

Theatre-inspired Dialogue Sparks Grassroots Projects

Image



'The best possible result is to awaken Canadians to their responsibility as citizens'

A series of theatre-inspired dialogues about Canada's future that took place across the country last year is now bubbling into community action. "All over the country, grassroots initiatives have started as a result of these conversations," Duncan McIntosh, project lead, tells Axiom News.

Dubbed Canada 300, the theatre/dialogue project was launched by the Watermark Theatre based in Rustico, PEI. The project featured nine short plays about Canada's future. The plays were performed in 20 cities and towns across the country from February to April in 2015. Following performances, actors and audiences mingled to

converse about their hopes and dreams for Canada's future.

"The use of theatre as a key component of the Canada 300 process has provided a way to engage people on an emotional level," facilitation and public engagement lead Brian Woodward told Axiom News while the tour was under way.

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The responses to the future-focused conversation were mixed. Some people expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk about something they find meaningful.

"They reflect almost an ache to have a change," Brian said. "(They want) a change in focus from the day-to-day news cycle that makes them feel the world is a terrible place to live in ... and from the fear that is inculcated in most stories we receive through the media."

Other participants expressed deep concerns which were the opposite — they profoundly wanted no change.

“Some wanted to just dream of a happy future, others wanted to work for a happy future,” says Duncan, Canada 300 artistic director.

The tour of plays and conversations surfaced three priority topics which recurred in every location: what will our environment be like, what will our communities be like and what will our nations be like.

A follow-up conference in September in Charlottetown convened Canadian leaders from the public, private and community sectors to explore and propose road maps for achieving Canadian’s dreams for the future in anticipation of Canada’s 150th birthday in 2017.

The conference centred on the three priority topics as well. Questions such as the following guided the discussions:

What will people’s lives look like in 150 years? What do we need to do now to build supportive and sustainable communities in an increasingly disconnected world?

What will nations look like in 150 years? What can we learn from our First Nations about governance for millennia? What actions can we take now to make Canada the nation we want it to be on its 300th birthday?

What will our environment look like in 150 years? Are we destined to live in the post-apocalyptic dystopia worlds described in novels? How can we survive climate change? Will its natural environment continue to be one of Canada’s greatest resources? What actions can we take now to begin to address these questions?

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At the end of the conference, one representative from each city or town visited by Canada 300 pledged to go back to their communities with a plan to start preparing for the next 150 years now.

“A group of people inspired to take actions have connected with many other groups,” Duncan says. “These include many of the people grouped together in cities like Calgary’s [ImagiNation150](#).”

The Canada 300 project has wrapped up with the exception of the finale, which is the publication of a book chronicling the project. This book, *The Canadian Book of Hopes and Dreams*, will be published in January, 2017. In a ceremony at dawn on July 1, 2017, a copy will be placed in the walls of Province House in Charlottetown. A request will be made to the government of 2167, the 300th anniversary of Canada, to open the book and read the hopes of Canadians today for their descendants. Some of the wishes are available for viewing now on the website, www.canada300.ca under “Conversations.”

“The best possible result is to awaken Canadians to their responsibility as citizens and to their enormous power as a collective,” Brian said.

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