



ANNUAL CONVENING MONTRÉAL 2023

22-26 MAY 2023
SUMMARY REPORT



GCDN

Global Cultural
Districts Network

An Initiative of AEA Consulting

FOREWORD

The ninth edition of the convening was an invitation for GCDN to return to Montreal – where we held the first meeting of the network back in 2014. Nine years later, the membership and attendance has grown about tenfold and we were delighted to welcome over 200 members, speakers, and guests.

Hosted by the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles, the convening built upon our understanding of the multi-layered and far-reaching value of cultural districts to explore their potential as civic sites dedicated to arts, culture and creativity for transformational change in urban life. We had a lot to discuss and did so through an extensive program of sessions, workshops, focus tracks, site visits, and social events that allowed members and guests to meet, share ideas, as well as to learn from each other’s practices. Suffice it to say that we had a blast!

More so than any other year, this edition of the GCDN convening also invited us to discover the vibrant and ambitious local creative community. Through their distribution arm, Quartier des spectacles international, our hosts provided us with ample opportunities to interact with Montreal-based creatives. There were showcases of public artwork on the convening sites commissioned especially for the convening and artists were invited to join us for sessions and social events. We even held a full additional day of intellectual programming specifically geared towards the local creative community. By curating a space where global could meet local, our hosts ensured that this convening was truly rooted within the context of the hosting district.

Like the ones before it, the Montreal 2023 convening supported GCDN’s commitment to make an authentic contribution to addressing the most challenging issues of the day. We are living in a time of increasing social, economic, environmental, and political flux. The state of the world makes it ever more important to go beyond the rhetoric and refine our understanding of the resources and appetite required to achieve meaningful change; and for cultural districts to contribute to the transition to a greener, more inclusive, and more resilient tomorrow. Although it will take much more than a 3-day convening to solve any of these existential challenges, our time in Montreal allowed us to move the needle on many of these conversations and to build incremental knowledge that will ultimately lead to positive evolution for art organisations, cultural districts, cities, and communities worldwide.

Gregorio Lucena Scarpella
Director, GCDN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank those who made the 2023 GCDN annual convening a successful event on many levels. Our immense gratitude goes to our hosts, the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles, and their dedicated team who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this convening – with special thanks to:

- **Monique Simard**, President, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles
- **Éric Lefebvre**, Director, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles
- **Guillaume Aniorté**, Director, Quartier des spectacles international
- **Kakim Goh**, Executive Producer in charge of the event, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles
- **Marie Lamoureux**, Head of Communications, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles
- **Élodie Lavergne**, Development and Distribution Coordinator, Quartier des spectacles international
- **Christian Gagnon**, Technical Director for the event, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles

We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to all our members, speakers, international and local guests, and partners who actively participated in the event – contributing to four days filled with engaging conversations, events, visits, and meaningful exchanges.

THANK YOU!



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This convening brought together cultural and creative leaders from across the world to connect in a context that as a result of multiple crises coming together, has become significantly more complex. But complexity breaks down rigidity, often out of necessity, paving the way for flexibility both in practice and in mindset. Widened perspectives and wavering boundaries hint at the potential to grow, to change, to evolve, and to become leaders in societies. This has led to the realisation that instead of adhering to an outdated status quo, cultural districts have the possibility to carve their own path towards something more impactful, more relevant, and ultimately more exciting. This identity expansion will inevitably face challenges, but its radical nature is arguably a creative response in its purest form to the shifting global context.

Coming together through the convening to address issues that unite health and arts, sustainability and culture, equity and design, only solidifies the realisation that cultural districts are moving into an expanded field; in the same way that they are moving beyond the confines of their own boundaries and into the surrounding public space. As cultural districts champion a new space grounded in community, they delve to bring the inside out. This trend is evident in a multitude of forms; from structural barriers being physically broken down through architecture design, to empowering communities to have creative control of cultural development projects in public space.

Out of the pandemic a more empathetic environment is being cultivated that is attentive to encouraging openness and transparency in order to share knowledge and respond to the needs of communities. As a result, collaboration emerged as a continuous theme throughout the convening. This was demonstrated on multiple levels, from community and partner collaboration on a grassroots level, to the creation of regional collaborative networks, to international initiatives cultivated across borders, to on a global level, the convening itself. This implies that collaboration is key to overcoming issues faced by cultural districts, and suggests there is power as a collective in achieving greater impact.

In forging their own narrative, cultural districts are able to embrace more than ever before the thing that makes them unique: their position of creative entities at the intersection of culture and urbanism. This embodies creativity through infrastructure, creativity through innovating operations, creativity through reimagining cities, creativity through solving challenges, and creativity through creativity itself. The districts' flexible environment has enabled imaginative approaches to changing funding processes, evaluation and widening constructs. This has created a hotbed for artists to explore their practice and empowered communities to also become artists.

Uniting cultural districts across the world in a single moment is both inspiring and powerful. The GCDN convening in Montreal essentially became its own temporary global cultural district, an international platform and collective of knowledge sharing, cultural activity and conglomeration of cultural institutions; rich with ideas. In cultivating collective thinking on a global scale, cultural districts can then return to their respective areas equipped with inspiration of how to generate change creatively and individualise their learnings to respond to local specific contexts.

With an increased role as social leaders, comes increased responsibility, and cultural organisations cannot turn their backs on the issue that is rapidly affecting us all: the climate emergency. The effects of climate change became alarmingly apparent whilst the convening was underway, as wildfires in Quebec never before seen on this level began to engulf the region and beyond, destroying habitats, and affecting the health of communities across continents. This shared experience is the urgent sign for cultural districts to embody the learnings from the convening and put them into action; to pool resources, collaborate, advocate, innovate, and use their unique creative lens to affect the greatest change.



DAY 1

Welcome from the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles (PDQS) and Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) Plenary Session



The ninth convening of the Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) brought together cultural districts from across the world to the heart of Montreal's cultural district, the Quartier des spectacles.

Aligning with the 20th anniversary celebration of the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles (PQDS), the co-hosts kicked off the convening with a reflection on the work of PQDS over the years, giving an overview to the array of cultural offerings available in the area where the event was taking place. This ranged from cultural venues, to the many festivals and creative public spaces that make Montreal so vibrant and unique as a UNESCO City of Design.

Special mention was made of the interactive public artworks that had been installed especially for the convening in various spaces in the Quartier.

There was a warm reception from PQDS, Quartier des spectacles International (QDSi), and the GCDN who thanked participants for attending and welcomed new and old GCDN members to the cultural heart of Montreal.

This opening paved the way for the convening to be a space for participants to approach issues and challenges within a supported environment, and have more fruitful interactions and ideas as a result.



DAY 1

Nimble Responses: Navigating the Impact of our Changing Global Context

Plenary Session

Moderator:

- **Adrian Ellis**, Chair, Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN), Director, AEA Consulting

Speakers:

- **Simon Brault**, Chair, IFACCA, Director and CEO, Canada Council for the Arts
- **Marcus Desando**, Director, Prince Claus Fund (*via Zoom*)
- **Betty Fung**, CEO, West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (*via Zoom*)



This opening session set the cultural context for the convening, taking stock of the significant societal challenges over the last few years. It explored how cultural districts have reacted and adapted to a shifting global context, bringing into question how new trends of globalisation impact programming, business models, and contributions to civic life. These provocations fuelled discussions throughout the convening, cultivating a curiosity to discover whether these trends that disturbed and excited the status quo have continued.

Contemporary globalisation played a pivotal role in cultural districts being recognised as valuable to cities; in attracting tourists, investors and workers. Yet, the rise of nationalism, the disruption of supply chains, the climate crisis, the aftermath of a global pandemic and a profusion of other social, economic and humanitarian crises around the world weakened both the ideology and reality of globalisation. When globalisation became unstable, so in turn did the foundations of cultural districts, leading to geopolitical fragmentation, and in some cases, decoupling cultural districts from their general premise.

This era of polycrises, where we are at the intersection of multiple crises coming together, makes linear planning for cultural districts almost impossible due to the convoluted and complex operating environment. As a result, adaptation and resilience strategies on a structural level have been crucial, and often drastic, from changing patterns of work, to having to reduce or cancel programming entirely.

This changing context, whilst being undeniably difficult, also created opportunities. The pandemic in particular was a catalyst for changes; forcing adaptation out of necessity. New experimental relationships and protocols were forged at a fast pace that otherwise would have taken years to pass, or may not have happened at all. For example, in South Africa during the pandemic, unused mainstream theatres were utilised by newly formed theatre collectives. They were able to develop barter relationships with theatre companies as they prioritised keeping spaces alive over income generation. This meant borders were broken down, enabling people to interact with spaces in a way they had not done before.

Significantly, while many organisations were forced to adapt operations out of circumstance, facing prominent social issues has also led to the desire to change the very role and responsibility of cultural districts. Witnessing contexts of racial injustice, climate change, and COVID-19 has put cultural districts in a position where they feel the need to respond, developing a wider sense of moral responsibility within organisations. This has led cultural districts to lean into the idea that rather than being just arts and cultural spaces, they have a voice, and can be drivers and reflectors of change. Out of instability can grow experimentation, ideas, and innovation; a chance to move from traditional archetypes and evolve into something different, which serves the communities that demand new approaches.

These unstable contexts shine a light on the potential for change, and cultural organisations continue to make successful strides in altering the status quo. A significant example is how, as a result of the pandemic, The Prince Claus Fund profoundly transformed their funding model. Advocating for a non-prescribed way of working, they adopted a trust-based approach to funding community focussed artistic work where beneficiaries were not required to report back. This shift seemed revolutionary in the context of typical lengthy evaluation reporting requirements, and several attendees expressed a desire to further explore how to embed trust into the funding process and begin these conversations with their own investors and partners.

Cultural districts are therefore moving further away from the notion of art-for-arts sake, and towards critical questions such as art for whom? Which voices are represented, whose stories are told? Notions of arts and culture as distant from the communities where they are located have become outdated, with the need to now be involved in the wider conversations, by listening and responding to social movements. This is already being seen amongst artists, who are increasingly expanding their practice to involve

communities and approach problems faced by them. The more the arts and culture sector moves beyond siloes and participates as a major player and contributor to these social issues, the greater its potential influence, value and support. Having awareness of context on a global level, can then be niched and localised through cultural districts, making genuine impact in communities.

Embracing this moment of transition with openness, will enable the sector to grow to be more in sync with the realities of society, stay relevant, and be more exciting as a result. There is concern that ignoring this progress, and wanting to return to a pre-pandemic era state, would be a mistake. Growing transparency, acknowledging faults, and sharing learnings along the journey of change, is key to collective impact.



DAY 1

Fostering Equitable Cultural Leadership in North America Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Linda C. Harrison**, Director & CEO, Newark Museum of Art

Speakers:

- **Ericka Alneus**, Membre du comité exécutif, responsable de la culture et du patrimoine, Ville de Montréal
- **Kendra Ingram**, CEO, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust
- **Joan Squires**, President, Omaha Performing Arts



Four executives representing a range of cultural organisations across North America came together to discuss some of the biggest issues they face in terms of advancing equity. The panel focused on ways to embrace the full diversity of communities by understanding the complexity of intersectional cultural segments. It highlighted the need to expand to non-traditional recruiting pools and to make investments in professional development for BIPOC mid-level staffers so that they are ready to take on executive roles. It emphasised the need to question what real inclusion looks like and consider

how organisations in the arts and culture sector can better embed equity into their systems through practice and policy.

Equity is multi-faceted and goes beyond representation to legitimate power sharing. This requires organisations to break down traditional power structures and create new pathways to full participation. Historically, performing arts centres and major encyclopaedic museums have granted leadership primarily to white men. Many still do not have BIPOC leaders. While women have increased as a larger percentage, diversity still lags behind and diverse hires are usually not made in decision-making positions. Drawing on their own experience, panellists highlighted how even though they were hired as Directors, they were frequently treated as Chief Diversity Officers as boards assume 'it will be handled' with a more diverse chief executive in the role. Key stakeholders may feel challenged by having BIPOC individuals in leadership roles.

Whilst we see an emergence of programs to help address these issues, such as the [Live Art Centers of North America BIPOC Fellowship program](#) and [The Black Trustee Alliance for Art Museums](#), change is happening at a glacial pace. Hiring practices need to be fearless and reflect that qualifications should not look the same as they did twenty years ago. Looking at nontraditional recruiting pools to make sure diverse candidates are reached by going beyond existing networks to other industries, can bring new people and perspectives into the organisation. There should also be an emphasis on developing people in middle management who are ready for executive roles. Whilst this needs to be balanced with the urgency of hiring staff, the legacies of ensuring practices are equitable will make more effective change and resilient organisations in the long-term.

Equity work should start at the top, and it needs to become institutionalised. Whilst it was noted that symbols are important, organisations must intentionally go past diversity and get to inclusion consistently every day. Fostering a community of support is essential to overcoming marginalisation and cultivating a comprehensive sense of belonging, particularly among BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ employees. This requires accountability, not sporadic training. Working with community resource groups can be helpful to advise organisations and can help build trust.

In addition, the pandemic has increased employee's expectations of their employers and so investment in human capital is essential within a strategic plan. There is a need to create equitable compensation that exceeds today's industry standards and pay transparency so that all people, and particularly historically oppressed communities, feel empowered to advocate for themselves. Whilst this can be difficult when funders lean towards funding programming as opposed to overhead costs, holding to higher ethical standards, such as embedding living wage across the organisation is important, and should be communicated as such to key stakeholders.

DAY 1

Mythbusting Impact Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Claire Spencer**, CEO, The Barbican Centre

Speakers:

- **Eva Maria Chavez**, Associate Director of Evaluation & Learning, The Music Center
- **Kirstin Clements**, Partner Impact & Evaluation, Arts Centre Melbourne
- **Josephine Ramirez**, EVP, The Music Center Arts, The Music Center
- **Linda Soklich**, Director, Strategy & Planning, Arts Centre Melbourne



The idea for this session emerged from conversations at the GCDN 2022 Convening in Lugano and was clearly a resonant issue on a global level because the room was overflowing with people.

Through these disrupted and unpredictable times, the arts are arguably needed by communities more than ever. As cultural organisations evolve to respond to societal issues and be evermore involved with wider debates, there is a need to reevaluate how the arts and their impacts can be effectively communicated across sectors. Finding innovative ways to evidence and build narratives that correlate with cultural districts' shifting purpose strengthens the case for their expanding roles within society.

Effectively measuring the impact of the arts and communicating this value has been an age-old difficulty. The intangibility of artistic experience means the extent of impact cannot be fully known or communicated because it is beyond our language paradigm, and so some question the need to make the case in the first place. In addition, barriers established between value domains mean evaluation often centres around financial returns as a focus for funders, and so trying to categorise impact in a way that makes sense for both stakeholders and those making funding decisions is difficult.

However, attitudes are changing, and there is a growing interest to move beyond the intrinsic value argument and use evaluation as a creative tool. Through this shift, organisations can create a narrative that is also attractive to stakeholders but is predominantly for the organisation itself to grow and learn from. It is also a chance to challenge traditional economic evaluation methods that frustrate many by creating a narrative that is sophisticated, evidence-based, and transparent, whilst also showing its contribution beyond financial returns. This is a difficult balance to draw and takes time but is ultimately worth it.

There is no effective blueprint for evaluation because context, requirements, and intention within each organisation are so varied. However, utilising methods, such as a *Theory of Change*, can help teams achieve targets, understand impacts, and create accountability. Alternatively, adopting a more fluid worldview approach where impact research informs an organisation's purpose over time, could be beneficial. Any approach should ensure evaluation is embedded and continuous to leave room for learning, experimentation, and adaptation.

Addressing cultural competency and potential bias in data collection are key when undertaking effective evaluation. Considering how to reach target audiences where they are, whether that involves changing language or moving beyond traditional methods such as surveys, generates a narrative-based case that is effective in communicating a project's impact.

It should be ensured that people are invested at all levels of an organisation by making impact evaluation central to strategy. Responsibility should be embedded, where all management staff understand how to connect operations with the evaluation strategy or impact model. Creating a participatory approach to data design by building the capacity of staff through upskilling in data literacy addresses key barriers such as cost and resource pressure and brings in new ideas.

Approaching evaluation may seem daunting and time-consuming, but as the sector evolves to an expanded field, a collaborative effort is key to proving the power and potential of arts and culture. Until legitimacy is recognised, individual organisations need to come together around this subject and build the case through sharing insights and data. This would help demystify data research and could help with efficiency, innovation, and make evaluation more robust.

DAY 1

Cultivating the Creative Skills of Tomorrow Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Angelita Teo**, Director, Olympic Foundation for Culture & Heritage

Speakers:

- **Manal Ataya**, Director General, Sharjah Museums Authority
- **Teesa Bahana**, Director, 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust
- **Tetia Lee**, CEO, The Arts Federation (Indiana, USA)



Cultural districts and organisations can play a vital role in nurturing creativity by exposing audiences to a multitude of art forms and perspectives; as well as by providing local artists with the training and resources to thrive in an ever-changing landscape. In this session, panelists examined the different ways in which cultural districts and organisations cultivate the creative skills of tomorrow.

The Sharjah Museums Authority invests in cultural projects to grow its artistic scene. The development of cultural assets aims to help individuals understand their own cultural identity and the world around them. This is achieved through various initiatives, exhibitions, and programs. It includes partnerships with higher education institutes where

UAE artists come to inspire students to consider careers in the creative field. They also support artists and practitioners from the region who have been overlooked, promoting their work internationally. Emerging artists can gain guidance on engaging with institutions and galleries, which is crucial for them to navigate the industry effectively, and they have opportunities to meet established artists.

The Ugandan Arts Trust is an independent non-profit contemporary arts centre. It focuses on promoting better coexistence and co-creation, and has received funding to build its own infrastructure. Uganda has a vibrant cultural scene with many young people who have a lot to express, but there are limitations on freedom of expression and restrictions on public space. Therefore, arts organisations play a vital role in Uganda. The Ugandan Arts Trust provides artists with a residency program, studio spaces, and organises public festivals to create a platform for artistic expression.

The Arts Foundation recognised that different rural counties in Indiana have unique programme needs, and so established regional arts partners to distribute funds accordingly. Projects range from offering a residency program for art professionals, running an after-school program that funds artforms and new media, and creating partnerships with the juvenile justice system to engage young individuals in the arts. One key initiative addresses the financial barrier for emerging musicians, where old instruments are donated, fixed, and distributed to those in need. Another popular programme is their mural arts programme which focuses on public art to create a positive impact in communities. Through this, they aim to combat gentrification and ensure that cultural programs and changes to neighbourhoods don't displace individuals.

All organisations embedded community ownership and engagement into their approach. In Sharjah, moving their Biennial's cultural events out of the museum islands and into accessible spaces within neighbourhoods ensured greater interaction with people from varying backgrounds. In Uganda, artists and the wider community were actively involved in the design process of creating new studio spaces, with ongoing dialogues being seen as vital to ensure that the space meets the needs and desires of the community. In Indiana, engagement through new art practices such as an AI programme encouraged the community to interact with innovative art forms, cultivating a sense of ownership and participation in shaping the artistic landscape.

DAY 1

Public Art and the Identity of Place Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Josee Guerette**, Development and Touring Director, QDSinternational

Speakers:

- **Rami Bewawi**, Partner and cofounder, KANVA
- **Sumantro Ghose**, Artistic Programming Director, The Royal Commission for AlUla
- **Maria Wong**, Managing Director, HKwalls



Public art can enhance places by fostering a sense of belonging, creating or strengthening local identity, and providing communities with spaces for celebration and cultural significance. Curating public art involves a balance of creativity, accessibility, sustainability, and innovation whilst also advancing artistic practices and benefiting the community. This session delved into how cultural leaders, artists, and placemakers can collaborate to select appropriate art, for the appropriate location, at the appropriate time, to enhance the identity of place, enrich the experience of its community, and contribute to its long-term success.

When approaching public art, there is a need to strike a balance between responding to tourism while simultaneously connecting to the needs of local communities and artists. Both AIUla and HK Walls are finding different ways of tackling this issue but understand that tourists often like to connect on a local level to place while residents will often appreciate experiencing outside perspectives and works. This moves beyond the mindset of creating Instagrammable art for tourists, to trusting that visitors can and want to be challenged through art.

There was significant discussion about the temporary or permanent nature of public artworks and the corresponding benefits. On the one hand, permanent exhibitions leave more room for interpretation, allowing works to take on different meanings through time, whereas temporary works create a sense of urgency. Art in public spaces may be heading towards shorter durations, in order to adapt to changing environments and to be more responsive to communities.

Creating meaningful community engagement was also emphasised as an outcome of public art. In AIUla's case, the Arts District is currently under development, so there are significant opportunities to experiment with art in public spaces. However, the cultural heritage in AIUla and the communities that live there play an important role in how it takes shape. While it has been exploring temporary and contemporary installations through its exhibition [Desert X](#), there are some public artworks that require more engagement with the community and are envisioned for the longer term.

Encouraging interactions not only with the works themselves, but also through wider engagement through workshops and mentorship programmes enables the community to directly take part in the creation of an identity of place and gives additional meaning to public space. Privately-owned spaces that are still accessible or on-view for the public arguably require a greater level of community engagement, and so working collaboratively with neighbours, landowners, and artists helps to encourage successful public art projects.

DAY 1

What's in a name? Being a "City of Culture" Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Laia Gasch**, World Cities Culture Forum

Speakers:

- **Chenine Bhathena**, Creative Programmes Director, Consultant
- **Patrick Marmen**, Chef d'équipe et commissaire au design, Ville de Montréal



Over the last few years cultural policy has shifted from niche into the mainstream as more cities develop strategies tailored to the creative industries. Cities are under growing pressure to retain their individuality, attract businesses and skilled labour, and remain flexible and resilient in the face of change. This has led to a rise of initiatives that celebrate culture, ranging from global schemes such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, localised labels such as London's Borough of Culture, to individually proclaimed titles. This session examined why cities may seek this recognition, the significance of a label, and the benefits, challenges, and opportunities that emerge from it.

These designations can have different durations but are commonly more than a year. Having longer-term recognition can have significant benefits, as seen in Montreal which

has been recognised as a UNESCO “city of design” for fifteen years and counting. This is perceived by the city to not just be a label or reward, but an indicator of value, celebrating design as a continuous process; an invitation to use design to build a more interesting city. It creates capacity to leverage resources and transform the public realm evermore creatively. This prompt has led to national recognition for initiatives such as Esplanade Tranquille, which won the award of excellence at the architecture exhibition of Quebec. This example therefore demonstrates the value in being able to take risks, experiment, and innovate through having a label as a cultural destination.

However long the duration of a label, considering its sustainability and legacy is important throughout. Creating the greatest impact on people and places in the long term can be achieved by integrating cultural democracy into the process. Taking a grass-roots approach to work directly with communities builds a programme with embedded ownership, and creates a programme rooted in place, one that matters to the people that live within it. This can be used as a moment to make active change happen and open up conversations around social issues within the area in a creative way. Creating equitable programming is essential to engage people of all backgrounds and demographics in the perceived success and authenticity of the brand.

Drawing on previous discussions about measuring impact, the label “City of Culture” can also be a means to communicate cultural value across sectors. Initiatives such as the Borough of Culture in London grew specifically out of this need to demonstrate the value of culture at a local authority level. Encompassing stakeholder agendas within strategy enables the label to generate conversation around reversing a decline in funding and makes people specific to place, invested in the concept.

Yet, practitioners can equally face issues in effectively communicating the impact of being a “City of Culture” as success is difficult to measure when different stakeholders want different outcomes. Celebrating successes and offerings in a way that public officials can also share recognition, has many positive implications. However, there is also value in talking about failure, too. Sharing both positive and challenging experiences through networks like GCDN can be beneficial for aspiring cities to learn from. Whilst it is appealing when spending public money to only identify successes, this would ignore the context of societies that are facing multiple deep-rooted problems. Therefore, communicating impact through a narrative that encompasses failure as a constructive process creates transparency and has the potential to be engaging to a variety of stakeholders.

DAY 1

Presentation: A Feral Commons Plenary Session

Moderator:

- **Fiza Akram**, Director, Alserkal Advisory

Speakers:

- **Tairone Bastien**, Curator, *A Feral Commons*
- **Andrea Dempster Chung**, Cofounder & Executive Director, Kingston Creative
- **Adrian Ellis**, Chair, GCDN
- **Gilbert Guaring**, Global Head of Marketing, Sust. and Engagement, UAP
- **Vilma Jurkute**, Executive Director, Alserkal Initiatives



The global co-commission 'A Feral Commons' was initiated by Alserkal Advisory and is supported by GCDN and UAP Company. The project came about through a COVID-era GCDN virtual event, showing the effectiveness of bringing local organisations together to face global issues. The pilot 2022-23 edition, curated by Tairone Bastien, invited participating cultural districts to present a public art commission examining the often unrecognised co-dependency and open-ended collaborations between human and more-than-human beings. Partners used this presentation to announce the participating artists and explore the project from its conception to its current status. The three installations commissioned for *A Feral Commons* are scheduled to open in coordination in late 2023.

'A Feral Commons' is the first cycle of the global co-commissioning initiative which has brought together three cultural districts on three continents: Alserkal Avenue in Dubai, Kingston Creative in Kingston, and Victoria Yards in Johannesburg. Bastien's curatorial approach stemmed from an intent to create a commons across continents; creating knowledge resources and methodologies for producing public art in a non-western context within the climate emergency. Moving beyond traditional commissioning norms, the process considered what could be grounded in collective thinking on a global scale, which can then be individualised to respond to a locally-specific context. As this is the first co-commission of its kind, there needed to be a level of trust and belief amongst the cultural districts to embark on the journey together. Despite geographical distance, this has deepened the relationship between Johannesburg, Dubai, and Kingston.

Undertaking climate-engaged art has additional implications about processes that other art forms are not subject to. Therefore, environmental concerns are not only an artistic theme, but have also been integrated within the operational undertakings of the co-commission. Partners' acknowledgment of the environmental impact of a single co-commissioned artwork moving around the world from the outset, emphasised the need to explore how to commission something that is site-specific and does not travel but is also collaborative. This led to the idea of embedding shared goals for the public artworks, sustainability, and impact across three continents. It was necessary to study the sustainability impacts of artworks and so partners will use UAP's signature artwork ingredients list, created by the firm to measure carbon emissions. It is interesting to note that the artworks are being audited for their environmental impacts, bringing out a competitive streak among the artists, which makes them want to reduce their environmental impact further.

The commissioned artists need to be active agents invested in creating work that draws awareness to environmental concerns. The successful commissions will generate new pathways for interspecies cooperation and show the benefits of adopting a decolonial model for producing public art in non-western cities. The selected artists announced are:

- **Camille Chedda (Kingston Creative).** Camille identified a site in downtown Kingston that had fallen into disrepair, and wanted to reinvigorate the space by focusing on a local plant, the Rice and Peas Bush, known for its qualities both as a pollinator and a food source. She will place efforts on enabling the community to be guided by this plant into the space, reinvigorating and placing value back into it.
- **Io Makandal (Victoria Yards).** Io's idea focuses on hybrid ecologies in relation to human habitat by activating a highly polluted waterway for civic engagement. She aims to create a bridge for animals to cross over the river to repair the zone on either side.
- **Mohannad Shono (Alserkal Avenue).** Mohannad observed the existence of feral plant ecologies that go unnoticed, but flourish through industrialised landscapes. Water dripping from AC units produces weeds that thrived despite the unusually warm climate. These nature-machine interdependencies, specifically coined "AC ecologies", are apparent within Alserkal Avenue. His focus is on saving the only tree within the Avenue, one which has never been consciously watered, but acts as symbolic focal point to promote ecological stewardship and connections between humans and nature.

DAY 2

Centering the Indigenous Experience Plenary Session

Moderator:

- **Andrea Dempster Chung**, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Kingston Creative

Speakers:

- **André Dudemaine**, Artistic Director, Festival Présence Autochtone
- **Raymond Two Hawks Watson**, Founder & CEO, Providence Cultural Equity Initiative



The UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights is a comprehensive instrument that details the birthright of Indigenous peoples in international law and policy. It contains minimum standards for the recognition, protection, and promotion of these privileges. It also establishes a universal framework for the survival, dignity, and sovereignty of the world's Indigenous peoples – including cultural rights. This session explored how cultural districts must responsibly facilitate diversity of cultural expression and the harmonious and cooperative relations between states and Indigenous nations. Indigenous peoples have the right to participate fully in all matters that concern them while also ensuring their liberty to remain distinct and to pursue their own priorities in economic, social, and cultural development.

Many cities around the world are built on Indigenous people's ancestral settlements and gathering places. Despite that, they are too often not welcoming to Indigenous cultures. That is the case, albeit in different ways, for Montreal and Providence, the two places discussed during this plenary session. In these places, as in too many across the globe, there is frequently no visible sign of the Indigenous ongoing relationship with the place. This erasure is alienating because Indigenous people don't recognise themselves within the past or present landscape. Even some attempts to address these issues, such as cities changing street names to reflect the Indigenous' place names, are often inadequate. Contemporary cultural placemaking strategies therefore need to make cultural equity integral, whilst also creating greater public recognition of the continuous presence of Indigenous lifeways and culture when on Indigenous land. Supplementing and correcting current narratives of place by bringing visibility and accuracy to pre-colonial history and to the Indigenous nations that still exist on the land, is genuine placemaking. This is not only important on a moral level, but it provides value from a tourism perspective in captivating the interest of an international audience.

Indigenous cultures, like any other existing culture, are living and adaptive, and continue to evolve according to context and place. Preserving artefacts in museums is effective in increasing engagement and awareness, but looking to the past is only one part of cultural heritage preservation and survival as these cultures continue to be a part of society and so should also be celebrated in their present form. Pursuing festivals, performances and physical gatherings are an effective way to celebrate how Indigenous cultures continue to evolve and thrive through generations. A key example of this is Montreal's First People's Festival ([Présence Autochtone](#)), which aims to bring back the spirit of the land through concerts, performances, films, and art installations inspired by tradition. When creating events, it is crucial to ensure that engagement is undertaken in a respectful and appropriate manner that doesn't tokenize culture. This can be achieved by ensuring planning processes are informed by communities as opposed to being top-down decisions.

Whilst many cultural districts have been attempting to address this, in the context of cultural organisations being held in the limelight of critique, there is a fear of doing the wrong thing. But respect, awareness, and development of effective strategies for equitable participation of Indigenous peoples in cultural life should be paramount. Reconciliation is a long and sensitive process that involves a tragic history, and so the key to overcome many of these challenges and avoid assumptions, is to ask. Developing relationships with Indigenous communities to create meaningful inclusion and an understanding of their perspectives should be integral. In addition, creating spaces like this session, where people feel supported in facing difficult conversations and challenges, is really valuable.

There is a need to acknowledge that this is a continuous learning process where concepts and perspectives evolve. For example, panellists highlighted that whilst it is unifying, the term *Indigenous* can be problematic as nuance is lost and so preference was made to referring to people first by their respective nation. In addition, emerging practices such as land acknowledgments are already perceived to be tokenized. This re-emphasises the need for proactive, ongoing engagement through relationship building, so that when cultural districts formalise initiatives, they align and adapt to the desires of communities.

DAY 2

Cultural Tourism in the 2020's Plenary Session

Moderator:

- **Elaine Bedell**, Chief Executive (CEO), Southbank Centre

Speakers:

- **Elly Andriopoulou**, Managing Director, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre
- **Yves Lalumière**, Président-directeur général, Tourisme Montréal



Cultural tourism has driven the development of many districts, as governments and organisations have competed to attract this type of visitors who famously stay longer, spend more, and return more often. But, like many other sectors, culture and tourism were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout. To this tremendous disruption, we must compound the slower but just as significant one caused by the climate crisis, not to speak of all the other social, economic, and humanitarian crises which are impacting travel and visitation trends globally. Understanding this context, where is cultural tourism – local, national, and international – heading over the next decade? Looking at tourism in London, Athens and Montreal, this session explored some of the key themes, challenges, and trends for cultural tourism in the 2020's.

The post-COVID bounce back for tourism has been positive for cities represented on the panel. In Athens, growth since the pandemic has been faster than any other European city and is only 3% lower than in 2019. Despite Canada being late in reopening, Montreal's cultural offering has attracted a return of tourists, with people desiring to spend their money on cultural activities and entertainment. Similarly, for London, although Chinese visitors are down by 91% since 2019, cultural activity has been cited as the principal reason to visit the UK with tourism soon being expected to exceed 2019 levels.

Tourism trends and targets have shifted since the pandemic, with accessible culture being an ever more prominent draw for these destinations. For Athens, the tourism season has extended to twelve months of the year, and tourists now want to explore the new side of Greece in addition to its antiquities and beaches. New audiences have also emerged. The rise of the flexible workforce means digital nomads are a key audience base, and so infrastructure has begun to evolve around this new target visitor. Similarly, increased desires for using cultural spaces as a gathering place is a side-effect of hybrid working, which has remained beyond restrictions as people demand a greater work-life balance. In London at the Southbank Centre, this has been demonstrated through the rise of corporate memberships; as employers recognise that to retain staff, access to cultural space is a benefit.

These shifts have led to a rise in thinking creatively about the potential of cities in order to bring in tourists, to create inclusive placemaking with residents, and to stand out as cultural destinations. Transforming cities into cultural playgrounds is becoming a progressively mainstream concept that responds to the changing needs of tourists, residents and workers alike. However, a main problem of tourism is its impact on residents. As tourism rises in an area, it often makes the area progressively unaffordable, creating price hikes due to an influx of practices such as Airbnb. This forces residents to move outside the centre of the city and ultimately changes the feel of the area. In Mykonos for example, the area over-catered to tourist desires, generating resistance amongst residents as they believe it has become inauthentic. As a result, there is a need to address how to retain the social fabric and create a positive impact through tourism, where residents can be involved as opposed to being victims of it.

New cultural districts should take into account that it is hard to instantly create an ecosystem of tourism, but aligning with a country's overall narrative can be effective. There is a need to over expect on visitor numbers and develop infrastructure accordingly. This is because existing cultural districts feel unprepared for the level of visitors. Infrastructural concerns stray into the need for extra financial help as development is unsustainable. The potential solution to overcome this was through the introduction of a tourist tax where private enterprises can give back.

Finally, environmental sustainability has to be considered as tourism returns, thriving, but in the context of the climate emergency. Cultural districts should acknowledge their own responsibility in contributing to the issue and take into account emissions generated by tourism. Taking steps to encourage local tourists in addition to greening own practices should be considered. Small efforts are being made, but greater steps are essential.

DAY 2

Exploring Immersive Experiences

Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Hilary Knight**, Senior Consultant, AEA Consulting

Speakers:

- **Myriam Achard**, Chef Partenariats Nouveaux Médias & PR, Centre Phi
- **Fady Atallah**, Creative Director, Moment Factory
- **Jason Bruges**, Artist, Jason Bruges Studio

This panel explored the immersive landscape from a range of perspectives, and discussed how cultural districts and venues can successfully engage with, and benefit from engaging with immersive cultural experiences. Speakers from the Centre Phi, Moment Factory and Jason Bruges Studio took the audience through a range of immersive projects across diverse scales and geographies, transforming venues into reactive and living spaces, while expanding the realm of imagination and emotions. Key success factors in immersive experiences include:

- **Creating multisensorial spaces:** Immersive experiences are about spatiality, transporting users into other dimensions and immersive scales from headset environments to urban multisensorial spaces. Immersive experiences fully engage the senses and create the sense of being fully present in a particular environment – from purely analogue and physical to fully digitally immersive.

Often overlooked, sound immersion could be more powerful than visual experiences. Sound adds depth and spatial awareness to visual experiences, enhancing the sense of presence and helping create a multisensorial experience.

- **Storytelling:** Storytelling and narrative-building is one of the most important parts of designing an immersive experience. Narratives have the power to fully captivate and engage audiences, create a sense of curiosity, and connect the individual experience to a collective one.
- **Evoking emotional experiences:** Emotional engagement deepens the experience and fosters empathy. This allows visitors and users to co-author the space, engaging them in a more compelling and meaningful experience.

Immersive projects highlighted during the panel include: “Light Masonry” by Jason Bruges Studio, a site-specific light installation based in the main nave of York Minster; “The Infinite” by Centre Phi at the Old Port of Montreal, and “Foresta Lumina” by Moment Factory, a walking trail through a forest of light and sound in Gorge Park in Coaticook, Canada.

DAY 2

Safety, Security and Accessibility for all at Night Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Mathieu Grondin**, Co-Founder, MTL 24/24 – moderator

Speakers:

- **Pamela Binette**, Coordinator of intervention services in the field, GRIP
- **Carly Heath**, Night Time Economy Advisor, City of Bristol
- **Kady Yellow**, Senior Director of Placemaking and Events, Downtown Vision

As we continue to strive towards creating safer and more inclusive public spaces, the topic of security at night has become increasingly important. This session was produced and delivered in partnership with MTL 24/24, a local advocacy group striving to develop nightlife in Montreal. From developing strategies for harm reduction, approaches to drugs and alcohol, and leveraging the latest technology and design principles, the discussion delved into the various challenges and opportunities associated with ensuring safety in public spaces at night – exploring best practices and insights on how to create environments that are both welcoming and secure.

The Montreal presentation highlighted the cultural and historical importance of nightlife and its impact on the local economy. It explored how MTL 24/24 was established in collaboration with the City to bring about changes in the regulatory framework for night events. Montreal is renowned for its vibrant festival culture and nightclubs, but the electronic music scene faced stigma from police due to a 3 am curfew. The organisation's goal is to extend night-time activities while ensuring harmony between those who want to go out and those who prefer a quieter environment. They conduct research into best practices from around the world. In the week preceding the GCDN convening, MTL 24/24 organised an event with 25 speakers from 10 different countries, including urban planners and architects who explored nightlife as a subject of research and social science. Notably, a pilot project for a 36-hour non-stop weekend party was also developed.

GRIP (*Groupe de recherche et d'intervention psychosociale* / Psychosocial Research and Intervention Group) is a strong partner of PQDS, and many festivals in Montreal utilise their services. It provides a way to shift the focus from policing to health during night-time activities. While GRIP is primarily active indoors or at festivals, its approach can also be applied to public spaces in general. The local business association created a team called the *veillard*, which studies social norms and provides support to individuals who may be excessively intoxicated at night. This initiative positively impacts the perception of safety in public spaces.

The Bristol presentation introduced participants to the UK city of Bristol, highlighting how it thrives after 6pm with numerous activities enjoyed during the night. The night-time economy is the essence of the city and includes various sectors like social care and transportation, employing 38% of the workforce between 6pm and 6am. The Night Time

Economy Advisor's role is to represent the broader aspects of the night-time economy, with a specific focus on hospitality and nightlife. Funded by the public health budget, the organisation adopts an approach that revolves around public health, prioritising safety, inclusion, and reducing alcohol-related issues. Recognizing the different experiences women have in public spaces, the organisation launched the Women Safety Charter Toolkit to prioritise their safety. Free anti-sexual harassment training programs are offered, both in-person and on the organization's website.

The Jacksonville (Florida) presentation highlighted how the organisation faced challenges related to ownership of public spaces, along with social, political, and funding barriers. In downtown Jacksonville, as part of the business improvement district, the organisation focused on ensuring residents' quality of life and encouraging active participation. They employ models that stimulate imagination, encourage ownership, and bridge gaps in public spaces. They believe that activation can be an alternative approach to promote safety. While alleys are often perceived as dangerous, through public calls and commissions, the organisation animates these spaces through art installations. This turns uninviting gaps into spaces suitable for socialising, which reintroduces residents into those spaces. The organisation has also created the first food industry incubator in the area, which addresses the obstacle of licensing that prevents home-cooked food from being sold on the streets.

Engaging private security companies that have strong community connections can be an alternative to allocating budgets towards police presence. This fosters a sense of community policing from within. In addition, safety teams can offer mental health and housing services to improve people's quality of life. Including individuals with lived experiences, such as those who have faced housing challenges or homelessness can be instrumental in developing effective solutions.

DAY 2

Sustainable Development in Cultural Districts Breakout Session

Moderator:

- **Helen Kearney**, Researcher

Speakers:

- **Ilana Altman**, Co-Executive Director, The Bentway Conservancy
- **Nicole Gordon**, CEO, Better Bankside
- **Erika Taylor**, Vice President of Arts, Culture & Engagement, Navy Pier Inc

Cultural districts have the opportunity to be leaders in addressing climate change and can act as important advocates for sustainable practices within their communities. This panel discussion continues the work of the recently published ‘Sustainable Cultural Districts’ report (GCDN and City of London, 2023), reflecting on sustainable practices being implemented across the world by cultural practitioners. With members representing districts in Toronto, London and Chicago, the panel discussed practical steps related to sustainability practices including:

- How to transition from a position of implementing ‘quick wins’ to undertaking fundamental structural change
- The unique role that cultural districts can play and the unique barriers that they face
- Expanding practices beyond the walls of the buildings themselves

Environmental sustainability is becoming a common part of many cultural districts’ agenda, reflected within both programming and operations. From initiatives such as Navy Pier’s permeable pavers, green rooftops, and beekeeping, to the localisation of materials and the introduction of electric vehicles. In London at Better Bankside, the power of a collective approach to create greater change was emphasised, as well as additional cost-saving benefits, too. Through the Business Improvement District which encompasses over 1,000 businesses, collective action has led to business decarbonisation, subsidised recycling, a green logistics centre, and the implementation of greening and biodiversity on hyperlocal levels.

New cultural districts are also forming to create greater public space within cities by utilising unconventional places, such as The Bentway in Toronto. This transformed the use of public space underneath an elevated expressway and aims to reconnect communities in the built environment to nature by igniting the urban imagination. They were able to utilise their unique position to pilot scalable sustainable strategies and develop infrastructure to meet climate goals. Observing how the highway acts as a collection for stormwater runoff, the pilot addressed alternative methods to stormwater management through implementing bioswales before water enters the groundwater system. This highlights the need to create the conditions and capacity for cultural districts to observe issues and experiment to come up with sustainable, innovative solutions.

This desire to create and utilise public space has arguably increased as a result of the pandemic. During restrictions, people within cities looked to be immersed in green public space that connected them with nature; highlighting the importance of access for health, wellbeing and socialising. For Navy Pier, having a green outdoor space large enough to enable social distancing circles was a key attribute to their audience base, and local people who may not have engaged with the cultural district, began to utilise it.

In addition, the pandemic created nimbleness by necessity, which in some cases revolutionised practice in enabling cultural districts to move further ahead with their sustainability choices. In Toronto for example, the city staff had reduced capacity, and so were willing to work and partner with nonprofits for planning, which had not happened on that scale before. There is a desire to try to keep this flexible context that the pandemic enabled, despite the end of restrictions.

One of the key challenges for cultural districts approaching sustainability is funding. When having to prioritise, it is often seen as an add-on that can be cut yet commitments cannot be made if funding is not in place. Cultural districts are also limited in being able to take initiatives further, particularly if they don't have a scalable site. However, in a time when the impacts of climate change are becoming significant, green criteria should be seen to be as important as cost. In London's Better Bankside area for example, the climate has shifted from the times of "frost fairs" on the frozen River Thames, to streets now being emptied from extreme heat as people work from home. The effects of climate change will soon, if not already, inevitably impact programming and the way people are able to interact with cities, and so threatens the very infrastructure of cultural districts. Addressing climate change must therefore be reframed by cultural districts from being a *nice extra* to being seen as *risk mitigation* that should be intrinsic to strategy.

Even with limited capacity, there are opportunities to make positive changes. Internally, involving staff at all levels to input their ideas on sustainable practices, encouraging forums and creating structures that encourage ownership and empowerment can be really effective. In addition, cultural districts have a unique opportunity to create dialogue and narratives about climate change through arts and culture. Programming is a key way to create moments of influence and engage citizens, encouraging important civic conversations through shared immersive experiences. As many cultural districts can already see firsthand the effects of climate change in their own space, taking the additional step to declare a climate emergency is a statement that can create accountability, generate awareness, and encourage collaboration and innovation.

DAY 2

Closing Session Plenary

The second day closed the convening in its current space, as the final day would be held at the Places des Arts, follow a different format, and open to the local creative scene. The GCDN leadership gave thanks to the 200+ members and guests that attended the event, in addition to the staff, and organisations that made the convening happen.

The next location of the annual GCDN convening was also announced. Travelling next to Athens in Greece, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre is excited to host the 2024 event.

Participants were then invited to continue on and explore the delights of Montreal's cultural offerings at the *Festival TransAmériques*, with the opening performance of 'Vástádus Eana'.



WORKSHOPS

Hands-on, practical, and interactive workshops ran in parallel over the first two days of the convening (May 23-24). They were repeated to enable members to participate in different sessions.

Developing Sustainability Strategies for Cultural Districts

Facilitators:

- **Christos Carras**, Senior Associate, AEA Consulting
- **Annie Bares**, Research Analyst, AEA Consulting



This practical interactive workshop explored how the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were relevant to the arts and culture sector, and how they could be utilised through a 'Sustainability Strategy Development' framework. It highlighted how toolkits such as the [Theatre Green Book](#) were useful for organisations interested in taking practical steps in greening operations but emphasised the need to integrate sustainability into the overall strategic and operational planning of cultural districts.

Cultural districts bring together a broad range of operations and infrastructure, interacting with their communities at many levels. These units, therefore, have a crucial contribution to make to global sustainability and can act as significant vectors of change, with the potential to look inwards and make operational changes, and externally to mobilising constituencies and communities. Investing in achieving a higher level of overall sustainability within the cultural sector can therefore be seen to have a multiplier effect on society.

The scope of sustainability can be daunting, and so cultural districts need a strategy to address it. Recognised globally as key targets for sustainability, the UN's SDGs can act as a broader framework to develop strategy around. While culture may not be explicitly mentioned as a standalone goal, it can be applied to all the SDGs as a means to help achieve them. Therefore, utilising the SDG's as a broader framework that interlinks key objectives is an effective way for cultural districts to become more sustainable. Implementing this approach would help with measuring and assessing impact, stakeholder engagement, benchmarking performance, target setting, and communicating progress.

Developing a sustainability strategy would involve:

- **Current state analysis:** an identification of main impact areas, mapping topics to SDGs, and analysis of current performance.
- **Gap analysis & strategy development:** definition of indicators and benchmarks, staff roles and monitoring systems.
- **Implementation:** sustainability reporting, identification of shortfalls, targets and action points, communication.

The workshop then encouraged participants to implement this framework into practical examples. Small groups worked together to integrate sustainability strategy development into hypothetical cultural districts. Key insights included:

- **Context:** Taking an initial review of local context and stakeholder input is key to understanding where the district sits and identifying requirements.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborating with key stakeholders at city-scale, as well as engaging external consultants and specialists as integral members of the internal team, is crucial for effectively implementing the framework.
- **Education and Awareness:** Capacity building and awareness facilitates engagement and participation from various stakeholders within cultural districts. Developing necessary skills enables them to measure progress, adapt to changing environments and ensure the long-term viability of the district.
- **Community Engagement:** Cultural social discourse is important while developing a sustainability strategy. This would include engaging with the community to develop programs outside of the realm of cultural institutions through listening sessions and workshops. The community could also actively participate in data analysis tools to measure performance and set targets.

WORKSHOPS

Embedding Equity in Public Space: The High Line Network's Community First Toolkit

Facilitators:

- **Asima Jansveld**, The High Line
- **Sonia Torres Rodriguez**, Research Associate, Racial Equity Analytics Lab, Urban Institute, Office of Race and Equity Research
- **Caroline Filice Smith**, Senior Urban Designer and Strategic Planner; Urban Historian and Researcher, Grayscale Collaborative & Harvard University



Developed by The High Line Network, the [Community-First Toolkit \(CFT\)](#) is a set of tools codifying a path to embed equitable development in public spaces for park practitioners. It helps organisations identify how to improve current approaches to have more equitable projects and maximise their impact. Recognising that the development of park projects or public spaces can have unintended negative impacts on the community, the CFT encourages a community-centric approach and demonstrates how public space can have positive social, environmental, and economic impacts for city residents. Today, the High Line Network is composed of 47 members – all based in North America – who have been implementing the Toolkit and are reusing infrastructure as parks or public space.

The CFT recognises that to spearhead equitable work in public spaces, practitioners cannot operate in silos. Creating a sense of ownership and inclusion requires ensuring marginalised communities are not pushed out but can actively participate in the transformation. Practitioners should learn and be knowledgeable about how histories of inequality have shaped their contemporary cultural contexts and how this has led to inequitable urban development and disparate investment in communities based on race, class, and ethnicity. Forging meaningful partnerships with community groups and platforming their advocacy efforts is important in addressing these historical harms.

The CFT emphasises the importance of examining history, centering equity, internal planning, building partnerships, and ensuring progress in an order that suits the specific context. It is based on four connecting categories of impact which serve as a way to measure and track progress on advancements in equity:

- **Thriving Civic and Cultural Life:** Public spaces are hubs for community engagement. Tracking social interaction will help organisations understand who visits, and who might feel left out and why, increasing awareness of possible barriers.
- **Equitable Economic Development:** Popular infrastructure reuse sites have had unintended consequences, such as rising rents that threaten to displace neighbours. A commitment to community development should be embedded into projects from the start.
- **Health, Wellness, and Resilience:** Spaces for play and physical activity help improve health and wellness in communities. In places with inequities such as high pollution levels or low tree canopy, public spaces must be part of the solution.
- **Equitable Organisational Growth:** Every organisation that manages public space has a chance to model equitable labour policies. In addition to external impacts, consider internal culture, too.

Cultural institutions often avoid innovating out of fear of failure, but creating the space to explore and test ideas that begin responding to community needs is important. While there may be barriers, meaningful collaboration can be achieved through building trust and transparency, and by taking activities directly into the community.

WORKSHOPS

Impact Toolbox: How to Translate Strategy Into Action

Facilitators:

- **Linda Soklich**, Director, Strategy & Planning, Arts Centre Melbourne
- **Josephine Ramirez**, EVP The Music Center Arts, The Music Center
- **Eva Maria Chavez**, Associate Director of Evaluation and Learning, The Music Center



While it can seem tedious, research and evaluation are essential for cultural organisations to create tangible strategies for future progress. Taking a data-oriented approach can help achieve impact goals and ensure that an organisation is aligned with its mission and purpose. This workshop explored a Theory of Change (TOC) model and highlighted how it might be a useful approach for cultural districts to translate strategy into action. A TOC is a widely used strategic approach for organisations across sectors. It acts as an explanatory map of a programme's overall vision, illustrating linkages between strategies and desired impact. It is a causal model, so each step should articulate why it will cause a subsequent action. Through the TOC methodology, workshop participants explored how to clarify their organisational goals and desired impacts, identifying changes or targets they needed to make along the way to achieve them.

The necessary ingredients for a TOC are: activities, core program components, and outcomes. There is a need to continually question why certain aspects are included and what social relevance they may have. Being able to see a clear roadmap into how actions can lead to desired outcomes is valuable for organisations. It helps teams align their work, improve clarity with decision-making and embeds a learning mindset into the process.

There may be barriers to implementing a TOC as it involves facing challenges and asking questions that some staff may not be ready to address. Ways to overcome reluctance could include meetings to go over feedback and spreading accountability across the team. Showcasing data to relay impact can also be a means of convincing stakeholders to see the value of TOC implementation. While data collection is daunting to some cultural organisations, testing and discovering different ways to embed evaluation into processes across different departments can be highly effective in linking clear outputs to impact.



WORKSHOPS

Culture for Health: Barriers and Enablers

Facilitators:

- **Alexandra Burton**, Senior Research Fellow, Socio Biobehavioural Research Group, UCL
- **Rosie Dow**, Freelance, Arts and Health Consultant
- **Stephanie Fortunato**, Director of Special Projects, Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN)



Interest in the social impact of arts and culture has grown significantly in recent years, with many research studies pointing to a clear link between cultural participation and population health. Regular arts participation is associated with more positive behaviours in adolescence, better mental health in adulthood, less chronic pain and better cognition in later life, and even improved longevity. As promising as these findings are, barriers exist that may be preventing people from benefitting equally from arts and culture, with stark inequalities based on demographic and socio-economic factors such as neighbourhood deprivation, age, or health status. These factors are still not fully understood, and we are yet to learn how these trends vary worldwide.

Based around research developed by the [Social Biobehavioural Research Group](#), the session highlighted the different ways arts and culture can be used in healthcare, which included:

- clinical based art therapies
- collaborations between artists and clinicians
- artists supporting wellbeing during illness or social challenges
- outreach programs for communities and vulnerable groups
- general arts engagement without specific health aims

The workshop utilised the international nature of the convening to encourage participants to share localised perspectives in order to understand different contexts of culture and health. This involved identifying local barriers, enablers and policy efforts surrounding cultural participation. Despite context, the pandemic was a uniting experience in changing attitudes within organisations, where programming shifted to focus more on health and wellbeing.

First-hand experiences are highly valuable when trying to develop an understanding of the impact of arts on health. The workshop encouraged participants to consider their own experiences, drawing on their interactions with the musical installation created for the convening just outside. Even from only a few minutes of interaction, the installation could create a positive impact on rooting people in place, making them feel cared for, and could influence the way they went about their day. This positive engagement placed emphasis on the importance of putting artworks into public space and highlighted how leveraging art and culture through placemaking activities could help contribute to addressing issues of health in society.

Approaching health through arts and culture involves addressing equitable access, particularly because of the link to social and health inequality and access to the arts. When people in lower socio-economic backgrounds engage in the arts, greater improvements in wellbeing are reported. This shows that there are significant benefits, but too often cultural amenities are inaccessible for the communities that need them most. Therefore in programme design, it is essential to explore potential barriers to participation, relative to place, and cater activities in a way that enables inclusive participation. Decentralising programme delivery by bringing projects into communities is an effective way to achieve this.

There is a perception amongst the cultural sector, that arts for health purposes devalues the notion of art-for-art's sake, and so emerging concepts such as the social prescribing of art to improve access and support wellbeing, are disputed. However, being able to see evidence-based results of cultural engagement was really appealing to many workshop participants, particularly from a funding perspective. This is because making the connection to public health strengthens the argument for arts and culture, as government bodies and funders require convincing data to support the use of art and culture in promoting health. This creates an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to generate robust evidence validating the impact of arts interventions, but this needs to be specific and place based, and studied over time.

In the coming months, the research team and GCDN will produce a report with findings for publication in late 2023.

WORKSHOPS

UAP's Public Art 360

Facilitators:

- **Owen Craven**, Managing Principal, Senior Curator, UAP
- **Gilbert Guaring**, Global Head of Marketing, Sustainability and Engagement, UAP



Created with the help of UAP's clients, collaborators and research partners, Public Art 360 aims to develop a comprehensive and holistic study that both quantitatively and qualitatively defines the impacts and benefits of public art. The workshop shared sample case studies with participants and introduced UAP's vision and journey in developing the tool.

Looking at examples of notable public art installations such as Marina Bay Sands, Discovery Green and Fourth Plinth London, the workshop explored public arts potential to create economic, commercial, environmental, and social benefits as well as support health and wellbeing. It highlighted how public art has place-based benefits (tourism, economic growth, heritage, public realm quality, and appearance) as well as human-based benefits (place perception, education, cultural and social connections, and inspires strong emotional responses, creating a sense of belonging). Falling between place-based and human-based, great public art is: time-appropriate, inspiring, courageous, distinctive, democratic, timeless, interactive, experiential, engaging, inclusive, memorable, and transformative.

There is a lack of holistic and standardised evaluation methodologies for such projects to be included in wider city planning. Public Art 360 aims to fill this void by developing a benchmark and evaluation tool for public art that helps build a consensus on what constitutes valuable public art by identifying common characteristics of impactful projects. Through a partnership with Griffith University, Public Art 360 first assesses various criteria about what makes great public art, and then measures its impact. The criteria were eventually defined as: time-appropriate, inspiring, courageous, distinctive, interactive, inclusive, engaging. It considers impact scale (site, neighbourhood, city), human scale (individual, community, society), and time scale (short-term and long-term impacts).

Eight preliminary impact areas have been identified for public art and include: innovation, placemaking, society, culture, economy, sustainability, wellbeing, and wisdom. Over the next 9-12 months, UAP will engage in field research and methodology development to further explore case studies, including the three installations associated with *A Feral Commons* in the research.



FOCUS TRACKS

Focus Tracks were 75-minute sessions with four presenters each giving a 15-minute presentation on a shared theme, and a 15-minute general Q&A. Three Focus Tracks ran concurrently and so were repeated over the first two days of the convening to enable members to participate in different sessions.

Public Art in Quebec

Moderator:

- **Antoni Durski**, Senior Consultant, AEA Consulting

Speakers:

- **Daniel Iregui**, Digital Artist, Founder, Iregular
- **Anne Lagacé**, Artist
- **Dominique Marier**, Co-directrice Artistique, Toxique Trottoir
- **Gene Pendon**, Artist



This focus track brought together four Montreal-based artists to present their work on public space and explored how public art can play a role in shaping social cohesion in everyday life. Whilst each artist presented their differing approaches to public art, their

artworks collectively strengthen the social fabric of the city, by uniting people through unexpected, transformative experiences.

Daniel Iregui, founder of digital art studio [Iregular](#), focuses on turning cities into interactive museums, creating an interplay between art and technology. Through an R&D process, Iregular experiments with innovative technology and interaction, enabling ideas to become sophisticated through invention. With a focus on creative interventions that impact on how people move through public space, his work is highly interactive, accessible and enables audiences to be part of the artworks. A simple concept pulls the curiosity of people to interact with an artwork, where there is no incorrect way to do it, and these random inputs evolve the artwork to be different all the time. He creates projects that can be adapted to be relevant to each city, so that the local community are engaged as much as possible.

Artist [Anne Lagacé](#) presented the concepts behind her new work “[Lucia](#)” and how she developed an artpiece that was both poetic and meaningful. Her intentions through art are to bring common spaces to life with quality art offerings that reflect shared experiences and are accessible to everyone. Her new installation was a collaboration with musicians, sculptors, and multimedia artists to create a holistic artwork. It combined original music, monumental sculpture, illustrated short film and multimedia scenography to create an experience where audiences could actively interact with the work to influence the final result. For example, the greater the number of people that interact with the artwork, the more the music turns from a solo instrument, into a full orchestral symphony.

Toxique Trottoir creates transformative experiences that break the fourth wall by presenting shows in unconventional spaces. They see every public space as having the potential to be a theatre, and transform the city through unexpected intervention. They engage citizens in participatory experiences by bringing them outside of their comfort zone. This can be in the form of roaming shows, street fairs that engage vulnerable groups, theatre performances that push boundaries and pursue social justice, and interactive performances centred on themes of nature and climate change. They are enthused by how public art generates an element of surprise and is a process of democratising art, as people who wouldn't usually go to theatre, or who are marginalised, engage with artworks.

The fourth artist, Gene Pendon, spoke about the transformative power of street art, skating, and punk culture. He described how he observed street art grow as a trend and how in 2010, artists were really pushing their work and the climate for funding started to change. The city decided they wanted to make more of a municipal effort in supporting it and so street art was able to develop a greater value. The Leonard Cohen mural that he created, for example, became more than a project. It transformed how people looked at the city, and it soon became a globally recognised landmark that is an intrinsic part of the culture of Montréal.

Key things to consider when creating artwork for public space is that public space is wild and cannot be controlled in the same way that a conventional gallery space can. Therefore, design should be catered for differently, such as creating modular works that can grow and change shape depending on the space and budget of the client. It is important to also consider marginalised people who may live in the vicinity of the installation, so there is need for sensitivity to sound and repetitions.

FOCUS TRACKS

Districts and their Contexts

Moderators:

- **Sherif El-Itriby**, Principal, AEA Consulting

Speakers:

- **Christopher Dupe**, Development Director, Misk City
- **Sarie Mairs Slee**, Executive Director, Here for Culture and Place
- **Dora Vougiouka**, Networks & Strategic Partnerships Coordinator, Onassis Stegi/Onassis Foundation
- **Shelley Worrell**, Founder, Little Caribbean



This session brought together leaders from four different parts of the world, highlighting some of the models that exist for cultural districts and looking at the role they play in activating neighbourhoods, partnerships and policy development.

This session first looked to Riyadh, at the MiSK City greenfield development founded by the Crown Prince. This is the first non-profit city in the world and aims to support young people and the growing arts community by becoming an incubator for innovation, entrepreneurship, and the creative industries. It aims to be a walkable, 15-minute city with no cars but features an integrated mobility system exemplifying modern urban transportation. There is also significant focus on enriching sustainability and maintaining balance with nature, whilst remaining practical.

In England, a variety of networks have been established that bring cultural districts and cities together. One example is in Northern England, where cultural districts partnered to create an entity called the Creative Improvement Districts (CID). This functions similarly to a BID but focuses on creative districts and creates affordable, accessible workspaces focused on a culture-led model. Another model is the Key Cities Culture Network, which is composed of 27 cities across the country. Through relationships between cities and universities, communities, businesses, and towns, the network seeks to build regenerative partnerships. Mapping assets is a core step for creative regeneration or cluster development, which should be nurtured and maintained through collaboration.

Onassis Stegi in Athens is a cultural centre where contemporary culture meets aesthetics and science. It has developed programming that extends beyond its walls; hosting activities, exhibitions, and showcasing multidisciplinary arts around the neighbourhood and beyond. It focuses on the importance of activating the local area with arts events, with the aim of generating everyday relationships and unexpected interactions. When engaging with public space, Onassis Stegi recognises the importance of not acting as an owner of public space but as part of the public, and reflects this accordingly when marketing arts events in public space.

In Brooklyn, Little Caribbean is a district that has not only brought together different community entities, but has also become a brand in itself. CaribBEING is a cultural venture that has been centering the Caribbean experience for over a decade. Since starting as a film festival, it has grown to undertake an array of artistic and cultural interventions to address the lack of representation of culture and community. It can be seen as a model for community development as it continues to celebrate and amplify the thriving Caribbean-American culture and to commemorate the history of the Caribbean Diaspora in New York City. Like other districts, Little Caribbean has also sought to extend beyond the neighbourhood and reach new communities. To do so, it created Caribbeing House, a flexible space created from a repurposed shipping container. This has developed a new line of revenue for the organisation, and is used as a small market in addition to hosting an array of events and activities.

These districts are interesting examples of how cultural spaces can extend beyond walls to create microcosms within cities. It is important for these initiatives to engage with the discourse of gentrification and displacement, and the change narrative that culture is producing to counter those negative impacts. These clusters, in their various forms, reiterate the importance of involving other partners in the community, private and public, to have an even greater impact.

FOCUS TRACKS

New Trends in Urban Design

Moderator:

- **Daniel Payne**, Managing Principal, AEA Consulting

Speakers:

- **Nassema Asif**, Senior Architect, Cultural and Civic Sector, RIOS
- **Mark Motonaga**, Creative Director-Partner, RIOS
- **Lindsey Hochman**, Associate, Hariri Pontarini Architects
- **Gregory Taillon**, Architect, Daoust Lestage Lizotte Stecker
- **Mark Thomann**, Wilding X WHY



This panel of architects and urban designers highlighted the latest innovative trends and practices in the field. The speakers showcased successful projects in the cultural and public realm, while also discussing key emerging trends in urban design.

As the global context shifts, boundaries are becoming blurred between cultural institutions and the public realm. Attitudes of wanting to be removed within a cathedral of high art are being replaced with the desire to create welcoming common ground that fits the needs of audiences. As a result, *culturescapes* are forming, where static buildings are transformed into elastic epicentres. Linking urban design principles with this mission of cultural venues breaks down barriers, reconnecting organisations

to the surrounding urban fabric and hyperlocal culture, creating more inclusive and resilient spaces.

Physical boundaries are being challenged and disrupted through innovative design approaches, using flexible and adaptable spaces as well as modular construction methods. Understanding the mix of different uses throughout the day are important considerations in urban design. This informs the creation of flexible spaces in cultural districts and allows for greater engagement and animation of the public realm. This can be seen in the Quartier des spectacles, where architects Daoust Lestage used the existing urban grid to design the cultural district, from its largest to smallest scale. The Place des Festivals is flexible and accessible, allowing for multidisciplinary activations and animations of all scales, such as the Luminotherapie, a flagship light festival in the district. As per the urban furniture, it is designed to be movable, enabling flexible installations to occur.

Strategies such as porosity and transparency are being employed to redefine performing arts centres and cultural hubs. Architects are reimagining the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces, especially while designing cultural facilities. For TO Live's St Lawrence Centre for the Arts (STLC), Hariri Pontarini architects used high-performance transparent façades extending the lobby to the plaza, which enables events to occur inside out.

The Music Centre Plaza Renovation in Los Angeles by RIOS enhances the plaza's connection to the community by creating more welcoming outdoor urban spaces, emphasising on its elastic footprint. The spaces that have a clear and generous access point that is oriented towards multimodal access to the site, allows for self curation and happening upon the space. It has flexible technical infrastructure, and generously arrayed amenities at different price points. This allows the community to get creative with the types of programming the space could provide, increases accessibility, and amplifies gathering spaces as hospitable destinations.

There is a renewed emphasis on approaching urban design through a sustainability lens, with a particular focus on nature. Traditionally, public spaces are often sanitised and lack biodiversity, and city dwellers have been conditioned to look outside of the city for meaningful biodiversity. Restoring natural wilderness into urban environments by incorporating elements of wildness to create heightened biodiversity can create healthier and more vibrant landscapes. Thomann's landscape practice explores the concept of "wilding" as a manifesto for incorporating nature and biodiversity into landscape design, untaming the built environment, and restoring connections to the natural world. From natural urban insertions to experiential gardens exploring climate change; wild landscapes transform public spaces and create meaningful green places which people can connect to and make their own.

FOCUS TRACKS

Discover the Quartier des spectacles

In this special Focus Track, which combined a presentation followed by a walking guided tour, attendees were invited to discover the history, public artworks, and current activities of the Quartier des spectacles.





DAY 3

Welcome

Moderator:

- **Monique Simard**, Présidente du conseil d'administration, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles – Montréal, Canada

Speakers:

- **Marie-Josée Desrochers**, Présidente-directrice générale, Place des Arts – Montréal, Canada
- **Glenn Castanheira**, Directeur général, Société de développement commercial Montréal centre-ville – Montréal, Canada
- **Ericka Alneus**, Membre du comité exécutif, responsable de la culture et du patrimoine, Ville de Montréal – Montréal, Canada



GCDN delegates were joined by representatives from the Montreal and Quebec region creative scene for a special third day of the convening. The day took place within one of the grand theatre spaces in the Places des Arts. Attendees were welcomed to the new venue for an array of highly informative presentations and discussions. The full day of plenary sessions were held in great part in French, reflecting the language spoken in the Québec region and Montreal's proud civic culture. The day began with an official welcome from representatives of the City of Montreal, PQDS, and the hosting venue Place des Arts.

DAY 3

In Conversation With... Montréal

Moderators:

- **Monique Simard**, Présidente du conseil d'administration, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles – Montréal, Canada

Speakers:

- **Valérie Beaulieu**, Directrice du service de la culture Ville de Montréal – Montréal, Canada
- **Ericka Alneus**, Membre du comité exécutif, responsable de la culture et du patrimoine, Ville de Montréal – Montréal, Canada



As a UNESCO City of Design, Montreal is a cultural metropolis of international calibre which hosts dozens of dynamic cultural activities throughout the year. Culture holds great social value and is also an economic asset, accounting for 7% of Montréal's GDP. The arts are alive throughout Montreal; from its diversified ecosystem of cultural and artistic institutions, to its vibrant pool of creators, and its cultural heart in downtown full of world-class arts venues and public spaces.

In this session, Ericka Alneus, an elected official responsible for culture and heritage at the City of Montreal, and Valérie Beaulieu, Director of Culture at the City of Montreal,

presented the vision of culture for the city and the scope of their actions. They first gave an overview of the Places des Arts, which was developed to revitalise downtown Montreal and make the area a destination on both a social and economic level. Places des Arts has 6 halls with 8,000 seats and puts on close to 1,000 shows annually. It also houses Canada's largest museum of contemporary art and fuses outdoor and indoor public space with links to the underground city – a web of tunnels and passageways which connect various places in the city centre, as well as its underground stations, to provide pedestrians with a weatherproof travel option – which is always open. The Place des Arts is designed to welcome people all year long and has won an award that reflects its success. It has now become an essential part of Montreal's identity, and there is a desire for it to now reach beyond its walls and be a catalyst for positive change.

There is a movement in Montreal and the wider Quebec region to ensure that the French language and heritage are preserved. During the pandemic, downtown Montreal went through one of the harshest health measures and lockdowns in North America. In spite of this, it has since become the fastest recovering economy in the region, with increased footfall through tourism. This is because the city centre is not just a business district, but is arguably the largest cultural hub in North America. This reflects that we are at a time when people are not obliged to go back to city centres yet go back because they want to be there. Therefore, maintaining and creating cultural events and spaces are key to ensuring a city's longevity.

Valérie Beaulieu, who is in charge of cultural affairs at the City of Montreal, then gave an overview of Montreal's cultural intervention structure, which is a collective commitment to culture with adapted strategies across 19 boroughs. She highlighted that whilst lots of work has been done, there is still a lot more to do by looking at wider cross-sector collaborations to encourage transversal thought processes. For example, within culture and commerce, further developing skill sets and creating partnerships that further creative economic development.

DAY 3

Presentation: Mapping Cultural Districts

Speakers:

- **Éric Lefebvre, directeur général**, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles – Montréal, Canada
- **Gregorio Lucena Scarpella**, Director, GCDN – La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland



This session introduced a new initiative created by the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles, in collaboration with the GCDN specifically for this convening. The initiative maps cultural districts through an online platform, which enables users to discover the array of different places across the world that identify as cultural districts. The tool currently maps over 500 cultural districts around the world and identifies the location of place-based cultural activities and conglomeration of cultural institutions. Users can explore the map and click on locations to learn more about each area. This mapping exercise was primarily aimed at highlighting the broad scope of structures, shapes, sizes, and models which these entities can take on the global scale. The project was spearheaded by the PQDS and gifted to GCDN. A second phase of the project will see the map become an interactive tool which will allow user-generated submissions and updates.

The map of cultural districts is now available online in its static state and can be accessed [here](#).

DAY 3

Districts Culturels: Structures et Modèles de Gouvernance

French-language Panel Discussion

Moderator:

- **Marc-André Carignan**, Chargé de projet, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles

Speakers:

- **Fabrice Berthereaux**, Directeur général Adjoint, SAMOA Nantes
- **Éric Lefèbvre**, Directeur général, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles
- **Katharina Scriba**, Directrice, Fondation Fiminco

Cultural districts come in many shapes and sizes, business models and governing structures. There is no one size fits all and context is often key. Nonetheless, common principles and practices underpin most successful cultural districts. Effective governance is typically networked across hierarchies and sectors, and is highly collaborative and responsive to changing circumstances, as well as to the concerns of citizens and society. Using GCDN French-speaking members as case studies, this session explored how these universally beneficial principles are implemented in various governance structures and business model configurations.

The presentation first explored SAMOA and the Quartier de la Création, which aims to establish a cultural and creative hub for cultural production and dissemination on the Île de Nantes in France. It has activated 337 hectares with 90,000 square-metres dedicated to the creative and cultural industries, generating 35,000 jobs. The knowledge economy places emphasis on the central role of universities within the urban environment, which includes 8,000 students in Nantes. The city aims to activate its spaces through the interaction between citizens and art, and there is a specific commitment to engage creatives in ecological initiatives. The governance structure also supports an urban development project focussed on cultural and economic growth. The goal is to create a resilient territory that benefits the entire city and its citizens over time. They have a contract with the city and are funded by the public sector, but are moving towards becoming owners and commercialising their properties.

The Fondation Fiminco can be found in Romainville, on the outskirts of Paris, and is part of a significant urban transformation project stimulated by the 2024 Olympic Games. The building is an important heritage site that the city wanted to preserve and enhance. At 11,000 square-metres, it hosts 7 galleries, acts as an international residency for artists and curators, and is home to art and design school Parsons Paris. By 2024, Fiminco's cultural district will also feature artists studios, an art school, an open storage space for artworks and a stage with 600 seats. The Fondation aims to become the creative hub for the city of Romainville and believes that business models and governance only work by collaborating with local authorities and having shared objectives.

The history of the Quartier Des Spectacles (QDS) dates back to 2002. It features over 30 performance halls, 8 lively public spaces, and showcases 100+ shows a month. The cultural district counts \$200 million in investment and \$4.2 billion in real estate-related economic benefits. The Partenariat's role within the QDS is to manage and programme public spaces, develop complementary cultural offerings, and promote the destination and its work. Ultimately, the investment made in the neighbourhood creates a cultural, economic, and social city centre, and has helped to revitalise the real estate of the city. Most of the cultural investment comes from the public sector, but the management is both independent and private, and so the partnership involves a high level of trust to function smoothly.

DAY 3

Creative Industries: Imagining New Cities

Moderators:

- **Delphine Beauchamp**, General Director, La Piscine – Montréal, Canada
- **Franckie Trichet**, Conseiller Municipal de Nantes, Innovation, Numérique, Francophonie et Pratiques Sportives libres & Vice-Président Nantes Métropole, Innovation, Numérique et Relations Internationales – Nantes, France

Speakers:

- **We Ker** – Nantes, France
- **Le Crabe Fantôme** – Nantes, France
- **Tungsten Studio** – Montreal, Canada
- **Charlie Tango** – Montreal, Canada
- **Harrison Fun Studio** – Montreal, Canada
- **Daily tous les Jours** – Montreal, Canada



As part of the “[Franco-Quebec Year of Innovation](#)”, two French and four Quebec companies presented their creative visions to amplify the vitality of city centres and contribute to the evolution of urban life. This session, initiated by SAMOA, GCDN, QDSI, and La Piscine, was an opportunity to discover how these companies are using cultural and creative expertise to open up new perspectives on the world of tomorrow and the future of their cities.

These high-level presentations explored how innovative and exciting tools, and some outside of the box thinking, can help generate ideas to realise the latent future potential of cityscapes. They each highlighted how creatives are key in utilising imagination to address local issues and improve daily life. The examples offered demonstrated their keen ability to encourage people to creatively interact with urban spaces, transforming cities into playgrounds in a way that entertains and educates.

In Nantes, We Ker transformed often dull evaluation and research processes into exciting video game experiences that encourage participation through gamification. They learned that producing a game to make surveys more fun, meant greater participation and input, which provided a wealth of data to inform future decision-making. Nearly 8000 players answered 42 questions in a game-based opinion poll that asked communities about their preference to offshore wind turbines in France, the results ultimately changed the government's plans.

Another gamification company is Charlie Tango, which uses a gaming mechanism to resolve issues and business challenges. Through games, such as a walking quest that people can access on their phones, players rediscover cities and navigate challenges through captivating stories.

Tungsten Studio also encourages people to reconnect with issues on a deeper level. Through the use of film as their medium, they create documentaries to support purposeful B Corp, institutions that share inspiring stories that have the potential to change the world.

Le Crabe Fantôme, based in Nantes, perceives the future of cities not to be shopping territories, but narrative territories. Through transmedia storytelling, the organisation fuses historical and scientific fact with fictional characters. They transform these stories into in situ experiences in an attempt to connect people through emotions and memories associated with a place. This creates opportunities for connections on a deeper level, and restructures the way people interact with the city.

Also utilising and reframing public space, are Harrison Fun Studio and Daily Tous Les Jours – both Montreal-based companies. Through their work to transform ugly or forgotten spaces into thriving public spaces, Harrison Fun Studio aims to inject fun into design. Through projects such as [Nrm1 Basket](#), where the public can undertake a free hoop-based game in colourful ball court, they reactivated a previously disused rooftop site. Daily Tous Les Jours transforms the everyday by bringing citizens together through immersive experiences and interactive installations, such as its popular musical swings. Both firms noted how the higher level of receptivity and support around prototyping ideas for adapting urban spaces in alignment with public health restrictions is now enabling them to pioneer innovations in the ways people interact with each other in public space.

DAY 3

Keynote: The Quartier des Arts du Cirque

This keynote was presented in collaboration with [C2 Montréal](#)

Speakers:

- **Daniel Lamarre**, Vice-Président exécutif du conseil d'administration, Groupe Cirque du Soleil
- **Stéphane Lavoie**, Directeur Général et de la Programmation, La TOHU



Artistic institutions and creative spaces can have a positive impact on the development of their environment, their discipline, and the life of their neighbourhoods. The Quartier des Arts du Cirque, located in the Saint-Michel district of Montreal, is a good example.

Daniel Lamarre, visionary founder of Cirque du Soleil, shared his experience with the company and its amplifying impact on the entire circus community of Montréal. This appreciation shaped his initial vision for the neighbourhood surrounding the Cirque du Soleil headquarters. Then, Stéphane Lavoie, General and Programming Director of La TOHU, discussed the influence of the Cité des Arts du Cirque in the Saint-Michel district and how this led to the creation of the Quartier des Arts du Cirque.

The Quartier des Arts du Cirque is a nonprofit to promote economic development, born from the common will of its founding members: La Tohu, the National Circus School,

Cirque du Soleil and PME MTL Centre-Est, supported by the City of Montréal. Its objective is to consolidate the excellence hub dedicated to the circus arts and to position this district as a zone of innovation for the cultural and creative industries.

Community is at the heart of the circus district, and they are proud of their contributions within their neighbourhood, believing that artists and cultural activities give a soul to a city. The very foundations of TOHU are built from cultivating a community, as the contemporary circus, culture and community hub that it is today grew out of a tradition of street performers living together. The organisations endeavour to look further than their role as prestigious artistic institutions, to embed social responsibility. Through initiatives such as Cirque du Monde, a program Cirque du Soleil created to promote circus art as a means of intervention they call social circus, they engage communities through developing activities and programmes that support marginalised people within society including training, job creation, and advocacy efforts.

DAY 3

Uniting stakeholders and galvanising community

Moderator:

- **Adrian Ellis**, Chair, Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN), Director, AEA Consulting

Speakers:

- **Andrea Dempster Chung**, Cofounder & Executive Director, Kingston Creative
- **Vilma Jurkute**, Executive Director, Alserkal Initiatives
- **Lily Cabatu Weiss**, Executive Director, Dallas Arts District



Marked by a rich concentration of cultural activities and organisations that draw a diverse range of stakeholders together, successful cultural districts are recognised for the vitality they bring to urban life. But to deliver these benefits to the wider community, stakeholders must collaborate around a shared goal. This includes not only public and private institutions of all sizes, government, and artists – but also audiences both from within and outside of the local community. Looking at successful stakeholder and audience engagement case studies from three profoundly different contexts, this session explored how cultural districts can unite communities and inspire meaningful collaboration, highlighting their power to bring people together and enhance the urban experience.

GCDN defines a cultural district as any geographical area known for having a concentration of artistic activity and infrastructure. While the definition of a cultural district has traditionally implied synonymy with the built environment, this has arguably expanded to encompass a greater plurality, where the in-between parts, the flows and processes of people and place that are instigated by culture, are what make a cultural district.

Whilst a historically narrow idea about who legitimate stakeholders are has been the norm, today, our understanding is greatly expanded and nuanced. Interestingly, over the last decade, “planetary” stakeholders have also been recognised. This brings in the environment, as well as social, and racial justice as legitimate interests that hold cultural districts to higher standards of accountability. There are also stakeholders outside of a cultural district’s control, because it exists within a wider neighbourhood and so needs to be perceived not in isolation, but as a part of something bigger. As a result, there needs to be a dynamic/ongoing negotiation of stakeholders and municipal diplomacy to achieve collective thinking. Particularly when confronted with resistance, building personal re-lationships, going to people on their own turf, and utilising cultural production as an important tool of agency, can all be effective methods.

Exploring what stakeholder engagement means on a practical level inevitably varies across context, but cultural districts can learn from each other about successful practices. Knowledge sharing is beneficial to understanding how to practically recognise stakeholders in a legitimate way that is realistic to operate in all situations and particularly under constrained circumstances. Low-hanging fruit, such as being active on social media, is an excellent way to engage stakeholders efficiently. Having an awareness of hyperlocal context is also important, as in Downtown Kingston for example, the post-colonial history makes engagement with neighbouring areas difficult.

When it comes to sustainability, culture should be viewed as a fourth pillar. Many cultural districts are extremely vulnerable to climate change and are experiencing its effects first hand. As a result, there is growing consensus that it is time to redefine dated paradigms through initiatives that actively engage with the climate emergency and wider sustainability. *A Feral Commons*, the global co-commission spearheaded by Alserkal in collaboration with GCDN, is an excellent example of a programmatic response. As highlighted in previous sessions, this increased importance came about through the pandemic, as many organisations came to the realisation that they could no longer stand on the sidelines of social issues; *“The silver lining of COVID made us not close our doors, but open our doors even wider”*.

DAY 3

Présentation: Les Jardins Gamelins

Moderator:

- **Catherine Girard Lantagne**, Director of Programming, Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles

Speakers:

- **Laurent Dyke**, Agent conseiller aux dossiers itinérance et LGBTQ2+, Division de la prévention et de la sécurité urbaine, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal
- **Janick Fortin**, Chargée de projets partenariats externes et formations, Société de développement social
- **Aïda Setbel**, Animation horticole et affiliation sociale, Sentier Urbain



Established eight years ago, [Les Jardins Gamelins](#) is a thriving public space in the heart of Montreal's Quartier des Spectacles, where social inclusion, collaboration, and cohabitation are celebrated. With its commitment to diversity and cultural richness, Les Jardins Gamelin is not just a park, but a vibrant and dynamic living space where diverse audiences gather. This presentation introduced the project ahead of a panel discussion on cohabitation in public space and also set the stage for an evening of festivities at Les Jardins Gamelin.

Les Jardins Gamelin can be seen as a bold and radical way to address social cohesion through design. The project took on a park where fragmentation between the general public and the marginalised people that populated it was prominent. Instead of adhering to traditional approaches to development where marginalised people are displaced, this social intervention embraced social diversity and took a radical stance in uniting communities by creating space for cohabitation and inclusion. Putting respect and active listening at the heart of the project meant the initiative was able to forge an interconnected community between police, health practitioners, the cultural district and the marginalised people that gravitated towards the Jardin.

The ongoing emphasis to create harmonious cohabitation in the everyday through a human-centred approach demonstrates the Jardins commitment to addressing key social issues. The Jardin embeds carefully planned initiatives, such as police-reducing interventions that increase their visibility through forging connections on a human level by spending time with marginalised people and through which they become familiar faces. This builds a more positive relationship between the marginalised people and the police, and is effective in reducing the criminal print of the area. The Jardin also has an important partnership with the SDS, a non profit organisation helping the most vulnerable in the community, working together to fight against homelessness and social exclusion through respect and collaboration.

The Jardin features several interventions that connect people with the environment, their community, and deliver essential services. A repurposed shipping container in the park acts as a central hub that can be utilised by partners to offer a range of different services from police community work to basic health services. The Jardin also has free daily artistic cultural programming, which 700 artists have been part of so far. This encourages people to return to the area. There is also a focus on social greening, with the belief that plants have the power to bring people together to be a medium for social and environmental connection.

Les Jardins Gamelin demonstrates the power of experimenting with place-based, collaborative cultural initiatives to address key issues shared across cities.

DAY 3

Cohabitation in Public Spaces

Moderator:

- **Ramon Marrades**, Director, Placemaking Europe

Speakers:

- **Catherine Girard Lantagne**, Director of Programming , [Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles](#)
- **Nicole Gordon**, CEO, [Better Bankside](#)
- **Robin Abad Ocuillo**, Director of [Shared Spaces](#), City and County of San Francisco



Ideal public spaces are designed to be flexible and accessible to individuals of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles. Cohabitation in these spaces can provide opportunities for social interaction, exposure to diverse perspectives, and the formation of inclusive communities. However, it can also lead to conflicts and tension, particularly when there are differing views on appropriate behaviour, use of space, and cultural norms. Understanding that as a critical aspect of urban planning and community development, this session explored the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in managing and promoting harmonious cohabitation in public spaces.

This session built on many of the ideas that surfaced in the previous presentation, reinforcing the need to take risks with creative interventions in public space to see what works. Though out of necessity, restrictions imposed on indoor spaces during the

pandemic arguably created conditions ready for testing ideas that facilitated cohabitation in public space. This showed the potential of bringing the inside out.

Tactical placemaking first involves seizing opportunities to test out ideas that can then create wider change. In the case of San Francisco, a prominent example of this is when someone fed a parking metre in order to turn a space dedicated to automobiles into a mini park. Over time, this led to a public/private partnership that has since grown thousands of parklets across the city. While this may be aesthetically pleasing, it also activates new uses of existing public space by bringing people together to interact with it in a new way.

Ensuring collaboration with local partners and communities is essential when working with public space because there are many stakeholders involved. When approaching new ideas that may present challenges, partnerships are also effective in stopping each organisation from becoming overwhelmed, and so they can ultimately make a greater impact.

Recognising that communities are the experts allows the organisations responsible for managing and promoting the public realm to also act as facilitators in enabling community ideas to happen. This is the case in San Francisco, where bureaucratic procedures were streamlined to support those who wanted to create activations in their neighbourhoods by providing direct grants. This is an equitable approach to encouraging cohabitation in public space because it creates shared ownership, empowers new communities to push their creative ideas, and makes public space something everyone can be proud of.

This session demonstrated the need to be bold in taking risks when opportunities appear to create positive change within public space. There is perhaps even an element of cheekiness reminiscent of the street art scene, in bending around regulations and pushing bureaucratic boundaries so that stakeholders can tangibly see the potential of an idea. These prototypes that activate public space in imaginative ways unlock an area's potential. As cohabitation in public space is a grassroots concept, it should either involve the existing community of users in the process or give them the agency to make the change themselves. This method creates investment that a top-down approach could not effectively manufacture. While often more aesthetically pleasing than dull grey cities, these interventions may have a greater impact in forging new social fabrics that are created by people from all intersections of society, inviting everyone to come together to enjoy a shared space.

2024 CONVENING

GCDN and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre announced the next convening will take place in Athens, Greece from 20-24 May, 2024.



ABOUT



GCDN

The Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN) is an independent, international association committed to improving the quality of urban life through the contribution of the arts, culture and creative industries. The network fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing among those responsible for creative and cultural districts, quarters and clusters in widely diverse contexts, providing rich and rewarding opportunities for cross fertilization and exchange. The forum engages leaders and opinion formers in culture and in urban development through convenings, research, multimedia content, and collaborations – in order to inform global, local and sectoral agendas. GCDN is an initiative of AEA Consulting.

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