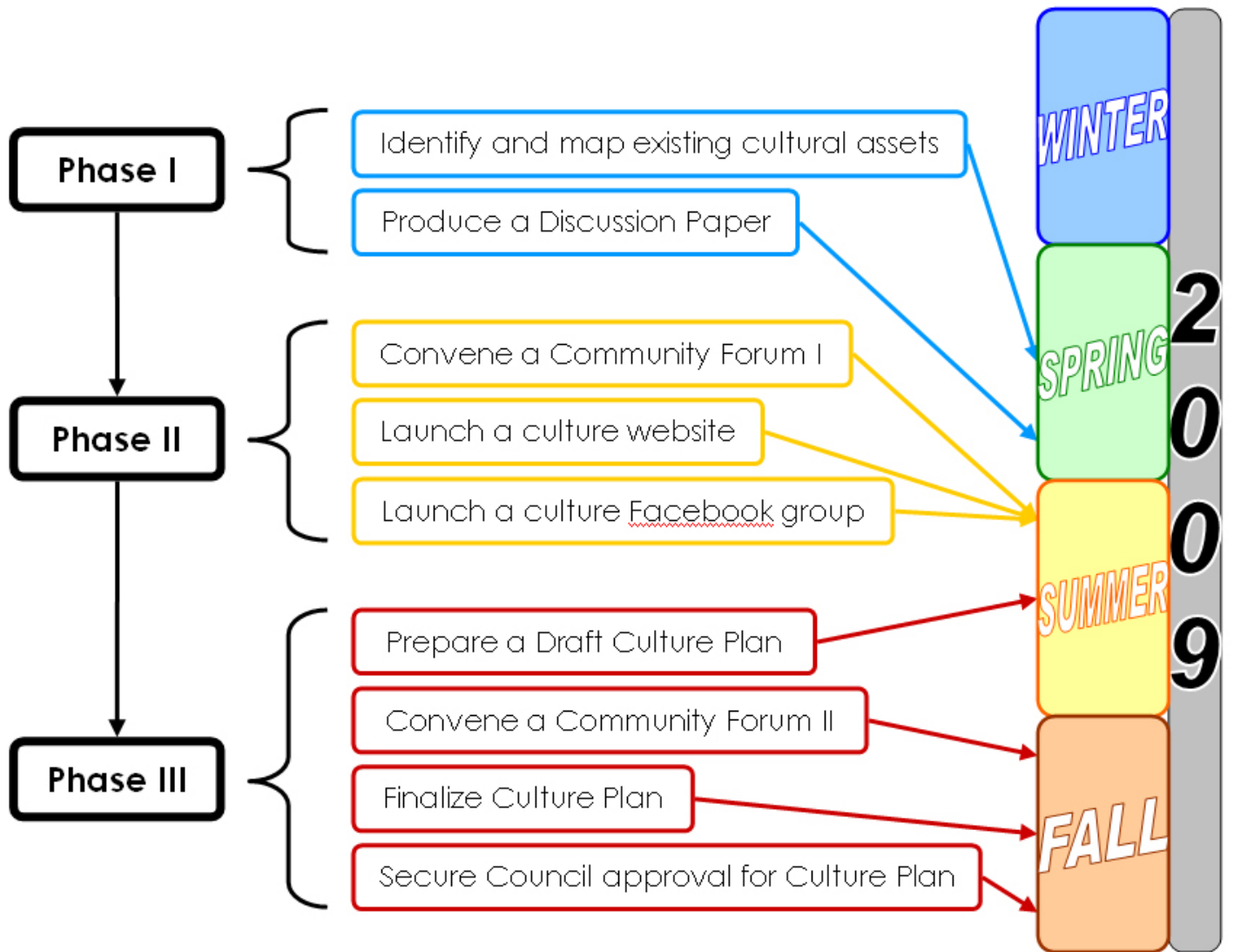
Quote

In a dynamic environment of global competition, demographic change, and migration, Canada's culture sector plays a critical role in attracting people, businesses, and investment; stimulating creativity and innovation; and distinguishing Canada as an exciting place where people can celebrate their heritage and achieve personal and professional fulfillment.

Valuing Culture: Measuring and Understanding Canada's Creative Economy
The Conference Board of Canada's

The process being followed for the Culture Plan is as follows:

Culture Plan Process





FRAMING THE OPPORTUNITY: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The Living in Niagara (2008) report, done by the Niagara Research and Planning Council, is a comprehensive assessment of life in Niagara using indicators across 11 critical areas. The study identified many strengths, but also serious challenges that can provide opportunities for the Culture Plan to build upon.

Among them:

- Niagara has a high rate of completion of education for high school, trades and college and a low completion rate of university compared to other areas in Canada.
- Our literacy rates are comparable to other cities and regions, but may not be uniform across the region.
- The average earnings and incomes are below those in Ontario.
- We have one of the highest unemployment rates in Ontario, as well as the lowest employment rates in Ontario.
- Many of Niagara's families and children live below the poverty line.
- Niagara has many engaged in employment in arts, culture and heritage and they could be paid better.
- Millions of tourists visit the region, travel mostly by car and attend arts, culture and heritage functions.
- While new employment opportunities are emerging, many of the larger employers in goods producing and manufacturing are shrinking and sales and service sectors are growing.
- Niagara has plenty of leaders and citizen participation, but we have some challenges in how to take action collectively at a regional collaborative level.



Our challenge is determining ways in which strategies and actions identified in a Niagara Culture Plan could help address these challenges – and realize Niagara's opportunities.

Did You Know?

A 2007 Conference Board of Canada study ranked St. Catharines – Niagara 19th out of the 27 other major Census Metropolitan Areas in Canada for innovation, 21st for society, 7th for environment, 26th for economy, and 24th for attractiveness.

City Magnets: Benchmarking the Attractiveness of Canada's CMAs, December 2007.

Did You Know?

At NiagaraPalooza, an economic forum held in early 2008, well known academic and urban strategist Richard Florida spoke about Niagara's strengths in an emerging creative economy: a vibrant tourism and cultural sector; agricultural advantages based on a unique climate, expertise in viticulture, fruit and greenhouses; successful specialized manufacturers; services and transportation resources. He also noted the region's innovative growth strategies: interactive media; bio-manufacturing (including green pharmaceuticals); health and wellness; and a green energy agenda.

There are also some very inspiring things that are happening of late in Niagara: programs at both Brock University and Niagara College focused on emerging technologies such as animation and game development;

- a joint initiative, called Project Niagara, of the National Arts Centre and Toronto Symphony Orchestra to create a 17-week summer music festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake;.
- steps have been taken to create incubators and support for micro-business startup to generate economic activity and keep students graduating from these programs in Niagara; and
- the partnership between Brock University and the City of St. Catharines to create an expanded home for the University's existing Centre for the Arts and the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts in downtown St. Catharines.

This last bullet represents a major partnership investment in a facility that will produce significant cultural, educational, recreational, social and economic benefits. The partnership itself stands as an example of the new public partnerships that must be a defining feature of the Niagara Culture Plan.

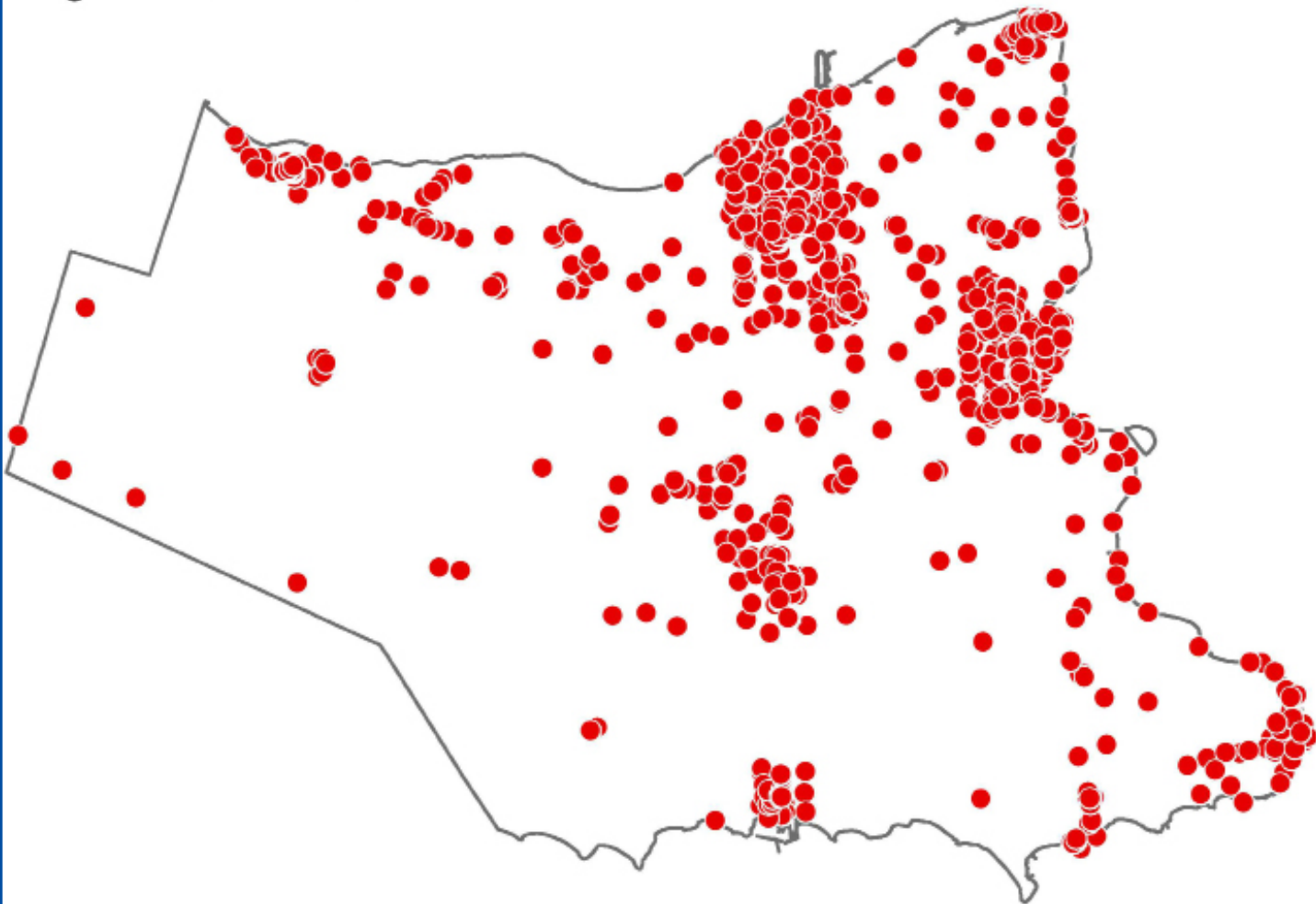
Our Cultural Assets: Where Do We Start?

Cultural mapping is a tool for locating cultural resources in the community. It is an essential component of the 'Municipal Cultural Planning' process and includes information about creative industries, creative occupations, facilities and spaces, festivals and events, community cultural organizations, and natural and cultural heritage. It allows municipalities to:

- identify the number of cultural resources and generate a deeper understanding of their role in contributing to the vitality of communities;
- build a stronger base of information on cultural assets using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology; and
- identify patterns of concentration and gaps, and to assess this information against core planning issues such as land use planning, economic development, social concerns and the regeneration of neighbourhoods, commercial districts and/or downtowns.

As previously mentioned, members of the Culture Committee have gathered information on over 1400 cultural assets in Niagara.

Niagara Cultural Assets



As part of the Culture Plan process further work will be done to verify the current information, gather additional asset information and identify ways to ensure this database is maintained for accuracy. The intention is for this information to be available and accessible to the public.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS: WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

The following are various directions that the Culture Plan can focus on, but this list is by no means exhaustive and is only meant to help focus this paper. These directions are formatted to provide some information, followed by a few questions to consider, and perhaps discuss in the community.

A Common Identity and Belonging in Niagara

In a global world, place has become more, not less, important. People want to live in distinctive places with unique characteristics and identities. In this context, Niagara must be celebrated as an area with great history and culture, unrivalled landscapes and natural assets, an enviable mix of larger urban centres, smaller towns and rural areas. These are but a few of the qualities of place that set Niagara apart and put it in a strong position in a competitive place environment.

Quote

When every place looks the same there is no such thing as place anymore...Part of municipal cultural planning is about combating the geography of nowhere.

Glen Murray, Urban Strategist and Former Mayor of Winnipeg

The region has a unique history including events such as the War of 1812, and the Underground Railroad and engineering feats such as the construction of the Welland Canal that have fundamentally shaped how we have evolved as a country and a community.

Niagara is known as a place of innovation which has drawn visitors and entrepreneurs for centuries. It has a history of being the home to visionaries and big thinkers who have had major impacts on Canada and the world. This support for creativity and innovation still inspires the region's leading-edge creative entrepreneurs.

For tourists and residents alike, Niagara's abundance of experiences includes everything from the drama of its great natural heritage – the Falls, rivers, lakes, escarpment and canal – to its casinos, theatres, artists, cultural heritage, wineries and culinary experiences.

Niagara has also been a home to several waves of immigration, from the United Empire Loyalists, to an influx of Europeans in the 1950s and 1960s, and more recent immigration from a wider variety of countries. This mix of cultures and ethnicities creates opportunities to explore and understand our friends and neighbours better through festivals and events, such as the Niagara Folk Arts Festival, that highlight our many ethnicities, interests, tastes and individual cultures.

The diversity of the various communities and identities underscores the uniqueness within Niagara but also poses some challenges in advancing a shared understanding.

Did You Know?

Inventors like Nikola Tesla and George Westinghouse have greatly influenced the value of Niagara Falls to the Niagara Region. Without AC power, of which both were major proponents, the fortunes of the region would be far different than they are today. A statue was unveiled in Queen Victoria Park in 2006 honoring Nikola Tesla and his contribution to the region.

Questions to Consider

What makes you feel like you belong in Niagara?

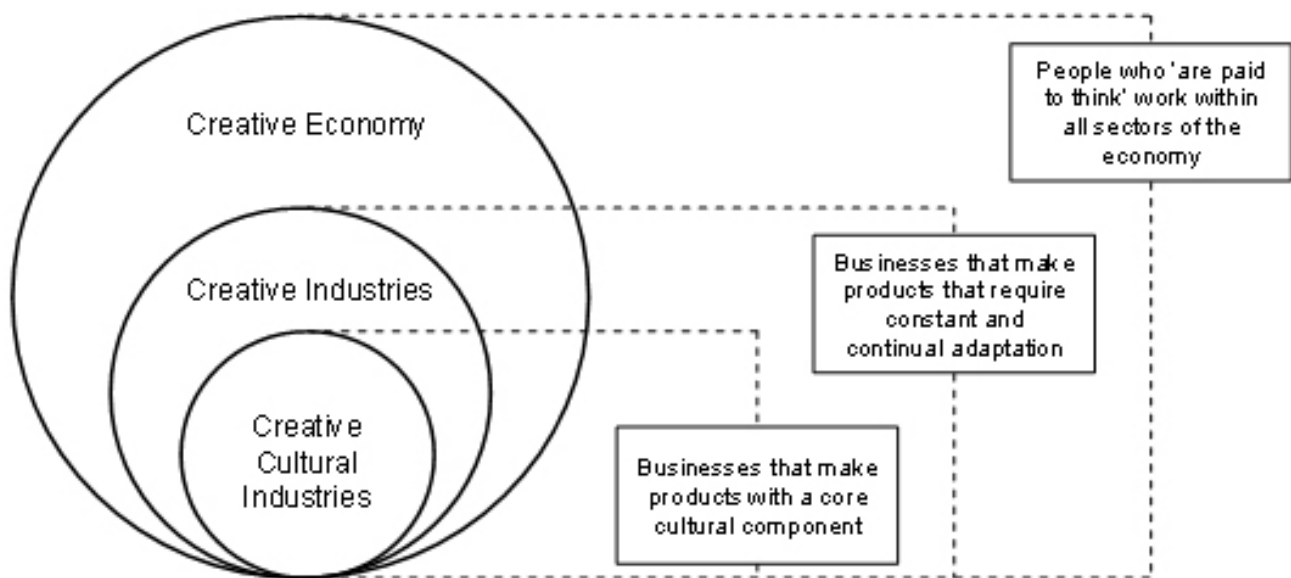
What do you celebrate in Niagara?

How can our overall quality of life be improved through a shared vision for culture?

The Creative Economy

A major theme in the Niagara Culture Plan is the creative economy and contributions culture can make to Niagara's success in today's marketplace. To discuss these issues with clarity we must distinguish between three ways in which creativity is driving the economy.

The **creative economy** represents a shift in the structure of the global economy, from one based on the production of goods to more knowledge based driven by ideas and intellectual property. Creativity and innovation are understood as common forces across all economic activity. **Creative industries** are essential to the economy through a range of particular industry sectors and sub-sectors including: professional and technical services, finance and insurance, healthcare and education, and the creative cultural industries. The **creative cultural industries** are a major and rapidly expanding sub-set of the creative industries that is the fastest growing sector in many jurisdictions today. Examples of these might include occupations such as actors, architects, or musicians; and industries such as broadcasting, advertising, or performing arts companies.



Did You Know?

The Conference Board estimates that the direct economic impact of Canada's culture sector was valued at \$46 billion, and indirectly at \$84.6 billion in 2007, constituting 8% of Canada's real gross domestic product since the year 2000.

Conference Board of Canada, 2008

Culture affects the economy in many ways from directly employing people to being a component to how almost any job can be done. This provides us with almost limitless opportunities for transformation that embraces the cultural economy.

As noted in the Living in Niagara report, and numerous other sources, Niagara has a lower income level than many other parts of Ontario. Some of the creative cultural occupations, such as artists, are particularly hard hit by this lower level of income in the community as there is less disposable income available in the community to purchase their work, and therefore maintain a suitable standard of living. The lower income levels also affect governments' or businesses' ability to sponsor programs that will lead to reliable funding to support these worthwhile efforts. Innovative thinking, partnerships and increased recognition of the cultural sector may all help to lessen the financial strains in the community and strengthen the economy for the cultural sector and all of Niagara.



Questions to Consider

How can Niagara stimulate innovation and creativity?

How can Niagara attract and retain creative talent?

What are some of the most innovative companies or practices?

How does Niagara support our creative industries and encourage investment?

Quote

A creative economy extends beyond the cultural sector to harness creativity and bring about positive social and economic changes across a broad spectrum of industries, sectors, and social organizations. Leadership is key in all these areas to getting the most from creativity. To do so, leaders work with the "raw materials" of culture – including imagination, attitudes, habits of thought and action, work expectations, talents, and values.

The Conference Board of Canada



The Social Importance of Culture

Culture is around us every day; we often just do not identify it as such. For example, if you were walking on a downtown street you would see the work of an architect in buildings, engineer in bridges, graphic designers in signage, landscape architects in a park, artists in public art, and storefront designers in window displays. You might also hear music escaping from a nearby window, see a sign illustrating an upcoming festival or event, or stop to have a culinary delight. It is all of these considerations that go into our everyday experience that highlight the importance of culture to our understanding of our community.



Culture can have many positive contributions to our overall social well-being. Cultural activities such as festivals or events can engage the community in celebratory public activities, or raise funds for social change. Classes, libraries and museums can all offer learning opportunities or skill development. Beautification of our communities can foster a greater feeling of ownership and pride by residents, and attract new residents and visitors to an area. Cultural pursuits have also been found to help children in their social and emotional brain development; offer future social career direction; and provide constructive activity after school.

There is almost no limit to the ways that culture can positively affect the social well-being of individual residents and Niagara as a whole. There are also a number of existing programs, initiatives and services that are already focused on the social well-being of the community, such as social programs and education. The challenge will be how the Niagara Culture Plan can help bridge the gap between programs that may already exist and the possibilities available.

Questions to Consider

How does culture affect your social well-being?

Are there ways that culture could improve social programs and services that are already in place?

Quote

The United Nations Development Programme has stated that “culture provides the social basis that allows for stimulating creativity, innovation, human progress and well-being. In this sense, culture can be seen as a driving force for human development, in respect of economic growth and also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life.”

UNDP, *Terms of Reference for Thematic Window on Culture and Development.*

Strengthening the Creative Cultural Industries

Before undertaking the Niagara Culture Plan process the Niagara Region Culture Committee held workshops to better understand some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the creative cultural industries. Many of the issues raised offer significant opportunities that a Niagara Culture Plan could help address.

Niagara has an abundance of cultural assets and people working within the creative and cultural industries. Often these assets and people are centred around specific communities, creating unnecessary competition within the cultural sector and between communities. Niagara is competing in the global marketplace, with approximately 430,000 people; we have a much better chance of success if we take advantage of the skills, knowledge, and opportunities across the entirety of Niagara.

In Niagara we have a high percentage of the population that are retired or are entering into retirement. We also have fewer numbers of young people moving into the area. Strong creative cultural industries can provide the retirees (or the unemployed) a chance to capitalize on a new found second career in culture or volunteer. The need for volunteers, however, is great and new generations also have to get involved. Today's young people are extremely mobile and can and will set up shop in places that support not only their lifestyle but their desired occupation. Acknowledging the need for fostering talent, providing both formal and informal learning experiences can also help strengthen the sector by providing new talent and new supporters.

Providing a place for culture and access to it are other important considerations to strengthening the sector. Revitalizing our downtowns, preserving heritage buildings and building or restoring cultural facilities can all have positive spin-offs to our larger society. For example, the recent revitalization of downtown Niagara Falls has brought galleries, restaurants and shops to an area that was largely ignored. This area will ideally draw residents who want to live downtown to take advantage of the excitement, job possibilities, and accessible transit nearby. Partnerships between groups, or co-location of facilities, also provide exciting opportunities for the cultural sector as well as the larger community, for example the Grimsby Art Gallery and Library, Welland Civic Centre, and the proposed Marilyn I. Walker School of Performing Arts.



Questions to Consider

What can be done to encourage future generations to have active roles in the creative cultural industries?

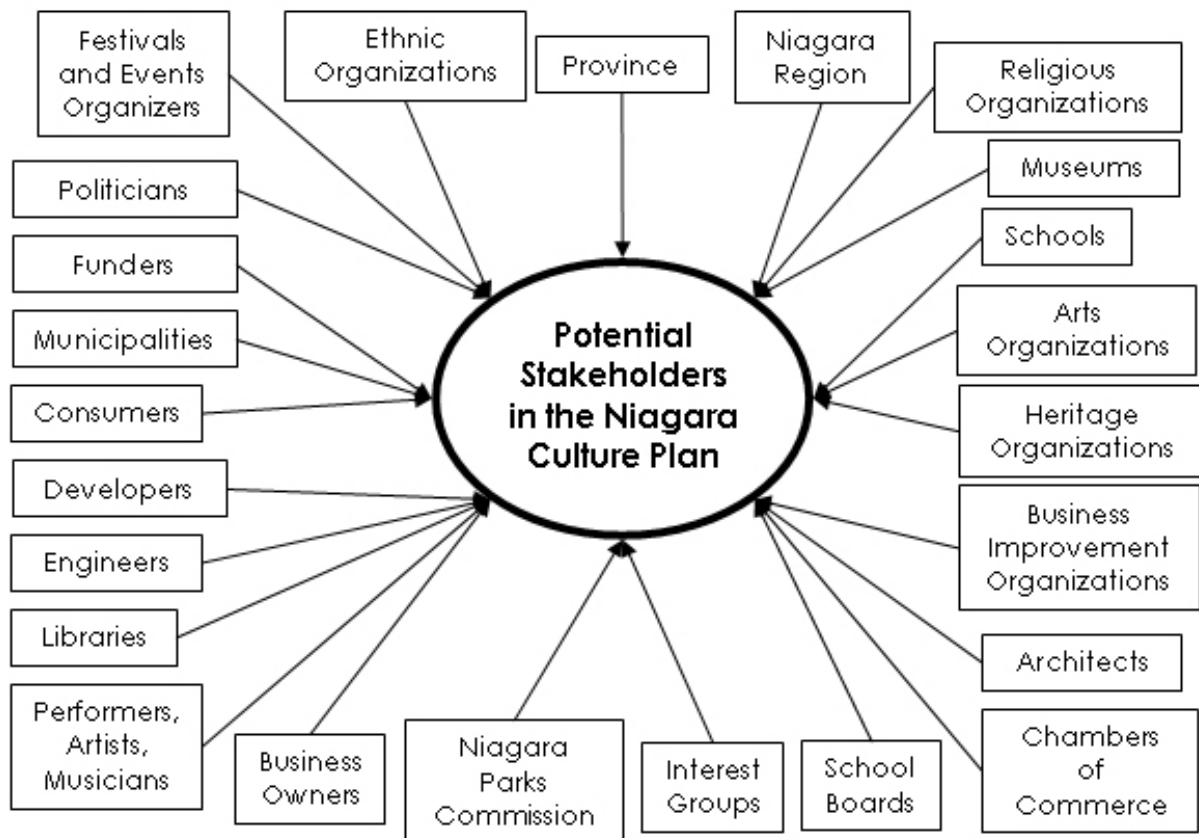
What can be done to support professional development of people working in the creative cultural industries?

What collaboration and partnerships among cultural groups currently exist in Niagara and is there room for improvement?

Working Together

Significant research has suggested that culture can be instrumental in transforming an economy that heavily relies on manufacturing to one that is more balanced and creative. To do this effectively will require significant effort and commitment from all levels of government, businesses, community groups, and individuals. This economic transformation is truly an opportunity to 'speak with one voice' and harness our collective power.

It is hoped the Niagara Culture Plan will provide guidance for all of these groups to better work together to help transform our economy. The following diagram illustrates many of the stakeholders who will be required to be involved in this process.



Considering how we will work together effectively is fundamental to moving forward. Communication is one of the most essential components to working together. Without knowing that there are groups to partner with, how can you take advantage of the possibilities? Concerted effort needs to be placed on how the message gets out through a variety of mediums, whether it be word of mouth, emails, online tools such as facebook, newsletters, posters, etc.

A number of ideas are being employed in other Ontario communities to ensure effective working relationships, including the creation of a strategic leadership group with members from a wide variety of backgrounds, the creation of working groups focused on specific tasks, holding annual cultural summits to discuss issues and celebrate successes, and issue-based community forums that discuss specific topics.

Achieving the goals of the Culture Plan means aligning responsibilities and building collaborative relationships and systems connecting many different agencies. Success in implementing the Niagara Culture Plan will rely on this type of effective collaborative practice between the Region and its many partners.



Questions to Consider

How can culture be better integrated with other government-community-business efforts?

How can we, as a community, encourage people to participate in culture in Niagara?

What networks and partnerships are already in place that can support ongoing collaboration?

What mechanisms are needed to support collaboration and partnerships?

What could these partners do together they could not do individually?

CONCLUSION: GET INVOLVED!

Recognition of the cultural sector as a whole, and the power it can have, is often overlooked. Given today's economic state and our ever apparent global relationship, it is now more crucial than ever that the Niagara community work together for a consistent, concerted approach that will help provide coordination and guidance for our community's citizens and leaders. The hope is that the Culture Plan can help with this effort.

Culture...it is more than you think.

We ask that you get involved with this process – if you have any questions, want to provide comments, or want to be engaged in the process, we have a number of ways for you to do so:

Email: culture@niagararegion.ca

Facebook Page: Niagara Culture

Niagara Region Website: www.niagararegion.ca

We will also be holding an initial forum on July 7th to gather input that will help form the basis of the Culture Plan. Information is available on the region's website.

