

## **PHD Defence**

### **Federal Arts Policy 1957-2014: The Rhetoric & the Reality by Duncan Low**

This is a news update from School of Communication, Simon Fraser University  
News Editor: Siboc Chen

Our dear colleague, Duncan Low, will defend his PHD Dissertation on Friday, September 23rd 2016 at Harbor Center Room 1600 (10:00 am – 1:00 pm). Here is the abstract of his dissertation “Federal Arts Policy 1957-2014: The Rhetoric & the Reality”.

#### **Abstract**

This dissertation is concerned with the question: what evidence exists to underpin the claim that 21st century Canadian arts policy is delivering the support necessary to maintain and build a vigorous and sustainable professional arts sector?

To answer this question this study begins with a retrospective examination of the Canada Council of the Arts, the principal instrument of federal policy for the professional arts celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2017. It also offers an intensive review of a recent program, the Marquee Tourism Events Program (MTEP), a multi-million-dollar federal program that ran from 2009 to 2010 and funded arts festivals on the basis of their tourism potential.

Close analysis of both the Canada Council’s history, and of a recent short-term policy initiative, the MTEP, reveals the major characteristics of the federal government’s shifting approach to the professional arts sector. The dissertation shows how the formation and management of arts policy moved away from an emphasis on an arm’s-length approach to the professional arts and turned to programs like the MTEP for which economic rationales were paramount- although their economic impacts were poorly documented. To reach these conclusions I conducted a content and document analysis of the federal major policy documents 1957-2014. I then compared these arts policy documents against the Canada Council Annual Reports over the same period. The policy documents and Annual reports were then triangulated against Library & Archives Canada material, Library of Parliament Reviews and relevant media in order to distinguish the economic rhetoric from the reality.

In 2009 and 2010 the MTEP delivered \$100 million in financial support to events and arts festivals across the country. Using a Freedom of Information request to access completed MTEP application forms, ministerial briefing notes, economic impact studies and Canada Revenue Agency data I

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evaluated the program's specific goal of attracting cultural tourists. The MTEP case studies examined include Canadian Film, Folk Music and Jazz Festivals as well as The Shaw and The Stratford and Luminato Festivals.

The dissertation exposes the increasing dominance of policy rhetoric over substance, with a neoliberal influence on engaging the arts for non-artistic purposes such as encouraging tourism. My review of these MTEP events and the inconsistent and sometimes missing reporting from them reveals a failure of accountability in economically orientated federal arts policy design and evaluation. These conclusions provoke a reconsideration of fundamentals in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional arts policy in Canada. The study concludes with a series of policy recommendations.

**Keywords:** arts and cultural policy; professional not for profit arts; cultural tourism; creative class; creative city; amenity / density bonus; public funding agencies