

Pandemic and Cultural Industries in a Regional Context¹

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly shaken the cultural industries. Researchers report significant financial and job losses worldwide for these industries. Much of the research on the pandemic and the cultural industries has focused on large cities. The objective of this research is to understand the impact of the pandemic on regional cultural industries. We studied the Outaouais region in Canada by conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews with artists and cultural workers. Our results report on the problems caused by the pandemic, the spin-offs it has generated, the initiatives that have emerged and the role of cultural organizations during the pandemic. This research contributes to the advancement of knowledge by describing the situation of cultural industries in a regional context during the pandemic. The results of this research encourage the maintenance of certain activities in virtual or hybrid mode, the development of grant programs to attract artists to the region, and the development of events or platforms to promote networking between artists and cultural organizations.

Keywords: Cultural industries, COVID-19, regional context, precariousness, impacts, semi-structured interviews.

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Pandemia e industrias culturales en un contexto regional

Resumen

La pandemia de COVID-19 ha sacudido enormemente las industrias culturales. Los investigadores informan de importantes pérdidas financieras y de puestos de trabajo en todo el mundo para estas industrias. Gran parte de la investigación sobre la pandemia y las industrias culturales se ha centrado en las grandes ciudades. El objetivo de esta investigación es comprender el impacto de la pandemia en las industrias culturales regionales. Para ello, se estudia la región canadiense de Outaouais realizando grupos de discusión y entrevistas semiestructuradas con artistas y trabajadores culturales. Los resultados informan sobre los problemas causados por la pandemia, los efectos derivados que ha generado, las iniciativas que han surgido y el papel de las organizaciones culturales durante la pandemia. Esta investigación contribuye al avance del conocimiento al describir la situación de las industrias culturales en un contexto regional durante la pandemia. Los resultados de esta investigación fomentan el mantenimiento de determinadas actividades en modo virtual o híbrido, el desarrollo de programas de becas para atraer artistas a la región y el desarrollo de eventos o plataformas para promover la creación de redes entre artistas y organizaciones culturales.

Palabra clave: industrias culturales, COVID-19, contexto regional, precariedad, repercusiones, entrevistas semiestructuradas.



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INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The economic context caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all industries. Cultural industries are considered one of the most economically impacted sectors by the pandemic (Laurin, 2020; Laurin & Nicholls, 2021; Wall-Andrews et al., 2021). Indeed, these industries saw all their activities come to a halt during the pandemic, as they involve bringing together large numbers of people. These industries were already on shaky economic ground before the pandemic, and COVID-19 made the situation even worse (Wall-Andrews et al., 2021); it thus appears to have exacerbated a situation that has been precarious for many years in these industries (Banks, 2020; Comunian & England, 2020). Cultural industries are a subsector of the creative industries, which are defined by Potts, Cunningham, Hartley, and Ormerod (2008) as industries that “rely to a greater extent than other socio-economic activities, on word of mouth, taste, cultures, and popularity, such that individual choices are dominated by information feedback over social networks rather than innate preferences and price signals” (pp. 169-170). The pandemic has hit the cultural industries hard. For example, Statistics Canada has reported a drop in employment of almost 25% in Canada for these industries between 2019 and 2020 (Wall-Andrews et al., 2021). Also, Canada's gross domestic product in art fell by almost 50% in July 2020, from \$15.6 billion to \$7.3 billion (Comité permanent du patrimoine canadien, 2021).

Culture in a regional context is particularly affected by this crisis; its survival is even questioned in some regions (Gallant, 2021). The survival of cultural industries, especially in the regions, is important because many have shown the positive socio-economic impact of these industries for society (Anderson, Potočník, & Zhou, 2014; Révészová, Barbora Andor, & Šebová, 2021; Wall-Andrews et al., 2021). Despite this positive contribution, the cultural industries were already characterized before the pandemic by a significant precariousness (Wall-Andrews et al., 2021). This research contributes to the advancement of knowledge by describing the situation of cultural industries in a regional context (Outaouais region in Canada) during the pandemic.

Precariousness of the Cultural Industries

The precarity of the cultural industries is widely documented and acknowledged in the scholarly literature, mostly focusing on the territory of Great Britain (Beirne et al., 2017; Comunian & England, 2020; de Peuter, 2011). According to Waite (2009), the changes imposed by the rise of a neoliberal and capitalist economy in the 1990s would have resulted in the emergence of precarity among modern cultural industries.

Comunian and England (2020) used four dimensions of precarity to relate these dimensions to the cultural industries in times of crisis in COVID-19. Briefly, a first element is the uncertainty about the duration of contracts among cultural workers and the presence of short-term contracts. Secondly, the haphazard union structure representing the interests of cultural workers prompts authors to reflect on the workers' control over their own creation and works. Thirdly, the insufficient regulation of the cultural ecosystem fails to protect workers from discrimination and to provide social security for them. Finally, the remuneration of workers also causes a state of precariousness, since it may be insufficient to support them. Such conditions would place cultural workers in a precarious and uncertain position well before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resilience of the Cultural Industries

Based on this precariousness, cultural industries are known for their strong resilience (De Propriis, 2013; Pratt, 2017; Robinson, 2010). In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, Robinson (2010) characterized the type of resilience in the arts and culture sector as adaptive resilience. He defines this concept as: "Adaptive resilience is the capacity to remain productive and true to core purpose and identity whilst absorbing disturbance and adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances" (p. 14). However, for Beirne et al. (2017), this resilience would not lead to increased economic prosperity for the arts sector, but rather to the mere survival of its workers. Indeed, Pratt (2017) explains that cultural industries are resilient by nature; this is a characteristic of these industries and not a quality they must develop. Moreover, Gupta and Gupta (2022) find that at some point, politicians rely on this resilience of cultural industries to justify disinvestment in culture. Cultural workers must therefore learn to live with a high level of uncertainty for their careers due to the precarious conditions of these industries; resilience is a way for cultural workers to survive (Comunian & England, 2020; Pratt, 2017).

Impacts of the Pandemic on the Cultural Industries

Comunian and England (2020) note a loss of revenue for cultural organizations and artists during the pandemic. Employment levels have also fallen drastically for cultural industries; for example, Wall-Andrews et al. (2021) report a drop of over 25% in employment levels for the arts, and entertainment sector in Canada in March 2020 compared to 2019 data. In addition, the pre-existing distrust of the arts

community by financial institutions has only amplified the sector's lack of liquidity (Comunian & England, 2020). Similarly, Wall-Andrews et al. (2021) report that philanthropic organizations also decreased their support for cultural industries during the pandemic, leaving these industries in an even more precarious position. Banks (2020) articulates the state of high stress and suffering in relation to the economic harm caused to cultural workers. He suggests that this is simply an extension of a trend in the creative industries that is being amplified by the economic effects of the pandemic. As mentioned before, the precariousness of the cultural industries is widely documented and recognized in the scientific literature (Beirne et al., 2017; Comunian & England, 2020; de Peuter, 2011; Wall-Andrews et al., 2021).

In addition, Comunian and England (2020) report that COVID-19 precipitated the consequences of pre-existing concerns in the cultural industries. First, certain groups such as women, visible minorities and people with disabilities may be more significantly affected by the crisis (Comunian & England, 2020). Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) had already identified systemic discrimination for the creative and cultural industries. The already-existing discrimination could therefore be exacerbated by the crisis. Secondly, the impacts of the pandemic could be unequal for cultural workers depending on their career stage due to the inadequacy of government financial support. New graduates would be particularly affected by the crisis (Comunian & England, 2020).

It is clear that the pandemic weakened cultural industries that were in many ways in a precarious position. Government support for the cultural industries during the pandemic is considered by some researchers to be inadequate. Indeed, Révészová et al. (2021) studied the policies implemented in Slovakia during the pandemic for cultural industries and their results report insufficient government support for these industries. The consequences are both monetary and social and affect all workers in the cultural industries, whether they are artists or work for a cultural organization. Research on the pandemic and these industries focuses mostly on large cities (for example: Révészová et al., 2021). But what about cultural industries in regional contexts? Cultural industries in the regions do not enjoy the same conditions as in large cities; indeed, cultural development is more important in large cities (Chapain & Comunian, 2010; Mossig, 2011). For example, Mossig (2011) reports a much larger increase in the labour force in large German cities in cultural industries compared to growth in the regions between 2003 and 2008. Similarly, Chapain and Comunian (2010) have studied the factors influencing the development of creative and cultural industries in English regions outside of London. They report a lack of understanding

by the governments of the cultural situation in the regions, which leads to policies that are not adapted to the regional context. It appears, therefore, that research on large cities cannot necessarily be transposed to the regional context. Consequently, the objective of this research is to understand the impact of the pandemic on cultural industries located in the regions. There are significant differences between countries, both in the way the COVID-19 crisis was managed and in the way cultural industries are managed. As a result, we are clarifying the scope of our research objective and limiting ourselves to the Canadian context.

METHODOLOGY

We chose a qualitative approach inspired by recent currents in action research (Fendt & Kaminska-Labbé, 2011). This type of approach is relevant to studies of transformation or adaptation, such as the situation the cultural industries are currently experiencing (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2015). We opted for the (qualitative) survey as a research strategy (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As stated in the research objective, we are interested in cultural industries located in the regions, since they experience a different context from that found in large cities. We focused on the Outaouais region, which is located in the southwestern part of the province of Quebec (Canada). By selecting a single region, the comparison between participants will be facilitated. It is important to provide some background on the cultural industries in Canada. Compared to other countries (e.g., the United States, which relies on the private sector), Canada's cultural industries are largely funded by governments (Wall-Andrews et al., 2021). In addition, these industries are characterized by a high rate of self-employment, with Wall-Andrews et al. (2021) reporting that in 2016, 28% of workers in cultural industries were self-employed and for artists, this proportion rose to 41%.

For sampling, we combined two strategies: generic and network purposive sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Schwandt, 2015). For the generic strategy, we chose three selection criteria for participants: 1) to be either an artist or an individual working for a cultural organization; 2) to work in one of the following disciplinary sectors, music, visual and media arts, and performing arts; and 3) to practice in the Outaouais region (Quebec, Canada). The cultural industries have been heavily affected by the pandemic. We decided to study artists and cultural workers in cultural organizations. The research aims to understand the impact of the crisis on the cultural industries, which is why we decided to study both artists and cultural workers. If we had studied just one group, we wouldn't have a picture of the industry as a

whole. For the network strategy, we asked participants if they could refer others who met the selection criteria to participate in the research. We chose two methods of data collection: the focus group and the semi-structured interview. In total, five focus groups (22 participants) and 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Table 1 shows the number of participants for these two data collections.

Table 1.

Research participants

Focus groups		
Sectors	Number of artists	Number of cultural workers
Music	1	4
Visual and media arts (group 1)	3	2
Visual and media arts (group 2)	2	2
Performing arts (group 1)	2	2
Performing arts (group 2)	2	2
Semi-structured interviews (individual)		
Sectors	Number of artists	Number of cultural workers
Music	6	3
Visual and media arts	11	2
Performing arts	7	4

Source: Author's elaboration.

As the pandemic was a new event, there was no existing research on the subject at the time of this project. We therefore decided to carry out an initial exploratory phase with focus groups, in order to be able to identify themes to be explored in greater depth with respondents during the second data collection phase. Five focus groups with a total of 22 participants were conducted in January 2021 using the zoom platform. Detailed minutes of the focus groups were produced, and these were used to develop the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. The themes of the focus groups and interviews were the impact of the pandemic on artistic models and the role of cultural organizations. A total of 33 semi-structured interviews averaging 60 minutes in length were conducted between February and May 2021. At the end of the interviews, we noted a certain saturation of data.

The interviews were transcribed and then coded using NVivo software. The coding catalog was created following the analysis of the focus groups where the main themes were extracted. For the analysis, we use the descriptive method as proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2020) to describe the impact of the

pandemic. We also use the exploratory approach of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2020), more specifically the cross-tabulation of coded data between: 1) participants from the same disciplinary sector (music, visual and media arts, performing arts); 2) participants from the same category (artists, cultural workers); 3) all participants. This project has received ethical certification from the research ethics committee of the Université du Québec en Outaouais. To ensure confidentiality, participants are identified by an alphanumeric code, the letter A is used for artists and the letter O for cultural workers working for an organization. The next section presents the results of this research.

RESULTS

We present the results of this research in four sections. First, we will discuss the problems that the pandemic has caused for the cultural industries in the region. Next, we will discuss the positive spin-offs that have emerged from this crisis. We will then present the initiatives and conclude with the role that cultural organizations have played or should have played in supporting artists and cultural workers.

Problems Caused by the Pandemic for the Cultural Industries in the Regions

The pandemic has caused several problems for the cultural industries in the region, starting with the cancellation and postponement of several cultural events. These cancellations or postponements had an impact on the artists' remuneration. Indeed, some cultural organizations paid artists even if the exhibitions or shows did not take place, but many cancelled the contracts, leaving the artists in a precarious situation. "As an independent artist, I have losses of [amount of money] in contracts that have been cancelled. I never saw any of that money and yet the preparation was done" (A1, music).

I think of my friends in the theatre companies [workers in cultural organizations], they will say we have a lot of work, everything is cancelled and all that. But they still have a salary, they still have a job, they still have a reason to get up in the morning and go to work. Whereas we [artists] don't even know if our career is over forever or not (A18, performing arts).

This situation has also created problems for diffusion organizations who have had to revise their programming several times. This has placed an additional burden

on organizations that are, in many cases, struggling with limited resources. Indeed, the closures of cultural organizations have forced many to temporarily lay off their employees.

We no longer had the financial capacity to pay for our [management position]. [...] But, at one point, we thought that we were not going to be able to operate anymore because we didn't see how we were going to be able to attract people (O10, visual and media arts).

Finally, these cancellations and postponements have caused problems for emerging artists because it delayed their entry into the labour market. Indeed, for young artists who have seen their first show cancelled, this puts a lot of pressure on them to continue their career.

There was work every day before the pandemic, so you had a job but now you don't because I came in last, that's the reality. I don't have seniority, I'm the last one hired, so everyone else goes before me, but I'm the last one. In March there were maybe four shows a week, I had the nights when people were not available (A5, performing arts).

In addition to these cancellations and postponements, there were flaws in artist remuneration systems and grant programs. Indeed, there were several communication problems where artists did not always receive the right information in terms of assistance programs for cultural industries. Also, due to their self-employed status, many artists were excluded from government grant programs. Again, this put financial pressure on artists and placed them in a precarious situation. "I followed a lot of the general programs available to the public, for individuals or grants for small businesses, and I didn't really qualify for any of that" (A9, visual and media arts). The overall health situation has resulted in administrative overload for some artists and cultural workers. Indeed, several programs have been put in place to help the cultural industries, but these have also brought an administrative burden that in some cases has slowed the productivity of artists and cultural workers.

Another problem is the limitations in access to creation, production and performance venues, equipment and materials. Sanitary regulations limited access to physical spaces. Some artists found themselves in a situation where they could no longer create, which obviously limited the survival of their artistic activities in the longer term. As for equipment and materials, there were many shortages in the regions. Indeed, supply chains were affected, and materials were difficult to access for artists in the regions.

“I don't think the pandemic has changed much except for access to certain materials. [...] now you have to look a little bit further for what you need” (A11, visual and media arts). Health measures were also poorly communicated. Indeed, many participants reported that it was very difficult to know what was and was not allowed for their sector. Access to information was complicated on two levels, between governments and artists and between cultural organizations and artists. This difficulty in accessing the right information put additional pressure on artists.

It's more like telling us if public health is going to be in this or that situation, here's what you might expect to do this summer, and we come up with scenarios. We didn't have that information last year. I guess it was too sudden and too complicated (O3, music).

Then, many artists feed their creativity with the interactions they have with their peers and the public. During the pandemic, there were times when artists had no contact with their peers and the public. This was difficult for artists who need these relationships to create. Thus, their productivity was severely affected by the isolation and lack of feedback on their work.

I'm young, I'm just out of college. During the pandemic, I must admit that I had it really hard. I put my violin on the shelf. To be honest, from one day to the next I gave up, I stopped everything, I was really angry. I was in over my head with it all. I was really angry. It really made me lose interest in playing the violin (A23, music).

Similarly, artists found themselves completely isolated during the pandemic. This prolonged isolation led to psychological distress for some. They experienced loneliness, financial pressures, and have doubts for their careers, which placed them in a precarious psychological situation.

Some artists have probably become discouraged as a result of this pandemic and they have not necessarily continued or wished to continue on the artistic path simply because there are real difficulties related to loneliness, isolation, and the impossibility of spontaneous exchange with a group of artists (A11, visual and media arts).

The last problem reported is particularly problematic for the regions, it is the exodus of the arts workforce to the large cities. Indeed, the cultural industries have

been able to maintain a small amount of activity in large cities, but not in the regions. Artists have therefore tended to move closer to these large cities to find employment and have easier access to equipment and materials. This exodus of labour is particularly alarming for the future of the cultural industries in the regions, as it is very difficult to attract artists to the regions when they are in the large cities.

It's particularly true for the region, because we were already having a hard time in the Outaouais region, but I'm including Ottawa in that, retaining artists. Many were leaving for Toronto and Montréal. [...] We risk seeing this problem increase tenfold, and we are beginning to see it in fact. So, for us to work with artists here, it's going to be a smaller pool (O2, performing arts).

Table 2 summarizes the problems caused by the pandemic for cultural industries in the regions.

Table 2.

<i>Problems</i>	
Problems	Impacts
Cancellation and postponement of cultural events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists' pay cuts • Burden on diffusion organizations (programming to be constantly reviewed) • Employee layoffs • Barriers for emerging artists
Communication problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor information sharing for certain grant programs • Administrative overload • Poorly communicated sanitary rules
Limitations in access to creation, production and performance venues, equipment and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists forced to stop working temporarily • Many equipment and material shortages
No contact with peers or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased creativity • Psychological distress
Exodus of the arts workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term sustainability of cultural activities called into question

Source: Author's elaboration.

POSITIVE SPIN-OFFS FROM THE PANDEMIC

Despite the problems noted, there were some interesting spin-offs from the pandemic for the cultural industries in the region. First, artists were able to reach new

audiences thanks to different approaches for artistic performance. Indeed, some artists changed their mode of performance which was able to attract a larger audience. For example, many artists turned to podcasts, which were listened to by a large number of people during the pandemic. Also, outdoor exhibits or performances, which in some cases replaced indoor exhibits, were able to attract a larger number of people and a wider audience. There were also more public art programs which allowed artists to reach a wider audience. These programs were for all disciplines. As an example, one organization was able to launch a radio channel available locally to all where the work of some artists from various disciplines was featured. "The FM zones became a safe and open medium for everyone. You can listen in your car; you can listen anywhere. There are even cafes that have had [name of radio station] rolling on the patios in the summer." (O4, visual and media arts).

Then, among the problems raised, some noted a loss of creativity, for others the pandemic had the opposite effect. Indeed, some were inspired and even developed new creative themes.

I've been thinking about my art practice for several years now, trying to make it more compatible with my young children. So, I had a little more time in the last year to change my practice. I changed my materials; I changed my techniques. Now I do [craft technique] it's less complicated than doing painting. I can do [craft] upstairs; I don't have to come down to the studio and the kids are involved (A3, visual and media arts).

I will admit that this availability in times of pandemic has probably, for some people, sparked a lot of creation. Then, in my own way, it allowed me to stop, step back and question what I really wanted. For another person who was experiencing a lot of frustration and bitterness, it becomes the engine to create something new. That's what being an artist is all about; it's about commenting on the present of a society first, before entertaining. So, I think there are people who probably had a big increase in their creativity (A1, music).

Similarly, the many closures have reduced the number of activities in which artists participate, such as various committees for cultural organizations or openings. As a result, some artists reported being more productive because they were able to spend more time on their art practice.

In the last ten years, I had a lot of social gatherings, I had a lot of socials and galas where I was invited to give out works of art to do fundraising. So that didn't happen in the last year, so I had more time. So, more time to create, more time to draw; to get inspired too, because I took a lot of walks, I went to a lot of new places this year (A14, visual and media arts).

Then, several artists highlighted the creation of new grant programs for the cultural industries. These grants came mainly from governments and allowed many artists and cultural organizations in the regions to survive the crisis. Finally, artists took the opportunity of the pandemic to develop new expertise, particularly in digital arts. Several training sessions were offered online during the pandemic, which allowed artists and cultural workers to develop new knowledge and skills.

Table 3 summarizes the positive spin-offs from the pandemic.

Table 3.

Positive Spin-offs

Positive spin-offs	Impact
New forms of performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching new audiences
Increased inspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new themes for artistic creation
Fewer cultural activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased productivity
New grant programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artist survival • Development of new expertise, knowledge and skills

Source: Author's elaboration.

Cultural Industries Initiatives in the Regions

Several initiatives were undertaken during the pandemic in the cultural industries in the regions. It is important to note that initiatives took place at all levels. Indeed, initiatives were noted for creation, production, performance, teaching and training.

For the creation, artists rethought projects they wanted to implement before the pandemic. Some projects were shelved due to lack of time, others due to lack of inspiration, but the forced pause from the pandemic allowed artists to revisit these projects. As an example, one artist recalls a book project that he recovered as a collective project to which he invited other artists to participate.

It had been a while since a former colleague from the master's program and I wanted to publish a book, to do something. We took advantage of the pandemic to relaunch the project and to do a series of round tables that will probably initiate other events that will take place (A3, visual and media arts).

Another artist decided to start a group for theatre actors and writers during the pandemic to maintain artistic activity.

I started a collective of young writers at the beginning of the pandemic called [name of collective]. Basically, we're trying to democratize access to art; it's like our mandate. The initial goal of this collective was to continue to create and then to get together despite the distance. [...] all the people in this collective come from the theatrical milieu. Then we do a lot of small contracts here and there (A19, performing arts).

This initiative has allowed this artist to keep in touch with his colleagues and to keep the regional theatre community active. This initiative has allowed him to increase his network of contacts and he has been solicited by production and diffusion organizations in his region. "During the pandemic, I actually got more contract offers than I've ever seen; I never used to get approached for contracts that much before" (A19, performing arts).

An important element to underline about the initiatives is that many of them were made possible thanks to the financial support of public institutions that injected significant amounts of money into the arts and culture sector during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, I'm thinking, among other things, of a project that I led with my collective [name of collective], we went to get a small grant to create small capsules available in podcast format [...] We received a grant from [name of granting organization] for digital projects that allowed us to develop our project (A21, performing arts).

In addition to the grants for projects as described in this quote, cultural organizations that receive recurring funding from public institutions have received additional funds during the pandemic which in turn has allowed them to support artists. "We received support from [name of granting agency]. [...] It allowed us to rent [our office spaces] to continue our activities. [...] Then they gave out other grants

and we received \$2,500 from [a granting agency]. It was an unconditional gift; it was like a gift from COVID" (O4, visual and media arts).

Participants in our research also reported initiatives related to diffusion. Indeed, all face-to-face performances or exhibitions were cancelled for several months, but cultural organizations found other ways to participate in the local cultural life. For example, one art gallery decided to close its doors for a year to avoid having to deal with numerous closures during the year. However, they did not remain inactive during this closure. In fact, they decided to transform themselves into a virtual research laboratory during this year.

So, we developed a project called [name of project], rather than continuing or at least trying to maintain some programming. We decided to postpone everything or cancel everything, depending on the case. We set up a transdisciplinary collaborative research laboratory where we developed five research axes. So, institutions, community, education, exhibitions and curating. It was really the team that was at the heart of these activities. We called on several players in the cultural industries: artists, curators, theorists, researchers, cultural workers. We called on many, many people to finally have truly transdisciplinary research that brings different points of view (O9, visual and media arts).

On another vein, many artists and cultural organizations turned to digital media during the pandemic to disseminate their work. Many have opted for podcasting, which has advantages in terms of cost and production time. "We invented podcasting four years ago, our podcasting show existed long before the world knew what COVID meant. [...] when COVID came along, we said: let's do more of that" (O7, performing arts). "[...] the pandemic had this impact, for example, to develop this whole digital side. I'm thinking, among other things, of podcasting. That's something that has developed a lot and I don't know if you've met a few people in that, but it's something that Gatineau in particular can be proud of" (A18, performing arts).

Digital technology has also been used by the visual arts where online vernisages have taken place. One artist reported having had a beautiful proximity with the public during the opening of his works using the zoom platform. He had the opportunity to present and explain his work which is usually not possible during a vernissage in person. A musician also produced a show directly in his home that

was broadcast online. He was pleased with the experience and the presenter who hired him decided to repeat the experience two more times.

I did three shows that I was hired by [name of presenter] to do an event; one show at the very beginning of the pandemic, I think, in May, last year in my living room. So, it was advertised through [name of presenter]'s platform, but it was at my house, I was doing it at my house. So, it was a lot of fun, we could see people reacting and it kind of got us into the swing of things. The response was so positive that we said to ourselves that we must come back (A1, music).

However, many artists in performing arts and music do not like recorded performances and prefer to perform with an audience. Due to the closure of venues, several musical or theatrical events were held outdoors during the summer. Similarly, a local organization decided to offer artists the opportunity to exhibit visual arts in the windows of premises that were closed during the pandemic. Artists could display their work in these windows, and the public could see it from the outside. Such an initiative allows to reach a wider audience that would not necessarily go to an art gallery. This type of initiative contributes to the democratization of art. "There is another initiative that surprised me again this year. It's [name of organization] [...] which put out a call that has just closed and the artists were invited to think about exposing the windows of closed buildings" (A13, visual and media arts).

The pandemic also allowed for collaborations between artists from different disciplines. Indeed, initiatives bringing together artists from the visual arts and digital radio sectors were created during the pandemic, as well as between the music and dance sectors. These collaborations have allowed artists to expand their network and realize different projects that can continue after the pandemic. In the same vein, a ceramist partnered with an opera singer. The opera singer delivered the ceramist's work and offered a song upon delivery. "With [name] who is an opera singer, we did a collaboration called [name of initiative]. So, she would deliver pottery to the home [...] with one or two opera songs sung" (A9, visual and media arts).

Finally, several cultural organizations decided to transform their traditional training into virtual training during the pandemic, which allowed artists with limited artistic productivity to gain new knowledge and skills. Indeed, many artists reported taking a large amount of distance learning courses during the pandemic.

I've noticed that there are a lot of webinars. There's a focus on training artists, whether it's about going online or whatever. Information is much more

accessible now. We want to train; we want to communicate. The webinars that are done by an organization in Montréal, I also have access to them. It's often free, so it's engaging. So, I would say that there are many more grants, independent artists' initiatives and training (A20, performing arts).

Table 4 summarizes the initiatives developed during the pandemic.

Table 4

<i>Initiatives</i>	
Initiatives	Impact
New projects for artists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification of art forms • Maintaining or developing relationships with other artists • Keeping cultural industries active during the pandemic
Government funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping cultural industries active during the pandemic • Enabling organizations to develop new projects
Development of digital media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding artists' skills • Reaching large audiences • Developing relationships with the public
Outdoor performances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching large audiences • Maintaining cultural activities • Democratization of art
Collaborations between artists from different disciplines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the network • New types of performance
Development of virtual training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new expertise, knowledge and skills • Greater accessibility to training

Source: Author's elaboration.

The Role of Cultural Organizations

This last section of the results explains the role that cultural organizations played during the pandemic or the role that artists would have liked them to play. First, grants were created for the cultural industries; most of these grants came from public institutions. It was reported that some artists did not qualify for technical reasons or that the deadlines for submitting applications were too short. Artists would have liked cultural organizations to intervene with public institutions so that the rules surrounding grant programs would be better adapted to the reality of the cultural industries.

I think that cultural organizations are probably the only ones that can help us. They can help us because we are influenced by politics (...) The

organizations can do something, because the public money that is distributed by our institutions, the organizations can influence them (A22, music).

It was also noted that the regional cultural organizations showed adaptability and flexibility by offering personalized support. This personalized approach was greatly appreciated by the regional cultural industries. In the same vein, they set up communication networks between regional artists and provided moral support by promoting mutual aid between artists and the various regional organizations.

I'm very happy with the work of [name of organization], because I've had regular discussions with them since the beginning of the pandemic because they wanted to get a feel for how things were going for their members. Just to feel supported by that, it helps morally (O2, performing arts).

It helps me a little bit psychologically. I think that's the element that can make a difference in terms of people's mental well-being or not. Because I know that our little encounters despite the fact that we meet with zoom make a big difference just to see each other to talk (A2, visual and media arts).

They have also improved their training offer rapidly, and training has been made easily accessible.

A lot of organizations also take advantage of this to do training. Online training with Zoom is very easy to organize, that's the advantage. There are a lot of them that have been offered. The last training I did was on the mental health issue since the beginning of the pandemic in the arts (O2, performing arts).

"I took some courses with [name of organization]. They offered free training with zoom. It was interesting" (A2, visual and media arts).

One of the problems reported above was the difficulty of accessing accurate and reliable information. The artists would have liked cultural organizations or support agencies to set up a centralized window of information concerning the health rules and restrictions related to COVID-19 for the cultural industries. They would also have liked cultural organizations to be more proactive in disseminating information. Each person or group had to find the information on their own.

The role of cultural organizations in a crisis like this is to serve as a meeting point. Also, to transmit information. I think that also it is their role to transmit certain information, certain organizations do it. Also, to make the bridge between the governmental decisions, to explain and popularize certain measures or to go to ask questions (A21, performing arts).

Finally, the artists would have liked to see more cultural mediation programs promoting exchanges between artists and the public. Some initiatives have been put in place, but the artists would have liked to see more. In the same vein, artists would have liked cultural organizations to act as intermediaries between them and public institutions; they would have liked to see more contact with public institutions through cultural organizations. “Listening and trying to see how they can help find solutions and how they can bring the needs of the cultural industries to the attention of political leaders” (O2, performing arts).

DISCUSSION

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has hit the cultural industries hard. The few research studies conducted on the impacts of the pandemic have reported significant losses for these industries, both in monetary terms and in the number of jobs lost (Comunian & England, 2020; Wall-Andrews et al., 2021). The research conducted to date on the pandemic and the cultural industries has focused mainly on large cities; we have not identified any studies specifically on the case of cultural industries in the regions. Also, the research is mostly quantitative and reports statistics, but few have conducted interviews with artists and cultural workers to learn more about the situation and how it is experienced. This research aims to fill this gap by documenting the case of the cultural sector during the pandemic in one region of Canada, the Outaouais.

The results of this research report several issues for the cultural industries located in the Outaouais region. These issues fall into eight categories. 1) Cancellation or postponement of cultural events has had a direct impact on artists' remuneration. This has also placed a significant burden on emerging artists and delayed their entry into the labour market. 2) Limitations in access to creation, production and performance venues, equipment and materials have severely limited the ability of artists to pursue their activity. 3) Artists and cultural workers have experienced significant psychological distress. 4) Flaws in artist remuneration systems and grant programs

for cultural industries have been noted. 5) Communication was poor, and artists could not find information on health measures for cultural industries during the pandemic. 6) Contact with audiences and peers was almost non-existent during the pandemic. 7) The pandemic resulted in administrative overload for many artists. 8) The region experienced a strong exodus of the artistic workforce, jeopardizing the viability of cultural industries in this region.

Although the pandemic had a significant negative impact on the cultural industries in the region, our results also show positive spin-offs. 1) Artists were able to reach new audiences thanks to different approaches for artistic performance (e.g., outdoor performances). 2) The pandemic brought out new creative themes for some artists. 3) Closures have allowed some artists to focus more on their artistic practice and this has resulted in increased productivity. 4) New grant programs have been created for cultural industries. 5) New expertise has been developed among some artists (e.g., digital arts).

In the same vein, we have observed initiatives coming from artists and cultural organizations. 1) Initiatives were noted at all levels: creation, production, performance, teaching and training. 2) Interdisciplinary collaborations have emerged, for example between visual artists and digital radio artists, or between the dance and music sectors. 3) Artists were quickly able to perform in a mix of face-to-face and virtual performances, leading to new types of artistic performances.

These findings are similar to those of research on cultural industries and the pandemic. However, as [Chapain and Comunian \(2010\)](#) report, policies for cultural industries are not always appropriate for regions. We note this situation also in relation to the pandemic. Indeed, for example, many artists and cultural workers were excluded from programs put in place by the Canadian government to deal with the pandemic because of their self-employed status (41% of artists in 2016 were self-employed in Canada). Knowing that in the regions, the cultural sector is characterized by few permanent jobs, artists in the regions have suffered a significant loss. In addition, the regions have experienced some intense issues, such as the exodus of the artistic workforce to large cities. We did not find any government measures to curb this exodus. It appears that the pandemic has hit the cultural industries hard and that regions have been even more affected by this pandemic. Our research has therefore provided important new knowledge to the field of cultural industries research by describing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on these industries in the regions.

CONCLUSIONS

Practical implications for regionally based cultural industries emerge from this research. Firstly, the maintenance of certain cultural activities in virtual or hybrid mode is encouraged. This makes them more accessible and enables artists to reach a wider audience. Secondly, grant programs are needed to attract artists to the region. It is recommended that governments work with cultural organizations to set up such programs. Finally, events or platforms to foster networking between artists and cultural organizations in the regions would be an asset to the vitality of cultural industries.

Our research has some limits, the most important of which is that we have only studied one region. It would be important to replicate the research to see if the results collected are applicable to other regions of Canada. In the same vein, it would be interesting to study the case of other countries whose cultural industries are structured differently, such as the United States, where cultural industries are financed mainly by the private sector. Also, we have focused on three artistic sectors; it would be important to study the impact of the pandemic on all cultural sectors. This research paves the way for further studies on the pandemic and the cultural industries specifically in the regions. It would be interesting to study the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the cultural workforce. A quantitative study to measure, for example, the economic impact of the pandemic on the cultural industries would be interesting. It would also be relevant to assess whether the situation of the cultural industries in the regions is better today than it was before the pandemic. Finally, it might be interesting to study the various government interventions to see which approach has been most beneficial to cultural industries around the world.

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ANNEX

Interview Guide

Introduction

1. Describe your academic and professional background.
2. How many hours on average did you devote to your art before the pandemic?
3. How many hours on average have you devoted to your art since the pandemic (March 2020)?
4. What are your expectations of this research project? In what format would you like feedback (training, results dissemination sessions, written report, round table, etc.)?

Theme 1: Artistic models

5. How has the pandemic changed your artistic practices?
6. Describe the initiatives you have witnessed within the cultural industries to deal with the crisis (how, who, what means, etc.).
7. What are your unmet needs related to the pandemic?
8. What needs have been met in connection with the pandemic? How were they met?
9. In your opinion, what are the major issues arising from the pandemic for the Outaouais cultural industries?
10. What can be done to address these issues?
11. How do you see the future of cultural industries in the Outaouais?
12. What new practices in the cultural industries will survive the crisis?

Theme 2: Role of organizations

13. How did (which) cultural organizations support you in the changes you had to make?
14. What do you expect from cultural organizations in this context? Which organizations are involved?
15. What role will (which) cultural organizations play after the crisis?