

## Putting a Price on Culture Ethnic Organisations, Volunteers, and the Marketing of Multicultural Festivals

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Résumé de l'article

La littérature anthropologique ou provenant d'autres disciplines et abordant le tourisme et le tourisme culturel suggère toujours un même problème : ces pratiques tendent à détruire leur propre objet. Ce danger est particulièrement important là où le tourisme porte sur l'expérience de cultures « intactes » ou « non occidentalisées ». Les touristes dégradent ou détruisent souvent l'environnement qu'ils sont venus apprécier, et leur intérêt vis-à-vis de la découverte de cultures exotiques ne prend pas en considération la réalité quotidienne des gens. Le Folklorama, au même titre que les autres festivals ethniques, est l'objet de pressions semblables. L'analyse du Folklorama nous donne une perspective qui éclaire davantage les individus et les groupes qui y participent que les hiérarchies, les infrastructures et les groupes dirigeants.

## PUTTING A PRICE ON CULTURE

# Ethnic Organisations, Volunteers, and the Marketing of Multicultural Festivals

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### Introduction: Ethnic Festival Tourism

Last October 1998, the Canadian Society for Traditional Music held its annual meeting and conference in Winnipeg. On the first night, we had an informal buffet dinner at “A Taste of India,” a restaurant near the University of Winnipeg, where the conference was centred. As part of the evening’s celebrations, our restaurant hosts invited a group of young women to come and perform some traditional South Asian dances for us. Though we were told that this group frequently performed at Folklorama, it soon became clear that this was not the slick, traditionally-packaged performance the locals among us had come to expect at that annual ethnic festival.

The tape began with a loud, discordant, alternative music-type introduction, which would undoubtedly have been nixed for Folklorama, since it was not an exemplar of “pure,” “authentic”<sup>2</sup> south Asian cultural expression. But even when the music settled into a more traditional-sounding arrangement,

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1. The primary research was conducted by Cynthia Thoroski, under the direction of Pauline Greenhill and as part of Greenhill’s SSHRCC-funded research program “Cultural and Identity Politics in Festival Construction and Performance.” We are grateful for this assistance.
  2. The notion of authenticity in tradition has been questioned and criticised by historians (e.g. Hobsbawm 1983), cultural critics (e.g. Williams 1976), and anthropologists (e.g. Clifford 1988). They suggest that much of what is seen as traditional is in fact of recent origin, and that tradition itself is a dynamic and continuous process rather than an objective social fact. Folklorists, too, have considered questions of authenticity from Narváez (1982) to Handler (1988) to Bendix (1997) and later.

the dancers approached their presentation quite informally. Though initially displaying some nervousness, they soon began performing for each other, directing facial gestures and movements within the group to comment upon their own activities. They seemed particularly amused by each others' mistakes, and their enjoyment appeared to be compounded by the odd situation of performance — not enough room for them to move freely and properly, combined with a generally culturally illiterate audience.

These young women performers clearly saw themselves as being asked to represent their culture, but they constantly undermined this position with the kind of horsing around and sarcastic commentary — albeit in a subtle form — well known to all who interact with North American teenagers. One of our colleagues, of South Asian origin herself, commented on how much fun it was to do those dances, and how it made her wish she was still young enough to do them. It *did* look like fun.

Multicultural festivals are increasingly marketed to Canadians as a symbol of our much-celebrated ethnic diversity. Festivals such as Toronto's Caravan and Winnipeg's Folklorama work to set Canadian ethnicities apart from one another, and from the mainstream, in their exhibitions of clearly delineated "authenticity" and "uniqueness." Such diversity allegedly sets Canadian culture apart from that of our neighbours in the United States; ours, the colourful patchwork quilt or mosaic, in contrast to theirs, the homogenisation of the American melting pot.

Folklorama, held for two weeks every August since 1970, combines local boosterism with big corporate sponsorship to create a tourist event.<sup>3</sup> Various "pavilions," located at different venues throughout the city — mainly in ethnic society halls, community centres, and public education buildings — represent ethnic, linguistic, national, and/or geographical groupings. This festival, which in the words of its own promotion "takes you down the street and around the world," bills itself in easy superlatives as "Canada's greatest cultural celebration," and "the world's largest multicultural festival."

Ethnic, linguistic, national, and/or geographical groups are represented in a "pavilion" — or, in many cases, in two or more pavilions, such as the "Pearl of the Orient Philippine Pavilion" and "Philippine Pavilion-Nayong

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3. A glance at the Folklorama website [www.folklorama.ca](http://www.folklorama.ca) will give readers some idea of the extensive focus upon tourism, commercialisation, and business sponsorships.

Pilipino”; or the “Ireland/Irish Pavilion” and “Isle of the Shamrock-Ireland Pavilion.” One might suspect that the presence of two pavilions indicates some political discord, or even heterogeneity in cultural presentation. However, Folklorama is structured in such a way as to ensure that contrasts within and between groups are masked by common presentation of three elements.

Although their website suggests that “Folklorama gives every group a chance to release whatever they want to express to everyone about their culture,” in fact, expressions are limited almost exclusively to music/dance, food/drink, and the display and sale of crafts. Thus, similarities and differences within and between groups are presented in discrete, separate locations; in 1996, only the Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain hosted more than one pavilion. And all are circumscribed within the aforementioned common structure of musical performances, edibles, and crafts, but also within one city.

The literature from anthropology and from other disciplines which have approached tourism and cultural tourism suggests the perennial problem involved in such ventures; they tend to destroy their own object. This danger is particularly acute where tourism relies upon experiences of “unspoiled” nature or “non-Westernized” culture.<sup>4</sup> Tourists, and the services they demand, too often degrade or even destroy the environment they are there to appreciate. Similarly, tourists’ expectations for exotic cultural experiences fail to take into consideration the lived realities of the peoples they have commodified.<sup>5</sup> Folklorama, along with other ethnic festivals, is subject to similar pressures.

We see Folklorama as a useful exemplar for how ethnic festivals can change and develop. Indeed, its parent organisation, the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg Inc. (henceforth FAC), increasingly hypes their event as such. These festivals are promoted and marketed across the provinces and regions of Canada. The specificity of our example allows the potential for comparison with similar events elsewhere. That we choose not to do so ourselves does not render our commentary merely regional. Our focus upon Folklorama gives us an in-depth

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4. The notions that nature can be separated from human influence, and that there are cultures unsullied by colonial interference have been questioned and critiqued in recent theory. See for example Davis (1997), Haraway (1989), Fabian (1983), and Clifford (1988).

5. See for example, Culler (1988), Frow (1991), Kaplan (1996), MacCannell (1976 and 1994), Pinney (1994), Pratt (1992), Urry (1990).

perspective upon the individuals and groups who participate, rather than upon hierarchies, infrastructures, and governing bodies.<sup>6</sup>

We gathered our information by attending and conducting participant observation at Folklorama, particularly in 1996 and 1997. In addition, we conducted interviews with coordinators and volunteers from several pavilions.<sup>7</sup> Some issues they raised — increasing economic strain, the threat of organisational collapse, and the homogenisation of cultural identity — reveal possible problems for the future of Folklorama. We discuss three primary problems — burnout of volunteers, orientation to limited forms of success and profit, and the increasing standardisation of format and content.

Not only did these areas raise the greatest concern in the interviews we conducted during this research, but they also stirred the most suggestions for change. We intend our comments here to suggest the net of interrelationships between festival organisers, ethnocultural organisations, local communities, performers, festival volunteers, and the tourist industry, rather than to present a comprehensive ethnography or case study. Our analysis introduces the issues that appeared as primary concerns of the associations and individuals we worked with.<sup>8</sup>

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6. The Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg Inc. has declined our team's invitation to participate in this work for the three consecutive years during which Pauline Greenhill's research program on festival and identity politics has been conducted (1995, 1996, 1997). The opinions expressed in this paper, therefore, do not represent those of the structural governing body of Folklorama. Nor do they represent the general view of volunteers or associations which participate in it. Rather, they draw upon the observations of those individuals and cultural organisation leaders we have interviewed, and who have given us their express permission to quote them for the purposes of our research. The opinions and conclusions are our own.
  7. In the summers of 1996 and 1997, many pleasant and intriguing hours of research were occupied in interviews with people who have been involved with Folklorama, most since its inception in 1970. We are indebted to the over 20 pavilion volunteers and coordinators who agreed to take part in these interviews that are the core of our research. We would like to directly thank all those who worked with us. We are, however, concerned that our selection of their criticisms may have negative impacts for them and for their groups. Specifically, the FAC, as Folklorama's governing body, is in a position to withhold or fail to provide benefits to these organisations and individuals. We are thus maintaining anonymity and confidentiality to the best of our ability.
  8. Further research will consider the conceptual implications especially in terms of the informal economy, reciprocity, and unpaid labour.

We think there is value in offering what has, hitherto, been a successful venture some alternative perspectives from both without and within. We do so in the hope that the implosion of Folklorama, or its eventual lapse into relative banality, can be avoided. The directions that the FAC offers as indicators of its success — the number of bus tours serviced, the presence of scouts from Disney, and so on — demonstrate to us that bigger is not always better, and that international attention can be profoundly exploitative. Yet events like Folklorama also serve needs for the groups which put them on. These ethnic communities can be a source for balance and an alternative to the auto-cannibalism which seems to be Folklorama's current direction. We feel certain that the festival can remain financially viable, yet retain the sense of enjoyment, timeliness, and unexpectedness that was so much a part of the intercultural encounter at "A Taste of India."

## **Two Weeks to Break Even: Pavillons and Profits**

Many cultural organisations, discouraged by the lack of creative input, personal appreciation, and financial reward offered within the festival structure, have considered giving up their participation in Folklorama altogether. Yet the incentive remains because cash funding is difficult to obtain. Most ethnic organisations in Winnipeg were formed during the early glory years of multiculturalism — the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time, infrastructural support was available, and organisations could afford, for example, to buy a building to house a centre, fund cultural enrichment activities, and even pay staff. Serious financial strains have been imposed on many cultural organisations by the ending of infrastructural support, the decreases in project grant amounts combined with greater competition for fewer dollars, the phase-out of community bingos and their replacement by government-funded super-casinos, and the lack of new membership. Without alternatives to Folklorama as a source of funds, some groups hang on and participate in the event despite serious misgivings.

One of the biggest misconceptions surrounding Folklorama is that the pavilions make a great deal of money. All the organisers we interviewed agreed that while there was some profit to be made from the festival, it has never been enough to justify the time, organisation and volunteer hours:

It's extremely big money to put together a pavilion. Any pavilion in the city at the moment has, in expenditures, somewhere up in the \$50,000 mark to operate a pavilion. At the end of the day, after a week of very hard work —

never mind all the work that's gone into it in *advance* — you really don't walk away with a lot of money. People have this notion that the pavilions are making bundles. They're not. I'd hazard that after all the bills are paid this year, we'd be lucky — *lucky* — to make between \$7000 or \$8000. Granted, it's useful money. But you have to ask yourself, for the amount of sweat, blood and tears that you put into making \$7000 or \$8000, was it really worth it? If you take it on the basis for the amount of hours of volunteer labour....No. It's not worth it (CT interview A, 1997: 2).

Volunteers and pavilion representatives recognise that decreased government grants to ethnic societies and fund-raising competition from government-run casinos have financially strained their cultural organisations. There is little economic support from the city or the province. In addition, increased costs for liquor and liquor licenses during the festival have limited the opportunities for cultural communities to expand their profit margin in line with that of the tourist industry. The maintenance of pavilions has thus become a matter of convention and obligation. Even worse, it may be seen as one of the few ways to make a pittance at the expense of a disproportionate amount of volunteer time and labour. One tour coordinator agrees, saying that Folklorama has become an end in itself rather than a boon to her cultural organisation:

Folklorama is something we *have to do* nowadays to get funding from the government. We've been doing it for so long that we seem to be in the situation where we *have to* put it on. It *is* wonderful for our dancers, but *culturally* it's not such a big thing. We kind of feel that we're *forced* into doing so many things (CT interview B, 1997: 8).

Frustrated with the lack of grants, flagging membership, and dwindling revenue, many are looking for new ways to breathe economic life into the infrastructure of their groups.

The increased costs and limited returns have impelled organisers to look for new ways to fund bigger, better pavilions to attract more tourists. For example, extensive public relations with ethnic group corporations can lead to monetary and "in-kind" donations of goods and services such as beverages and transportation. Some organisers have also been particularly active in lobbying for support through the municipal government. One organiser's efforts netted a waiver of \$2000 rent on the municipally-owned pavilion facilities:

I went to City Hall to find out if I could use one of their facilities. I went to the recreation department and they said that they couldn't approve it. So I

called up the Mayor's Office and asked her out for breakfast and she said, "Sure." That's when we got it....I said, "Seeing as it's a city building, is it possible for you to give the building as an in-kind donation of \$2000? We have contacts. We have all kinds of functions. We have 60,000 taxpayers...." And after all this, she said, "Okay, we'll do it" (CT interview C, 1997:5-6).

Other pavilion organisers have looked upon Folklorama itself as an example in marketing and have used its visibility as part of their development strategies. One pavilion co-organiser regards Folklorama not only as an opportunity to promote other events his group sponsors, but also to raise interest in associate memberships:

Folklorama is a place where I can go and check out other cultures in a very non-threatening way. It's a great thing to have. I can get an introduction and I can get the contact [with other cultures]. If I make the contact I can go down and meet Fred, Joe and whoever it is and have a good time with them and be introduced to culture in a very non-threatening way. Now can we do the same for our association and bring people who are not members of our group into it and end up with a strong club that can support itself and the community (CT interview D, 1997: 7).

Looking upon Folklorama from the eyes of a "pure consumer," he sees the festival volunteer corps as a means of securing future government support. The "professional volunteerism" he suggests could offer other pavilions and the FAC a new appreciation for the value of donated labour:

When I worked in the museums in the Yukon we were having funding cuts like crazy. What we ended up doing was finding a strategy that worked. I haven't seen it being used here much. Every meeting that we had, we'd get volunteers and then get a piece of scrap paper and write their name, the time, the date and what you were doing. It was a cost-accounting system of volunteer time. We gathered up all these scraps of paper and put them on a spread sheet. So, when we were doing a project, I would gather this stuff when we were looking for a grant. I would say, "I need 20,000 bucks plus the cost of the project. Here's my \$10,000," and my \$10,000 was all the time and labour and effort for my volunteer group. I could say exactly how much we'd spend today and what our projected spending was. This was our investment of time and energy. You need to put a price on it. It makes a difference. I have to use that to get grants. I can't just sit there and say, "Aren't we wonderful?" Nice is no good. It's the job of the presidents of these groups to get this information and to do the sales. That's the sort of thing that I want to see happening — professional volunteerism (CT interview D, 1997: 11).



Cultural organisations clearly want the FAC to recognise, understand, and value the financial, cultural, and symbolic capital<sup>9</sup> in the pavilions and their volunteer labour. Especially with economic difficulties threatening their communities, many organisers have come to resent the FAC's lack of appreciation for their efforts to keep Folklorama alive. The most common complaints, however, seem to lie not merely with the FAC's lack of direction and support in funding, but with its bureaucratic regulation of pavilions. It surprised us that those who had worked most closely with the FAC — those who sat on its Folklorama board — have the most criticism of its restrictions regarding pavilion content and format.<sup>10</sup>

Folklorama's continual expansion means that each pavilion must provide more services to their visitors. One coordinator commented that such mass-marketing makes it difficult for small, community-run facilities to find enough volunteers to serve the expanding numbers of tourists who might provide them with increased profit. He says that the festival's major change in the late 1980s from a one-week to a two-week event was not a response to local, ethnic group, or pavilion demands, but rather an answer to the needs of bus-tour schedules and vacation packages. As a result, he feels, the original excitement and intimacy of the festival, and the sense of cultures reaching out to other cultures, has been diluted into a "marketing venture focused to tourism, with pavilions and communities simply providing goods to the tourism and hotel industry" (CT interview D, 1997: 2-3).

Another change in festival format, instituted in the 1970s, limited the number of pavilions to two per cultural group (CT interview E, 1996: 4-5). Previously, there had been only one. This regulation has been a source of hard feelings and confusion for pavilion organisers over the years, particularly since the FAC has recently begun to adapt and reinterpret these limits. According to one pavilion organiser, double pavilions were not a response to community demands for different expressions of ethnic identity from within similar regions

9. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identifies cultural capital as "knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications" (defined by Thompson 1991:14) and symbolic capital as "accumulated prestige or honour" (Ibid.). These forms of capital can also have financial implications, but they are primarily sources of social power.

10. The FAC Folklorama board has representation from the pavilions and communities, but those we interviewed who had served on the board felt that they and their perspectives were outnumbered and overruled.

and groups. Rather than a presentation of cultural diversity, it has been a method of increasing attendance by adding to the number of highly popular pavilions:

This goes back to one of the early Chairmen...who was involved in all kinds of aggravation in the early years of Folklorama. The Folk Arts Council — to its lasting discredit in my mind — instituted the allowance of several different sub-split ethnic communities. For example, there was, for a long time, just one Irish Pavilion. Then, a second Irish pavilion was allowed to be established. The rationale behind it at the time was that the Irish pavilion was very popular and therefore there was a need to allow a second pavilion....We [the ethnic association board] fought this very bitterly and were very, very angry about it and tried every way we could, legitimately, to stop it. We did not want a second Irish pavilion on the basis that, immediately, it would be said, "Oh. One is the Catholic pavilion and one is the Protestant pavilion" (CT interview A, 1997: 9-10).

The Irish Association of Manitoba's explicit mandate of non-sectarianism seems to be contradicted by the FAC's community sub-splitting. There is no cultural, political, or religious rationale for having two Irish pavilions. And that is not the only example.

Up until 1996, two pavilions represented the Afro-Caribbean community: Africa-Caribbean and the Caribbean Islands; they have always been extremely popular with Folklorama visitors. In the following year, two more were added: Cari-cana and Africa. One member of this community told us that the FAC's exceptions to the two pavilion limit (itself potentially divisive) are made only in cases where it would benefit the tourism industry; four pavilions means a potential for four separate single entry admissions to individual locations for each Folklorama visitor.<sup>11</sup> These four separate enterprises represent a relatively small cultural group within Winnipeg's total ethnic mix. Thus, the strain on community resources is considerable, and the resulting tensions between the sponsoring groups are extremely problematic. Many community members feel that the resultant competition has also hurt individual venue profits and created confusion as to how pavilions represent the cultural area(s):

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11. In 1996, passport tickets, enabling visitors to return to pavilions any number of times for a single price, were eliminated. They were replaced by single entry tickets giving slightly reduced prices on bulk purchases but proving more profitable for the festival overall (Kives 1996:17-18).

They [the three other pavilions] *tell* the Folk Arts Council that they are different but I don't really see too much difference in the culture. There *may* be a difference in how you cook a dish but basically, I think — except for Trinidad and Guyana — the Caribbean is more or less the same culture....All the other African countries are basically the same culture. That's what I think anyway...I don't know what it is [the FAC] look for. I sometimes think that they try to break up communities, although they might not. I know that other pavilions are complaining that there's this competition...not other *ethnic groups* (PG interview A, 1997: 6).

Whether or not there are substantial cultural differences between these communities, the cultures presented are fundamentally similar — limbo dancers, drumming, colourful swirling costumes, tourist wares, and so on. But there is more at stake in these complaints than the future of Folklorama itself. Pavilion organisers want the FAC and other groups reliant on cultural communities' volunteer labour to be concerned about the future of community organisations.

Specifically, mass marketing to the international and interprovincial tourist trade has led to a conventionalisation of the previously discrete and distinctive arrangement of Folklorama's pavilions. This standardisation may well be a legitimate response to the demands by bus tour operators, vacation package promoters, and corporate sponsors for a consistent, convenient consumer package. Yet this market expansion has also engendered an increasing drain on the seemingly limitless "natural" resources upon which multicultural festivals have come to rely.

The largest and most obviously endangered of these resources is the volunteer force of willing donors who give the time, effort, and cultural knowledge upon which large-scale multicultural festivals depend. Cultural communities, and the structures provided by ethnic clubs and organisations have long been the foundation for the festival's entertainment, labour, and cultural capital. Yet standardisation and regulation are also increasingly straining the supporting ethnic communities.

### **Culture on Stage: Bureaucracy and the Standardisation of Festival Format and Content**

Financial considerations aside, differences with the FAC around issues of cultural representation and individual identity discourage some individuals' and groups' participation in the festival. In concert with many other interviewees, a former pavilion coordinator says that Folklorama has become

less of a community “cultural event” and more of a tourist industry business concern under the strict regulation of the FAC:

I think that, at some level, it should wither on the vine...the Folk Arts Council part of it. Now it's such a big business. It brings in more money than the Jets brought in. So, it's not ever going to die. But is it going to be a *truly cultural event*? I don't think so. It only survives on the basis of the volunteers. There's not a business in the world that could run this festival with paid staff. And yet they [the FAC] try all these different methods of maintaining control over pavilions (CT interview E, 1996:18-19).

This woman speaks from considerable experience of working with the FAC and other groups in both volunteer and paid positions. But she is not the only one to find the increasing standardisation and regulation of Folklorama's liberal, apolitical representation of ethnic diversity problematic. This homogenisation has been at least partially responsible for the lack of interest that the festival has held for the youth among these cultural organisations as well. Squeezing more tourist dollars has seemingly replaced Folklorama's original emphasis on building the local ethnic communities upon which it is based.

Although organisers recognise that safety and health regulations are necessary to the running of a large-scale public event, and a certain level of continuity is valuable, they find the FAC's regulation of bureaucratic procedure and their censorship of pavilion content frustrating. According to those we interviewed, the problem stems in part from the festival's mandate to provide access to an apolitical, non-threatening multicultural experience. But in so doing, the FAC exerts a high level of control over process and content.

In particular, organisers express serious misgivings because the FAC makes pavilions answerable for their financial and cultural integrity, while providing little to no accountability in return. For example, prior to the festival, each pavilion must elect a representative to attend FAC Folklorama board meetings. Volunteers are fined \$100 for non-attendance at these mandatory gatherings. Yet many who attend express their bewilderment at the lack of productive or cooperative dialogue that takes place:

It was my feeling as a board member that we never got the stories. We got the decisions presented to us as already made. I'd been on boards long enough to know that this is how some boards operate. You have got to have a core group of people that know what the situation is and can make decisions. But you never got the feel that you had enough information to really make informed decisions as a board member (CT interview E, 1996:14).

Organisers see one of the main priorities of the FAC's regulated festival format as the presentation of a non-offensive, easily-accessible entertainment package. That is, in order to be "authentic" Folklorama pavilions, the representations must appear homogeneous, apolitical and static.<sup>12</sup> This notion that all cultures remain the same through time and space, and despite differences among individuals, is interrogated by pavilion organisers. One cultural display organiser locates the emphasis on pavilion uniformity and regulation with marketing, not the communication of culture:

Folklorama has got to be open to new ways of doing things. It has simply *got* to. The way that it will become more open is if we simply put these new things in front of them. We have different kinds of displays that are not just a fluffy doll leprechaun with a shamrock sticking out of its butt for \$4.95. That's not Irish. That's merchandising. That's marketing...and it's as common to Germany as it is to Japan or the United States (CT interview H, 1997:9).

The standardisation that has made Folklorama such a large-scale marketing success has had still other ramifications. Although the "fluffy leprechaun" formula has worked well in attracting and maintaining tourist visits, the homogenisation of pavilion format and content has alienated other audiences that are just as important to the continuation of the festival. It is of particular concern for younger community members who feel the need to bring pavilions up to date with their knowledge and experiences:

We are not a static people. That concept just seems so *simple* to me. It frustrates me so much. I get frustrated when I'm talking with people and they find out I'm [ethnic]. The first thing that they say is, "Oh! I know something [ethnic]!" or "I know this [ethnic] person." I'm supposed to think that there are about 65 [ethnic]s who represent us all (laughs)? Sometimes it's totally beyond my comprehension (CT interview G, 1997:4-5).

Another cultural display coordinator harbours similar misgivings, particularly in regard to restrictions on political material. For example, in 1995, a FAC inspector asked that the Irish pavilion's cultural display concerning a cease-fire in Northern Ireland be removed on the grounds that its pictorial representation of children's involvement in civil warfare would be "objectionable" or "inappropriate" to pavilion-goers (CT interview E, 1997:

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12. The resultant package has much in common with the living museum noted by Ronald Grimes in his discussion of Disney's cultural displays at Epcot Centre (Grimes 1995).

5). In the end, the depiction remained, despite the FAC's stringent disapproval. The coordinator was not at all sympathetic to this point of view. He comments that to give in to this sort of political censorship would ignore aspects integral to Irish culture and the experiences of many Irish-Canadian immigrants:

I've lived in Northern Ireland and worked there quite closely with the troubles. I've been through a lot of the bad action during the early 1970s. When we lived there, there were a lot of gun battles, a lot of bombing....I saw the very frightening face of what sectarian strife is all about. My mother was raised Protestant and married Catholic....These aren't just labels. They're very real parts of our life in Northern Ireland. In the wrong circumstances, they can be your death warrant. Irish people know that, particularly people from Northern Ireland — of which we have a large representation at the club. We cannot be members of that club and carry that baggage with us. This is a message, not just to ourselves, not just to the outside community in Canada, but to people in Ireland. This is who we are (CT interview H, 1997: 4).

Many organisers see the type of cultural representation favored by FAC officials as “stagey,” “stereotypical” (CT interview H, 1997: 5), and appealing to the “lowest common denominator” (CT interview A, 1997: 7-8). One interview in particular located a further rationale behind the adherence to out-dated stereotypes within Folklorama; these representations of culture are often based upon the nostalgic memories of former immigrants:

I would visit Scotland in the 1980s and see many different things on their menu than what they were reflecting in their menu at the pavilion....I finally figured out that it was what [the food coordinator's] family and her people ate in the post-war period. So, it's certainly true that if you go to Scotland you'll find mince pies, patties, bridies and sausage rolls; but you'll also find salads and all sorts of things that you didn't post-war and that you don't at the pavilion. In my tours around the pavilions, I think that the same thing is happening. The people that are organising it are people who have done well in Canada and have the money and the time and the energy to give to organising this sort of a cultural event. They likely left their homeland 20 years ago. In my mind, I think that what you see of Folklorama is not reflective of whoever might be at whichever pavilion but of their *memory* of what the food was like in their particular part of the country. If you go to Scotland *now* you can buy haggis on a stick. I always thought that this is what they should have served at the pavilion. It would have been a talking piece (CT interview E, 1997: 4)!

Indeed, the similarity between Folklorama and mainstream North American representations of multiculturalism are such that Disney scouts

regularly attend Folklorama pavilions and opening celebration events in search of talent for Epcot Center shows. For example, the director/instructor of a Winnipeg cultural dance academy was told before the opening ceremonies that his young dancers would be observed by a Disney scout. They were informed after the festival that they had been chosen to perform at Epcot (CT interview I, 1997). Although the children were given free accommodation and passes to MGM studios and its parks and pavilions, the group was not paid for their performance, nor was their airfare covered:

We had to pay for our own flights to get there. Considering Disney has all this money, I was a bit disappointed in that. But it was still an opportunity that I couldn't refuse for these kids. We did some fund-raising events. We made it. We did the shows. On the way back, I thought to myself that it was worth it even though we had to come up with our own money for the flights. The experience alone for those kids was worth something....and, of course, they got to see Mickey Mouse too (CT interview I, 1997:13).

Despite this instructor's insistence that "it was worth it" if only for the sake of the children, many community members expressed disgust that a multinational, profit-oriented corporation such as Disney would fail to pay for talent recruited from multicultural festivals (CT interview G 1997:14). As we will later show, the treatment of volunteers as a continually renewable and easily exploitable resource has led to much frustration within cultural organisations struggling to maintain funding and encourage future membership.

Cultural standardisation has benefits as well as drawbacks. The experience gained from performing at Folklorama may be a perk for those few who are chosen. Many of those interviewed, however, fear for the continuity of their long tradition of participating in the festival as the costs begin to outweigh the benefits. The emphasis on apolitical representations of an idyllic past has not only created frustrations among current organisers of Folklorama's pavilions, it has alienated future leaders as well. Younger generations may find it difficult to locate a meaningful sense of ethnic or cultural identity amid nostalgic representations of their parents' and grandparents' often historicised memories.

### **Volunteers: A Non-Renewable Resource?**

In 1995, reflecting growing numbers of tourists from outside Winnipeg and Manitoba, Folklorama drew in audiences exceeding 400,000 (Jager 1996). The FAC proudly reports this total to media and the tourism industry alike. A

statistic perhaps less often mentioned is the number of volunteers upon which the festival depends for its entertainment, organisation and labour. Each year, an estimated 20,000 people from cultural organisations throughout the city work, literally around the clock, during Folklorama's two week multicultural marathon. The number of hours varies from individual to individual, of course, but we could assume the average work at 40 hours (less than a full week's Folklorama shift for most), for the current minimum wage of six dollars per hour. Such estimates are a clear undervaluation of the skills needed for nearly all of the volunteer positions as well as the time involved. Yet, this represents a minimum work value of nearly \$5,000,000. A more realistic estimate might double or triple that amount.<sup>13</sup>

Many volunteers return year after year to provide the festival with the stable staff and consistent structural support that is arguably its most valuable resource. A large number are immigrants who came to Winnipeg during the late 1960s and early 1970s. They have been with the festival since its inception in 1970, donating countless hours, vacation time, cultural expertise, and the accrued Folklorama experience of nearly three decades. Despite their unswerving loyalty in the past, this resource is being depleted quite rapidly — sometimes by burnout and disillusionment — and is not being replaced by a new generation of volunteers.

The original core of immigrant volunteers who have provided Folklorama with its authentic representation of multiculturalism are beginning to tire. Despite their years of effort and personal investment in the festival, many are deciding to give up their participation. This would not be a problem if others were willing to continue the work and to build upon the solid foundation the immigrant generation has provided. However, repelled by Folklorama's static portrayal of an ethnic past that no longer exists, the youth of Winnipeg's cultural organisations look elsewhere for representations of a cultural identity to which they can relate:

What our difficulty seems to be is having enough people to draw on. We need more people. If we're not going to have more immigrants, we're going to have to appeal to our own birth members or people who don't even know that we exist as an ethnic club. Some focus on the youngsters in the

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13. We do not wish to underestimate the value of volunteers' work. We have decided, however, to err on the side of modesty in indicating the potential costs of such activities. We find the figures, nevertheless, compelling.



club is another thing that we've tried to do with some mixed success. Probably the dancing is the best expression of it; but we have not done enough to bring youngsters into the club's activities. That's probably been a basic mistake right from the beginning. I'm not sure how we're going to address it (CT interview A, 1997: 11-12).

For example, many younger members of the Irish community would rather hang out at local Irish pubs than come to the Irish Club or attend Folklorama (CT interview J, 1997: 5). As this young Celtic woman describes, the Irish youth in Winnipeg have very little to relate to in terms of cultural celebration:

When I got here, I noticed that the majority of [Irish] Club members were quite a bit older than me. There were a couple of people involved that were younger... There were not a whole lot of people my age. Considering Ireland is a country with fifty percent of its population 30 and under, I thought that this was really different. Where I came from, the Celtic music scene is a young scene. Even the session nights [at the Club] were not that young a crowd, people in their forties and parents with their children who come for dance class (CT interview K, 1997: 2).

Thus, the first generation immigrants who built Folklorama's pavilions are increasingly concerned that all their effort of the past 25 to 30 years will be wasted. With the rewards of volunteerism providing little intrinsic attraction, and a lack of opportunities at Folklorama for meaningful cultural expression, it seems increasing likely that no one will be there to take over with the passing of the "old guard." A young organiser echoes the feelings of many of his peers, and of the old guard as well, when he talks of the discouragement many volunteers feel at the lack of appreciation their efforts receive from the FAC:

Many times, [the FAC] creates *justifiable* frustration. Many of them just sat there, and the volunteers put so much time and energy. They just take the credit. They should focus more on the volunteers and try to create some reward. If you spoke with different groups, you'd get similar feedback. It's like a stratification scenario with the haves and the have-nots. If such behaviour continues, it might lead to the death of Folklorama. I hope not. I hope that the Folk Arts Council will take a good look and listen to what the people are saying. We need to be heard. We need some recognition. We need more say in whatever profit is made so that we can distribute it to the people who need it most.<sup>14</sup> They are steering away from [the communities] that were the intended purpose of Folklorama (CT interview F, 1997: 8).

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14. Authors' note: As a non-profit organisation, the FAC would not be allowed to show a profit. However, as this volunteer indicates, where excesses of revenue over expenses

Yet in addition to the problems created by the FAC's homogenisation of multiculturalism and censorship of political content, many organisers will sometimes grudgingly admit that they are also at least partly responsible for limiting younger generations' involvement in Folklorama. After so many years of personal investment, older organisers may be reluctant to pass the torch. New input is not always appreciated by the "old guard." One young woman, active in an ethnic dance tradition, feels her attempts to become directly involved in community and festival were not enthusiastically received:

If you grow up within the community, it's really hard for people who have seen you grow up to let you be an adult. I've been through this myself. You try to participate. You try to help organise and they say, "Oh, yes, dear. That's fine." Nobody will listen to you. You get disillusioned and say, "Fine. I don't want to participate if they're going to treat me this way." I think they're more aware of it these days....But ten years ago, if you were eighteen or nineteen and you wanted to pipe up with an idea, nobody wanted to hear from you (CT interview L, 1997: 9).

Pavilion organisers and younger members of the community have a mutual understanding that there are potential volunteers in the upcoming generations. Their concern, however, is how to adapt both Folklorama and ethnic groups to create an environment where future generations can hold a sense of identity that is neither homogenised nor the residue of some nostalgic past. A young pavilion coordinator for the aboriginal community commented that she hopes festivals such as Folklorama can adapt to reflect changes in multicultural traditions rather than remaining rooted in old stereotypes. She looks upon festivals as especially important for youth who may have lost or had no previous access to their cultural roots:

My belief is that there is a link to event promotion and self promotion. It reflects back on your culture and personal views. I've always had this need to show people that First Nations people are very proud and self-sustaining people. It's especially important for First Nations people who have lost their culture through genocide or through assimilation....When you lose a portion of your sense of self, you lose a part of yourself. A lot of my volunteers can't speak their language. A lot of my volunteers don't know how to dance, and yet, they're in the First Nations Pavilion. You know that guilt when you have to say, "No. I'm not aboriginal?" And then you have to ask yourself,

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are directed, and which expenses are given priority in the first place, can have considerable effect upon both the FAC's operations, and on those of the cultural organisations which support it.

“Who am I? What am I?” That question is always around here (CT interview G, 1997: 3-4).

While some pavilions struggle with issues of how to include future generations of volunteers in the organisation of Folklorama and other community events, others have found strategies of preparing for a cultural future. The Africa-Caribbean association has developed a recruitment policy allowing a dynamic growth of membership and youth involvement. One coordinator says that her pavilion is literally “plagued” with kids. Activities such as dinners and fundraisers and the presentation of community service awards and scholarships to youth have maintained their interest and commitment. The volunteer coordinator for the pavilion says that the community’s emphasis upon interdependence and “passing the torch” maintains their success in involving younger generations:

I can’t speak for other pavilions but one of the ingredients that we use is passing the torch. We try to instill in our organisation the importance of maintaining our culture as well as appreciating other people’s culture. We pass on this experience to the younger people. We try to let them feel that they are a part of the process. We try to work together as a team. We feel that if we are going to be leaders in our community, we have to lead by example. So far, I am very pleased with the response (CT interview F, 1997: 14).

## **A Future for Folklorama?**

Despite the integral role that volunteers play in the success of Folklorama, economic strain, bureaucratic regulation and a lack of cultural connection have led many to feel unappreciated for, and frustrated with, their participation in the festival. Amid this general disillusionment, hope for the festival’s continuation remains. A cross-section of pavilion organisers and volunteers continually expressed their feelings that, with significant changes in the future maintenance of volunteer resources, Folklorama should continue to represent an image of Manitoba multiculturalism as well as draw tourist dollars.

Future dialogue between cultural organisations may provide some valuable ideas for fund-raising and stimulating the interest and participation of younger generations. Such communication may aid in creating a meaningful future for ethnic communities. However much more dialogue between these communities and Folklorama’s governing bodies is also needed. Many pavilion organisers feel that much more change — and more importantly, a commitment to change

on the part of the FAC — will have to take place before Folklorama can be seen as a profitable, satisfying and viable event for all concerned.

I think it [Folklorama] *has* to change. If you don't change, you die. I look around the room and talk to the people at the Folklorama board meetings and I have a sense that there's a tremendous undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the event as it currently stands. I think that what it really boils down to is that the festival has not kept pace with the needs of the people of the city of Winnipeg. What it has done is it has allowed itself to become a tool of tourism marketing and forgotten that the number one supporters of Folklorama are the people of the city of Winnipeg, not the bus tours. That's been allowed to happen over time through a whole variety of ways, not the least of which is the Folk Art Council becoming a bigger and bigger bureaucratic entity....I'm not knocking the importance of Manitoba's tourism industry but I think that it's time to re-evaluate what's happened with the festival and where it is going (CT interview A, 1997: 5).

Such comments have resounded throughout our interviews. Community volunteers understand that tourism marketing has been a boon to provincial and municipal pocketbooks, and, to an extent, they support this investment of their time and efforts. However, many of Winnipeg's cultural organisations have valid concerns for their own economic future and flagging membership. Especially given that volunteers are the most important resource to large-scale multicultural festivals, there is a marked need for serious dialogue and research regarding the future continuity and growth of Winnipeg's cultural organisations, and how events such as Folklorama and bodies such as the FAC can truly support them.

The suggestions we received from interviews with pavilion organisers and community members shows that behind much of the antagonism and frustration with bureaucracy, financial hardship, and censorship, there is also a deeply-felt respect for Folklorama's tradition. Many, both within and outside the organisational structures of the festival, regard it as an emblem of the friendship and cooperation between and among Manitoba's cultural communities. For the immigrants of the 1960s and late 70s, the festival is a marker of how far they have come in building their identities as Canadian citizens and as members of distinct cultural groups. With future dialogue, pavilion organisers are hopeful that new and relevant patterns can be found within this framework, patterns that reflect the growth of Manitoba's cultural communities as well as its tourism industry.

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