

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Daniel Schwanen
To: The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage
Date: September 27, 2016
Re: **EXPORTING CANADIAN CULTURE**

You have engaged Canadians [in a review](#) of policies that support the creation and promotion of Canadian cultural content. This review is an excellent opportunity to clarify the principles that will underpin the government's cultural policy goals in the digital age, and inform the specific policy instruments used to achieve them.

Many such current policy instruments were instituted to fit a bygone technological era. As you [have noted](#), they need to be revisited and adapted to the current environment, in which “citizens want choices and access.”

You have also indicated that a drive to boost cultural exports will be a vital component of the strategy you will unveil later this year at the conclusion of the review. Cultural goods and services encompass a wide array of industries such as video games, or advertising services. In that light, focusing on exports as a core component of cultural policy may be trickier than it appears, as everyone will want to get in on the action.

It would be natural for federal cultural policy to strengthen Canada's cultural footprint abroad. The government may want to do this to increase Canada's appeal to non-Canadian audiences, promote the Canada “brand” as a form of public diplomacy, or even keep Canadians connected with one another while abroad.

But many other benefits of export orientation bear little relation to the central reasons for government intervention on culture. This central rationale is expressed for example in the mandate of Canada's National Film Board, which is to support products and content “designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations.”

Exports benefit Canadians because jobs in globally competitive sectors are typically better remunerated than others, and because export success is associated with innovation. But these are lessons from the broader economy that do not constitute an argument for supporting the cultural sector more (or less) than other sectors, including other services industries whose future is also increasingly intertwined with digital technologies.

Your review should check any export-driven angle to cultural policy against the core justification of government intervention in the name of culture.

Like any major policy in an open economy such as Canada's, cultural policy must be designed with an eye to the export market, to attracting and supporting two-way flows of cultural products and activities, and to promote Canadian innovation in and through the sector. But the instruments of this policy should primarily focus on supporting the kind of information and original content, creation and dissemination that would not be delivered unassisted by the marketplace. Mass production aimed at the export market should only be an afterthought of Canada's emerging cultural policy.

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