



Saskatchewan Partnership for Arts Research

Saskatchewan Partnership for Arts Research (SPAR)

Understanding the Role of Cultural Networks within a Creative Ecosystem:

A Canadian Case-Study

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Abstract

Despite prevailing theories which presume the importance of networks linking artists and others in their communities, we lack sufficient systematic, artist-centred, primary research for a good understanding of how such cultural networks function. To address this lacuna, a project fostered by the three major arts organisations in Saskatchewan is employing quantitative surveys of artists and the public as well as qualitative interviews and consultations to understand such networks and their connection with broader networks at local and national levels. With the first publicly funded agency for arts support in North America and until recently, a buoyant economy fuelling a diversifying and increasingly indigenous population, established formal and informal cross-disciplinary networks which created a vibrant cultural ecology in Saskatchewan are in transition. Insights into the current dynamics of these cultural networks and the health of the province's creative ecosystem demonstrate the value of such research in Saskatchewan and elsewhere.

Keywords: cultural networks, arts ecology, cultural ecology, artist networks, creative ecology

Introduction

The assumption that artists are interconnected within complex networks that also include other cultural workers and a broad range of individuals outside the arts sector in the artists' immediate and extended or virtual communities is central to a host of current theories and studies related to the arts and culture. However, surprisingly few scholars have undertaken artist-centred, primary studies that contextualize and

test these theories against the practical realities of how such networks are formed, how they actually function, who composes them--or even if artists have access to such networks within a cultural ecosystem in a specific place and time.

Networks within the Creative Economy and Culture

Richard Florida's (2002) initial work on the creative economy, for instance, posited a creative class which included not only artists but also individuals such as scientists, researchers, analysts, engineers, professors, designers, architects and creative professionals in high tech, finance, law, health and business. Unlike John Howkins (2001) who defined the creative economy as being driven by creative industries, Florida argued that the productive interaction of individuals in this creative class facilitated by their clustering in large urban centres, leads to creative cities which then function as economic generators and incubators for innovation and creativity. In a more recent revision of his theories, Florida (2012) has modified his thinking to recognize the potential for smaller city centres--and virtually any community--to function similarly in providing a place for productive interaction across the creative class, and he has very broadly extended the web of the creative class to potentially include members of the working and service classes as well.

In a more comprehensive review of the relationship between economics and culture, David Throsby (2001) considers not only economic but also social and cultural capital and notes that the latter two are closely entwined and dependent on "social networks and relationships of trust" (p.49). As an example he cites Robert Putnam's (1993) classic study of networks and relationships at work in Italy--a study which today might be easily framed and interpreted in ecological terms. Although he addresses the role of the arts and culture only tangentially, Putnam demonstrates how essential networks of civic engagement are to social capital, especially horizontal networks involving close personal contact between individual peers. Doug Borwick (2012), who has focused less on the economics of culture and more on the importance of civic engagement to the future of arts organisations, has argued that the arts have a responsibility to foster engagement that will contribute to healthy and sustainable communities and culture. Despite his primary emphasis on arts organisations in his examples and case studies, his argument presumes a set of interconnections linking arts organization, artist and public in the construction of social capital. In the final section of his book, he identifies artists as essential "for connecting with the community," since: "Ultimately it is the artist that is central to community engagement. Performing arts organisations and museums establish and support frameworks through which any community arts project is based" but "artists [...] are often the face of community engagement." (p. 350) He assumes that if artists engage in what matters most to their communities this will in turn position artists and arts organisations as indispensable components of a community of individuals engaged by the arts. Like Florida and Howkins, however, Borwick notes the important role of artists and the networks they construct without referencing specifics regarding actual networks and their capacity to encompass and engage the public in a particular place and time.

Networks within Cultural Ecosystems

For scholars who have begun to study the arts and culture as ecosystems or parts of larger ecosystems, a similar emphasis on interconnection and networks is implied because they are as fundamental to cultural ecosystems as they are to any biological ecosystem. Mark Robinson (2010) places the artist at the centre of the arts ecosystem, but notes that the connections between the various levels of the system work both ways, so that "what happens in a town or city [...] impacts on the arts sector. What happens in the arts or in an arts venue changes the city" (p. 25). In fact, he relates the relative health of the ecology, its capacity to maintain creativity in the face of change, directly to "connectivity" and "networks of relationships enabling adaptive behaviour and resilience" (p. 26).

Howkins' (2009) *Creative Ecologies* is in fact promoted as showing "how our ability to develop ideas successfully depends on how we use networks; for example, knowing when to collaborate, when to compete, and when to go it alone." Bill Sharpe (2010) in *Economies of Life: Patterns of Health and Wealth* also argues that "growth flows from relationships," but he focuses on the arts as an ecosystem in which money is just one currency of exchange and secondary to art itself which is the currency of the economy of experience: "the value of art is precisely that it concerns itself with reflecting the experience of a particular life in its own terms and bringing that experience into the infinite conversation of shared culture." (pp. 17, 39)

Finally, in *The Ecology of Culture*, the report recently produced by our keynote speaker, John Holden, he attempts to shift our vision of the arts and culture from that of an economically driven model to that of an ecosystem with greater attention to how it functions--its "relationships and patterns, ... how careers develop, ideas transfer, money flows, and product and content move, to and fro, around and between the funded, homemade and commercial subsectors." (2015, p. 2)

Understanding How Cultural Networks Actually Work

Holden's report for the Arts and Humanities Research Council underscores the currency and influence of such theories which place emphasis on both formal and informal networks encompassing artists, cultural workers and their wider communities--and especially the trend towards situating artists within a broad ecosystem of symbiotic relationships. Increasingly practitioners in arts and culture from around the world cite and draw from such theories in media releases, reports, programming and policies, and the concept of culture as an ecosystem has slipped into the day-to-day consciousness and resulting discourse of artists, cultural administrators, government bureaucrats, agencies and organisations. However, for the successful application of these theories through programming and policy making, it is important to understand how in practice formal networks and informal interconnections function in a given place and time. Artists and other individuals within Florida's extended creative class need to understand how such networking functions in order to maximize creative contributions to their community as well as the benefits of such networking to their own creative practice or innovative endeavours. Arts and cultural administrators and policy makers need to consider how policy and program changes will impact such networks and to regularly ask how effectively and sustainably the arts and culture are functioning as an ecosystem--and interconnecting within an even broader ecosystem beyond the arts. In short, where are the disruptions and gaps? Who is included within existing networks and who is not?

Unfortunately, detailed studies and data relating to artists and their role within cultural networking at the grassroots level are in short supply—and for good reason. Simply identifying the number of artists in a given location is fraught with definitional complexities as well as the practical challenges of contacting and classifying them. Much more work has been done at the level of arts and cultural organisations where identifying the organisations, contacting them and collecting consistently recorded quantitative data over time is much more manageable. Most arts and cultural organisations would acknowledge, however, that the essential and most basic components of cultural networking are at the individual level. For the arts this means the interactions between the artist and other individuals within the extended arts and cultural community—including individuals not always regarded as members of the arts community or even the so-called creative class.

Scholars like Ann Markusen and Gregory Schrock (2008) through the Leveraging Investments in Creativity program in the US and even Statistics Canada (2014b) and the Department of Canadian Heritage in Canada

have led large scale projects to mine existing census data and other sources such as labour statistics for information about artist demographics and work patterns, but in Canada at least these efforts have proven less than satisfactory or helpful because criteria used in the original collection of the data excluded significant numbers of artists and failed to address some of the most important questions from the perspective of the arts and culture (Hill, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). Such studies do contribute to a useful constellation of secondary data sources, but other scholars such as Elizabeth Lingo and Steven Tepper (2013) have argued for the importance of primary research focused specifically on

artists as catalysts of change. We need to better understand how artists both create changes in the labor market itself and the way cultural work is done. What is their process of innovation and enterprise? What is the nature of their work and the resources they draw upon? How do different network structures produce different opportunity spaces? How do artistic workers create and manage planned serendipity—the spaces and exchanges that produce unexpected collaborations and opportunities? And how do creative workers broker and synthesize across occupational, genre, geographic, and industry boundaries to create new possibilities?” (pp. 348-9)

Evidence in their special 2013 issue of *Work and Occupations* addresses some of these questions and other scholars have undertaken “careful detailed empirical work, involving in-depth ethnographies” of clusters and networks suggest that economic and ecological theories, as they relate to the arts at least, do not always square with the working realities of artists (e.g. Kong, 2009, pp. 62-3; Di Maggio, 2011; Spencer, 2009; Porter, 2000; Gibson and Robinson, 2004; Markusen, 2006; Van Heur, 2009).

While commonalities across such existing studies reveal the collective benefits to be derived from increasing this body of quantitative and qualitative data, differences across them also point to the importance of studies situated in the specific place, time and disciplines for which programming and policy-making is taking place. While individual creative practice along with whole disciplines and an ever expanding constellation of consumers and audiences may be converging at a global level, for many artists and members of their communities the generative creative experience remains a local one. In a 2010 report produced for the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance in Canada, Canadian/Australian scholar Marnie Badham called for a specific place-based study grounded in the broad and unique arts ecology of Saskatchewan,

a coordinated effort from arts leaders, policy makers, and the private sector to develop a framework that is informed by research expertise from many disciplines including the arts, but also public policy, economics and sociology. This approach will also help us collect better data, both qualitative and quantitative, about the arts and their relationship to our lives and our environment. Over time, this would not only tell us more about the arts, but about how the public feels about the arts, and will help to inform better policy decisions. (p.19)

In response to this call to action, the three major arts organisations and agencies in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan came together in a research partnership to address this gap as it relates to Saskatchewan artists and their communities. The Saskatchewan Arts Alliance, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, and SaskCulture formed the Saskatchewan Partnership for Arts Research (SPAR) in 2012 with the immediate objective of better understanding the role of artists in cultural networking and addressing the dearth of detailed data on how artists in the province work and develop networks in the process. In seeking out the perspective of both artists and members of the public as grassroots components of an arts ecosystem who together construct cultural meaning, SPAR embraced both the limitations and the potential benefits of such

research as articulated by Holden (2015, p. 3): “There are no parts, only ways of seeing things as parts. The connections, symbiosis, feedback loops, and flows of people, product, ideas and money are so dynamic and intense as to defy complete description. But a deeper understanding of culture can be achieved by applying the multiple perspectives that an ecological approach demands.” The partners had much information and data relating to arts organisations, their audiences and the spaces and programs they controlled, but the partners lacked a good understanding of the position of the artist in the system and how those artists were connected with not only the other components of the arts ecology but also more complex cultural, social and economic dimensions of the broader ecosystem. SPAR launched its first research project, Understanding the Arts Ecology of Saskatchewan, in 2013 thanks to funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and it immediately set about to develop survey instruments targeted at both artists and the public which would begin the process of addressing three basic questions: What is the nature of professional connections and networks forged by artists among themselves and with their community (broadly defined) and are these connections contributing to a healthy and sustainable arts ecosystem as well as the cultural, social and economic dimensions of the provincial ecosystem?

The findings presented here derive primarily from analysis of these surveys as well as early qualitative follow-up consultations in the next stage of the research, but they need to be understood in the context of the broader provincial climate. As observed by Holden (2015, p. 22): “culture exists within a wider political, social and economic environment with both proximate and remote connections. No account of the ecology of culture can be complete without recognising the broader context in which culture sits.” Understanding something of the provincial context--both the arts and cultural sector and the extended geographical, social and economic environment-- will also help people determine the extent to which our data may be peculiar to Saskatchewan or more widely applicable to the experience of artists and communities further afield.

The Provincial Context

As the home of the first publicly funded, arms-length arts agency in North America, which later served as a model for the Canada Council at the national level, Saskatchewan has historically placed considerable importance on the arts. Beginning in 1948 the Saskatchewan Arts Board was formed to serve as a catalyst for training and funding amateur and professional artists as well as supporting arts organisations in a wide range of disciplines in the arts and crafts. The ongoing legacy of this organisation is an arts community which boasts a diverse range of artists, organisations and educational programs encompassing the full array of contemporary art forms, traditional indigenous arts and crafts as well as various electronic media. In SPAR’s recent sample survey of the province’s professional artists they classified themselves as pursuing 967 different art forms or combinations of disciplines in some of the province’s most remote regions as well as in its major cities.

In 1997 the Arts Board assumed sole responsibility for professional artists and arts organisations, and the government created SaskCulture which received additional funding through the lotteries to further support an even wider scope of cultural experience, including not only the arts (primarily at amateur and student levels), but also heritage, multiculturalism and cultural industries. In 2013 the government formed a third crown agency, Creative Saskatchewan, devoted exclusively to supporting the marketing of the arts and crafts with a particular emphasis on the creative industries of publishing, screen-based media, music and sound recording. Today the array of provincial agencies responsible for the arts and culture conforms roughly with the three spheres of culture outlined by Holden (2008): publicly funded culture, homemade culture and commercial culture. However, there is considerable overlap and convergence of the three spheres in official programming and cultural practice -- especially in the flows of creative ideas, cultural workers and audiences.

This backbone of funding agencies began evolving during difficult economic times for the province, but in recent years Saskatchewan's abundance of oil, gas and potash along with its agricultural strength have made it one of the few places in North America where the economy was booming right through the 2008 crash up to quite recently. Although large sections of the province remain sparsely populated with broad expanses of prairie farmland or boreal forest in the north, the economic boom brought ongoing population increases which are ongoing in rural as well as urban centres and pushed the provincial population to 1,134,000. With metropolitan populations of just around 300,000 its two major cities, Regina and Saskatoon, have until very recently regularly been among the fastest growing cities in Canada, in some recent years growing at more than four times the national average and ranking among the top five youngest cities in the country. One result of this influx has been escalating rental and property prices as well as a shortage of housing in some locations--something that has had a particular impact on people in low income brackets like student and emerging professional artists many of whom need space in which to work as well as live.

Another result of the province's economic boom is the diversification of the population. Although the province's share of immigrants to Canada remains comparatively low (3.5% in 2011), 85% of the province's immigrants come from Asia, Africa and the Middle East to a culture where established residents identify overwhelmingly with European ancestry. (Government of Saskatchewan -- Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Government of Saskatchewan -- Ministry of the Economy 2011, p.14). Contributing to further diversification is the rapidly increasing indigenous population which comprised 16% of the provincial population in the 2011 census and is projected to become the largest in Canada's provinces at 21-24% by 2031 (Government of Saskatchewan--Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Malenfant and Morency, 2011).

Within this climate of comparative wealth, increasing urbanization and diversity, it is not surprising that Florida has singled out Saskatoon, one of the province's two major cities (both of which have cultural plans and related funding), as a smaller city which displays the characteristics of a creative city. (Florida, 2009, xvii, 95) This perception was corroborated in open responses to our artist survey. As one respondent put it, "Specific to Saskatoon, the creative energy is high. Artists from other jurisdictions have moved, or are considering moving, here. This is a mixture of opportunity, activity, and energy, and a good mix of artistic experience."¹ Another respondent noted, "There is a growing younger artistic community in Saskatoon which is invigorating and essential to the breadth of a broader artistic community."

¹ Apart from the theoretical studies already cited, SPAR's approach to our research and the analysis of our data have been informed by an amalgamation of theory and methodology drawn from sociology and ecology as well as the cross-disciplinary field of sustainability studies. SPAR's comprehensive Process and Methodology statement is available (Blackstone et.al., 2015a, p.3-5). Unless otherwise

The design of our surveys facilitated feedback like this on the health of the ecosystem as personally experienced by our respondents so that SPAR could determine the impact of the province's new wealth and diversity on the health and sustainability of the entire arts ecosystem -- including the experience of professional artists and the public outside urban centres. There had never been a comprehensive survey of local artists and, in fact, no one really knew how many professional artists lived in the province. SPAR wanted to know how the shifting economic, social and cultural dynamics of the province had affected artist networks, connections and relationships. To what extent were newcomer and emerging artists as well as those not claiming European ancestry functioning within the arts ecosystem and its network of connections? To what extent were artists connected with their broader communities, and to what extent were artists everywhere benefiting from the province's wealth?

A particular disruption to the arts ecosystem just before SPAR was formed provided special impetus for this type of ecological study. The emergence of the crown agency Creative Saskatchewan was partly in response to the devastating effects on the local film and television industry of a government decision to eliminate the film employment tax credit in 2012 and the film commission and funding agency, SaskFilm, in 2013. These decisions were apparently made suddenly on the basis of fiscal priorities and ideological perceptions rather than economic or cultural evidence in the form of studies or even consultations. Because most other provinces and states in North America have funding mechanisms of this kind, the government's decision made it very difficult for local production companies to compete, and a myriad of individuals from film directors and actors to production crew, to find work locally. The result was a fairly rapid mass exodus of production companies and industry professionals (Lederman, 2012) which according to a report by the Saskatchewan Media Production Industry Association led to "a lack of community"-- a sense of "isolation [...] as industry activities and awareness decline and people leave." Employers complained "that they no longer knew who was left and available to hire." Workers in the industry complained about the collapse of personal and professional networks for "collaboration and friendship, and students specifically indicated that lack of this community would be a motivating factor to relocate." (Alberts, 2014, p. 27). At the same time people working in other creative disciplines began to realize that these departing film artists and workers had also been involved in other creative projects. Directors and actors, for instance, had been key players in the province's theatre community. In the context of these disruptions and anxieties, consequently, SPAR had to

noted, the data described herein are from the SPAR Artist Survey Dataset. For more information, see www2.uregina.ca/spar or email: <mailto:spar@uregina.ca>.

address two particular questions: if the arts function as an ecosystem, what impact have these changes had on the remaining artists as well as the system as a whole, and how did they affect its sustainability.

SPAR Methodology and Approach

Although conceived and launched well before Holden's 2015 report calling for such detailed ecologically-based cultural studies, SPAR's research on Saskatchewan's arts ecosystem has involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches closely related to the research approach Holden advocates. This presentation focuses primarily on the first stage of the research, the surveys, which were made possible by an artist registry set up by its partner, the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance. It enabled SPAR to draw from a database of more than 3200 artists from whom it invited a sample of just over 1300 to respond to a substantial survey in the spring of 2014. Nearly a quarter (348) of those artists invited to participate responded and many completed the lengthy survey in great detail, often providing extended answers to open questions that exceeded our expectations for qualitative information to be gained from the survey. Simultaneously, SPAR also released an open online survey of the Saskatchewan public in order to compare the perceptions of artists and others in their communities regarding the relative embeddedness and connectedness of artists in the wider economic, social and cultural ecosystems of the province.

Because of the openness of the public survey as well as uncertainty as to how representative the database of artists was of the entire artist population, making general assumptions and projecting to the wider population solely on the basis of these survey results is not possible. Observations and analysis of the data are being used to set up hypotheses and questions as well as to identify gaps that are being further pursued through more qualitative consultations with artists, arts organisations and whole communities. The SPAR partners felt that the challenges of identifying and accessing verifiable artist populations and others connected with arts and cultural ecologies have too often functioned as an obstacle and impediment to primary studies of artists, and they felt that this two-part approach taken in conjunction with other pre-existing studies and data would, in fact, provide them with strong evidence for informed programming and policy-making.

Importance of Informal and Formal Networking

When asked to rank the relative importance of informal or formal networking to both their evolution as an artist and their ability to create or interpret work, artists ranked it highly, although they tended to rank networking as being more important to their evolution as an artist than their ability to create or interpret work. Not surprisingly respondents found connections with other artists in their specific arts discipline to be most important although connections with other artists were still ranked as important. Despite indicating a substantial use of electronic means of communication with other artists and arts organisations, two-thirds of respondents placed the greatest importance on connections with artists, arts organisations and/or businesses in the arts or culture at the level of their local geographical neighbourhood or municipality with steeply declining importance assigned to regional, national and global connections in that order. (Blackstone, Hage, and McWilliams, 2015a, p. 23). An important exception to this ranking came from indigenous artists who also placed a high importance on networking at the national and international levels as well as within their extended cultural community (Blackstone et. al., p. 8-11). Only approximately 50% of respondents ranked connections with organisations and/or businesses outside the arts in their immediate locale or region as important although 71% placed a high degree of importance on their local context (e.g. their immediate natural environment, particular community or neighbourhood) as facilitating their creativity and art practice

(Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p. 20, 23). Generally speaking, the younger the artist the more importance they placed on networking, but the respondent’s location whether in rural Saskatchewan or in one of its two major cities seemed to make no difference to the importance they placed on networking despite a slightly lower ranking of outright collaboration by rural artists.

Although the survey asked artists to overtly rank the importance of networking to the evolution of their careers and realization of their creative work, it also asked them to provide specific information about the individuals, organisations, spaces, events, means of communication, etc. that helped to facilitate those connections. SPAR then analysed these responses to determine their *network density*, a variable derived from individual artists’ responses identifying relationships within and beyond the arts. The survey also asked for details relating to income, grants, public and peer recognition, types of employment inside and outside the arts, etc. The detail that artists provided enabled a more complex analysis of the relative correlation between the degree of networking density and their responses to other questions. For instance, there was a nearly perfect correlation between high networking density and the receipt of a publicly funded grant in the past two years (figure 1). Similarly, both higher incomes and residence in one of the two urban centres were associated with stronger networking density (figure 2). While it is not possible to ascribe a cause and effect relationship between networking and grant success, income or an urban environment, there clearly is a correlation and a suggestion that the importance of networking overtly registered by survey respondents may be further supported by their responses to other questions.

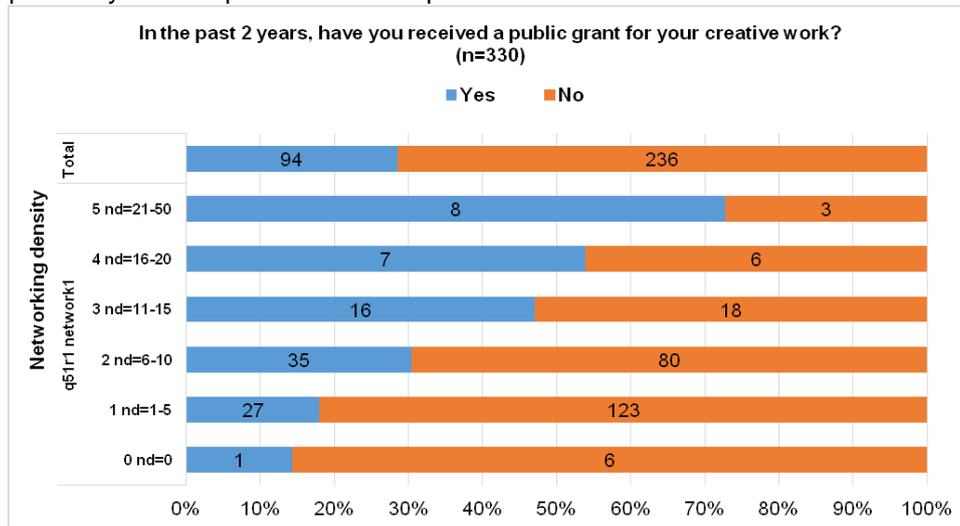


Figure 1. A perfect inverse relationship, the less networking, the more “no” for receiving a public grant.

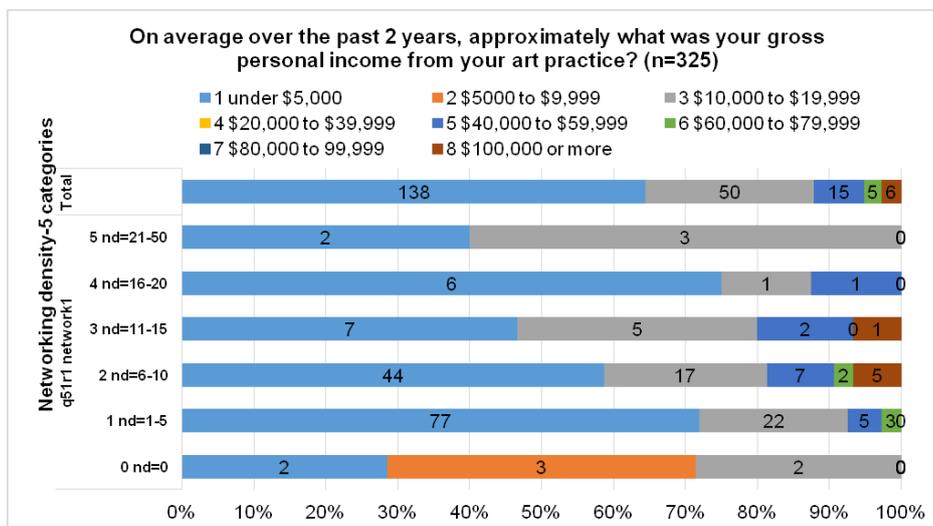


Figure 2. Higher incomes are associated with more networking.

The Nature and Facilitation of Artist Networks

Disciplinary and Cross-Disciplinary Connections

One of the most striking discoveries to come out of artist survey data was the overwhelmingly cross-disciplinary character of creative practice in the province. Nearly 75% of respondents indicated that they were engaged in two or more out of nine general areas of creative work listed (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.11). The disciplinary breadth of artist networks was further reinforced by the range of organisations, agencies, educational institutions and/or businesses (inside and outside the arts) that had contributed to their evolution as an artist or the realization of their creative work. In three open questions respondents could identify as many relationships as they wished ranging from formal, membership-based organisations in the arts; to other arts or cultural organisations and agencies engaged in programming, production, training or funding; to any kind of entity outside the arts. Not all artists responded to these open questions, but those that did gave more than 1300 specific names which provided both a window into the networks formed by some individual artists as well as a small indication of the broader complexity of the networks which contribute to the ecosystem of the arts in the province (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.19).

Organisations and Agencies

While the artists were frequently fuzzy on the exact nature of the relationship (e.g. sometimes citing funding agencies as membership-based organisations) and the particular organisational connections varied according to the disciplinary orientation of the artist, some relationships figured consistently in the responses to these questions. Not surprisingly, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, the primary funding agency for professional artists, was a constant with over 140 references in this initial section (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.19). Later in the survey when specifically prompted to rank the role of the Arts Board as a direct source of income over their entire career as an artist, just of 45% identified it as important despite the fact that less than 30% of respondents reported receiving a publicly funded grant from any source in the past two years (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.16). Of course with reference to the Arts Board respondents would also have recognized that its funding of arts organisations had constituted important if indirect support for their creative work. In another question, 57% of respondents identified arts organisations and festivals along with arts-related businesses as their most important direct source of creative income followed closely by 56% who saw sales to individuals, galleries and collections as important. In the public survey a large number of

respondents credited arts organisations, arts-related businesses or related activities and events as the reason they came to know both professional and emerging artists (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p. 16-17).

Educational Institutions and Facilities

A more unexpected discovery with respect to artist networks was the prominence that universities (either cited generally or with reference to a specific institution) assumed. In open responses they were by far the most frequently cited organisations with over 200 references (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p. 18-19). The importance of universities should not be that surprising, though, given that over 70% of the respondents reported having at least one university degree--a statistic that is consistent with the high level of education reported in a national survey of visual artists (Maranda, 2009). Additionally, respondents with the highest levels of networking density placed considerable importance on arts facilities in educational institutions in helping them to make connections necessary to their creative work. Although not necessarily related to a university or institutional context--or involving remuneration, over 50% of respondents reported devoting up to nine hours/week to teaching or mentoring in their creative discipline(s)--something that underscores the importance of students whether avocational or emerging professionals in the creative networks constructed by a majority of our artist respondents (Blackstone et. al., 2015, p.12). In fact, greater network density correlated with a higher number of hours devoted to teaching and mentoring (figure 3). The educational orientation of artist networks was also reflected in artist responses to another question--the relative importance they ascribed to the contribution of artists in general to ten potential areas of leadership in their communities. The three most highly ranked areas involved overt roles in levels of education -- K-12 through post-secondary, the professional development of other artists, and contributing to the understanding and appreciation of the arts among the general public. Over 85% of artists and 90% of public survey respondents ranked artist contributions in these areas as important, and just over 50% of artists reported actually contributing in all three areas themselves (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p. 25-26; 2015b, p.9).

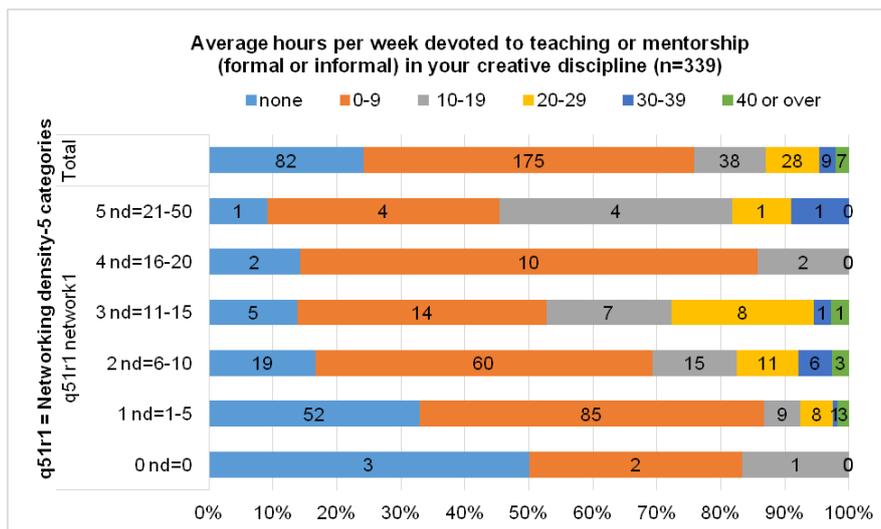


Figure 3. Greater networking density correlates with higher number of hours devoted to teaching and mentoring.

Work Outside the Arts and Contributions to the Creative Economy

Yet another insight to evolve out of both artist and public surveys related to the networks artists form by working outside the arts. 38% of artist respondents devoted 20 hours or more a week to work outside their creative practice and 55% derived some kind of income from employment outside the arts and culture (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.12,15). These facts do not come as a surprise to most people involved in the

arts. However, because data derived from Statistics Canada's labour force surveys and national household survey have been the primary source for artist income and work-related data, the information provided by our artist-specific survey reveals important insights that Statistics Canada criteria and procedures have previously obscured. Statistics Canada categorizes the occupations of its household survey respondents on the basis of the work they spent the most time doing during a specified one-week period. If they spent 15 hours working as an actor, another 15 hours working as a singer and 16 hours working as a computer programmer they are classified as a computer programmer. If they were employed full-time as an IT manager during that one-week but given flexible hours and working conditions so they could also be a member of one of the most prestigious string quartets in Canada, they would still be classified exclusively as an IT manager. If they were employed full-time as a professor of music but were expected to be actively engaged as a professional musician as part of their duties, even to the extent of being a principal musician in the local symphony orchestra, they would be categorized as a teacher--not an artist.

Because our survey respondents could give details about their work outside the arts as well as the nature of their education and degrees both inside and outside the arts they were able to provide insights into the networking that Florida takes as a given across the creative class. Artists who work outside the arts may possibly be functioning as free radicals as they move back and forth between various players within the creative class and creative clusters, and we should not assume that they are only doing this at working class or service class levels such as plumbing, waiting tables, or driving taxis. For many artists their highest level of education was not in the Fine Arts but rather in fields such as agriculture, commerce, education, humanities, journalism, law, nursing, psychology, and various sciences. Respondents reported a variety of advanced/professional degrees and certifications, the occupations they pursued outside the arts reflected this diversity in fields such as secondary and postsecondary education, research, agriculture, communications, business and consulting, administration and management.

Over 70% of artists as well as public survey respondents thought that artists make important contributions to the economy and the development of the creative and innovative capacity of businesses or other professionals (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.25; 2015b, p.9). Interestingly, just 39% of artists, thought that they personally were making an important contribution to the provincial economy and just over 30% thought they were making an important contribution to creative or innovative capacity (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.26). These low percentages may have something to do with the low levels of income artists reported receiving from their creative work, something we will return to in the next section. However, the fixation on the low levels of creative income for artists has possibly eclipsed attention to the artist's average gross personal income. That level of income as reported by respondents to our artist survey averaged \$44,335--a figure considerably higher than that calculated for Saskatchewan artists on the basis of Statistics Canada data and higher than either the average Canadian income in 2010 (\$40,650) or the average Saskatchewan income in the same year (\$40,798) (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.15).

This suggests that artists are productively connected with and integrated within the wider economic fabric of the province. An important question we are asking at the qualitative stage of our research is whether this integration is by choice or necessity; whether they feel they are sacrificing creative time and energy in order to earn enough money to support their creative practice and their families. However, we cannot assume that the extension of an artist's network outside their immediate creative practice--as in the case of the professor or the IT manager already mentioned--does not provide a personal creative return in the form of social and cultural capital as well as economic capital. In open questions some artists credited work outside their creative discipline as productively contributing to their creative work in the form of enhanced expertise and

extended contacts. When asked how they had come to know an artist or artists, a significant number of public survey respondents identified work-related contexts: as a work colleague, a client or customer, an employee or employer.

Other Community Connections and Broader Contributions to Social and Cultural Capital

Beyond the realm of work, artists and public survey respondents made it clear that artist networks extend broadly and deeply into communities. Two-thirds of public survey respondents reported knowing ten or more professional artists as friends, neighbours, family members, fans, patrons, customers, community leaders or through involvement in an arts organisation, arts-related business or other volunteer activity. 85% also knew an emerging artist and over 90% knew an avocational artist (SPAR 2015b, p.19). While these figures may be influenced by our comparatively rural and small population even in our largest urban centres, it may also derive from the long established priority placed on the arts by provincial residents as well as an often celebrated, if contested, cooperative tradition stemming from pioneer era collective place-making. In small town Saskatchewan artists would find it difficult to hold themselves apart from the rest of the community, and artist and public respondents alike define creative networks broadly as intersecting and blurring with larger community agendas. Well over 75% of respondents to both surveys thought that artists and arts organisations in general make important contributions to the knowledge and understanding of human behaviour; the formation of personal identity, values and beliefs; the exploration of social, economic and/or political issues; social cohesiveness; and a community's shared sense of place, health, well-being and sustainability (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.25; 2015b, p.9). Responses by artists regarding the importance of their personal contributions in these areas were all in or around the 40% range (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.26).

Respondents to both surveys reported their contribution of volunteer time and charitable donations to not only the arts but also a wide range of other non-profit sectors, and although their levels of donations were lower than those of the public, artists closely paralleled their public counterparts in the areas and amount of volunteer time given thereby reinforcing their connectedness within their community (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.24; 2015b, p.13-14). As will be addressed in more detail in the next section, this data also highlights the fact that many of the interests and demographics of our public survey respondents closely mirrored those of our artist respondents and were not representative of the demographics of the general public in the province. Although it is common even in targeted telephone surveys of the public for individuals actually willing to complete a survey to be more interested in the topic of study and therefore display characteristics of that subgroup rather than those necessarily representative of the general public, for the purposes of our research the public respondents to our open online survey, which was promoted heavily by the arts sector as well as public media, may give us a helpful profile of those members of the public who feel most closely associated with the arts ecology and its artist networks.

Networking Mechanisms

Finally, it is important to consider the vehicles for and manner in which artists form and maintain their networks. With 75% of artists listing their place of residence as Regina or Saskatoon, a quarter of artists remained in smaller city centres as well as much more rural areas (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.29). Although nearly all artists had access to the internet in their home (98% of n=343) and in most cases their place of work (88% of n=317). As their preferred mechanism for networking, face to face contact only slightly edged out electronic communication. Telephone contact figured as a distant third choice (SPAR 2015c, p17; SPAR Data). Interestingly, though, unlike respondents who displayed lower levels of network density, 70% of artists in each of the top two levels of networking density saw informal social gatherings (whether or not

associated with the arts or other artists) as important in helping them to make connections necessary to their creative work.

The Health and Sustainability of the Arts Ecosystem

Rather than defining the components of the arts ecology a priori, SPAR encouraged artists and the public to provide their own experience and vision of it, arts and culture bleeding into other sectors not usually recognized as part of the arts, blurring the lines and suggesting that individuals and practice as well as organisations and agencies are collectively devising through relationships the way the arts ecology functions as an open and fluid system. These necessarily fuzzy perspectives of those actively engaged in negotiating the evolution of creative ideas and culture will be further examined through qualitative consultations not so much with the intention of developing models or boundaries for establishing a helicopter perspective on the arts ecology as attempting to derive a sense of its health, adaptive resilience and sustainability.

Fortunately, our two partner agencies, the Saskatchewan Arts Board and SaskCulture, have amassed magnificent data sets derived through annual arts and cultural organisational reporting which enumerates such things as the numbers and nature of arts and cultural offerings; numbers of professional, emerging and/or avocation artists as well as other cultural workers, community participants, audience members, patrons and volunteers involved; funding sources and amounts; financial inputs and returns; and capital expenditures and liabilities relating to infrastructure and equipment. The Saskatchewan Arts Alliance has also recently commissioned two reports on the arts and education in the province one of which details critical statistics regarding numbers of post secondary students, programs and graduates along with resource allocation over the past 20 years (Gingrich, in-press). It will be important through our consultations to determine which criteria and related data the community sees as most useful in assessing the vitality of the arts ecology, but some potential indicators have emerged out of the analysis of the SPAR surveys themselves.

Using some of the criteria derived by Holden from the study of natural ecosystems for assessing the relative health or weakness of a cultural ecosystem, we can see that Saskatchewan's arts ecosystem displays some characteristics of strength. As we have already seen, public respondents placed high cultural, economic and social importance on the arts and displayed a strong degree of connectedness with artists. 48% had made charitable donations to the arts and culture, and 79% had spent \$500 or more annually on the arts. Participation rates were generally high with 76% of respondents having accessed live performance often in the past 5 years. Over 70% specifically accessed music or theatre during that period and this kind of participation extended to children as well. The great majority of respondents who had children 25 or younger reported that those children had also participated in the arts (Blackstone et. al., 2015b, p.6).

Artists displayed a corresponding degree of connectedness within the provincial arts ecology and the wider provincial ecology as well, and the array of arts disciplines represented along with the surprisingly high degree of cross-disciplinary activity and the robustness of artist networks all suggest in their complexity and intensity that these may be important adaptive traits which artists have developed in a comparatively isolated and rural province, much as natural ecosystems have evolved similar traits to survive and thrive. As one respondent observed, "Our relative isolation as compared to larger metropolitan centres has made the Saskatchewan arts community more innovative." The high level of education reported by artists and the importance of educational institutions, their facilities, programs and students within the artist networks would also appear to be strengths as long as the educational institutions continue to maintain those critical

requirements for artists and the long term future of the arts more generally. The studies recently commissioned by the Arts Alliance, however, along with open responses from some artists throw this assumption into question and highlight a potential weakness in what may also have evolved as another adaptive strategy (Gingrich, in-press). In a province with a lack of population density and less concentrated access to both arts organisations and cultural infrastructure, it makes sense that artists have gravitated towards publicly funded and adaptable spaces like those professionally equipped spaces found in post-secondary institutions and K-12 facilities dotted all over the country side. If educational institutions reconsider their commitment to training and facilities associated with the arts and/or make those less accessible, artists will either need to leave or develop alternatives.

This leads to other questions with respect to the health of the arts ecosystem that emerged from the survey data. At the top of the list is the disconnection between the importance placed on artists by the public and the remuneration they receive for their creative work. Although nearly all artist respondents reported receiving income from their art practice, over the past two years 43% received less than \$5000 from their art, and their average annual income from creative work was \$15,380. During the same period Saskatchewan wages rose nearly 5%, the highest increase in the country, but it is unclear that artists are benefitting from such a boom as the wages of provincial workers in art, culture, recreation and sport had just dropped by 2.6% when the artist survey was being released in 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2014a; 2014c) It was the only wage sector to experience a decrease.

Fundamental concerns about the survival of artists in the provincial ecosystem are further fuelled by the fact that only 57% of artists devoted 20 hours or more to their creative practice and when all their working hours from both inside and outside the arts were combined they were working an average of 49 hours a week, nearly 8 hours more than the average provincial work week. Perhaps not surprisingly, the cohort of artists may be aging. 47% of artists were 55 and over while only 18% were in the 18-34 age range. This compares with 35% 55 and older in the general provincial population and 30% in the 18-34 range (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.12-13).

One of Holden's proposed ecological measures of "systemic health" is "increasing complexity; a healthy ecology should be generative." Although there are signs of new art forms in the cross disciplinary mix reported by artists, one has to ask whether there is sufficient evidence of new artists. Holden suggests that "the ecology should be getting more complex not only in terms of the numbers of people involved but in the diversity of their involvement. Variety is a source of ecological strength." If respondents to our surveys are a measure of both artists and non-artists connected within the arts-ecosystem then they are not representative of the diversity of the general population. With 9% of artist respondents and 4% of public respondents reporting indigenous ancestry, this compares with 16% in the overall provincial population (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.28; 2015b, 19). But with a very low response rate from indigenous people on reserves in both surveys, it raises questions about the extent to which individuals on those reserves are engaged in a provincial ecosystem or simply operating within isolated or disconnected cultural systems of their own. Further to the point of diversity, respondents to both surveys were disproportionately female, and newcomers to the province as well as individuals of non-European ancestry (apart from indigenous respondents) were virtually invisible in either survey. One newcomer who did respond to the survey complained that "the arts community in Saskatchewan is very much a word-of-mouth, networking community. It is very hard for newcomers to Saskatchewan to break into the arts community successfully without a strong network in place. There is no cohesive place to find opportunities and access to auditions and artist related information. It is very hard to get 'in'." We have organised focus groups to get further input from this component of the

community, but the limited response from these constituencies would seem to confirm the findings of a 2014 SaskCulture report, *Engaging Saskatchewan's Emerging Demographics*, regarding the inability of the arts and cultural communities to adapt quickly enough to the changing cultural dynamics of a province that is experiencing population increases accompanied by shifts in cultural demographics.

Artist survey responses also suggest systemic weakness in limitations affecting the quality of artist networks. Only 56% of artists reported adequate access to mechanisms or opportunities for collaboration or networking with individuals, organisations or businesses in the arts and only 40% reported adequate access to the same type of mechanisms or opportunities involving individuals, organisations or businesses outside the arts (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.20). These concerns appeared to apply to individuals regardless of the relative density of their existing networking or their location in urban or rural environments. Very limited evidence of networking, grant applications to federal agencies or foundations and other connections at that level leads to questions regarding the extent to which the ecosystem is sufficiently open to or facilitating access to much needed resources from outside provincial boundaries. Access to technology beyond basic internet service could be a factor as individuals with a high density of networking had made much greater use of video and teleconferencing to effect connections necessary to their creative work, but responses to another question which showed no significant difference in responses from individuals with high to low density networks suggests a more fundamental problem within the system. Only 60% of artist respondents reported that they or an agent, dealer, publisher, etc actively promote their creative work or skills (Blackstone et. al., 2015a, p.10).

A final observation relating to the health of the ecosystem concerns one of the precipitating factors behind our study--the major disruption of the film industry and resulting exodus of film professionals which has since been documented in declining local memberships in organisations like the Directors Guild, Equity, ACTRA, IATSE and SMPA. Taken before this research program was launched, the government decision which caused the dislocation is a classic example of policy making without sufficient evidence, and it was not surprising to see that copious references to the situation appeared in responses to open survey questions. Many of these responses confirm the findings of the SMPA report cited earlier that irreparable damage had been done to the media sector, that networks needed to be completely rebuilt and that the individuals who remain need to adapt what they do to the new limited opportunities available to them. What is important to note is that the effects of the blow levelled at the film industry radiated out beyond individuals directly associated with that industry. As one respondent observed,

There is no film industry. This has hurt almost every sector of the arts community. Not many other art disciplines on the local level can provide a high wage like the film industry. [...] Many of these artists would take that money and invest it into other personal projects, which bring an additional unmeasured benefit to the economy and culture of Saskatchewan--sound department being musicians, art department being painters, camera operators being photographers, directors writing local stories etc.

The suggestion here is that the former film industry with its complex and broad scope occupied a position at the top of the supply chain and because of that contributed to networks and support systems as well as good paying jobs that could then feed other creative work outside of film. The conclusion of several respondents was that Saskatchewan had become "a less sustainable arts community" because of what happened to film.

Conclusion

Given that our research on the arts ecology of Saskatchewan is still in progress, neat conclusions are not possible at this point. But the benefits of such research to not only the immediate arts ecosystem but also arts administrators, policy makers, theorists and scholars further afield should be apparent. First, simply undertaking primary research that is informed by familiarity with the arts community and the particular questions that most need to be addressed in that community has revealed the serious drawbacks to relying on secondary research data often framed by unhelpful criteria that mitigate against the very knowledge and understanding that we seek. Second, consulting directly with artists and the public to get a perspective on the arts community from the two most essential components of the creative process may be challenging and messy from a statistical standpoint, but artists and members of the public have critically important insights to offer and are eager to share them. Third, using ecological approaches to examine arts and culture as ecosystems in a given place and time and, in particular, the networking that is taken as a given by scholars who talk about the creative economy as well as the creative or cultural ecology can further inform and interrogate such theories while also giving us new ways of seeing arts ecosystems, assessing their health and sustainability and developing an action plan to foster adaptive resilience that will ensure the ecosystem's long term vitality. As we move forward to broaden this work into the entire Prairie region of Canada over the next 8 years, I invite colleagues interested in similar ecological studies to partner with us in comparing data and developing further methodology for what promises to be a productive field of research.

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