

In Praise of Small Cities: Cultural Life in Kamloops, BC

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Abstract: This article demonstrates how cultural participation contributes to collective understanding in a small city, using Kamloops, British Columbia, as a case study. It examines how pools of social and cultural capital give purpose and shape to the arts and heritage community and considers two related variables: the geographical and social proximity of people, organizations, and neighbourhoods, and the recognition that various kinds of collaboration may determine or constitute collective activity. The article addresses these factors by initially identifying several arts and heritage activities and by focusing on choral societies to further demonstrate how individual interests and collective understanding converge in specific forms of cultural expression. The article concludes by recommending several directions for comparative urban research based on the contours of cultural life in a small city. This article features online (<http://www.cjc-online.ca>) photographs of cultural works.

Résumé : Cette étude souligne de quelle façon la participation culturelle contribue à la compréhension collective dans la petite ville de Kamloops en Colombie Britannique, utilisée ici comme sujet de recherche. On y voit comment certains réservoirs de capital social et culturel donnent un sens et un contexte à la communauté des arts et du patrimoine et on y présente deux variantes connexes : la proximité géographique et sociale des personnes, des organisations et des quartiers, et le fait que différents types de collaboration peuvent définir ou constituer une activité collective. Cet article considère ces prémisses, d'abord en identifiant plusieurs activités dans le secteur des arts et du patrimoine et ensuite en portant son attention plus particulièrement aux sociétés de chorales afin de démontrer de quelle façon les intérêts personnels et la compréhension collective se rejoignent dans certaines formes d'expression culturelle. La conclusion propose plusieurs voies de recherche urbaine comparative, basées sur la configuration de la vie culturelle d'une petite ville. Cet article inclut des photos d'œuvres d'art disponibles sur le site web de la revue : <http://www.cjc-online.ca>.

Keywords: Cities; Cultural policy analysis

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Introduction

Research, writing, policymaking, and advocacy about culture have exploded during the past 15 years. Whether measured by increased attention from all levels of government or by the growth of scholarship, the interest in culture as process, system, and product is undeniable. In the case of culture in the urban milieu, the emphasis is decidedly metro-centric, the focus resting primarily on major and large cities. Yet what bodes for small places? More specifically, what bodes for small cities that are not tiny enough to be considered or appreciated as rural, are not tourist destinations, and are sufficiently autonomous to be distinguished from large and dense urban centres, regardless of whether they are located in a remote region or in the shadow of a metropolis? Responding to this situation, university researchers and community partners in Kamloops—a “small” city of about 80,000 in the southern interior of British Columbia—were involved during the past five years in “The Cultural Future of Small Cities.” This multifaceted research project explored why and how the arts and heritage flourish in small cities with populations between 50,000 and 150,000.¹ Research areas included urban planning, local history and heritage, the linking of cultural resources to social development, and the study of popular representations of Kamloops. The project also explored related issues such as migration to and from small cities, and the development of cultural indicators for the small-size version of the livable city.

Using this work as a principal reference point, this article demonstrates how cultural participation contributes to collective understanding within the context of a small city. Most notably, pools of social and cultural capital give purpose and shape to the arts and heritage community yet are also abundant in other sectors, including recreation, social services, and education. This has led researchers in this small-cities project to also call attention to a *culture of participation* that stretches across the city and is a key ingredient of cohesion and understanding (Dubinsky, 2005a). Yet one should not assume a straightforward correlation. Two other variables are equally critical: the geographical and social proximity of people, organizations, and neighbourhoods, and the recognition that various kinds of collaboration may determine or constitute collective activity, cultural or otherwise.

The article addresses these matters in four ways. First, it takes the reader on a brief tour of “The Cultural Future of Small Cities” project, while conveying the specific look, feel, and sound of Kamloops to focus attention on the interplay of social capital and other community forces. Second, it looks specifically at choral societies and groups in Kamloops to further demonstrate how individual interests and collective understanding converge in a cultural activity that continues to be thoroughly rooted in the community. Third, by introducing two community-based museum projects in other cities into this ongoing focus on Kamloops, the article looks at the importance of geographical and social proximity for nurturing expression and understanding through cultural organizations. Fourth, and with further reference to Kamloops, the article speculates about the premium now placed on collaboration as a means for setting and meeting policy objectives and for providing services and resources, cultural or otherwise, in communities large and small.

Small minds, small sizes

Initially, something must be said about the focus on the small. For many—and this includes researchers, scholars, and policymakers—attention to the small can appear downright nostalgic: a romantic attempt to recover community and cling to parochialism in the face of increasing cultural diversity. To remain small can be seen as a concession to one's worst fears about the "other," and to a corresponding need for familiarity and security within a very defined and manageable location. There are also those who frown upon a "small town mentality," considering it to be an anachronism now that the world has become "a global village"—to use the ubiquitous term coined by Marshall McLuhan some 35 years ago. It is thus advisable not to over-romanticize the small, especially since history has taught us that some of the world's worst aggressions began in small places.

That said, and as Mary Douglas (1986) points out, small entities—neighbourhoods, villages, towns, and small cities—are assumed to provide a greater climate of trust, cooperation, and accountability owing to the closeness of people and resources. Yet she questions these assumptions about scale, noting that institutional expectations, structures, and pressures apply regardless of size. Nevertheless, there is something authentic, if not exactly comforting, about a small place—what Lucy Lippard (1997) refers to as "the lure of the local." This *feeling* that there is something "authentic" about a small city is also found in neighbourhoods of large cities, many of which are increasingly defined by ethnicity, race, and language, and which often operate as if they were small autonomous communities. On the other hand, many large cities are rapidly becoming larger either because of the influx of new residents from other countries and smaller places, or as a result of municipal amalgamations that, for many individuals and groups, have made small cities appear more livable and desirable.²

Pools of social and cultural capital

So where is Kamloops, and why did it become a focal point for a study of cultural development? As noted initially, Kamloops is located in the southern interior of British Columbia in the Thompson-Nicola region. It is four hours northeast of Vancouver, eight hours west of Calgary, and two hours north of Kelowna—a city in the Okanagan Valley with which it is often compared or confused. Until very recently, the economy of Kamloops—like much of British Columbia's outside the metropolitan regions of Vancouver and Victoria—was dominated by resource industries such as forestry and mining. Within the last 20 years, and consistent with provincial and national trends, Kamloops has become more driven by a service economy in which educational and health institutions are its principal employers (MacKinnon and Nelson, 2005).

Contrary to what one might expect, Kamloops' relative isolation remains one of its virtues, for at least in the case of the arts and heritage, large cities are too distant to satisfy an ongoing craving for the cultural. But isolation is not the sole condition for the sustainability of local arts and culture, and there is a high degree of involvement that is attributable to more than just the city's geographical location. Indeed, the principal impetus for "The Cultural Future of Small Cities"

project was the range and extent of cultural activity in Kamloops, anchored by four organizations—the Kamloops Art Gallery, Western Canada Theatre, the Kamloops Symphony, and the Kamloops Museum and Archives. What distinguishes Kamloops from cities of comparable size throughout Canada that also have art galleries, museums, and performing-arts organizations is that all four are financially stable, have tremendous community following, and have reputations for programming and ingenuity that, in many instances, extend beyond the city. This may seem like boosterism rather than cultural analysis, but what must be emphasized is the *degree* of activity: activity that also includes more than 30 other arts groups and organizations (Janzen & Associates, 2003), a university whose presence is felt culturally, and the involvement of an increasingly diverse population.

What therefore are some of the initial cultural aspects of the small city, as exemplified by Kamloops, that contribute to a sense of community? To begin with, consider the North and South Thompson rivers that flow through the city. For anyone living on Canada's coasts or in the Great Lakes region, this waterway seems small by comparison. Yet the terrain of Kamloops is semi-arid desert; it's a geological anomaly in the south central interior of British Columbia, which looks like it belongs next to Arizona or New Mexico. Water is, therefore, greatly valued, and has a historical legacy and symbolic authority. The name Kamloops is of Secwepemc First Nation origin and means "meeting of the waters"; a local radio station proudly and loudly calls itself "The River," and the University College of the Cariboo, having recently received full university status, is now Thompson Rivers University. The river also mirrors the city's networks, resources, and amenities, for Kamloops is distinguished by various and intersecting pools of social and cultural capital relative to its size and rather isolated location.

First, widespread voluntary participation is an integral part of community activity, cultural or otherwise. Kamloops for example, has five Rotary Clubs, including one that began in 2003, which is a sizeable number relative to the population. This is but one confirmation of the persistence of traditional forms of social capital, such as the service club, as noted by Putnam (2000). More specifically on the arts side, contributions of time and money go beyond board involvement or regular donations. In the case of the Kamloops Symphony, for example, not all of its professional members are resident players, but when they come to perform in concerts they are billeted at homes throughout the city. This act of hospitality and generosity results in additional interchanges between the musicians and members of the community while reducing symphony expenses. On the heritage side, Kamloops was one of the first places to be engaged at the local, regional, and national level with the heritage fairs program of Historica, a national organization whose aim is to promote the study and appreciation of Canadian history, especially among schoolchildren. Volunteers, including school principals, teachers, parents, and other citizens, have played an instrumental role in this program. In 2001, upwards of 300 were involved when the city hosted the national fair for schoolchildren from across Canada.

Complementing voluntary activity is engagement by the major arts organizations in a range of local initiatives while maintaining professional standards and reputations. Each sees no incompatibility between community responsibilities and professional commitments to their disciplines. The Kamloops Art Gallery, for example, was involved in the development of the publicly supported Beattie Elementary School of the Arts, which opened in 2004, and like the symphony and theatre company, it also offers an array of programs for all grades and classes in the local school district. These ties and commitments exist in most large and small cities across the country but again, what is significant about Kamloops is the *abundance* of them.

Also significant is that these pools of social and cultural capital are long-standing, providing continuity for cultural expression and participation. Consider, for example, the reflections expressed by Donna McAlear, a former director of the Kamloops Art Gallery, when the gallery celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2003: “I recall the generosity of the many volunteers who left their mark on the Gallery’s forward-moving achievements. Community volunteers will always be an essential core of public galleries, no matter what professional changes the institution is experiencing” (pp. 3-4).

In addition to the long-standing activities of the major organizations, the history of smaller groups and associations is exemplary, as in the case of the Kamloops Film Society. It screens films not likely to be shown in commercial venues or subject to limited runs and, while the society now uses the resources of the Film Circuit—a distribution arm of the Toronto Film Festival—it has consistently and successfully done for almost 30 years what this recently developed circuit now offers to many small communities across Canada. A highlight is the society’s annual film festival in March. Filmmaker Atom Egoyan, who made his film *The Sweet Hereafter* in the region, was a guest at the festival in 1998. He describes the enthusiasm that greeted him in Kamloops in a diary he kept of his trip to the Academy Awards, which included a stop in Kamloops:

I am here for the opening night of the Kamloops International Film Festival (featuring nine films) and the excitement at the Paramount Theatre is extraordinary. No one can believe I’m here. Why would a double Oscar nominee be in this small BC town weeks before the most glamorous event in the world? To thank the district, that’s why. This is the area where the film was set (in a fictitious town called Sam Dent) and where most of the exteriors were shot. After I introduce the film to this insanely pumped-up crowd, I go over to see the local hockey team, the Blazers, beat a U.S. team from Spokane 4-3. It is easy to forget how exciting a hockey game in a town like this can be. The fans—from three year olds to people who hadn’t missed a game in 40 years—go absolutely nuts. In places like Kamloops you can still feel what Canada is all about. Everyone’s rooting for the home team, and on March 23, the home team is *The Sweet Hereafter*. (pp. 61, 64)

Though Egoyan’s account of the support and conviviality may seem sentimental to some, it remains that the actual turnouts for the film and the game are real: not discrete forms of local participation reminiscent of some earlier historical period

when shopping malls were not the major site of communal activity but rather, concrete examples of choosing to venture out into the community over staying at home to watch mediated versions of culture and/or sport.

Continuity is also implicit in the very acts of cultural engagement. This is evident in the interest in local history, whether expressed through the holdings of the Kamloops Museum and Archives, through events such as the Heritage Fairs as noted above, or through the everyday actions of citizens. Kamloops is little more than 100 years old, but for a relatively young place it is very conscious of its heritage. To illustrate, the downtown is not a model heritage district, but if you stroll along Victoria Street, the main thoroughfare, and look closely at various buildings, you will see plaques that indicate the year of construction and that furnish information about their ownership. This official designation not only recognizes the city's history, but acknowledges the people behind it. Inside some establishments there is further evidence of this recognition. On the corner of Victoria and 4th Avenue, for instance, sits the Plaza Heritage Hotel. Built in 1927, it epitomizes the classic Spanish Moor style that was popular at the time. Inside, the walls are lined with photographs and texts about various individuals and families who contributed to the city's economic, social, and cultural development. As one might expect, the usual politicians and business people are there. However, also featured are a music teacher, an entomologist, and several celebrated mothers. This may seem quaint by some standards, but it is an authentic record and it is there as a result of the efforts of Elaine Webber, the wife of the hotel's president and general manager.

Finally, there is an increasing tendency in Kamloops toward inclusiveness, at least within the arts and heritage community. The relationship between the Kamloops Art Gallery and the Secwepemc First Nation has resulted in several exhibitions and the development of significant acquisitions. A current initiative—a curatorial project—involves Aboriginal youth who are working on the permanent collection. In another vein, the gallery showed *Gods, Demons and Princes: Masterpieces of Indian and Himalayan Art from the National Gallery of Canada* during the summer of 2003, and the main related event was “The Art and Cuisine of India,” sponsored by the Indo-Canadian community of Kamloops. Western Canada Theatre commissioned award-winning playwright Tomson Highway to write a work based on the Laurier Memorial, a historical document that contains the grievances presented by the chiefs of the Okanagan, Shuswap, and Thompson First Nations to Prime Minister Laurier during his visit to Kamloops in 1910. The play, *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout*, which had its world premiere in Kamloops in 2004, focuses on the lives of four Aboriginal women as they go about preparing a dinner for Laurier. The Secwepemc Cultural Education Society was instrumental in the development of the play and notable, as well, is the fact that Highway, who is Cree, was encouraged to write the play, and the cast included Aboriginal and White performers. These are just some of the local instances of intercultural collaboration based on trust relationships and on the will and resources of various arts and heritage organizations.

Some may see these examples of community cultural participation in terms of place promotion and civic pride, as if Kamloops—consistent with its physical terrain—is a social and cultural oasis that has somehow managed to retain communitarian values. It is difficult not to acknowledge Kamloops' various attributes, especially with respect to the major arts organizations, as their many years of relative financial and organizational stability have gone hand in hand with the participatory inclinations of Kamloops' residents. The various examples provided demonstrate significant types of social and cultural capital as identified by Adler and Kwon (2002) and Putnam (2000), including instances of "bonding," "bridging," and "linking." As concerns "bonding," examples of ties within specific communities include the aforementioned Rotary service clubs, which attract like-minded people; they also encompass other fraternal societies, such as the Colombo Lodge—an organization of the Italian community which has roots in Kamloops dating back to the 1910s. As concerns "bridging," examples of this are evidenced by the significant amount of participation that takes place across sectors and cultural groups—the major arts organizations epitomizing this particular phenomenon. There is also significant "linking," whereby particular cultural activities span a range of organizations and individuals. Examples of this are the aforementioned Historica Fair, but also include choral singing and a recent school-based arts project—both of which are discussed later in the article.

However, it would be remiss to idealize or romanticize this situation, for Kamloops, like any other city large or small, is also characterized by marginalization of various groups, whether defined by age, cultural identity, social status, economic situation, or any combination thereof. Consider, for example, a small-cities research project in which Aboriginal youth explored, through the arts, connections between their home on the reservation and the urban environment. As researcher Marianne Ignace and art teacher Kathie McKinnon explain:

Contemporary Aboriginal youth also live with the profound influences of global messages and images that shape their identity. An affinity with the voices of marginalization, such as black ghetto art of graffiti and rap with its messages of violence, anger and frustration, is shared in the experience of Aboriginal youth. The small city represents the *real* point of connection between the reserve culture, with its social networks still intact despite a flood of grief from past oppression, and the urban ghetto culture, whose vernacular messages of marginalization and alienation provide affinity and inspiration. (2005, p. 82)

Their artwork was included in *Urban Insights*, the culminating exhibition of the small-cities project, and to an extent, as Ignace & McKinnon point out, "For the young people, showing their art is a way not only to be seen, but also to be heard" (2005, p. 82). By providing support, the small-cities project and St. Ann's Academy also legitimized the expression to some degree. That said, the specific feelings and realities conveyed should not be lost on researchers and policymakers seeking to understand the social effects of culture. As noted, these are Aboriginal voices, but ones compounded by identification with a youth culture that is physically far removed yet transmitted through various forms of mass media. If the

experiences are any indication, the mechanisms for enhancing local expression are certainly not confined to local institutional support or to social networks, be they the First Nations community or Kamloops itself. They are inextricably tied to larger social and cultural currents and enactments.

The same is true for other individuals and groups, such as recent immigrants, who are farther out on the cultural periphery, where existent social capital, at least for now, has no significant enabling effect. The resonating influence may not be the voices of the black ghetto but the comparable circumstances of other newcomers in other places. To illustrate, in mid-March 2005, the feature story in the tri-weekly newspaper *Kamloops This Week* focused on the racist treatment of a recent Filipino immigrant (Johnson, 2005). This was not an isolated or celebrated case that had received extensive press coverage, but an attempt to convey the experience of many newcomers through the story of one individual during a week intended to officially acknowledge the prevalence of racism.

Apart from the specific experiences of individuals and groups, there are other developments that may potentially alter, challenge, or reinforce the patterns of social and cultural capital. Kamloops is growing—and not just in terms of newcomers from other provinces or outside of Canada. A recent study by Ross Nelson and Robert MacKinnon (2004) detected significant intramigration, with the Thompson-Nicola Region being the number one destination for people in British Columbia living outside the core areas of Vancouver and Victoria. Interestingly, the age levels varied, with both seniors and young people attracted to the region.

The persistence of traditional social capital, the realities of marginalization, and a population increase in Kamloops invite further speculation about what contributes culturally to the dynamics of urban life. In his influential work *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), Richard Florida maintains that a city's success is tied to attracting highly skilled and educated people, such as high-technology entrepreneurs, and having amenities and services that cater to and/or are operated by other creatively driven groups, which he identifies, for example, as the gay population and what he calls the "Bohemian" class. By contrast, Putnam (2000) claims that there is a major decline in community affiliations and in traditional forms of social capital, such as neighbourhood activities and memberships in voluntary organizations, resulting in a marked decrease in civic involvement. People, including members of the so-called creative class, may be engaged in all manner of activities, cultural or otherwise, but increasingly absent is significant communal engagement. As Putnam (2000) puts it in his now famous dictum, people are "bowling alone."³

From Florida's perspective, Kamloops—and possibly other small cities of comparable size—presents an interesting case. On the face of it, Kamloops would immediately score low on any Florida index given that it is still somewhat dependent on a resource-based economy, is relatively isolated, and has no high-technology sector. The staffs of the arts organizations, the university faculty, other local professionals, and various newcomers may qualify as constituents of the creative class, but they still would not necessarily amount to an optimal critical mass

even within the confines of a small city, according to Florida's requirements. By contrast, consider a small city like Ann Arbor, Michigan, in which the University of Michigan is practically synonymous with the city. Yet the range and degree of arts and heritage activities in Kamloops is certainly consistent with the needs and interests of the creative class. But what is responsible for the vital cultural life in Kamloops are the kinds of social capital that Putnam laments are in rapid decline. As for Florida, he would regard such capital as the social glue that used to be present in what are now struggling cities, and which is now unable to provide these places with the skills and resources needed not only to survive but to prosper.

Florida and Putnam offer compelling perspectives on what shapes or dissolves communities, yet they offer an either/or proposition. Somehow, a city that accommodates, if not embraces, the creative class is a place that has shed, or at least devalued, more traditional ties and resources. And what is one to make of specific groups, such as youth or newcomers, that do not fit the Florida mould? To put it another way, what are the social and cultural consequences for collective understanding if there is a dominant creative class that, Florida acknowledges, seeks "quasi-anonymity"? Are there cities that accommodate both or, more to the point, can there be compatibility between the two?

Choral groups in Kamloops: A specific case

However, traditional forms of social capital remain strong, at least for now, necessitating more probing to further make sense of the links between cultural activity and collective understanding in Kamloops. To this end, the article now turns to a specific dimension of cultural life in Kamloops: the choral society or group. This dimension is not particular to Kamloops, for cities large and small have many of these associations, from large choirs affiliated with a major symphony orchestra to small groups of 20 people whose delight in singing converges with their desire for camaraderie. Especially significant is that the divide between professional and amateur performers or groups is not tied to the size of a group or its location. One is as likely to find some non-professional singers in major choirs as to find professionals in groups that are small or very rooted in their community. Kamloops reflects these tendencies, but noticeable once more are the relative number of groups and the apparent diversity of their interests. Again, the claim is not that Kamloops presents a special case, but that the choral activity is consistent with other patterns of cultural production and participation. Below is a thumbnail inventory of some of Kamloops' choral groups.

A Capella is a chamber group of 8-10 performers led by local composer Art Lewis.

Canstabile is a 20-voice choir of mostly young adults led by Evelyn Claude-Pierre.

Classy Chassis is a group of five senior women who sing in nursing homes and other community centres.

Desert Sounds is a group of over 20 singers connected to the Barbershop Quartet organization.

The German Choir is a group of 15 performers who sing only in German.

Happy Choristers is a large choir of seniors.

Higher Ground is a group of young adults with no connection to a high school and led by Nora Lee Quast, a music teacher with long-standing involvement in the community.

Kamloops Choristers is a long-standing group that began with the encouragement of School District 24. It was initially incorporated as a non-profit society, had a hiatus, then revived but saw no need to continue as a formal organization. It currently has 85 members, up from 50 during the past four years, and is led by Kelvin Barlow.

School District 73 Children's Chorus is a large ensemble that sings at local, provincial, and national festivals and other venues.

Serious Options is a chamber choir of 16-20 people also led by Nora Lee Quast, made up of young adults recently out of high school who want to continue singing.

Spectapella is a group of four singers led by music store owner Wilf Epp.

Thompson Rivers University Chorus is a large choral ensemble that performs with the Kamloops Symphony. Half the chorus are students from the university, and its activities are tied to university course offerings. It is conducted by John Churchley, currently the principal of Beattie Elementary School of the Arts.

Vivace is a group led by Sally Whitmore that has about 16 members and is especially interested in madrigals and other chamber work. John Franks, a local composer, is also involved.

A number of findings shed light on these groups as cultural associations and on their role in and effect on the community. First, and perhaps not surprisingly, seniors are very well represented. Yet there is also a concerted effort to engage young people, either within a course of study at the university or through various informal groups. In either case, young women predominate. Moreover, and as confirmed by Kelvin Barlow, director of Kamloops Choristers and a board member of the Kamloops Symphony, the local school district has played a considerable role. It directly supports activity, has encouraged the formation of several community groups, and is a source for leadership as many of the directors, including Barlow, are former schoolteachers. As one would expect, and as noted above, the various groups offer an outlet for a particular interest, if not a love of singing, but also provide an opportunity for conviviality. Yet professional and amateur performers intermingle, and most groups, and their various leaders, maintain ties with the British Columbia Choral Federation, one of the largest and most active of such associations in Canada, and with a society of choral conductors and directors.

Although initial and cursory, these observations indicate that choral activity represents significant community engagement. There is dual participation, as group members are performers and also volunteers who keep their associations going. There are also almost no barriers to entry, except perhaps the customary audition, which is why, along with the inexpensive cost of participation, both

young and old are attracted to what can best be described as the choral scene.⁴ Moreover, while few if any groups are incorporated as non-profit societies, they nevertheless do not exist for financial gain, unlike most local rock bands and similar musical ensembles who perform for a living, whether they are in one community or have a wider audience and following. Choral groups and societies are therefore very much predicated upon traditional forms of social and cultural capital. If the Kamloops examples are any indication, such groups tend to reinforce ties and associations that have contributed to community cohesion and expression given the individual and collective needs they seem to fulfill.

The power of proximity

As a range of organizations and activities suggests, collective understanding is enhanced by cultural expression and participation in Kamloops. Furthermore, forms of social and cultural capital are both the necessary ingredients and the outcomes of such interchange. Whether this recommends Kamloops as a model is open to question. Perhaps it is more typical than studies contend when factors such as inclusion are also considered. Or perhaps such communication is more likely to happen in small communities. To put it another way, it may be critical to stay attuned to local conditions, to indigenous forms and expressions, and to the importance of scale, whether the objective is research, assessment, policymaking, or advocacy. On the other hand, and echoing some of the preliminary cautions of this article, there may be risks in being too local.⁵ There are, potentially, many responses to these observations or issues that may potentially have an effect at all levels of government if the desire is to further articulate the connections between culture and community. Such is the case with proximity which has several implications. Just as the focus on the small city may have initially seemed romantic and anachronistic, so too might an emphasis on proximity in a world marked by increasing globalization and digitization—a world which, moreover, now includes the embracing of virtual places. At the same time, a focus on the constituents of a civil society, as demonstrated earlier in this article in the discussion of Putnam (2000), indicates a corresponding, if not acute, concern with local and everyday realities that occur on the ground, directly face to face—a concern certainly borne out in policy terms, for example, by the Canadian federal government's recent and direct support of cities. In these respects, proximity may account for the *degree* of local engagement. This is not to say, however, that proximity does not come with its own peculiar set of nuances. More than 40 years ago, E. T. Hall, the distinguished anthropologist, shed light on the whole notion of proximity when he identified four kinds of distance: intimate, personnel, social, and public (Hall, 1964). Today, these distinctions can serve as a departure for further understanding the interstices of the local, but also the virtual, as we seek to understand the culture of place and the place of culture. These distinctions are certainly important when considering the role played by proximity, in its various forms, in Kamloops.

One of the principal factors that drove the small-cities project is the geographic location of Kamloops. The sense of Kamloops as a place is uppermost in

many of the studies, in the *Urban Insights* exhibition at the Kamloops Art Gallery, and in the play *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout*. Yet proximity must be measured in more than just distance from metropolitan areas and smaller communities, as the proximities within a city equally give meaning, shape, and effect to cultural production and participation. Although Kamloops is one of the largest cities area-wise in British Columbia, its many assets, amenities, and services are close and accessible. However, studies have questioned this assumption in terms of the availability and location of resources for marginal or disadvantaged groups and/or specific cultural communities. Some have pointed to related instances of deprivation (Boone & Nelson, 2001; Deutschmann, 2005).

Kamloops, like other cities large and small, has physical divides that translate into social and economic differences. The Thompson Rivers, an initial symbolic reference, tend to reinforce many prejudices and stereotypes, both social and spatial. The south bank of the river, for example, contains the downtown, an old treed and affluent neighbourhood, and the regional hospital, while the more recent residential areas and shopping centres make their way up the hills that rise from the city centre. The gallery, the performing spaces for the symphony and the theatre company, and the university are also on the south side. By contrast, the “North Shore,” which before an amalgamation almost 30 years ago used to be North Kamloops, is much more culturally diverse, has a growing Aboriginal population, and has several low-income areas. In another direction across the rivers is the Kamloops Indian Band.

The perception and the reality of the two sides of Kamloops obviously present challenges with respect to enhancing community through cultural production and participation. There are, for example, differing visions as to where to build a proposed multi-purpose arts centre, which is intended to accommodate working artists and several cultural organizations. Yet perceptions are also countered by realities that suggest engagement may be far more widespread than is assumed, precisely because of proximity. For one thing, the North Shore area has a strong collective identity: it is called “the North Shore” by residents and others alike as an expression of civic pride and a sense of place. There is no collective equivalent for the south side of the city other than reference to specific residential areas, which is also the case for the North Shore when it comes to pinpointing actual locations. The use of cultural services is also significant, as the North Shore branch of the regional library is busier than the main library downtown.

A recent school-based visual-arts project further illustrates the significance of proximity and, by extension, the strength of diversity and the potential for collective understanding. Last winter under the aegis of Catalyst for Change, a program of Vancouver-based ArtStarts in Schools, Kamloops-based artist Tricia Sellmer worked with grade six children at A. E. Perry Elementary School to create a community quilt. The large work contains self-portraits of the students and images of people they admire and respect. Sellmer also enlisted the assistance of other community members including a group of quilters who gather every week at the Japanese Cultural Centre. What resulted is a work that powerfully represents

culture in many ways—a quilt that depicts many single mothers as most admired, but is also significant for the absence of fathers, a quilt filled with images, stitching, and beadwork that conveys many backgrounds, traditions, languages, and pastimes. The quilt also served, at least temporarily, to celebrate individual differences and similarities while bridging several cultural divides on the North Shore, particularly in the immediate area around the school.

Suffice to say, proximity in its many forms is a key factor in the cultural life of the small city. It has symbolic significance and determines to some degree the location and flow of social and cultural capital. In the specific case of the quilt, or similar cultural creations, proximity can facilitate collective understanding and possibly contribute to the formation of new networks and trust relationships. Proximity also has ramifications for larger cities and metropolitan areas, especially when it comes to enhancing collective understanding. In fact, when large cities and their attendant social and cultural organizations recognize the degree to which distance mediates cultural possibilities and participation, engagement may become more attainable.

To probe these connections further, consider the activities of Reading the Museum, the national program of the Canadian Museums Association that utilizes museums as resources for literacy education for adults and families. From 1993 to 2001, and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, the program supported 34 demonstration projects in which various types of museums, large and small, worked with community organizations to encourage literacy learning in practical and imaginative ways. Site visits to these projects in my capacity as program coordinator called attention to *where* they were happening and, more to the point, the proximity between the museum and a literacy program in a given city.

Take for example the project at the Edmonton Art Gallery in Edmonton, Alberta—relevant to this discussion even though the latter is a large city. The education curator at the time, Marie Lopes, approached Prospects Literacy, a community organization about 12 blocks away from the gallery. The gallery is on the main city square that also houses the city hall, the Citadel Theatre, the largest professional theatre company, and the Winspear Centre, a concert venue, while Prospects, at the time, was in an economically marginalized area, literally and metaphorically on “the other side of the tracks,” but within walking distance of the gallery. When Marie approached Prospects about using the gallery for literacy learning, the prospective learners were curious but insisted that she first come to Prospects before they go to the gallery, which none had ever done. After several weekly meetings, the students felt comfortable and secure enough to cross the threshold and spend time in the gallery looking at various artworks and writing and talking about them. Proximity was crucial, as the short distance enabled a group of learners to go a long way in their learning and in their use and appreciation of, and eventual attachment to, a cultural institution that was nearby but in which they had never set foot. In this context, close proximity became the means for access: for having a sense of ownership of a public place.

A group of mostly single mothers and their children in London, Ontario, were initially not as lucky. In the summer of 1998 they commuted by bus once a week from a subsidized housing complex to Eldon House, a heritage building that is part of the Museum London complex located in the city's downtown. For six weeks they used the house, its contents, its history, and its grounds as a basis for journal writing. The distance factor was eventually overcome as the bus trip became an integral part of the project, with participants using it to chat about their learning experience and to get to know each other better.

When I came for the site visit, the project coordinator, Cydna Mercer, suggested that we go initially to the housing project and that I travel on the bus with the learners to appreciate the whole process. Sitting and talking to some participants while waiting for others, I noticed a group of people staring at the bus. I was told that they were a group of recent Somali immigrants who had been approached to join the project and who were initially willing until the first morning, when they saw the bus and collectively decided against participating. Apparently, the bus frightened them because in strife-ridden Somalia when a bus or truck comes it is often to take someone away, sometimes indefinitely. Despite the new and peaceful environment, the bus was too symbolically charged and, despite assurances, the group was not prepared to trust the project organizers or others in the housing project. Cydna had hoped that when the group saw other participants returning each day they would participate, but this never occurred. Evidently, trust needs to develop over longer periods of time. Yet if the museum were closer, within walking distance, near enough to allay fears and give anyone in the group the freedom to leave, the situation might have been completely different. Again, proximity seems an obvious factor, but profoundly so, because it is bound up with people's needs, perceptions, and access, all of which must be considered by researchers, policymakers, educators, and other professionals within or beyond the cultural sector.

Collaboration: The new organizational paradigm?

This article has looked at ways cultural production and participation facilitate or enhance collective understanding in small communities. Crucial factors or determinants for making connections, allocating resources, and realizing aims include various kinds of social and cultural capital and the strategic importance of proximity. Questions have also been raised as to what small cities might demonstrate to larger ones about the contours of the local for encouraging community affiliations. The article now takes a different track in an effort to raise a related organizational and policy issue. One assumption that goes with any kind of collective endeavour is the necessity for collaboration: what one might call, drawing on the previous discussion, a form of social proximity, whether this consists of a partnership, an alliance, or some other form of cooperation. This may seem patently evident if the sole or principal aim of production and participation is the collective good.

However, collaboration has not always been the case in the arts and heritage sector, as in many other fields and government bodies where organizational

autonomy, disciplinary boundaries, and other territorial concerns were considered to be sacrosanct. Today, the opposite increasingly prevails and collaboration among groups is taken as a given. As a result, collaboration becomes as much the principal objective as the very content or program it is supposed to accommodate. One can hear the language of collaboration in the corridors of governments—and this includes granting agencies and programs—and one can also hear it in the corporate sector, in universities, in the cultural sector, and in other non-profit arenas. Strategic alliances, shared resources, co-productions, co-sponsorships, and cross-sectoral partnerships are some of the key concepts and arrangements that govern, if not determine, the organization of many activities, including cultural production and participation. In our own case, “The Cultural Future of Small Cities” project was funded by the Community-University Research Alliance program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

This is not to suggest that alliances or other collaborative forms emerged unprecedented. For example, art galleries, museums, and performing-arts organizations have, for a considerable time, cooperated on joint ventures such as traveling exhibitions and performances, and in many places there is a long-standing tradition of community outreach. Significant now is the degree to which collaboration has become the rule, with assumptions and formalities developed with respect to expected outputs and outcomes. The point is not to call into question what may be a new paradigm. Rather, it is necessary to recognize more fully and critically that there are many kinds of collaboration. Whether the locus of interest is cultural production and participation or another community activity, the origins of cooperation and the kind of collaborative framework that ensues may matter a great deal, especially if collective understanding is a desired goal.

These perspectives are finding their way into considerations of policymaking and governance. Recognizing the frequent claim that it is not what governments do, but rather how they do it, Gattinger (2005), for example, addresses the importance of collaboration for horizontal decision-making as opposed to relying on a traditional top-down approach. She suggests that the policy process can benefit from “creative pique” in the dual sense that it should “pique interest” while also allowing for “pique,” as in “irritation” or dissatisfaction (pp. 201-220). For Gattinger, the key issue is engagement and she identifies three levels: active, which involves extensive participation in the policy process by a range of actors; passive, which refers to a less influential, if still engaged, role; and disengagement, in which organizations who could be engaged are not, or have previously been involved but have exited the deliberations. She also places importance on the nature and mechanisms of engagement by referring to several kinds of possible arrangements for formulating and implementing policy and to the “quality of interactions” among individuals, organizations, and sectors, including the extent to which dissent is recognized and managed.

Looking back at cultural participation in Kamloops, and for that matter at other examples of cultural participation cited throughout this article, Gattinger’s perspective assists in further accounting for a cultural climate characterized by

collaboration. A broader picture that includes the role of governments and the differing expectations and claims of various organizations may reveal evidence of passivity or disengagement, if not in some cases conflict or dissent, even if the outcome is enabling. However, there can be situations in which the state is not dominant, such as “grassroots” activity, even if government is a funder, which it often is. There are also instances in which neither the state nor a community-based activity is instrumental, but, instead, intermediary institutions such as larger educational organizations, social agencies, professional cultural organizations, or other established non-profits play a key role.

Faced with various contingencies and leaving open the question as to whether collaboration is state induced, state supported, or stateless, this article draws on Gattinger once again to introduce five kinds of collaboration.⁶ They are neither fixed types nor mutually exclusive, but are intended to provide an initial framework for thinking further about the possibilities and constraints for cultural production and participation, whether in small communities or major cities. Several examples are drawn from the Kamloops experience and from the arts and heritage sector, while others are more general in nature.

Organic collaboration

Organic collaboration can arise from evolving or emergent conditions or opportunities. It can often be serendipitous. Organizations, through ongoing communication or by chance, might recognize that there are ways they can work together more effectively to accomplish goals than going it alone. Collaboration might continue in an informal fashion, guided by inherent trust and clarity about expectations and responsibilities, but might also at some point require a formal framework, such as a legal contract. In many ways the small-cities project was initially an organic collaboration. The Kamloops Art Gallery became aware of the CURA program and then approached the university. Other partners became involved as the proposal took shape and the research/community interfaces were developed. Now that the project is completed many relationships have endured, depending on the type and scope of the research studies and the personnel and partners involved.

Self-interested collaboration

This kind of collaboration may also have emergent qualities or result serendipitously, but one or more parties will be specifically self-interested from the outset—on the lookout, as it were, for possible partnerships and alliances. The relationship may continue to be informal, may require contractual agreements, or can have a sunset provision. The gallery’s role in the formation of the small-cities project could be seen as self-interested rather than organic. Yet the same might be said for the other partners, especially the university given the SSHRC as the principal source of support. As another example, consider the community quilt project described earlier. ArtStarts chose Kamloops as a site for its Catalyst for Change program owing to existing strong interest in community-based art activities. But once the various school-based projects began, their realization was primarily due to organic factors, with collaboration evolving depending on what actors became involved. The same can be said for the Reading the Museum projects, in which the

participation of museums and literacy organizations was a combination of organic and self-interested collaboration.

Mimetic collaboration

This is collaboration based on emulation, whereby an organization thinks collaboration is a good idea or is needed. The guiding maxim “If it worked there, it will work here” applies, with the expectation that the collaboration will be fruitful and satisfy what has been missing, since others seem to have benefited from it. Self-interest may also matter, but the power of the example will prevail, especially in times of uncertainty when organizations are looking for ways and means to operate, if not survive and prosper. The art world, more specifically major arts organizations from galleries to performing-arts groups, often looks to the corporate sector when developing and organizing partnerships and other alliances to mount travelling exhibitions and performances. Emulation is embedded in components such as marketing strategies and goes far beyond traditional corporate sponsorship and other private support. Yet emulation can also be community based. In the case of the Reading the Museum program, for example, several of its projects were a source emulated by other museums and galleries.

Normative collaboration

This kind of collaboration happens as result of, or in response to, standards or conventions in a given field or sector that require or recommend cooperation of some sort. It can have a mimetic cast. It can also be self-interested, but the adherence to norms, where the basic rules of the game—such as ethical guidelines—are initially known, may be the basis for emergent collaboration or more formalized alliances and partnerships. Throughout the course of the small-cities project, several normative considerations were at play given the involvement of the university and its expectations about research. More specific to cultural production and participation, all partners had to learn, and hopefully have come to respect, each other’s boundaries, agenda, and ways of working while continuing to collaborate.

Coercive collaboration

This is forced cooperation, whether an organization coerces another to collaborate or whether an organization feels compelled to collaborate. The method generally used to coerce amounts to various degrees of arm-twisting, ranging from gentle encouragement to strong pressure. There may also be normative or mimetic elements, but the need for and importance of collaboration and the consequences of not doing so, such as ineligibility for funding, usually dominate. Forced or persuasive collaboration may, therefore, have conditions and constraints that imply such coercion is really not collaboration at all, although it is regarded as such. However, there can be unintended consequences whereby coerced organizations occasionally turn out to be the most cooperative.

Some tentative conclusions and recommendations

This article has identified some of the forces, conditions, and possibilities of cultural production and participation that enhance collective understanding in the small city. As reiterated several times, different but complementary forms of

social and cultural capital are both the necessary ingredients and outcomes of such activity. However, there may be an incompatibility, if not a disconnect, between these networks and norms and what is envisioned as necessary for the development and maintenance of what is generally characterized as the creative city. This article also stressed the importance of proximity for developing and analyzing initiatives whose principal aim is the pursuit of the collective good. In addition, it pointed out some of the subtleties, conditions, and challenges of working together that may apply to the arts and cultural sector as well as other fields. Based on the analysis and various observations, here are some tentative conclusions and recommendations concerning a research program on the social effects of culture.

1. A need exists for comparative study of how cultural activity is framed, supported, and realized within the context of cities, large and small.⁷ This requires more than an analysis of policies and municipal mechanisms, although they are central. As demonstrated by various community-based studies and collaborative activities, there is a need to know more about the relationships between the cultural (i.e., symbolic) choices that people make and the social locations in which they take place (Berger, 1995). This suggestion recalls an observation made by Raymond Williams almost fifty years ago, when he laid down some of the essential groundwork for the study of culture. As he put it: "Culture refers to relationships between elements in a whole way of life and the analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships" (1961, p. 46). His perspective continues to resonate as it offers the possibility of getting beyond various claims for the impact of arts and heritage activities to understanding what culture means and why it matters.⁸
2. Although such comparison is a tall order, there is also a need to consider cultural production and participation in relation to other forms of civic engagement. As the Kamloops experience demonstrates, this entails looking at other sectors for complementary or different patterns of engagement, especially given the weight now placed on collaboration as a strategy. Among other things, there needs to be a greater focus on community-based organizations. Yet, as Stern and Seifert (2000) point out, some concepts and categories for analyzing government programs and agencies, professional organizations, and other "rational" actors may not be appropriate for gauging the work and workings of, for example, community-based arts groups. They argue that these entities are "social movements" and must be regarded as such when examining their active role in developing and sustaining communities. This is not to suggest that these organizations are subject to different standards when the aim is analysis or assessment; rather it is to recognize the different voices, motives, origins, and life cycles of many participating organizations.⁹
3. Finally, none of the above can be substantially considered without addressing related urban realities such as marginalization, in- and out-migration, gentrification, and tourism that are reshaping cities, large and small. These realities

are tied to the competition for and allocation of resources and services, and for many small cities and remote communities facing economic and population decline—and this does not include Kamloops and other growth centres—the future looks increasingly bleak. Political debate thus becomes crucial as to what should be done to sustain or maintain communities, whether they are growing or vulnerable.

4. For growing communities, municipal support for resources and services, cultural or otherwise, is provided, or at least available—sometimes even plentiful. For vulnerable communities, as Slack, Bourne and Gertler (2003) point out, the issue is subsidization. As they explain, the argument “is drawn from the concept of *place-based equity*, that is that people have rights to public goods whenever [sic] they choose to locate . . . there is an obligation on the larger society to provide minimum levels of services to all citizens wherever they live” (2003, p. 25, emphasis in the original). Interestingly enough, culture is seldom included in the list of basic services or resources; in fact, much is made of the position that culture is *too* subsidized, regardless of the location and/or economic circumstances of a given municipality. Yet, whether the focus is vulnerable or prosperous cities, small or large, an attention to culture as a public good and to what Edward Casey (1997) refers to as the “fate of place” must be taken into account if the aim is to more fully understand and appreciate the social effects of culture.

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Notes

1. This five-year project (2001-05) was supported by the Community-University Research Alliance program (CURA) of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and had nine initial partners: Kamloops Art Gallery (lead), Thompson Rivers University, City of Kamloops, Forest Research Extension Partnership, John Howard Society, Kamloops Museum and Archives, Secwepemc Culture and Education Society, Stuart Wood Elementary School, and Western Canada Theatre.
2. How a city is classified by population is also a factor. Statistics Canada distinguishes between two geographic units: a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), in which one or more adjacent municipalities are situated around a major urban core of at least 100,000, and a Census Agglomeration (CA), which requires an urban core of at least 10,000. The population requirement can also have political overtones. In June 2004, Canada’s 22 largest cities met at a closed-door forum to discuss the particular economic, social, and governance challenges they face, especially in relation to support, or lack thereof, from the federal and provincial governments. The group included Toronto, with a population of more than 4 million, and Sherbrooke, Quebec, listed as number 22, with a popula-

tion of just over 150,000 people. The small-cities project, as it is referred to in shorthand, also used 150,000 as the cut-off point in its work because it marks a natural break between regional centres and their metropolitan counterparts in Western Canada.

3. In a more recent publication, Putnam confirms several of his initial findings about the decline of community. He also found one pattern with Canadian overtones that is particularly interesting given the location of Kamloops in the southern interior of British Columbia. He notes that the highest instances of social capital in the United States are along the Canadian border, and particularly in the northeast and the Pacific and mountain regions of the northwest. See Robert Putnam, 2001.
4. Will Straw has provided considerable analysis of the notion of a "cultural scene." While his focus is popular music, some of the observations he makes are germane to other musical forms and situations. See, for example, Straw, 2004.
5. As the discussion of these commissioned papers indicated, there are now several variants of the local, including "glocalization." The convergence of local and world cultures in the art of Aboriginal youth noted earlier may well be an illustration. Consider too "re-localization." Citing several sources, Paradis suggests that Roswell, New Mexico, in capitalizing on its world reputation as a place of UFO sightings, "is through the process of theming ?? attempting to assert itself as a distinctive local place in the midst of a globalizing society" (Paradis, 2002, p. 40).
6. The initial two categories are derived from the author's work in "The Cultural Future of Small Cities" project. The third, fourth, and fifth are inspired by the work of Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell on the increasing sameness of organizational forms. See in particular DiMaggio and Powell, 1991. Extensive discussions with Catherine Cole, heritage consultant, Edmonton; Wendy Newman, director of ArtStarts in Schools, Vancouver, BC, and Linda Schohet, Director of the Centre for Literacy, Montréal, also contributed to the formation of the framework as a result of our work on collaborative models and community facilitation for linking literacy and the arts. For further information, see Dubinsky, 2005b. Also of assistance in formulating the types: Mintzberg, Dougherty, Jorgensen, and Westley, n.d.
7. Over the past ten years the study of major or large cities has risen dramatically, with some research endeavours concentrating entirely on culture, such as the recently completed Culture of Cities project at McGill and York universities which looked at Berlin, Dublin, Montréal, and Toronto. Other initiatives have included culture within a regional framework, such as a research consortium that involved 23 small and mid-size cities in nine countries in the Baltic Sea region (<http://www.mecibs.dk>). However, there seems to be little or no comparative that includes cities of various populations, sizes, and locations.
8. For a thorough, useful and critical review of various claims about the impact of the arts, see Guetzkow, 2002. In making this recommendation, I am reminded of the discussions at the ISSEC meeting in August 2004 about causation, especially Francois Colbert's caution about making too much of direction correlation, such as art experience contributing to better skills in other domains, hence the importance of looking at various kinds of relationships. Most recently, the Rand Corporation has published *The Gift of the Muses* (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2005), an exhaustive study about the benefits of the arts, which includes a thorough review of many economic, social, psychological, and political justifications. Among other things, it suggests that the intrinsic value of the arts, an age-old rationale, remains perhaps the strongest argument. This may be cold comfort to arts advocates taken up with specific correlations. Yet even the most intrinsic qualities and motives are founded on or propelled by relationships of some kind even if they are not be necessarily causal.
9. For a very recent research report that raises many related issues, albeit in a large city, see Kully, Stewart, Etoile, Dudley, with Granger, 2005. For an analysis that specifically addresses community-based art within the context of debates about modern and contemporary art, see Kester, 2004.

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