SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

A Discussion Paper

Submitted by
KTA INC
401 Richmond St West, Suite 389
Toronto Ontario
416-204-9658

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aboriginal culture has stepped into the national and international spotlight. In many ways, Aboriginal cultural industries are undergoing a renaissance in Canada that is resulting in an exciting diversity of industries populated by a growing pool of Aboriginal artists, role models, and leaders. Just as exciting are the benefits of these industries on Aboriginal people and communities.

This discussion paper serves as a preliminary examination of the social and cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries on Aboriginal people, communities, and mainstream Canada. Emerging evidence strongly suggests that these industries can facilitate immediate and lasting positive changes, from launching individual careers to altering the course of a community's health. However, the true depth of the socio-cultural impacts will not be fully understood until there is an Aboriginal-specific system of measuring and assessing these cultural industries.

This paper is an early step towards that outcome. In this regard, we have developed the following framework to discuss the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries and their measurement:

- o Promoting identity and well-being;
- o Restoring social capital and building social cohesion;
- o Preserving, creating, and maintaining culture;
- o Contributing to community development; and,
- o Fostering civic participation and public education.

This emerging, interconnected framework is utilised in the context of a case study of the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, one of this Canada's most successful Aboriginal-specific annual events and a part of one of the country's fastest growing cultural industries. The festival demonstrates the vitality and diversity of the Aboriginal film industry and the artists who populate it. The lens is then cast more generally on the larger Aboriginal and mainstream communities where evidence suggests a growing appetite for Aboriginal cultural products and, thus, opportunities for learning about how these industries impact on the larger society.

The paper also suggests a broad set of recommendations for moving forward in developing policy and information gathering systems in the interests of Aboriginal cultural industries. The areas of recommendation include securing government commitment, cultural preservation and promotion, developing a system of measurement, and understanding the dynamics of cultural creation and consumption between Aboriginal communities in urban and rural or northern environments. Ultimately we hope this discussion leads to a larger initiative that will make clear the vast importance these cultural industries have on Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians.

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, a scandal erupted in Alberta regarding the treatment of Aboriginal children in foster care. Two years previously, a 17-year-old Métis boy had committed suicide and left behind a diary of his experiences about being shuffled in and out of 28 foster homes since he was four. The public's reaction to his tragic life and death resulted in a massive change of the province's policies regarding Aboriginal children in foster care. What precipitated this change was not a news piece on his death, but rather a short film made by an Aboriginal director.

Alanis Obomsawin – one of Canada's pre-eminent documentary filmmakers – was so moved by his story she decided to make *Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child* as a tribute to his life and to the many Aboriginal children in foster care he represented.[1] In Obomsawin's own words:

> The reason I make films is to give a voice to our people, a place to express themselves in dignity, to expose injustices and to tell our history.[2]

That the film resulted in such change illustrates how an artistic product can impact dramatically on the social and cultural arenas of Canadian life. In other words, it is but one example of how an Aboriginal cultural industry can have real socio-cultural impacts.

In many ways, *Richard Cardinal* embodies the essence of this discussion paper, which broadly situates the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries on Aboriginal people and communities as well as on mainstream Canadian society.[3] In the last three decades, there has been a dynamic renaissance of Aboriginal people producing a diversity of works in a plethora of cultural industries including the visual arts, publishing, music, tourism, and film. In turn, more people – Aboriginal and otherwise – are embracing this cultural renewal.

The Canadian Framework for Culture Statistics notes that "the consumption of culture will give rise to social and economic effects, some of which have an impact directly on the individual and others accrue to the broader community."[4] It must be recognized that quantitative and qualitative data on or, specifically, tools to measure the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries are grossly lacking in public documents. As a result, this paper draws on what evidence exists in published materials, through examples in various industries, and on a case study of the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival to illustrate key discussion points. This lack of formal information is

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[1] *Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child*, National Film Board of Canada, 1986.
[2] http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/Eng/rose/obomsawin_a.htm#open
[3] For the purposes of this paper, "Aboriginal" refers broadly to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada regardless of status or residence.
[4] *Canadian Framework for Culture Statistics,* Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics, Research Paper, Culture Statistics Program, Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 81-595-MIE2004021, Ministry of Industry, 2004.

compounded by the absence of any centralised source of information regarding Aboriginal cultural industries. We know there are many places where culture is produced – often in innovative ways – but these are incredibly difficult to track and to promote as no formalised systems exist.

It is important to specify that the economic effects and impacts – while embedded in any discussion around the contributions of Aboriginal culture – will not be addressed in this paper.[5] Rather, this discussion paper will provide an initial survey of the socio-cultural impacts that will contribute towards the Department of Canadian Heritage's broader mapping exercise on the relationship between culture, cultural industries, and economic development.

DEFINING SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS

Aboriginal cultural industries span a variety of media and artistic expressions. A quick review of the mandates of urban Aboriginal cultural industries in Toronto (such as the Toronto Council Fire Cultural Centre, Native Earth Performing Arts, and the Association for Native Development in the Performing & Visual Arts) demonstrates a common goal to improve the lives of Aboriginal people, extend social networks, and/or to positively promote or preserve Aboriginal culture. For a diverse community that has been marginalised both economically and socially, Aboriginal Canadians have maintained a strong connection to their culture. Their cultural industries not only provide much needed sources of employment, but also create positive role models, enhance the preservation of culture, and strengthen the sense of community.[6]

To understand their full impact, however, we must first begin with a definition of *culture*. While there are commonalities between the cultures of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, we would like to first acknowledge the dynamism of Aboriginal cultures. Often cast as a monolith, the rich diversity of Aboriginal societies and cultures is often overlooked, but has consistently been a source of strength, pride, and identity that nurtures the health and well-being of Aboriginal Canadians.[7]

The Canadian Framework for Cultural Statistics defines culture as a "creative artistic activity and the goods and services produced by it, and the preservation of human heritage."[8] While pertinent, this definition could be expanded in an Aboriginal context to include three additional elements: tradition (heritage, language), creation, and patterns of living.[9] So important is culture to one's well-being, many organisations including the Public Health Agency of Canada now consider culture to be a social determinant of

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[5] See PCH's companion *Discussion Paper on Economic Impacts of Aboriginal Cultural Industries*, Andrew Webster, Aboriginal Affairs Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage, 2007.

[6] Webster, p. 27, 2007.

[7] *Aboriginal Culture in the Digital Age*, Aboriginal Voice Cultural Working Group Paper, May 31, 2005.

[8] *Economic Contribution of Culture in Canada*. Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics, Vik Singh, Statistics Canada, Ministry of Industry, 2004.

[9] "We Are Still the Aniishnaabe Nation: Embracing Culture and Identity in Batchewana First Nation", Gayle, Broad, Stephanie Boyer & Cynthia Chataway, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 31, p. 42, Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation, 2006.

health.[10] Moreover, a unique set of principles guide relationships between individuals, communities, organizations, and, increasingly, participation in the global village. These relationships are the underpinnings of Aboriginal social and cultural life.

Ultimately, these definitions point to the relevance of *social capital* in Aboriginal cultures and societies and, by extension, to Aboriginal cultural industries. While numerous definitions exist, social capital can be defined as a "relational resource" composed of social networks, social norms and values, trust, and shared resources.[11] The Public Policy Research Initiative has concluded that social capital is also a valuable public policy tool as social ties or networks can be vital ingredients in achieving positive social outcomes such as improved health or quality of life.[12] Moreover, there is a growing call for culture to be added as a "fourth pillar" of sustainable development alongside the economic, environmental, and social pillars.[13] The idea is that culture cannot be removed from the sustainability and prosperity equations, particularly where Aboriginal people and communities are concerned.

Through this lens, Aboriginal cultural industries can therefore play a significant role in the lives and well-being of Aboriginal individuals and communities as well as in the wider Canadian society. These industries can be defined as the full expanse of activities (individual, organizational, and national) that relate to the creation/production, distribution, and consumption of culture.[14]

While the definition of cultural industries has referred historically to the performing and visual arts – and to traditional arts and crafts in an Aboriginal-specific context – contemporary understandings are much more expansive and inclusive. We wish to stress that Aboriginal cultural industries today are much more than arts and crafts based on traditional methods and materials. Rather, the totality of Aboriginal culture has expanded into the digital age and encompasses the full spectrum of media and materials available for cultural production, distribution, and consumption. For the purposes of this paper, Aboriginal cultural industries include the following:

- Visual Arts
- Performing Arts (theatre, dance)
- Sound Recording/Music
- Writing/Publishing
- Cultural Tourism
- Fashion Design
- Jewellery and Crafts

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[10] Public Health Agency of Canada, http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants
[11] *Information and Communication Technology in Aboriginal Communities in Canada: Increasing Aboriginal Social Capital*, Javier Mignone, Heather Henley, Jason Brown, John O'Neil & Wendy Ross, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council & Crossing Boundaries Research Initiative, p. 7, 2008.
[12] *Measurement of Social Capital: Reference Document for Public Policy Research, Development, and Evaluation*, PRI Project, Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool, Sandra Franke, Policy Research Initiative, 2005.
[13] "Investing in Culture: The 4th Bottom Line", Rodger Spiller and Chellie Lake, *Ethical Investor*, Issue 22, June 2003.
[14] *The Value of Aboriginal Culture for Canada and for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, Ashley Sisco and Rodney Nelson, The Conference Board of Canada, 2007.

- Film/Video/Broadcasting (TV & radio)
- New media (information and communications technologies)

While Aboriginal cultural industries exist throughout urban, rural, and northern communities, many of the larger industries (visual and performing arts, film, and broadcasting in particular) are based in urban centres where the majority of the Aboriginal population now live.[15] Certainly, rural and northern Aboriginal communities can be hubs for cultural industries such as traditional arts and crafts, cultural tourism, and, in some cases, as with Igloolik in Nunavut, film production.

Urban Aboriginal communities tend to place importance on the visual and performing arts. In urban centres, Aboriginal individuals use industry events such as plays, films, dance performances, etc. as an opportunity to build and extend their social networks while reaffirming their cultural ties. Urban Aboriginal populations are generally a diverse group for whom Aboriginal cultural industries provide the means and space for them to develop their social capital. This last point is a particularly salient one especially as the urban Aboriginal population continues to grow. The migration of Aboriginal people to cities is a relatively recent phenomenon that can result in isolation and alienation for some individuals, particularly with those who feel far removed from their culture. In creating unique environments for people to express, explore, and reinforce their culture, Aboriginal cultural industries then become critical to a person's well being.

An Emerging Framework

To fully explore the socio-cultural impacts of these industries we looked at existing research including the findings of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which determined five categories for the social importance of Aboriginal cultural industries. These include creative expression, cultural pride, cultural preservation, sense of identity and heritage, and the reflective ability of artistic cultural industries.[16]

Additionally, the Canada Council for the Arts provides some useful guidelines for a larger framework for this paper. The Council credits the arts for being at the "core of the creative life in Canada" and attributes the arts to stimulating creativity and innovation; building healthy, dynamic and attractive communities; enhancing civic engagement; contributing to liveable cities and communities and to economic development; developing understanding of differences and deepening inter-cultural respect; and, projecting an image of Canada as a creative, vibrant and cosmopolitan nation around the world.[17]

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[15] In the context of this paper, "rural and northern communities" includes First Nation reserves, Métis settlements, and Inuit communities.

[16] *National Accounts and Financial Statistics: International Measurement of the Economic and Social Importance of Culture*, John. C. Gordon and Helen Beilby-Orrin, Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007.

[17] Webster, p. 24, 2007.

Taking these findings into account and applying them to concepts emerging from the case study, the following framework emerged from which the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries will be discussed:

- Promoting identity and well-being;
- Restoring social capital and building social cohesion;
- Preserving, creating, and maintaining culture;
- Contributing to community development; and,
- Fostering civic participation[18] and public education.

It must be noted that these points are interrelated in scope and in the impact they have on Aboriginal societies and cultures. The future development of indicators in each area will help to further define this framework.

CASE STUDY: imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival

As we are well aware, cultural endeavours are central to Aboriginal people and society. Certainly, cultural industries constitute a large proportion of many Aboriginal communities' economies. One in particular, Aboriginal filmmaking, is growing at a rapid rate. Instead of viewing filmmaking as a radical new aspect of Aboriginal culture, many Aboriginal filmmakers view it simply as a cultural extension employing new technologies. A good analogy is the introduction of glass beads by Europeans which are now almost exclusively associated with traditional Aboriginal arts and crafts. Alanis Obomsawin herself has related filmmaking to the oral tradition, in essence, storytelling via a new medium. Employing our framework established above, the following case study on the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival demonstrates both the importance and the impact of cultural industries and cultural production on Aboriginal people, social capital, and society.

Background

Founded in 1998 as the Centre for Aboriginal Media, the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival began in the year 2000 and will celebrate its ninth outing in 2008. The festival is the largest international celebration of works by Indigenous peoples on the forefront of innovation in film, video, radio, and new media. Each October in Toronto, the festival presents a selection of the most compelling and distinctive Indigenous works from around the globe, with a 60% majority being made by Aboriginal Canadians. It is important to note that Aboriginal youth or first time filmmakers produce the majority of these films, which speaks to the appeal of Aboriginal cultural industries for an often marginalised population.

The festival's mission statement is as follows:

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[18] "Introduction: The Social Effects of Culture", Dick Stanley, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 31, p. 8, Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation, 2006.

> imagineNATIVE showcases, promotes, and celebrates emerging and established Canadian and international Indigenous filmmakers and media artists.
>
> imagineNATIVE is committed to dispelling stereotypical notions of Indigenous peoples through diverse media presentations from within our communities, thereby contributing to a greater understanding by audiences of Indigenous artistic expression.

The four-day imagineNATIVE festival and its annual tour (that takes selected programming to remote Indigenous communities in Ontario) fill a void in the artistic and cultural landscapes of Toronto and across Canada in which Indigenous filmmakers and media artists are often underrepresented. The festival has, in a few short years, helped to establish an Aboriginal film industry where one barely existed a decade ago. Equally as significant, the festival helps Aboriginal people overcome feelings of dispersion, alienation, and isolation by providing an urban venue to celebrate and reinforce Aboriginal culture.

Prior to imagineNATIVE, Aboriginal filmmakers in Toronto – arguably the country's centre of independent filmmaking – had few opportunities to screen their work. Only a handful of trailblazing Aboriginal producers and directors have achieved any level of recognition within the film industry or had any representation on Canadian television or screens. Toronto is a city with a knowledgeable film going public and boasts approximately 70 film festivals a year.

imagineNATIVE has grown exponentially since 2004 and audience attendance has increased dramatically: from 3,599 attendees in 2004 to 16,023 in 2007. Additionally, artist film submissions to the festival have also increased. In its early years, approximately 100 films were submitted to the festival; that number now stands at almost 400 submitted works. This point speaks to the symbiotic growth that Aboriginal artists have with Aboriginal cultural industries. That is, the festival grew because more artists were making work at the same time that more opportunities to distribute their products became available. In 2007, 104 films were shown at imagineNATIVE (59 of which were by Aboriginal Canadians) as opposed to three such films at the last Toronto International Film Festival, the continent's largest film festival.[19]

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[19] All statistics courtesy of the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, www.imaginenative.org.

Promoting Identity and Well-Being

Throughout its existence, imagineNATIVE has been host to numerous directors who have chosen film to explore and express their personal experiences or their Aboriginal identity. For Ervin Chartrand, a Winnipeg-based Ojibway filmmaker, the industry was a means to shedding light on social ills with the goal of building brighter futures. A former prison inmate, Chartrand turned his life around after taking a course that led to the production of two award-winning short films that address the humanity of Aboriginal prisoners. In his own words:

> I wanted to reach out to all the troubled youth and talking at schools wouldn't cut it, so I took a broadcasting course, not knowing what path it would take me down. Now I don't take things for granted, and learn from my life experiences, so that is why I do what I'm doing today, making films of what I know best.[20]

Aboriginal youth have played a large role in imagineNATIVE either as filmmakers or as attendees. In the case of the former, the festival gives emerging filmmakers a rare opportunity to have their work distributed to a larger public. For youth in attendance, the festival offers them an equally rare opportunity to see complex, inspiring, and diverse reflections of their lives and communities. The result, in a nutshell, has been cultural pride.

Like Chartrand, filmmaking was an opportunity to express and explore deeply personal feelings for youth filmmaker Adam Garnet Jones (Cree). As a teenager, Jones struggled with his sexuality and his mixed ethnic background. Now in his mid-twenties, Jones is a prolific artist who has made filmmaking his career of choice and credits the industry with changing his life for the better:

> Film has limitless potential to combine visual and oral traditions, broadcasting our stories into the power and prominence that they deserve. When I was in my early teens, and I started making video, it felt like I was being listened to for the first time in my life. If I hadn't found my voice, I don't know what would have happened to me.[21]

In the last few years Adam has joined the ranks of leaders in the Aboriginal film industry, including his role coordinating the 7th Generation Image Makers – a youth program dedicated to fostering the expression of Aboriginal film and visual arts. In fact, in the most recent provincial Speech from the Throne, the Lieutenant Governor recognized this achievement: "[Adam and 7th Generation] are a powerful symbol of what we in Ontario all want to see: far greater opportunities for Aboriginal youth in our province."[22]

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[20] http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/Eng/rose/chartrand_e.htm
[21] http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/Eng/rose/garnet_jones_a.htm
[22] The Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Speech from the Throne, November 29, 2007 http://www.ontla.on.ca/house-proceedings/throne-speeches/files_pdf/39-1-speech-from-the-throne_en.pdf p 12.

At the 2007 festival, *Tkaronto*, a feature film made in eight months for a budget of $20,000, was selected as the closing night film. The film's director, Shane Belcourt, used the film to explore personal questions and experiences of being Métis in Toronto. The film poignantly addressed issues of identity faced by many Aboriginal people today, particularly in urban environments. Cultural industries, therefore, can be arenas to not only explore identity, but to promote it and a greater understanding of it, as *Tkaronto* does with Métis culture and identity. Anecdotally, Métis culture is arguably one of the least understood by mainstream Canadian culture.

Not only do these examples demonstrate the diversity of Aboriginal identity, and the factors that influence it, they point to the larger power of cultural industries in directly affecting an individual's well-being and the subsequent impacts an individual's well-being might have on a community.

Restoring Social Capital and Building Social Cohesion

A key function of imagineNATIVE is to serve as a nexus point for Aboriginal artists to meet others in their field and to make contact with industry professionals from across Canada and internationally. While a primary purpose is certainly economic in nature, the festival still facilitates the building of social capital and contributes to social cohesion.[23] For Aboriginal filmmakers, there are few opportunities of this scale to join a network of individuals from a great diversity of backgrounds (both professionally and culturally). The results have been artistic collaborations, opportunities to screen work at other festivals, and films purchased for broadcast in Canada and worldwide.

Each year the festival invites domestic and international film festival programmers (including the Sundance Film Festival which has programmed numerous works from imagineNATIVE thus introducing Aboriginal Canadian filmmakers to one of the world's most significant film industry events) as well as television buyers and broadcasters. To date, imagineNATIVE has facilitated the sale of films made by Aboriginal Canadians to networks in the United States, New Zealand, France, and Germany. The festival has only been tracking sales in a formalised manner since 2006, however, estimates for sales from the 2007 festival is approximately $226,500, a more than 20% increase over the previous year.[24]

Equally as significant, the imagineNATIVE festival functions as many urban-based Aboriginal cultural industries do: as a focal point for the diverse urban Aboriginal community to gather, reinforce relationships, and build new ones. In a city as large as Toronto, Aboriginal cultural events then become critical to maintaining a person's well being. While this is true, it is also of interest to note that the majority of audience members to imagineNATIVE have been non-Aboriginal. Since 2004, festival attendance has increased a remarkable 345%. With a programming mandate that presents work that often subverts cultural misconceptions – and work that is presented from Aboriginal perspectives – the festival serves to educate and enrich its audiences and, through word-

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[23] This is reflected by the audience and festival attendance.

[24] Business transactions in the film industry can often take one to two years to complete so this figure has the potential to increase.

of-mouth and through sales, the national social fabric. In other words, the festival has become one of the largest annual Aboriginal cultural events in Toronto that promotes cultural awareness and understanding.

Preserving, Creating, and Maintaining Culture

The imagineNATIVE festival and the filmmaking industry also function as venues whereby elements of Aboriginal culture are preserved and promoted. As we are all too well aware, language preservation and promotion is becoming increasingly important as all but three of Canada's Aboriginal languages are threatened with extinction. In the world of Aboriginal filmmaking young filmmakers, such as Cree director Kevin Burton, have chosen to place language the centre of their creativity. Originally from Gods Lake Narrows in northern Manitoba, Burton, who grew up fluently bi-lingual, has used the Cree language as the basis of his latest award-winning film.[25] Rather than provide a didactic work, Burton employs experimental film techniques to remind the viewers that the language is as vital in contemporary times as it has been historically.

Burton's film is but one example. Modern Aboriginal filmmakers are not only preserving culture but they are also creating new cultural representations through documentary, drama, radio, and, in the case of Cree artist Kent Monkman, through a variety of media. Monkan's art has been generating a lot of buzz in Canadian art circles largely due to his artistic alter ego: Miss Chief Eagle Testikle, a brash, brazen Aboriginal drag queen. Through film, performance art, and visual art Monkman's persona is a playful – but powerful – commentary on the romanticised "Indian" that is so prevalent in pop culture and, in the process, cleverly subverts long-standing misconceptions about Aboriginal people.

Both Burton and Monkman embody the essence of imagineNATIVE: the festival presents a much-needed contemporary view of Aboriginal people - their aspirations and issues - from Aboriginal perspectives. It is Aboriginal culture expressed and created in a specific medium. For the majority of its non-Aboriginal attendees, the festival becomes a venue to hear these new and divergent perspectives and thereby learn about Aboriginal culture.

Contributing to Community Development

In the Aboriginal community, cultural industries are central in developing and promoting healthy role models, a foundation for ensuring brighter futures for Aboriginal youth. In a country largely devoid of positive Aboriginal role models in mainstream society, Aboriginal cultural industries such as imagineNATIVE offer Aboriginal youth numerous opportunities to find them. A direct parallel can be made here with marginalised black youth populations in North American cities for whom black athletes are held in esteem as role models. As with these athletes, Aboriginal musicians such as rock singer Lucie Idlout (Inuit) or Aboriginal actors such as Lorne Cardinal (Cree) – one of the only First Nations actors who appear

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[25] *Nikamowin (Song)*, Kevin Burton, 2007.

regularly in a Canadian TV series – are the role models who inspire Aboriginal youth.[26] imagineNATIVE gives youth immediate access to these role models, either in person or via its screenings and musical performances. The impact of these role models on the development of Aboriginal youth cannot be overlooked. Without them, Aboriginal youth would have few visible role models to aspire to or who would help guide them through the early stages of exploring future careers.

Not only that, Aboriginal artists have become much needed leaders in urban, rural, and northern Aboriginal communities. Shirley Cheechoo (Cree) is a fitting example. Born in 1952, Cheechoo turned to filmmaking relatively later in life, in 1998, after working as an actress since the 1980s. Each of Cheechoo's films have screened at imagineNATIVE, including *Bearwalker*, a feature film she produced, directed, and starred in, a first for an Aboriginal woman. While still producing her own films, Cheechoo has also taken on a significant leadership position in Manitoulin Island, Ontario where she founded the De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Company and the Weengushk Film Institute. Through these two groundbreaking reserve-based cultural industries, Cheechoo passes on her knowledge of cultural industries while providing the opportunities for local Aboriginal youth to flourish and develop their own cultural expressions by giving them practical skills in the film and theatre industries.

Additionally, the impact of imagineNATIVE on the broader Aboriginal film industry and community has been significant. With CRTC-mandated diversity standards Canadian broadcasters have a real need for work made by Aboriginal Canadian filmmakers and that showcases Aboriginal talent. imagineNATIVE has risen to the plate to become an annual stop for broadcasters including the CBC, CTV, and Global to meet with Aboriginal Canadian producers and directors. The same broadcasters have often served as mentors to the emerging Aboriginal film industry, including providing Aboriginal youth with training and employment opportunities in the mainstream film and television industries.

Fostering Civic Participation & Public Education

Civic participation, in the context of this discussion paper, means not only engaging a population (either Aboriginal or otherwise) in Aboriginal cultural industries, but it also includes a healthy level of public education and knowledge transfer. In the context of imagineNATIVE, this latter point can be illustrated clearly with the large number of non-Aboriginal people who attend the festival's screenings. This is a vital point in addressing civic participation: people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds converge at imagineNATIVE for a shared experience centred around Aboriginal cultural expressions. Moreover, civic participation also manifests through the festival's donor community and through community support of the festival's initiatives.

Collaborations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and organisations have helped facilitate the impact that culture can have on the larger society. In 2007 the imagineNATIVE festival collaborated with the Royal Ontario Museum on an exhibition

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[26] Lorne Cardinal is a regular cast member of CTV's *Corner Gas*.

of contemporary Aboriginal art displayed alongside historical objects in the museum's collection. While this collaboration helped build Aboriginal human capital in visual arts curating, the underlying intent dovetailed with a recent revolution in North American museums: changing the perception of certain historical Aboriginal objects such as carved walrus horns or porcupine quill baskets from "artefacts" to "art." The impact is a subtle, yet profound one that elevates Aboriginal art to that of its European counterparts which have long enjoyed that status.

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS ON ABORIGINAL AND MAINTREAM COMMUNITIES

In regards to the numerous socio-cultural contributions to Aboriginal individuals and communities, it is clear that the impacts of cultural industries are inter-connected. Ultimately each points to the larger renewal or restoration of social capital and, by extension, to an improvement in an individual's or community's quality of life.[27] However, as Andrew Webster states in his companion discussion paper, it should be cautioned that cultural industries are not a "panacea to all the ills which affect Aboriginal communities and societies."

In the sections below we use our emerging framework to discuss additional impacts that Aboriginal cultural industries can have on Aboriginal communities and on mainstream Canadian society. While the case study has helped to iterate some of the impacts, this section applies the framework more generally towards Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Promoting Identity and Well-Being

The growth of Aboriginal cultural industries has allowed for greater representation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists across Canada. It is important to make the distinction here between the three Aboriginal groups as the diversity in cultural industries – and the platforms that distribute them – has allowed each to assert their individual and community's sense of identity. The result has not only been a sense of personal cultural pride, but also greater awareness of the cultural distinctiveness of Aboriginal people amongst the mainstream Canadian public.

The socio-cultural benefits are also apparent on Aboriginal individuals and communities. Not only does new media and technology offer new venues for the distribution of traditional teachings and other cultural elements, but evidence speaks to the power that cultural industries have in reducing suicide rates. In those communities where Aboriginal culture has been intentionally nurtured and promoted, youth suicide rates are either nil or at national averages.[28] This is in stark contrast to other communities with few-to-no

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[27] Webster, p. 27, 2007.

[28] "Cultural Continuity as a Moderator of Suicide Risk Among Canada's First Nations", Michael J. Chandler & Christopher E. Lalonde, *The Mental Health of Canadian Aboriginal Peoples: Transformations, Identity, and Community*. University of British Columbia Press, p. 2.

cultural industries that have suicide rates as high as ten times the national average.[29] This phenomenon is illustrated in the Nunavut town of Igloolik where the award-winning film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* was shot by Isuma Productions, the country's northernmost film production company also responsible for *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. Employing and engaging the majority of the community for one year, the socio-cultural implications on the well-being of locals were dramatic: for the first time in many years residents could remember, no one committed suicide.[30]

Aboriginal cultural industries have a scope of impact across Canada and beyond. As we referenced earlier, the Canada Council credits cultural industries with "deepening inter-cultural respect" and "projecting an image of Canada as a creative, vibrant and cosmopolitan nation." [31] While historically, Aboriginal contributions to Canada have been largely overlooked in the mainstream, today the opportunities present themselves to more deeply inform or even recast Canadian identity.

The 2006 exhibition of artist Norval Morrisseau at the National Gallery of Canada illustrates this point. Morrisseau –known popularly as the "Picasso of the North" – made history not only because he brought the Woodland style of Aboriginal artistic expression to the world, but also because this show was the first major solo exhibition of a First Nations artist at the country's premier gallery in its 126-year history. This is a salient point not because it was a long overdue acknowledgement of a major Canadian (and not simply "Aboriginal") artist, but rather it was confirmation that Morrisseau is a central figure in the country's artistic canon. The exhibition was a success. The more than 40,000 visitors quadrupled original projections and attendance was three times the norm for that period. In a nutshell, more Canadians and international visitors were exposed to his work and, thereby, given the opportunity to learn more about the diverse fabric of Canadian art through an Aboriginal lens.

Restoring Social Capital and Building Social Cohesion

Cultural industries create spaces for Aboriginal people to extend their social networks within and beyond Aboriginal communities. In fact, these industries – from performing arts to publishing to broadcasting – are essential to restoring Aboriginal social capital largely because of the spatial diversity and mobility of Aboriginal people and communities. As we have mentioned, Aboriginal cultural industries are literal or virtual meeting places that facilitate the transfer and reinforcement of culture, particularly in urban centres where the majority of the Aboriginal population now live. Without them many Aboriginal people would not have access to cultural products that speak to their shared culture or personal experiences. Furthermore, as the case study illustrated, in creating a collective cultural experience for Aboriginal people, cultural industries also help address contemporary issues that can emerge from migration to urban centres.

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[29] Ibid.
[30] http://atanarjuat.com/production/filmaking.php
[31] Webster, p. 24, 2007.

The proliferation of Aboriginal media outlets further extends this reach. Aside from national broadcasters such as Aboriginal Voices Radio (AVR) and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), numerous community newspapers thrive in each region of Canada that report on news that is often omitted by other news sources. Add to this mix Aboriginal interest magazines, such as *SPIRIT Magazine* and the youth-run *Redwire*, and the proliferation of web-based social networking sites (not the least of which, Facebook which has numerous Aboriginal social groups, as well as the Aboriginal Youth Network, which contains social, cultural and health applications), then it is clear to see how these networks are created, reinforced, and expanded.[32] What these media outlets provide, aside from an Aboriginal perspective, is the rare opportunity to see themselves reflected in the media either in television shows, documentaries, or news items.

We would like to emphasise that institutions such as AVR and APTN have significant impacts on social cohesion. Both broadcasters were trailblazers in their respective industries by becoming, respectively, the first national Aboriginal radio and television networks. By occupying such a visible public space, these broadcasters ushered Aboriginal stories and perspectives to an unparalleled level of visibility and accessibility in Canada. For Aboriginal people, the networks are reflective of their realities and for non-Aboriginal people they provide opportunities for greater understanding and awareness.

Preserving, Creating, and Maintaining Culture

Undoubtedly, a key benefit of Aboriginal cultural industries continues to be the impacts it has on the promotion and retention of Aboriginal cultures. Often times the means to preservation or renewal have been groundbreaking.

If we look at the case of Isuma Productions once again, the films produced by this company have all been historical in nature. The filmmakers have made it a priority to be historically faithful to actual events and to Inuit culture in all aspects of production, including the actors' costumes and film props. As a result, there has been a renaissance of traditional Inuit skills and technology. Tool and clothing making skills that were once threatened to die with the elders have been passed on to younger generations who make the culturally faithful props for filming.

Similarly, the world of publishing is promoting language preservation. Nominated for a Governor General's award for fiction in 2005, Aboriginal writer Joseph Boyden's novel *Three Day Road* is currently being translated into Cree by Penguin Books. On the publishing front, Canada also boasts a handful of Aboriginal book publishing companies – including Theytus Books in British Columbia and Kegedonce Press in Ontario – that carry scores of fiction and non-fiction books by Aboriginal authors, providing a distribution point for works written in Aboriginal languages and in English.

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[32] The Aboriginal Youth Network website promotes healthy living from an Aboriginal perspective and engages youth by promoting information and discussion on topics such as traditions, sexuality, and skills development. Its holistic approach targets the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional aspects of Aboriginal youth.

Contributing to Community Development

As we illustrated in the case study, Shirley Cheechoo has become a leader in the Aboriginal cultural industries through her filmmaking. Cheechoo has also been recognised for her contributions to the arts at the 2008 National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, an annual celebration of Aboriginal achievement in various categories from cultural heritage to media. Presented by the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF), the awards have become a yearly staple on Canadian television and an institution in the national psyche of Aboriginal people. NAAF's intention is to raise awareness of the innumerable contributions made by Aboriginal people working in multiple industries, but also to create role models for Aboriginal youth. The awards show is a polished, inspirational event that acknowledges the existing and emerging leaders of Aboriginal society. Moreover, the Foundation is the second largest financial contributor to the education of Aboriginal youth after the federal government.

As more Aboriginal cultural products are produced and distributed across a variety of industries, further discussion surrounding intellectual and cultural property rights will become increasingly urgent. Intellectual property rights are already complex and can become more challenging when issues of collective, or community-based, rights are brought forward. Such is the case with the Inuit *amauti*. A woman's parka with a hood designed to carry a child, the *amauti*, worn traditionally and in a cultural context can reveal a woman's home community, her age and status, or relate to a specific job.[33] Through proactive community consultations and knowledge training, Inuit women are collectively trying to develop a system of authenticity – while navigating the complex world of intellectual property rights – that will protect the rights of the maker and the *amauti*'s place in Inuit society. In other words, the plight to protect the *amauti* is empowering Inuit community members through the development of skills relevant to their culture and to the global arena.

Aboriginal and mainstream cultural industries can also instil a sense of pride in one's Aboriginal identity while passing on practical skills and training. In this sense, cultural industries can function as zones of learning. In 2001 the CRTC began to impose licensing expectations for television broadcasters to reflect the ethnic reality of Canadian society in front of and behind the camera.[34] In the case of the latter, many major broadcasters in television and radio, including the CBC and Standard Radio have Aboriginal-specific training and mentoring programmes designed to build human capacity and expand the diversity of the industry behind-the-scenes.

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[33] *Appropriate Use: What Have Inuit Women Learned?* Phillip Bird, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, Aboriginal Affairs Branch, 2007.
[34] *Review of the Regulatory Framework for Broadcasting Services in Canada: Final Report*, Laurence J.E. Dundar and Christian Leblanc, Canadian Radio-Television Commission, p. 249, 2007.

On a related note, *Moccasin Flats*, the first Canadian television series entirely produced by Aboriginal talent, employed a creative tactic to engage inner city youth in Regina. Big Soul Productions, the company behind the series, utilised public funds to create positions for 40 local Aboriginal youth to work behind the scenes and in front of the camera.[35] This innovative training system not only aided in creating a realistic portrayal of the urban Aboriginal community in Regina, but it also provided a unique and valuable opportunity for these youth to focus their energies in a community facing numerous socio-economic issues including large gang populations.

Fostering Civic Participation and Public Education

According to Dick Stanley, civic participation is the "reverse side of the coin" to community development.[36] Through an increased capacity to act together, a community – whether Aboriginal or not – can achieve remarkable goals. Igloolik, Nunavut – home to Isuma Productions – again provides a significant example of civic participation. One of Canada's northernmost communities, Igloolik normally has a 60% unemployment rate and ten times the national suicide rate.[37] The community came together in an unprecedented way the year *Atanarjuat* was filmed in Igloolik. We have illustrated the remarkable impacts the film had on the community's health by drastically reducing the suicide rates – and its role in preserving traditional Inuit skills as mentioned above – but in addition approximately 80 jobs were created and $1.5 million was injected into the local economy.[38]

The proliferation of national Aboriginal media outlets can also contribute vastly to civic participation and education. Not only does an industry leader such as the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network create a space for training, it is also a place where daily news from an Aboriginal perspective is made available. For Aboriginal people and all Canadians, APTN is a source for information that is not readily available – or non-existent – through mainstream broadcasters.

On another note, while knowledge of Aboriginal history and aspirations might not be well-known with non-Aboriginal Canadians, evidence suggests a desire to learn more. The 2004 Ipsos-Reid survey on Public Views Regarding Aboriginal Peoples indicates that 77% of Canadians believe they can learn from Aboriginal culture, heritage, and the unique relationship Aboriginal people have with the land. Moreover, 74% of Canadians agreed that Aboriginal culture, language and artistic expression contribute to Canadian society.[39] Aboriginal cultural industries provide this opportunity.

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[35] http://www.moccasinflats.com/media.html
[36] Stanley, p. 13.
[37] *A Proposed Toolkit for Aboriginal Cultural Industries*, SynParSys Consulting Inc., p. 7.
[38] Ibid.
[39] "In Your Opinion…", *Public Opinion on Aboriginal Languages, Cultures and Other Aboriginal Issues*, Canadian Heritage, Aboriginal Affairs Branch, 2006.

SOME KEY CHALLENGES FACING ABORIGINAL CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Funding

Aboriginal cultural industries are in a constant process of seeking funding. Many of these industries rely heavily on government project grants to fund their overhead and the production and distribution of their products. In providing a broad overview of the characteristics of Aboriginal cultural industries, the Cultural Human Resources Council identified key characteristics of Canada's overall cultural sector including a significant proportion of independent/self-employed workers, a significant proportion of not-for-profit organisations, a significant proportion of volunteers, and low remuneration for a highly-educated workforce. The ensuing picture is of an industry that is sitting on financial fragile ground.

Passing of Elders

While new media and technologies provide avenues for the creation of new cultural products, many Aboriginal cultural industries – and certainly Aboriginal individuals and communities – are faced with the reality of losing generations of knowledge as older generations pass on. As a result there is a sense of urgency amongst Aboriginal communities to ensure precious information is recorded but more importantly, that it is passed on in an appropriate cultural context. However, to do so requires human and financial resources as well the necessary infrastructure given that many Aboriginal elders live in rural and northern communities away from the cities where Aboriginal cultural industries proliferate.

Protection & Appropriate Use

While the implications of Aboriginal cultural industries can certainly result in greater understanding and social cohesion in mainstream Canadian society, there is also the significant risk of the misuse or misappropriation of Aboriginal culture. The importance of cultural and traditional knowledge protection is a fundamental one to Aboriginal people in Canada. The discussion is at the forefront of many Aboriginal cultural industries, not least of which involve traditional arts, crafts, and knowledge. As the example of the Inuit *amauti* demonstrates, Aboriginal people across the country are engaged in a daily struggle to protect individual and collective property rights amidst a global setting where these rights are increasingly threatened.

This struggle is witnessed throughout Canada, especially in matters related to the protection of traditional knowledge. Some communities have devised creative solutions often with the use of information and communication technologies. For example, the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch in eastern Canada is an Aboriginal-run board that established governance structures for culturally appropriate processes and outputs for using Mi'kmaq

knowledge.[40] PCH's companion paper on the Final Report on the Appropriate Use Roundtable provides a valuable starting point from which to develop culturally-appropriate strategies.[41] Whichever system is devised, Aboriginal peoples must play a central role in the ownership, control, access, and protection of their cultural information.

Information Gaps

As numerous reports corroborate, data on the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries is extremely limited. While anecdotal evidence exists, quantitative data is almost non-existent. As a result, the study of these impacts is greatly impeded. Most striking, Statistics Canada's Guide to Culture Statistics, which was established in 1972, does not address Aboriginal cultural industries directly. As a result, little to no information is being gathered from which to assess the actual impact of these industries on various individuals or communities.

Likewise, aside from a few provincial Aboriginal tourism associations, few if any Aboriginal cultural industries have created associations to promote their products or to expand their reach. As a result, seeking information on these industries is a piecemeal venture that could result in the oversight of significant examples of socio-cultural impact. In other words, no formalised information gathering system is in place to assess these industries' important role in Aboriginal and mainstream society.

MOVING FORWARD

It is clear that Aboriginal cultural industries can have immediate and lasting impacts on Aboriginal individuals, on Aboriginal communities, and on the mainstream Canadian society. However, the depth of the socio-cultural impacts will not be known until the necessary steps are taken to adequately understand these industries' true role in the fabric of our country. Following are broad recommendations aimed at PCH for moving forward in developing policy and information gathering systems in the interests of Aboriginal cultural industries.

Policy Drivers and Areas to Enable Aboriginal Cultural Industry

Changing Demographics

The latest Census gives proof that the Aboriginal population continues to grow at a more rapid rate and is much younger than the national average. Additionally, a significant issue that will warrant future attention is the rise of an Aboriginal middle class, particularly in urban areas where the majority of the population now live. While poverty levels and poor standards of living still plague the majority of Aboriginal Canadians, there is a growing population of Aboriginal families who are decidedly middle class. What's more, the children of the first generations of urban Aboriginal professionals are growing up in cities

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[40] Aboriginal Voice Cultural Working Group, p. 12.
[41] Appropriate Use Roundtable, Final Report, Department of Canadian Heritage, November 2007.

not ever having faced the hardships of reserve life that their parents' or grandparents' generations might have faced.[42]

The implications of this class and generation will be profound, particularly where Aboriginal cultural industries are concerned. Greater wealth can mean greater support and consumption of Aboriginal cultural products. The result, we can assume, will be a stronger and more financially resilient industry base that will have spin off benefits for communities across the country.

Fostering Greater Public Education

Greater awareness of the positive impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries will enhance an appreciation these industries amongst non-Aboriginal Canadians. PCH should consider strategies and policies that would target non-Aboriginal populations with the intent of increasing the profile of Aboriginal cultural industries for mainstream consumption. A greater appetite for Aboriginal cultural products would help to add stability amongst the industries.

Increasing Aboriginal-Specific Cultural Funding

Multi-level public funding from arts councils and departments are a lifeline for Aboriginal cultural industries. Strategies should be developed that not only looks at securing operational funding for industries in all sectors, but also examines strategies to assist in developing a more diverse and stable funding base for the Aboriginal individuals, organisations, and communities that operate within these industries.

Preserving & Promoting Culture & Language

The preservation and promotion of Aboriginal cultures and languages are among the handful of issues at the forefront of Aboriginal societies today. Currently, many initiatives of differing scale, funding, and origin are being implemented across the country to varying degrees of success. PCH could consider accessing existing federal government strategies and/or facilitate a best practices study to determine which models or preservation and promotion work best for Aboriginal cultural industries.

Protection of Culture and Knowledge

Many, if not most, Aboriginal cultural industries are faced with issues of cultural authenticity and the protection of individual and collective property rights. While various Aboriginal cultural industries have established their own systems of authentication and protection, assistance in developing these strategies and systems is not readily available. PCH should consider strategies to assist Aboriginal cultural industries to develop systems that work within their particular fields.

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[42] *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, eds., Policy Research Initiative, 2003.

Developing Strategies for Partnerships & Collaborations

Collaborations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, communities, and organisations can have far reaching implications. Not only do they allow human capacity to be built, they also increase the profile of cultural industries in both Aboriginal and mainstream societies. The results can have long last effects. For example, galleries and federal bodies could collaborate with Inuit groups to devise ways to protect the *amauti*. Similar endeavours could extend to many facets of Aboriginal cultural production.

Recommended Areas for Prioritizing Evidence Gathering

Securing Government Commitment

Not only will public resources be necessary in future information gathering endeavours, leadership will also be essential. Securing federal and provincial buy-in is critical, but so too must leaders in each sector of Aboriginal cultural industries begin the process of measuring the socio-cultural impacts in their fields.

Developing a Measurement System

An Aboriginal-specific system of measuring the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries would be central in assessing their true contributions. Such a system would need to take into account the ethnic and geographical disparities that exist amongst Aboriginal people in Canada and the industries that function alongside them.

PCH could develop strategic partnerships with Aboriginal cultural industries and with the Canadian Framework for Culture Statistics (part of Statistics Canada's Culture Statistics Program) to develop such a system. Existing resources and infrastructure at the CFCS could be employed by PCH to avoid "reinventing the wheel."

Based on the framework of this discussion paper, a measurement system could develop key benchmarks in each area to generate data to capture and assess the real socio-cultural impacts of these industries. For example, some measurement tools might include:

- Promoting identity and well-being
    - Compiling demographic data on Aboriginal people connected to cultural industries
    - Monitoring the numbers of Aboriginal artists and/or cultural industry workers
    - Exploring the correlations between areas with strong cultural industries, strengthened identity, and increased well-being
    - Measuring the positive changes to Aboriginal community health (for example, a decrease in suicide rates)

- Restoring social capital and building social cohesion
  - Growth in number of Aboriginal cultural industries
  - The number of Aboriginal cultural industry associations

- Preserving, creating, and maintaining culture
  - An increase in language speakers
  - Development of strategies to protect and authenticate Aboriginal cultural products

- Contributing to community development
  - Tracking Aboriginal artists who benefit from cultural industries
  - Tracking the growth/progress of cultural industries in rural and northern communities

- Fostering civic participation and public education
  - Greater non-Aboriginal participation in and consumption of Aboriginal cultural industries
  - Greater Aboriginal community involvement in Aboriginal cultural industries
  - Greater mainstream awareness of Aboriginal culture

Developing a National Registry

A national registry of Aboriginal cultural industries – as suggested by Webster in his companion paper – would assist greatly in future information gathering initiatives. Webster suggests six rationales for such a listing including faster response to needs, better understanding of Aboriginal cultural industries, more responsive programming, improved co-ordination and communication, an appropriate role for the federal government, and the promotion of Aboriginal cultural industries.[43]

Rural/Northern vs. Urban Cultural Production & Consumption (Market Analysis)

Ultimately, while the socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal cultural industries are deeply significant, they do not exist in a vacuum. As we have mentioned, these impacts go hand-in-hand with the economic benefits these industries offer. As a result, PCH should consider a market analysis that incorporates the socio-cultural and economic production and consumption habits of Aboriginal people and communities in rural, northern, and urban environments. This information will help PCH and better understand these industries and the needs and aspirations that face them.

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[43] *Discussion Paper on a National Listing of Aboriginal Cultural Industries*, Andrew Webster, Aboriginal Affairs Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage, 2007.

CONCLUSION

Cultural industries are thriving amongst Aboriginal communities in Canada and continue to grow in numbers and reach. This not only speaks to the need amongst Aboriginal community members to see their lives and experiences reflected, but it also speaks to the growth of Aboriginal artists, the number of venues to distribute their works, and a diverse base of patrons across Canada and internationally who have an appreciation and appetite for their work. The result has been numerous socio-cultural impacts on Aboriginal individuals, on communities, and on mainstream Canadian society. While the absence of formalised measurement tools has resulted in a dearth of qualitative and quantitative data, the current dynamics of Aboriginal populations presents valuable opportunities for PCH to develop strategies to capitalise and enhance on the positive effects of these cultural industries. This is all the more timely when considering the growth of the youth population, the number of youth entering cultural industries, and the migration of Aboriginal people to urban environments.

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