

Toronto's Global Partnerships for Arts and Culture

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**Insights on Cultural Diplomacy:
Toronto's Global Partnerships for Arts and Culture**

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Current State of Toronto's International Affairs

In Canada, the federal public service is responsible for promoting a national brand and representing the interests of all municipalities. However, large cities like Toronto have unique requirements that most other Canadian cities need not imagine. The Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) accounts for 17% of the national population and is the fastest growing city in North America. Toronto has the additional responsibilities of bidding for international events and conferences, competing for global investment and businesses, marketing itself as a cultural destination, and vying for major film shoots. Furthermore, City staff must organize and facilitate a transportation infrastructure for residents, tourists from abroad, and out-of-towners traveling into the City for sporting events. It is essential for municipalities to have their own international partnerships and affiliations, often because their Nation may not accurately represent a City's needs.

In 2001 the City of Toronto created the International Alliance Program, which highlights four main objectives: economic development, cultural development, tourism development, and cross-cultural community development.

This paper is primarily focused on cultural development (marketing Toronto's cultural tourist attractions to the world; creating connections between international cultural institutions) as well as cross-cultural community development, creating distinction from other cities based on its multiculturalism; marketing Toronto as home to virtually all of the world's culture groups and more than 100 languages.

Toronto has several international City partnerships, some as recent as 2019 and some go back as far as 1986. There are three categories: Partnership Cities, Friendship Cities, and Cities with which Toronto has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

In 2019 alone, the Mayor and City officials have participated in missions to Los Angeles (USA), New York City (USA), Lisbon (Portugal), London (UK), Paris (France), Marseille (France), Torino (Italy), Milan (Italy), Copenhagen (Denmark) and Stockholm (Sweden). From 2016 to 2018, Toronto has worked on several international projects such as collaborating with Latin American cities for trade and cultural exchange, including Montevideo (Uruguay), Mexico City and Monterey (Mexico). In 2017, Mayor John Tory led a delegation of business leaders to India and Sri Lanka to promote Toronto as a preferred destination for investment. In 2018, City staff traveled to Tokyo and Sagami-hara (Japan), as well as Shanghai and Chengdu (China) with the goal of building international relationships for trade and export development. While most of these trips were largely focused on promoting economic interest in the Toronto Region, they were also important for public diplomacy and cross-cultural exchange.

In addition to economic development, the arts and cultural industries are also important areas for paradiplomacy. In terms of film, City officials have traveled to Maharashtra (India) and Los Angeles

(USA) for the purpose of building relationships and growing Toronto's film, television and media industries.

Since 2013, Toronto and Austin (USA) have actively participated in the *Toronto-Austin Music Cities Alliance*. It is the first of its kind in the world and focuses on how the cities can promote themselves as music hubs. Since 2015, Toronto has been included in Austin's South by South West annual music festival. In 2016, they co-hosted a Music Cities Alliance Summit, and in 2017 they collaborated to showcase their relationship at Canadian Music Week. This partnership is ongoing and encourages music industry acceleration and joint programming.

In 2015, Toronto and Chicago (USA) began the "Tale of Two Cities" Music Project. The partner cities co-produced a concert, networking and development series that focused on emerging music artists. There were events, workshops, and concerts held in both cities, and the series culminated with Jessie Reyes from Toronto recording a track with Chance the Rapper from Chicago.

Another interesting case involves Sagamiyama (Japan), who established a partnership with Scarborough in 1991. When Toronto amalgamated to include Scarborough and the other boroughs in 1998, the city inherited this relationship with Sagamiyama. When the City decided to beautify the Birkdale Ravine, Sagamiyama gifted dozens of cherry trees to the project. The trees were planted over 2015 and 2016.

Finally, Toronto has an active Street Art Program that is completing some fantastic projects. The Program is run by the City's Transportation Division and initially began as a graffiti management plan, paying artists to paint murals that would deter tagging. It soon evolved into an international artist exchange program. The first exchange was with Chicago in 2017, as that was both the year of Canada's 150th birthday and Chicago's Year of Public Art. The Chicago artist painted the underpass from Roncesvalles Avenue to Sunnyside Beach, and the Toronto artist painted an underpass near Navy Wharf in Chicago. Next, Street Art partnered with Chile in 2018, a collaboration that not only included Toronto and the Valparaiso Municipality, but also the Toronto District School Board, the Canadian Embassy in Chile, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chile, and the Chilean – Canadian Cultural Society. In 2019, Street Art wrapped up artist exchange projects with Peru and Frankfurt.

Potential Opportunities for Toronto's International Affairs

Despite the collaborative projects described above, the City of Toronto should engage in more international cultural ventures in order to truly demonstrate its potential as a global City.

Toronto is excellent at proclamations and one-way communication. City Hall often acknowledges international and historical events, such as recognizing the Pontian Genocide (May 2016), declaring a day of respect for Italian immigrants (April 2017), creating a Filipino Heritage Month (June 2017), announcing a day for Vietnamese History and Community (March 2018), and raising the Kurdish flag at City Hall (February 2019). These proclamations are important to discuss because they demonstrate that Toronto is looking externally. However, although these decrees are often international in nature, they are not actually being communicated internationally: there is no profound exchange or cooperation as a result.

Perhaps the City of Toronto could take the next step and create dialogue from these one-way proclamations. For instance, Toronto is home to the fourth largest Italian community outside of Italy. Instead of Toronto only declaring a day of respect for Italian immigrants, the City could use

its existing partnerships with Milan and Matera to arrange cultural exchanges or joint endeavours on specific projects.

In terms of the declaration of a day for Vietnamese History and Community, this could be a good way to reinvigorate Toronto's relationship with Ho Chi Minh City. The two municipalities have had a friendship agreement since 2006, however they have not engaged on joint initiatives together since 2008. Since Toronto is already celebrating Vietnamese History, officials could reach out and to create a dialogue.

In October 2017, Toronto was awarded the title of a UNESCO Creative City in the category of Media Arts. There are 13 other UNESCO Media Arts Cities around the world, representing Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and North America, yet there has been no collaborative programming between Toronto and these other cities. Toronto should take advantage of this title to create partnerships, join collaborative projects, and to represent Toronto in abroad Media Arts events and festivals.

Some of Toronto's current global partnerships are relatively unused. For instance, in 2015, City Council urgently passed a friendship agreement with Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) leading up to the 2016 Summer Olympics. Councillors argued that this motion would maximize benefits to Toronto in planning for future world sporting and cultural events. However, there has been no joint projects between the two Cities since the agreement.

In 2017, the City of Toronto signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Matera (Italy) in preparation for its role as the European Capital of Culture for 2019, along with Plovdiv (Bulgaria). One year after the MOU, the *Toronto Star* interviewed city staff, asking what resulted of the trip that a Councillor took to Italy. The organizers were unable to list any benefits of signing the agreement. It is evident that there is an absence of follow-through regarding Toronto's international relationships, likely because there is a lack of specific objectives and outcomes for each relationship.

Finally, the City of Toronto's benchmarking needs to be improved. There is a tendency for city staff to only study other North American cities for project comparisons, most often Chicago, New York City, San Francisco, and Vancouver. This is problematic for a couple reasons; it demonstrates that a global City is not researching globally, and it assumes that North American cities possess the best practices for each issue. In terms of winning tourism and business bids, how could Toronto stand out from other North American cities if it is consistently looking to copy these cities?

Instead, Toronto should be asking its partner cities about what they are doing about these issues. Matters regarding transportation, implementing digital infrastructure, and preserving the environment are not exclusive to North American cities. Collaborative international teams could better study and improve these areas of development.

For example, when Toronto was looking at implementing free public Wi-Fi throughout the city from 2013-2015, city staff studied the models of Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco. Toronto is a member of the Coalition of Cities for Digital Rights, along with 35 other major cities, including Amsterdam, Guadalajara, Helsinki, Milan, Porto, and Vienna; city officials could have used these relationships to determine best practices for the digital infrastructure.

In 2015, when the City was discussing removing the Gardiner Expressway, the highway that cuts through the downtown core, staff studied Chicago, New York City, and Vancouver. Why didn't city staff speak to their counterparts in Rio de Janeiro? Before the 2016 Olympics, Rio underwent the massive Porto Maravilha project that involved demolishing the Perimetral highway. Toronto could

have asked its Friendship City how the process was conducted, and if the results improved the experience of residents and tourists.

In 2019, Toronto was searching for ways to improve its winter economy, and studied Montreal, Denver, Ottawa, and Quebec City as benchmarks. Instead of relying on data from other North American cities, with whom Toronto would arguably be competing for tourism business, officials should look to international examples. For example, another UNESCO Media Arts awarded city is Sapporo, Japan; Sapporo would be a good partner for Toronto to pursue as it boasts a booming winter economy, hosts the Sapporo International Art Festival every three years, and recently developed an international artist-in-residence program.

The Future of Toronto's International Affairs

Regarding the future of Toronto's global projects, the Toronto Region Board of Trade released *Partnerships that Produce*, a report that advocates for updating and restructuring Toronto's current International Alliance Program. On December 17, 2019, Toronto City Council adopted the document's recommendations, meaning a formal review will occur in 2020. Additionally, Council agreed that Toronto should not be participating in any new city-to-city agreements until the review has been completed.

In terms of recommendations, *Partnerships that Produce* suggests that Toronto should play a more active role in initiating international projects, include partners other than cities (NGOs, businesses, museums, universities), and reclassify the City's current agreements. The document also discusses enhancing decision-making criteria for selecting new partners, and ensuring that projects focus on specific objectives, measurable outcomes, and expiration dates.

One example of a global partnership that has measurable results involves Burlington (another city in the province of Ontario, not far from Toronto) and its Twin City Apeldoorn (Netherlands). The two cities have been twinning since 2005, often celebrating anniversaries and hosting joint conferences. When Burlington decided it was time to create a bicycle infrastructure, they looked to their global partner, as the Netherlands is known internationally for its bicycle culture. Burlington city staff invited engineers and officials from Apeldoorn to visit, and to provide an assessment and recommendations for the construction of bike lanes.

Another example of a goal-based global partnership is between Mississauga (Canada) and Kariya (Japan). Both cities desired to enhance their global awareness. The solution in this instance was Mississauga creating a Kariya Park, while Kariya built a Mississauga Park; this project not only solidified their connection as Sister Cities, but also made their residents more aware of one another. As a result, Mississauga now hosts approximately 99 Japanese companies that contribute to the local economy.

What could Toronto accomplish if it followed the example of Mississauga and Kariya? It is conceivable that each of the City's international partners could have a small area dedicated to them. Maybe one day in the future, Toronto could be home to a mini Rio beach, complete with the Copacabana-style tiles. Perhaps we could ask our partners in Italy or Portugal to decorate and engage the neighbourhoods known as Corso Italia and Little Portugal, respectively.

Collaborative projects towards this vision could make Toronto a truly global destination.