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**Going with the Flow: Neoliberalism and Cultural  
Policy in Manitoba and Saskatchewan**

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*Abstract:* This article examines the impact that the neoliberal “tide” of the 1980s and 1990s has had on cultural policies in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It analyzes these developments in the context of the dominant political ideology that preceded neoliberalism in these provinces—social democracy. In Manitoba neoliberalism has been tempered by tensions between the centre and the hinterland, while in Saskatchewan it has been mitigated by tensions between the professional and community-based cultural organizations. Decision-makers have “gone with the neoliberal flow” in some respects, but have had to balance this with the traditional forces that have shaped cultural policy during the past 50 years.

*Keywords:* Cultural and arts policy; Cultural industries policy; Heritage policy; Law/legislation; Management

**Introduction**

One of the favourite nostrums of the neoliberal movement is that “a rising tide floats all boats”—in other words, that privatization, deregulation, lower taxation, lower inflation,

free trade, and cuts to the Keynesian welfare state will yield economic benefits for everyone in a society. The ideological “tide” of neoliberalism that has swept over most of the developed world in the past two decades has had a profound impact on public policies, even if the effects of “trickle down” economics remain in dispute.<sup>1</sup> Most jurisdictions have made significant changes to their administrative machinery to accommodate this ideological shift, including increased use of public-private partnerships, more support for measures intended to harness market forces, more contracting out of government services, and more emphasis on self-help instead of reliance on government services.

Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are sometimes used interchangeably, but in this article the focus will be on neoliberalism, a doctrine with three salient features. First, rather than relying primarily on the “invisible hand” of the market, neoliberalism achieves its aims through both law and policy. Second, it views both the political and social spheres as appropriate venues for market rationality. Third, the governance criteria of neoliberal administrations are based upon productivity and profitability—in other words, on business norms (Brown, 2006). Neoconservatives sometimes also espouse this form of market rationality, but **they** are primarily concerned by what Francis Fukuyama has characterized as “the possibility of linking power and morality” (quoted by Brown, 2006, p. 697) and by the decadence and vulgarity of contemporary culture and society. Although the two movements are sometimes conflated, this article is primarily about how the doctrine of neoliberalism has affected Manitoba’s and Saskatchewan’s cultural domains.

Neoliberalism's consequences have been examined primarily from an international and national perspective, where they have been linked to new instruments of global governance, such as the World Trade Organization, and to new transnational arrangements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, that have limited the ability of nation-states to develop both social and economic policies for the benefit of citizens and domestic interests. This article looks at the impact of this public-policy "tide" at the subnational level, specifically in the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and focuses on an area that has generally been ignored in the literature—that of cultural policy. In doing so, it has relied primarily on administrative documents due to a paucity of scholarly literature in this area. By mining official government cultural documents, it is possible to trace the trajectory of measures as they are introduced and, sometimes, modified. However, it should be noted that a broader analysis of these developments within the overall political and economic environment of the two provinces has yet to be undertaken and would no doubt add texture and nuance to the portrait that is developed in this article.

With these limitations in mind, this analysis will address the following questions:

- What has been the overall impact of neoliberalism in a cultural policy context?
- What has been the overall impact of neoliberalism in the Western Canadian political context?

- How has this ideological “tide” affected cultural policy and administration in Manitoba and Saskatchewan?

Despite the dominance of neoliberal ideas and the introduction of neoliberal administrative measures in both provinces over the three decades from 1980 to the present, this article will argue that these changes have not been able to completely alter the traditional orientation of their cultural policies or administration as shaped by their political, social, and geographical contexts.

### **Neoliberalism and cultural policy**

Cultural policies in Canada prior to the neoliberal era (which began roughly in 1980 with the election of the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom and the Reagan Administration in the United States) had been driven by what Victor Rabinovitch has termed Canada’s four cultural verities: cyclical public attention, technological innovation, interventions in support of Canadian cultural content, and a concern for national continuity in the face of both internal and external pressures (Rabinovitch, 2007).

However, according to the political scientist Stephen Clarkson, three global developments have combined to change the emphasis of public policies with regard to culture in the 1980s and 1990s. First, changes in global trade governance have clashed with norms favouring the preservation of national cultural production. Second, neoliberal attitudes (as typified by Margaret Thatcher’s denial of the existence of “society”) have placed policy emphasis on market and consumer-based aspects of the cultural industries, while downplaying the importance of collective and citizen-based concerns. Third, the

advent of digital communications technologies and their convergence with the nationally regulated cultural industries such as television and radio have made it increasingly difficult for nation-states to provide favourable treatment for domestic cultural producers (Clarkson, 2002).

As neoliberalism strengthened in the 1980s, a greater concern for culture as a *commodity* began to take hold. More policy attention began to be focused on what have been termed the “cultural industries” or “creative industries.” A great deal of what Stuart Cunningham has called “category confusion” exists with regard to these terms. However, the *cultural industries* as defined by Canadian public funding policies include museums/galleries, visual arts and crafts, broadcasting, film, publishing, music, performing arts, literary arts, and libraries. The *creative industries*, on the other hand, tend to be defined by the nature of their labour inputs, and usually include advertising, architecture, design and interactive software as well as broadcasting, film, publishing, music, and the performing arts.

Whatever term is used, however, neoliberal interest in the sector centres on how these industries “fuel the creative capital and creative workers which are increasingly being recognized as key drivers within national innovation systems” (Cunningham, Cutler, Hearn, Ryan, & Keane, 2005, pp. 106-107).

In practice, neoliberal concerns are most often focused on the creative industries as defined above, but these global developments have also had an impact on the rest of the publicly funded cultural domain. That is because emerging creative models view “social production” as a feeder for both the cultural and creative industries. According to John

Holden of Demos, the British think tank, the lines are blurring between the personal, public, and private-sector cultural domains:

Creative production now navigates three territories, not two. Publicly funded culture and online social spaces both feed commercial activity. Both social production and funded culture, which themselves overlap, are experimental spaces and testing grounds, but in different ways—you can't do a live performance on YouTube, you can't get global feedback in a studio theatre—but how they integrate and interact is not yet well understood. (Holden, 2007, pp. 14-15)

The virtual spaces of YouTube and Facebook are not the only potential sources of creative fodder for neoliberal innovation systems. Physical spaces are also important elements of the neoliberal cultural policy feeder system. Richard Florida in *The Rise of the Creative Class* has developed a persuasive argument in support of his thesis that creative industries are attracted to cities with a lively cultural life, stating in a recent work that “the general creative milieu of a place with a prominent presence of artists, musicians, and other creative people increases overall creativity and innovation by providing stimulus and inspiration to those who actually produce innovations” (Stolarick & Florida, 2006, p. 1801). The irony, perhaps, is that the local, “weak-tie” artistic networks that Stolarick and Florida consider to be so fundamental to “real” innovation are usually accorded little value or policy attention under neoliberal regimes.

## Neoliberalism in the Western Canadian political context

To appreciate the impact of neoliberalism in the Western Canadian political context, it is first necessary to understand its relationship to the dominant political ideology that preceded it in some parts of the West—social democracy. William K. Carroll (quoting Colin Hay) characterizes social democracy as a “political project committed to *redistribution* (to reduce the built-in inequities of capitalism), *democratic economic governance* (to mitigate market failures, excesses and inefficiencies) and *social protectionism* (to meet the needs of all citizens in the areas of education, health and welfare)” (Carroll, 2005, p. 9, italics in the original). In Canada, the primary vehicle for social democracy has been the New Democratic Party (NDP), which was formed in 1961 as a renewed version of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a party established in the Prairies the 1930s.

Although the CCF/NDP has never been able to form a government at the national level, it has enjoyed considerable support in the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia since its formation. In Manitoba, it formed governments from 1969 to 1977, from 1981 to 1988, and most recently from 1999 to the present. In Saskatchewan, it was in power from 1944 to 1964, from 1971 to 1982, and from 1991 to 2007. Social democracy in Saskatchewan has, in fact, been the cradle for some of Canada’s most cherished social programs, pioneering in the establishment of a universal hospital insurance plan in 1947 and a universal, prepaid medical care insurance plan in 1962.

Some political commentators, including Carroll and John F. Conway, have attributed the West’s willingness to embrace social democracy (as well as other radical political

movements) to a continuing and fundamental discontent with its lot in Canadian Confederation. As summarized by Conway:

Westerners feel that the federal government would never have dared to treat Ontario or Quebec as the West was treated during the energy crisis of the 1970s... Were the Crow Rate (the low freight rates fixed in federal law for Western grain) as significant to Central Canada as it was to the West, it would never have been dismantled. If Central Canada faced a twenty-year crisis of the magnitude of the chronic western farm crisis, a national disaster would have been declared and the necessary political will and economic resources would have been mobilized from the outset, instead of the partisan, politically motivated, cap-in-hand handouts stingily dribbled out to buy elections. If the Central Canadian automobile industry faced equivalent U.S. border closures to those imposed on B.C.'s softwood lumber and the West's beef industry, Ottawa would have acted more forcefully and effectively. (Conway, 2006, p. 4)

In short, Western Canada has usually felt itself to be the aggrieved party in Confederation, chronically on the receiving end of policies and programs initiated by the federal government to further the interests of other parts of the country. In reaction, it has traditionally espoused radical political movements to seek redress (Careless, 1989). Unfortunately for the region, once these movements become mainstream, they are often co-opted setting off yet another round of Western reaction.

The election of the Mulroney government in 1984 marked the beginning of the neoliberal era in Canada, but it is notable that of the four Western provinces, only Alberta voted unequivocally for the Conservatives, giving them all 21 provincial seats. In Manitoba, the Tories garnered only 27% of the popular vote and 4 of the province's 14 seats, while in Saskatchewan, they received 38% of the popular vote and 5 seats out of 14 (Conway, 2006). In the 1988 election, fought primarily on the issue of the proposed free-trade agreement with the United States, the Conservatives won slightly more support in Manitoba (37% of the popular vote and 7 seats), but Saskatchewan voters were, if anything, even less in favour of the federal agenda than in 1984 (36% of the popular vote and 4 seats for the Tories) (Mapleleafweb website, n.d.). Yet by the 2006 federal general election, both provinces had swung to the Right. In Manitoba, the Conservative Party gained 43% of the popular vote and 8 of the province's 14 seats. In Saskatchewan, the change was even more dramatic, with 49% of the popular vote and 12 of 14 seats going to the Tories (Elections Canada website, 2006).

Why did this change occur? In his study of the Macdonald Royal Commission,<sup>2</sup> Gregory J. Inwood (2005) traced "the battle of the paradigms," or how the dominant discourse shifted from a nationalist social democratic to a neoconservative continentalist stance within a few years of publication of the commission's final report in favour of a free-trade agreement with the United States. The "identifiable moment" when this transformative change took place, in his view, occurred when business groups, such as the Business Council on National Issues and the Canadian Manufacturers Association,

began to recognize that their future was linked to secure access to the U.S. market; when an influential group of economists from think tanks such as the C. D. Howe institute began to publish evidence in support of more open markets; and when “political and bureaucratic leadership was beginning to emerge as well, facilitated by institutional restructuring within the Canadian state” (Inwood, 2005, pp. 44-45).

In Western Canada, the neoliberal shift in the political class coincided with the rise of the Reform Party, another in the long tradition of regional protest parties. The party was formed in 1987, and Reformers campaigned in the 1988 federal election under the slogan “The West Wants In” with a platform that demanded deficit reduction, cuts in federal spending, and free trade with the United States (Conway, 2006). At about the same time, Western provinces that had previously been bastions of the NDP elected neoliberal governments, including Grant Devine’s Conservatives in Saskatchewan in 1982 and Gary Filmon’s Conservatives in Manitoba in 1988. As described by Conway, the Devine government’s agenda was characterized by two overlapping phases: “first, a process of ransacking the social and health security systems, and, second, a program of privatization of public assets” (Conway, 2006, p. 246). After a series of scandals and in the face of strong public opposition to the privatization agenda,<sup>3</sup> the Devine government was defeated in the 1991 provincial election by Roy Romanow’s NDP, which took 51% of the popular vote and 55 of the 61 seats in the legislature (Conway, 2006). In Manitoba, the Filmon Conservative government was re-elected in 1990 with a razor-thin majority, taking 30 of the 57 seats and 42% of the popular vote (Conway, 2006). Filmon’s government, which pursued a cautious neoliberal agenda, continued in office until 1999, when it was replaced by the NDP under Gary Doer. In Conway’s words:

Despite neo-conservatism's extravagant promises, the magic of the market and free trade did not bring results. In the West, the depression of the early and mid-eighties showed no signs of abating. It was not without a certain irony that the public very quickly learned that despite the ability of their premiers to articulate neo-conservative economic principles, when it came to performance, the western neo-conservative governments couldn't deliver. (Conway, 2006, p. 248)

Despite the return of nominally social democratic governments in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba in the 1990s, however, neoliberal policies and programs now represented the mainstream and continued to be pursued in both provinces. In Saskatchewan, the NDP **proceeded to adopt** a taxation policy designed to attract business investment, **reduce** support programs for agriculture, **close** rural hospitals, **privatize** several Crown corporations in the resource sector, and **reduce** royalties on oil, gas, uranium, and potash (Warnock, 2005). In Manitoba, the NDP adopted Tony Blair-style "Third Way" policies, which continued the cautious Filmon agenda of "modest cuts in program spending, a carefully blended mixture of tax cuts here and tax increases there, and a moderate reform of the income tax system in a more progressive direction" (Conway, 2006, p. 376).

The curious phenomenon of social democratic parties carrying out neoliberal strategies may appear counterintuitive but represents a certain degree of continuity with the

traditional Western posture as a “receiver” of central Canadian economic policy initiatives, such as John A. Macdonald’s National Policy or Pierre E. Trudeau’s National Energy Policy. During the 1990s, the federal government undertook a series of program reviews that downloaded a larger portion of the costs of major programs such as social services, health care, and post-secondary education to the provinces.<sup>4</sup> This devolution put pressure on provincial treasuries, particularly those in the “have not” provinces, forcing them to cut many services and to seek means of attracting more revenues. Faced with this dilemma, the NDP governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan responded by “going with the flow” and adopting some aspects of the “Third Way,” a strategic approach built upon the “social investment state” and characterized by “devolution, transparency, administrative efficiency in government, [and] public-private partnerships” (Grace, 2005, p. 68). These operational characteristics have played key roles in the evolution of cultural policy in Manitoba and Saskatchewan during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, as has an increased emphasis on the cultural industries and on culture as a potentially marketable commodity.

### **Neoliberalism and cultural policies in Manitoba and Saskatchewan**

As with the emergence of neoliberalism in a Western Canadian context, it is not possible to understand the significance of the “turn” in cultural policy in Manitoba and Saskatchewan from the mid-1980s without some knowledge of its history and roots. In both provinces, cultural support measures prior to the 1980s were governed primarily by community development concerns, and both were heavily influenced by the movement to democratize access to culture. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, this movement manifested

itself in community-level arts development initiatives, such as support for local music festivals and amateur theatre, but also in support for touring programs to bring travelling visual and performing arts shows from the centre to the periphery. Despite the two provinces' adjacent geographical locations and common philosophical roots, cultural policy in Manitoba and Saskatchewan has taken somewhat different paths, and it is important to understand that the overlay of neoliberal economic and social policies has not completely obliterated these roots, but rather has added new branches to the existing organism. Because of these differences, the trajectory of neoliberalism with regard to cultural policy in the two provinces will be described separately, followed by some general comments and conclusions drawn from the specific observations.

#### Manitoba

Cultural policy in Manitoba has been shaped by many factors, but one persisted over the years: a tension between the social and economic needs of the centre and the hinterland. The origins of the province's cultural policy initiatives lay in the recreation and leisure movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which emphasized the development of community capacities and training throughout the province. The province's first official cultural ministry, created in 1970, was part of the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. The Cultural Development Branch within the department was intended to "assist cultural development in Manitoba in order that the maximum [number of] cultural opportunities ... be available to all Manitobans at a reasonable cost" (Manitoba, Department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, 1971, p. 21). However, because of the dominance of Winnipeg as both an industrial and a cultural centre, cultural policy makers in the province have traditionally faced continual pressure to pay more attention

to the dominant cultural producers in Winnipeg and to the city's economic health and vibrancy.

The cultural department worked closely with the Manitoba Arts Council, which had been established in 1965, to support arts activities in Winnipeg and throughout the province. However, even during the department's early years the Manitoba cultural authorities, perhaps because of their links to the tourism field, were proactive on the business front. For example, as early as 1971, the department developed a "seal of approval" for local arts and crafts available for tourist consumption and convened a "Business and the Arts" conference, the first of its kind in Canada (Manitoba, 1972, pp. 31-32).

Financial support, partnerships, and cooperation between the federal and provincial governments and their agencies have been important to the success and growth of the cultural sector in Winnipeg. The Winnipeg Core Area Initiatives—tripartite agreements between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments—have been key instruments in the province's efforts to revitalize the city's urban core and have served as catalysts for a more neoliberal approach to cultural policy, spawning not only intergovernmental cooperation but also public-private partnerships to develop various sites as both cultural and commercial initiatives.<sup>5</sup> Two agencies were established under the 1981 Core Area Initiative, the North Portage Development Corporation and the Forks Renewal Corporation, which drew on the cultural ministry (renamed the Department of Cultural Affairs and Historic Resources in 1979) for expertise in developing programs in historic Winnipeg. Some of the sites and facilities resulting from this collaboration include the

Manitoba Museum and Planetarium and the Portage Place Shopping Centre, which features an IMAX theatre as well as the Prairie Theatre Exchange.

In the 1980s, Manitoba governments became more focused on the creative industries and introduced several administrative measures intended to increase the ability of these industries to develop and market their products. In 1984 Manitoba signed a \$21-million Canada-Manitoba Economic Regional Development (ERDA) Subsidiary Agreement on Communications and Cultural Enterprises, which became a model for federal/provincial agreements in the cultural sector elsewhere. This initiative coincided with the expansion of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Historic Resources, which was given responsibility for the Queen's Printer, communications and telecommunications policy, and recreation and re-named the Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation. A Cultural Industries Development Office, reporting directly to the Deputy Minister, was created to define, develop, and administer programs under the ERDA sub-agreement (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation, 1985). In 1984 an initial study of the Manitoba film and publishing industries was completed and in 1985 a four-year film industry support program was announced, providing loans and equity investment for script and project development, production support and marketing distribution (Manitoba, 1985). As well, in 1984, the Cultural Industries Branch and the Public Library Services branch implemented the Manitoba Book and Cultural Periodical Purchase Program, which donated a copy of each current book published in Manitoba to every public library in the province (Manitoba, 1985).

Over the 1980s and 1990s, Manitoba moved gradually toward a more arm's-length approach to cultural industry support. In March 1987, the Canada-Manitoba Cultural Industries Development Office was established to deliver 14 new programs in support of production, marketing, and skills training in film, video, and sound recording (Manitoba, 1987). Around the same time, the Cultural Industries Branch implemented three new publishing support programs: the Employment Assistance Program (wage subsidies and training support), the Marketing Assistance Program, and the Access to New Technologies Program (offered to both book and periodical publishers) (Manitoba, 1987). In 1987-88, the province got out of the direct support role, as the Development Office took over the administration of these programs and the Cultural Industries Branch was dissolved (Manitoba, 1987). Although the ERDA sub-agreement expired in September 1990, the department committed over \$1.8 million (partially from lottery funds) to the continued support of the film, video and sound recording industries (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991). In 1994-95, the department signed a new five-year Contribution Agreement with the Cultural Industries Development Office to deliver support to the film, video and sound recording industries. It also implemented new guidelines for the Publishing Support Program to provide publishers with greater flexibility in the utilization of market support and produced *A Buyers' Guide to Arts and Crafts in Manitoba* to commemorate the province's 125th Anniversary (Manitoba, 1995). In November 1996, in a decisive step toward devolution, the Manitoba Film and Sound Recording Development Corporation Act was passed, paving the way for new programs in support of the film industry, including a special loan program and a film and video tax credit introduced in the 1997 budget (Manitoba, 1997).

Efforts intensified in the ensuing years to position the province's cultural industries more advantageously within national and international markets. In November 1999, Manitoba's first film studio, the Prairie Production Centre, opened (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, 2000). The department announced \$1.6 million in new money in 2001-02 to implement the first year of a five-year economic growth strategy for the cultural industries (Manitoba, 2002). The film and video tax credit was increased in 2004 and again in 2005 to maintain the competitiveness of the Manitoba film industry (Manitoba Film and Sound, 2005). Despite these measures, the Prairie Production Centre encountered financial difficulties, and in 2005 the government of Manitoba bought it from its former owners, reversing the traditional logic of neoliberal privatization strategies (Manitoba, 2005).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Manitoba's heritage policies had been focused on the preservation of buildings and sites of historical significance, on the establishment of a community library system, and on the consolidation of historical resources such as the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (Manitoba, Department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, 1974). However, neoliberal influences became more prominent in Manitoba's heritage policy during the 1990s, which has been increasingly linked to commercial objectives, usually in support of the tourism industry. The cultural ministry (renamed Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism in 1999) worked with local businesses, heritage groups, the City of Winnipeg, and the federal Department of Canadian Heritage to develop the Winnipeg Exchange District Heritage Interpretation

Strategy as well as a marketing strategy (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1999). In 1999-2000 it organized a seminar on marketing heritage at the Rural Forum (an annual conference and trade show), prepared a Red River Heritage Tourism Corridor proposal to market and develop heritage attractions in the Red River valley, and developed a promotional brochure in collaboration with the tourism division on Manitoba's transportation museums (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, 2000). The Tourism Industry Forum, held in February 2001, identified nature-based and cultural/heritage tourism as strategic priorities for development and marketing (Manitoba, 2002).

Neoliberal ideas have also had an impact on the department's arts policies, particularly with regard to human resources, which have increasingly been viewed through an economic development lens. In conjunction with Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship assisted the Manitoba Crafts Council in holding an industry development forum in 1996. This was the final phase of an industry study, funded under the Winnipeg Development Agreement, which had produced an inventory of all craft producers, retailers, and suppliers in the province and an economic development report. As a result of the forum, the council established a strategic plan to help guide the industry (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1997). In the following year, the department launched the Visual Arts and Crafts Marketing Program to assist commercial galleries in the promotion and sale of works by Manitoba artists. Initiatives included the development of a website promoting Manitoba's artists and publication of an updated *Buyers' Guide to Arts and Crafts in Manitoba*

(Manitoba, 1998).

Social investment strategies linked to neoliberal economic priorities were also evident, with human resource development issues becoming a high priority during the latter part of the 1990s and the early years of the new decade. In 1997-98, in collaboration with the cultural industries and other departments, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship established a sectoral working group—the Arts and Cultural Industries Development Team (ACI), representing government, industry associations, cultural industries, artists, and trade unions—to develop a strategic plan for cultural human resource development in Manitoba (Manitoba, 1998). ACI published its report in 1999, and this led to a partnership with Manitoba Education and Training on a pilot project for training cultural workers (ACI & Manitoba’s Cultural Community, 2003, and Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, 2000). In 2001-2002, the ACI began to develop a Cultural Labour Force Development Strategy for workers in Manitoba’s arts and cultural industries (Manitoba, Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, 2002). In March 2003, the ACI released *Creative Manitoba*, a report that recommended strategies to develop the cultural labour force and to “establish the cultural sector as a growth industry” (ACI & Manitoba’s Cultural Community, 2003, p. 5).

Despite the heavy emphasis on Winnipeg-centred cultural industry development strategies since 2000 it is worth noting that Manitoba has not abandoned its commitment to community development objectives in its peripheral regions, but these activities have had a much lower profile. The department’s Recreation and Regional Services branch

continues to provide support to community festivals (44 grants in 2004-05), rural community arts development (120 grants in 2004-05), and juried art exhibitions for visual artists in rural and northern Manitoba (Manitoba, 2005). This support resulted in over 800 performances and visual arts exhibitions and more than 900,000 student hours of community-based arts instruction throughout the province (Manitoba, 2005).

## Saskatchewan

As noted above, social democracy in Saskatchewan has deep roots, dating back to 1944, when the province elected the first social democratic government in North America. The CCF/NDP's dominance in Saskatchewan over the past half-century resulted in a cultural development system that has generally been based on local resources and on arts, culture, and heritage networks that served the needs of both rural and urban communities.

Cultural development in Saskatchewan is small-scale, dependent on the health of the economy and the many province-wide associations of concerned citizens—both those directly involved as cultural “producers,” but just as prominently, those concerned with cultural “consumption” by citizens at the community level. Unlike Manitoba, Saskatchewan's population is much more evenly distributed and is dominated by smaller centres, distributed fairly evenly across the southern part of the province. Although the main cultural tension in Manitoba is between the centre (Winnipeg) and the periphery (the rest of the province), in Saskatchewan it is frequently between the professional and community-based cultural organizations.

In 1948, the province's Department of Education, which had been active for some years

in community-based adult education, began the process to create the Saskatchewan Arts Board, the first such organization on the continent. Designed to be arm's-length from the outset, the Saskatchewan Arts Board had as its initial mandate "to provide increased opportunities for the people of the province to engage in the fields of drama, the visual arts, music, literature and handicrafts" (quoted by Horne, 1989, p. 46). As a result, its early activities were very much in the spirit of its adult education roots. As more communities became active in arts activities, the board's role in the 1970s evolved toward one of encouraging higher standards for artistic production (Riddell, 1979), a priority that more closely aligned it with the goal of artistic excellence promoted by other arts funding bodies such as the Canada Council. Meanwhile, the Department of Education continued to pursue an adult education and recreational strategy that included cultural activities based on "programs ... at the 'grassroots' level, planned and operated by interested people in their own community" (Ellis & Nixon, 1986, p. 39).

In 1972, the province's first explicitly cultural ministry, the Saskatchewan Department of Culture and Youth, was established. Policy objectives continued to be community-based and decentralized, specifically to "facilitate the process to make the arts, multicultural and heritage activities part of the life, personal expression and identity of all citizens of the province, and to formulate policy in response to related needs; decentralize cultural activities across social and geographical barriers in order to provide equal opportunity for participation and expression by all residents of Saskatchewan; conserve and protect the cultural heritage of the province; encourage reciprocity amongst all cultural communities in the Province of Saskatchewan (ethno-cultural, urban-rural)" (Saskatchewan,

Department of Culture and Youth, 1973, p. 21).

Even before neoliberal ideas began to permeate public administration, Saskatchewan had already decentralized a fair degree of its cultural program support, but for community development rather than efficiency reasons. In 1974, the government awarded a licence to operate a lottery program to Sask Sport, which was to divide the profits of this lottery among sport (50%), culture (40%), and recreation (10%)<sup>6</sup> (Saskatchewan, 1974). This was the origin of a cultural financing system that is unique in Canada in that it confers responsibility for allocation of cultural grants to a non-profit, volunteer-based organization, SaskCulture, effectively decentralizing cultural program delivery (SaskCulture, 2003). This community cultural funding system, as noted above, has created tensions both with professional artists, who were largely funded through the Saskatchewan Arts Board, and with the cultural department which also intervened directly, providing cultural funding in support of its own priorities. These tensions among the various funders and recipients continued through the ensuing years, ushering in a long series of re-examinations of the province's cultural policies.

The election of a Conservative government in 1982 marked the beginning of the neoliberal "turn" in Saskatchewan. Rhetoric shifted notably from a discourse of community development to a discourse of economic development and productivity in the annual reports published by the cultural ministry. For example, in the 1985-86 annual report, the Deputy Minister highlighted the results achieved by this change in policy orientation: "The successes experienced in 1985/86 demonstrate the potential

Saskatchewan has in sport, culture and recreation ... These programs have stimulated the provincial economy, creating further growth and jobs” (Saskatchewan, Department of Culture and Recreation, 1986, p. 2). To emphasize this point, in 1986-87 the department produced and distributed 5,000 copies of a video entitled *The Bottom Line: The Economic Impact of Culture and the Arts*, outlining the contribution of the cultural sector to the Saskatchewan economy (Saskatchewan, 1987).

A shift to a more industrial orientation toward culture accompanied this rhetorical shift. However, at least initially, Saskatchewan continued to rely upon state or state-supported agencies to deliver its programs in this area. For example, the cultural department began work with the National Film Board in 1988-89 to develop a three-year program for local film training and the production of seven half-hour dramas for television. The department committed \$200,000 annually for this project, with Telefilm Canada contributing financially on a project-by-project basis (Saskatchewan, Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture, 1989). In 1989-90, the department established SaskFilm, a non-profit corporation with a budget of \$2.5 million over three years to provide loans for Saskatchewan film. The department also established a Locations Program to promote Saskatchewan as a film location (Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation, 1990). In September 1991, the Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan signed a Partnership Agreement on Culture with four components: a Cultural Industries Assistance Program, support to SaskFilm, support to the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, and support to the Diefenbaker Centre in Saskatoon. The Cultural Industries Assistance Program began operations in spring 1992

(Saskatchewan Family Foundation, 1991). The Saskatchewan Film Development Project, which had been announced in 1988-89, also continued its job placement, job training, and development workshops in partnership with the National Film Board (Saskatchewan Family Foundation, 1991).

The re-election of an NDP government in November 1991 did not alter this trend toward increased emphasis on the cultural industries and, in many ways, intensified it. Indeed, the tone was set in the cultural department's 1993-94 annual report, which stated that "The arts and cultural industries are major growth enterprises in this province and Saskatchewan Municipal Government has a responsibility both to support the creative artist, and to facilitate access to markets" (Saskatchewan, Department of Municipal Government, 1994, p. 38). In 1994, SaskFilm was allocated \$1.5 million for investment, project development, professional development, marketing, promotion, and locations services. In the same year, a Film and Video Joint Industry Committee developed a five-year strategic plan for Saskatchewan's film and video industry (Saskatchewan, 1994). In 1995, in partnership with the federal government, the department produced a report titled *Saskatchewan's Arts and Cultural Industries: New Opportunities in New Media*. It also organized the province's first New Media Conference and signed a three-year agreement with SaskFilm, providing \$4 million to help position the industry better within changing markets (Saskatchewan, 1995).

Along with these somewhat traditional support measures, during the 1990s the provincial government began to place more emphasis on indirect and arm's-length ways to promote the cultural industries. In 1996, Film Employment Tax Credit legislation and regulations were developed, which came into effect in 1998 (Saskatchewan, 1997). In 1999, the

government announced the establishment of a Cultural Industries Development Fund, which was intended to strengthen the production capacity of the industry<sup>7</sup> (Government of Saskatchewan, 1999).

Although after the turn of millennium there was a shift back, at least in rhetorical terms, to an emphasis on culture and community development, the cultural ministry (which had been re-created after a long period when cultural policy and programs had been broken up and subsumed under the Saskatchewan Family Foundation, the Community Services department, the economic diversification and trade department, and the department responsible for municipal affairs) continued to augment investments in the cultural industries. In 2002, the Canada/Saskatchewan Sound Stage was opened and amendments were made to the Film Employment Tax Credit Act and regulations to reduce red tape (Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation, 2003). In May 2006, the government announced a review of the music industry in Saskatchewan, intended to examine a range of issues, including means of increasing investment to improve the industry's growth and opportunities (Saskatchewan Executive Council, 2006). In October 2007, the government promised that a total of \$4.5 million would be invested in Saskatchewan's music, arts, and cultural industries in response to recommendations of the Music Industry Final Report (Saskatchewan Executive Council, 2007).

In general, there has been less "spillover" of Saskatchewan's cultural industry policies into the heritage and arts sectors than in Manitoba. Heritage policy during the 1990s and 2000s continued to focus on conservation, management, and development of the

historical, archaeological, and architectural heritage resources of the province, with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal sites and artifacts (Saskatchewan, Department of Municipal Government, 1998). While Manitoba has linked its heritage policies closely to the tourism industry, there is little evidence that the same holds true in Saskatchewan. Although Manitoba has pushed ahead with cultural labour force strategies in support of its economic development priorities, Saskatchewan's initiatives in this area have been slower to develop and have been more oriented toward the status of the individual creator. A special Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist tabled a report in 1994 containing 112 recommendations to improve the working conditions of Saskatchewan artists, but not until 2002 was the Status of the Artist Act, setting out basic rights for cultural workers, passed and a permanent Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist established (Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation, 2003). This legislation was widely seen as only a first step toward improving the working conditions of artists, and in 2003 and 2006 the advisory committee submitted reports to the government recommending additional measures with regard to collective bargaining, procurement, and taxation policies. A bill to create new status-of-the-artist legislation was tabled in 2006, passed as the Arts Professions Act in May 2009, and scheduled to come into force in June 2010 (Government of Saskatchewan, Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport website, n.d., and Weseen & Olfert, 2008).

Saskatchewan's cultural policies, while influenced by neoliberal priorities on economic development, appear to have drawn equally on the quality-of-life and innovation theories espoused by many urban planners. For example, the cultural department's vision, as

announced in its 2003-04 annual report, was to ensure that “Saskatchewan is a place where people increasingly choose to live and build a future” and that “[a]ll Saskatchewan people are engaged in the ongoing success of the province” (Saskatchewan, Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation, 2004, p. 5). To this end, in December 2006 the department launched a three-year \$100-million Building Communities Program to assist municipalities in addressing their cultural and recreational infrastructure needs (Saskatchewan, 2007).

### **Observations and analysis**

As has been mentioned above, Western Canada has traditionally been a “receiver” of political and economic decisions taken elsewhere, and this pattern appears to continue to hold in the area of cultural policy. Since the mid-1980s, the discursive and policy shifts in Manitoba and Saskatchewan indicate that those provinces have also been ideological “receivers”—both of mainstream neoliberalism, as espoused by the Alberta-based Reform Party, and of the hybrid form known as the “Third Way,” as espoused by Tony Blair’s New Labour Party in the mid-1990s, which advocated a renewal of social democracy to respond to globalization and the post-industrial economy. The ideological shift has, however, taken different forms in the two provinces, depending on the party in power and on the cultural context.

In Manitoba, the Conservative Filmon government in 1988 implemented a two-pronged economic strategy—deficit reduction and increased exports to the United States, both of which were typical of a neoliberal agenda. The Doer NDP government elected in 1999

adopted a strategy of self-styled “pragmatic idealism” that promised restoration of health care, improvements in education, safer communities, continued public ownership of Manitoba Hydro, and balanced budgets (Grace, 2005). Jared J. Wesley has, in fact, documented a “policy convergence around certain right-wing principles” among Manitoba’s political parties, including values such as government transparency, efficiency, affordability, tax reductions, and balanced budgets (Wesley, 2005, p. 19).

In the cultural policy area, this convergence has been clearly focused on the Winnipeg-based cultural industries, beginning with the NDP government’s 1984 ERDA agreement on communications and cultural enterprises, and continuing with the Conservative government’s creation of the Manitoba Film and Sound Recording Development Corporation in 1996 and the NDP’s “sweetening” of the film and video tax credit in 2004 and 2005. Although the province has not abandoned its commitment to the “periphery,” its primary cultural goal appears to be to encourage growth in the cultural work force and investment in the cultural industries through creation of a “cultural cluster” in Winnipeg. As somewhat of a sidebar to this goal, the heritage sector is being used as a tourism attractor to generate sustainable economic development in the outlying regions.

A “policy convergence around certain right-wing principles” is also evident among Saskatchewan’s political parties, and this too can be attributed to the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism. As John Warnock has observed, “Today the Saskatchewan NDP is no different in its mode of operation than the traditional parties on the right. It does not offer a vision for the future that is in any serious way different from that of the

major Saskatchewan small business organizations” (Warnock, 2005, p. 95). However, as a small hinterland society with a resource-based economy, the province has faced even more challenges than Manitoba in implementing economic growth policies. Because of their roots in the adult education and recreational movements, culture and cultural policies have generally been of peripheral concern to Saskatchewan’s neoliberal governments and have been relegated for the most part to municipalities and volunteers. In 1991, the Conservative government of Grant Devine even took the extraordinary measure of disbanding the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation and disbursing its functions to the Saskatchewan Family Foundation (a short-lived government agency), Saskatchewan Community Services, and Saskatchewan Economic Diversification and Trade. The rationale for this restructuring was “to create a smaller, simpler form of government that is easier to access and less costly to operate; to give a sharper focus to programs and services needed by communities; and to create a single window on government programs and services to communities” (Saskatchewan, Department of Community Services, 1991, p. 7). Although the NDP took power again in 1991, it did not reverse this organizational experiment for two years due to the dire fiscal conditions it inherited from the outgoing Devine administration.<sup>8</sup> While documentary records on the rationale for the dispersal of cultural policy and programs are scarce, this reversal suggests that the experiment was not judged to be a success. In 1993, most of the cultural policy and program areas were reunited, but within the Department of Municipal Government. Symbolically and practically, the public profile and priority given to these programs continued to be submerged within a large department that was also responsible for other key government files, such as housing and municipal finance.

Only in 2001 did culture regain its own ministry with the creation of the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation, where the community-oriented approach to cultural policy that had traditionally governed the sector continued to prevail. As Simon Weseen and M. Rose Olfert have recently observed:

The development of a cultural policy for Saskatchewan is probably closely related to the priority it is assigned in the broader government framework, as is always the case for policy development. In the assignment of priority, balance between the objectives of artists and the objectives of the broader industry and public must be better understood. While the arts community has been proactive in stating its case, the case for the broader value of the industry as an economic driver and as a factor in enhancing the attractiveness of communities is often not as clearly articulated.

(Weseen & Olfert, 2008, p. 23)

As a result, cultural industry initiatives announced during the 1990s, although significant, were never as consistent or coherent as in Manitoba, despite frequent pleas from the professional arts community about the need for more investment in the sector.

Arguably the principal neoliberal factor with which both provinces have had to contend is the deficit reduction strategy of the federal government, which began to have a discernable impact in the 1990s. However, evidence from Statistics Canada would

suggest that, in the longer term and contrary to the usual neoliberal pattern, these reductions have served to encourage, rather than discourage, increased provincial investment in the cultural policy area.

In Manitoba over the past two decades, provincial per capita cultural spending has remained remarkably stable, starting in 1985-86 at \$72.26 per capita, falling somewhat in the mid to late 1990s to \$69.60, but rising again to \$74.77 per capita in 2003-04. During this period, municipal expenditures on culture rose steadily, from \$30.77 per capita in 1985-86 to \$41.75 in 1995-96 to \$44.67 in 2003-04. Federal per capita expenditures, however, fell markedly, from \$72.26 at the beginning of the period to \$56.89 at the end (Gagnon, 2006).

In Saskatchewan, despite the many organizational upheavals during the 1980s and 1990s, provincial per capita expenditures on culture remained relatively steady, amounting to \$59.53 in 1985-86, falling slightly to \$58.51 in 1995-96, but rising again to \$68.17 by 2003-04. In relative terms, there was a significant increase in municipal cultural spending during the period, as per capita expenditures of \$25.96 in 1985-86 almost doubled to \$50.21 in 1995-96 and rose again to \$57.86 in 2003-04. However, federal per capita spending in the province decreased dramatically, from about \$52.44 per capita in 1985-86 to \$39.53 in 1995-96 to only \$35.36 in 2003-04. In short, neoliberal policies of spending restraint do not appear to have had a lasting impact on provincial cultural expenditures over the past two decades, despite a pronounced withdrawal on the part of the federal government and the ever-changing shape of cultural administration in the province<sup>9</sup>

(Gagnon, 2006).

Several hypotheses can be offered as to why provincial cultural expenditures in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have run counter to the prevailing neoliberal philosophy of spending restraint. One explanation may be that provincial efforts to boost investment in the cultural industries, which were being touted as key drivers of the new “innovation” economy, were additional expenditures that would not otherwise have been undertaken were it not for neoliberal policy norms. Another possible reason may be that culture represented such a marginal policy concern that it largely escaped the attentions of deficit reducers and program cutters. A third explanation may lie in the independence of lottery funding in Saskatchewan, which is not reliant on provincial budget decisions.<sup>10</sup> A fourth possibility is that the “pragmatic idealism” of provincial governments over the period (with the possible exception of the Conservative government under Devine) saw cultural policy as a useful tool to achieve a number of economic and social objectives in a fairly low-cost manner. The evidence would suggest, overall, that a combination of all four reasons may be responsible for the counterintuitive cultural funding trend in both provinces during the past two decades.

## **Conclusions**

Iris Young has observed that “governance cannot be divorced from land, its resources, and sense of place” (Young, 2000, p. 261). This is certainly true with regard to the influence of neoliberalism on the cultural policies of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The geographical, historical, political, and social contexts that have shaped life in the two provinces have provided the field within which the forces of neoliberalism have operated

in the past three decades. Neither province has been able to ignore the wider trade, technological, and ideological trends affecting the cultural sector, but each has adapted these trends to its unique situation—“going with the flow” but not necessarily abandoning its traditional directions.

Despite the strong “pull” of Winnipeg and its cultural needs, Manitoba has attempted to follow a mixed model, with both private and state initiatives and enterprises, utilizing a variety of strategies for and philosophies about the cultural sector. In addition to the expectation that culture will contribute to the economy through job creation, it is expected to play a social role too, enhancing the quality of life of all citizens. Although the earliest role of Manitoba’s cultural department focused on avocational and recreational activities throughout the province, this has been supplemented by the need to (a) develop and maintain the major cultural institutions; (b) encourage community and heritage development; and (c) support the cultural industries. Overall, the province has had a fair amount of success with this balanced model, perhaps because of the cautious nature of its political leadership, coupled with its long-standing interest in “the business of culture.”

In Saskatchewan, lottery funding has helped strengthen groups dedicated to community participation, arts education, and service organizations but has created tension between advocates of professional activities, funded by tax base dollars through the Arts Board, and the non-professional cultural community, represented in large part by SaskCulture and funded through lottery monies. Although the emergence of lotteries as a source of support gave some relief to the government, discontent in the professional cultural

community grew, leading to demands in the 1980s and 1990s for greater investments in the human and financial capital of the cultural industries and in the professional arts. Provincial governments have been generally sympathetic to such demands but have been prevented by finite resources and the embedded system of community cultural development from going as far in this direction as the professional community would have wished. However, a significant step toward an industrial development rationale was taken in October 2007, when the Saskatchewan Arts Board was allocated an additional \$4.5 million to “improve planning and business readiness in the cultural industries; ... [and] support access to a Revolving Investment Fund, which will provide small business loans and equity investments to businesses, organizations and individuals working in the cultural industries” (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., *Cultural Industries Development Fund*). As a result, responsibility for organizations working in the creative industries sector was transferred from SaskCulture to the Arts Board “to improve planning and business readiness in each creative industry sector” (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., *Creative industries*).

Although both governments have placed more emphasis on “the business of culture” and have stepped away from direct support for the cultural industries, the neoliberal policy “tide” in Manitoba and particularly in Saskatchewan appears to have flowed over, but not swamped, traditional cultural policies in the two provinces. Decision-makers have “gone with the flow” in some respects, but have also had to take into account the persistence of embedded cultural networks and policies, which have required a continual balancing act between the centrifugal force of geographically dispersed populations and the centripetal

force of the professional arts community. The pragmatic stance of the two provinces' administrations over the past two decades has been a response to these persistent characteristics of the cultural landscape since the 1970s. Whether for practical or idealistic reasons, the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have provided remarkably stable financial support for cultural activity in those provinces over the past two decades, which suggests that they view these activities as low-cost means of achieving both social democratic objectives (more equitable access to cultural resources) and neoliberal goals (more productive and profitable cultural industries). Neoliberalism is only the most recent ideology to flow over the cultural policy landscapes of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but one can conclude that it has not fundamentally altered the underlying contours of this terrain.

## Notes

1. The validity of “trickle down” economics has been questioned by many critics on the Left (see, for example, John Kenneth Galbraith’s critique in *The Good Society: The Humane Agenda*, 1996).
2. Officially known as the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, chaired by Donald Macdonald.
3. Conway reported a poll that showed opposition ranging from 52% against privatizing the Saskatchewan Transportation Company to 75% against privatizing SaskPower (Conway, 2006, p. 266).
4. The Canada Health and Social Transfer replaced two previous programs—the Established Programs Financing Program, which shared the costs of health care and post-secondary education with the provinces, and the Canada Assistance Plan,

which paid for half the costs of social assistance provided by the provinces to their residents. Under the new funding formula, the total allocation was reduced and could only be spent on these three program areas.

5. There have been two Winnipeg Core Area Initiatives: 1981-86 and 1986-91, followed by a Winnipeg Development Agreement in 1995 to 2001 and a Winnipeg Partnership Agreement in 2004-09. Total public-sector investment under these agreements totalled \$346 million (Western Economic Diversification Canada website, <http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/298.asp> .
6. The current lottery funding distribution is 50% for sport, 35% for culture, and 15% for recreation.
7. This fund was to be terminated in 2008-09 and replaced by an industrial development fund to be administered by the Saskatchewan Arts Board (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., *Cultural Industries Development Fund*).
8. As described by Janice MacKinnon, Saskatchewan's then finance minister, "Shock, disbelief, and despair overwhelmed the cabinet at its planning session at Government House ... in January 1992 as the Department of Finance laid out the full dimension of Saskatchewan's financial situation" (Kopala, 2003).
9. Statistics Canada calculations for 2003-04 reported by Weseen and Olfert suggest that among the provinces, Manitoba and Québec are tied for first place in per capita provincial cultural expenditures, followed in second place by Saskatchewan (Weseen & Olfert, 2008).
10. It should be noted, however, that Manitoba's lottery monies go directly to general revenues and that Saskatchewan has lowered lottery licence fees several times in

the past few years to maintain the amount of money available for distribution by the sport, culture, and recreation lottery trustees.

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