

Overcoming Poverty

Professional artists

Situation

According to the UNESCO, the profession of artist is essential and valuable to the functioning of society, just like other professions such as nursing, teaching, engineering and architecture.

Art is a fundamental vehicle in every sphere of activity: economy, education, health, etc. The creative energy arising from artists represents an impressive force that motivates all citizens, old and young, to be creative.

In New Brunswick, 1,900 artists¹ contribute to the economy of the information, and culture sector, which represented 910 million dollars in 2010 (4.1 % of the province's GDP)². In Canada, the direct, indirect and secondary economic footprint of the cultural sector amounted to 84.6 billion dollars in 2007 (7.4 % of Canada's GDP)³. The strength, energy and ideas of this sector lies in the work of artists.

Reality

Considering these facts, many people might imagine that artists make a good living. The reality, however, is very different.

The average income of artists in New Brunswick was \$15,600 in 2006 while their median income was \$8,800 \$⁴. According to Statistics Canada, this is far below the income of artists in other Canadian provinces. This average income is also below the average income of individuals in New Brunswick, which is \$28,400 (2006)⁵, and is below the low income cut-off.

What is more, artists rarely have access to drug, dental and eye care coverage, or disability insurance. Artists often don't have a pension waiting for them at the age of retirement and can rarely benefit from the employment insurance offered to salaried workers. Because of the prejudices that financial institutions have about artists, it is often difficult for them to obtain loans or mortgages.

Presently, any government, business, cultural organization or other agency or institution that hires the service of artists is not obligated to pay the fees recommended by national artist associations. Furthermore, artists are often the

first to be solicited to offer their talent and their work free of charge for charitable causes. The work of artists is appreciated, but often very poorly paid.

The options proposed

To allow artists to live from their profession (and out of poverty) and share their creativity with others here, the province must be a leader when it comes to recognizing the professional status of artists and improving their socioeconomic condition. In particular, the province must raise the income of artists, increase access to artistic and cultural infrastructures, invest more long-term funding towards arts and culture, and ensure the professionalization of their human resources.

Municipalities also have an important role to play with investing in arts and culture, as their citizens benefit directly from the presence and work of artists in their community⁶.

The CFSJ proposes that:

- New Brunswick develops legislation as well as fiscal, legal and social measures to recognize the profession of artist and to improve the socioeconomic status of these professionals.
- the provincial and municipal governments increases funding towards the arts and culture sector, to allow artists to continue to be a partner in the development of the province and help with current challenges.

Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Nelson Mandela

The Common Front for Social Justice www.frontnb.ca



¹ Hill Strategies Research, Inc. (2009). "Artists in Canada's Provinces and Territories. Based on the 2006 Census". *Statistical Insights on the Arts*, vol. 7, n° 5. <bit.ly/1cGFqxO> : p.32.

² MQO Research. (2012). "A Profile of the Information, Culture and Recreation Sector in New Brunswick": p. 3. <bit.ly/19CJ3Rz>

³ Conference Board of Canada. (2008). "Valoriser notre culture: Mesurer et comprendre l'économie créative du Canada". <bit.ly/Vtnyxk>: p.5

⁴ Hill Strategies Research, Inc. (2009). "Artists in Canada's Provinces and Territories. Based on the 2006 Census". *Statistical Insights on the Arts*, vol. 7, n° 5. <bit.ly/1cGFqxO> : p.32.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Hill Strategies Research, Inc. (2012), "Government Expenditures on Culture, 2009-2011". <bit.ly/1dQjVaX>.