



Nordic Council
of Ministers

NORDIC BRIDGES

Unleashing Nordic Culture
and Creativity in Canada



Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
NORDIC BRIDGES IN SHORT	4
OUTCOMES & LEARNINGS	8
ARTISTIC COLLABORATION & PROGRAMMING	15
NORDIC BRIDGES PROGRAMME	17
FELLOWSHIP FOR YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS	19
CULTURAL POLICY COLLABORATION	22
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	27
ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION	28

This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://pub.norden.org/nord2024-015>

INTRODUCTION

Nordic Cultural Initiatives outside the Nordic Region aim for greater interaction between the Nordic culture sectors and the rest of the world, raising the profile of the Nordic culture sectors abroad, and generating added value for the participants and artists, thereby also marketing the Nordic region as a creative region.

In 2019, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture chose Canada and one of its top contemporary arts institutes, Harbourfront Centre in Toronto as the lead of the Nordic cultural initiative Nordic Bridges. Built on shared values of creativity, innovation, inclusivity, resilience and sustainability, Nordic Bridges served to connect the Nordic Region and Canada by means of collaboration between Nordic and Canadian artists, innovators and thinkers.

It presented multidisciplinary contemporary art, culture and ideas across Canada over the course of 2022. The evaluation concluded that Nordic Bridges had been a successful programme and a prime example on how Nordic funding can create significant impact and benefits for participating stakeholders and artists.

This publication presents selected results, key learnings and highlights/features from the year-long programme. Take a look!

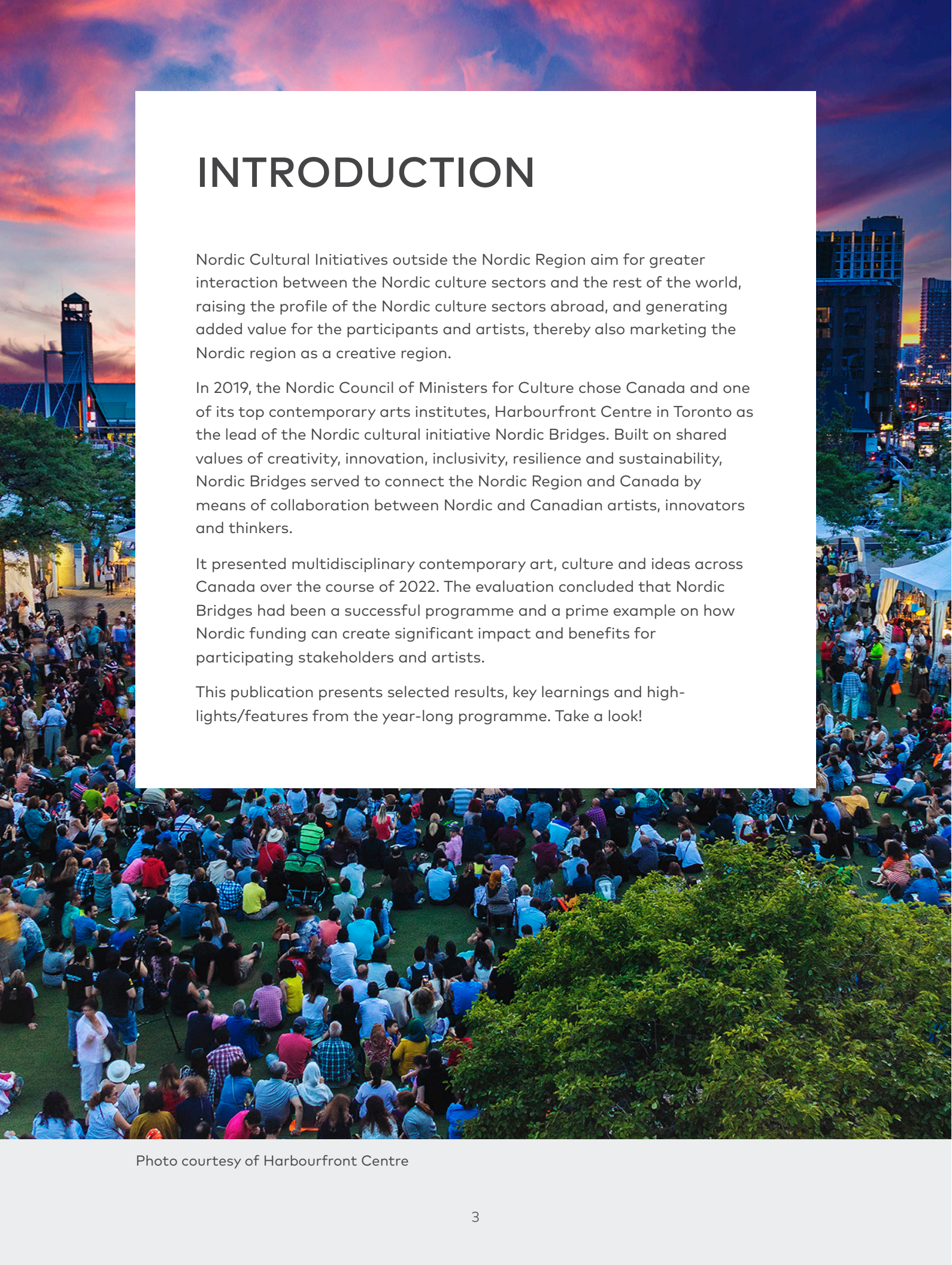


Photo courtesy of Harbourfront Centre

NORDIC BRIDGES IN SHORT

The year-long cultural initiative Nordic Bridges 2022 was one of the Nordic Cooperation's most ambitious international ventures to date as it connected artists, thinkers and innovators from the Nordic Region – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland – with programming partners and professionals from all over Canada.

From January to December 2022, the initiative highlighted contemporary Nordic art and culture in a range of disciplines, including dance, theatre, circus and music, visual and digital arts, craft and design, literature, film, societal debates, journalism, and culinary arts.

Leading and curating Nordic Bridges was Harbourfront Centre, an international multidisciplinary arts and culture institution in Toronto. Curation was based on four key pillars: Artistic Innovation, Accessibility and Inclusion, Indigenous perspectives and Resilience and Sustainability – with an ambition of net-zero programming and zero-waste events.

Nordic artists and stakeholders collaborated with and performed alongside Canadian colleagues at festivals, arts institutions and museums across Canada, as well as on the road and met new audiences, formed new partnerships and developed new methods for the future. It engaged programming partners all over the country, and artists, groups and artistic companies from all Nordic countries.

The choice of Canada as destination for a Nordic Cultural Initiative was made by the Nordic Ministers for Culture in 2019 after an open call. Harbourfront Centre in Canada was selected based on their focus on artistic innovation, sustainability, and demonstrating how arts and culture can be integral building blocks in sustainable societies. In addition, the strong collaboration between Harbourfront Centre and the Nordic embassies in Ottawa played a pivotal role in securing Canada as the host of the next Nordic Cultural Initiative.

The initiative was originally planned for 2021, but was postponed to 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture provided seed funding of DKK 5 million for the Nordic Bridges initiative. In addition, the Nordic Council of Ministers contributed funds to the Nordic-Canadian Fellowship for Environmental Journalism, a Nordic Talks series, and to enable the Nordic embassies in Ottawa to carry out a joint public diplomacy programme. Other funding came from Harbourfront Centre and their programming partners including in-kind, from Canadian and Nordic public and private funders, from the embassies, and ticket revenues. The initial seed funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers made a DKK 32 million programme possible.

PROJECT TIMELINE:

- May 2019: Nordic Council of Ministers announces Canada as destination for a Nordic Cultural Initiative in 2021.
- September 2019: Kick-off for research, planning and forming the organisation with key stakeholders.
- March 2020: WHO declares a global pandemic.
- June 2020: Nordic Bridges is postponed to 2022.
- March 2021: Nordic-Canadian Fellowship in Environmental Journalism is launched.
- January 2022: Nordic Bridges launches with the light installation festival Nordic Lights in Toronto.
- May 2022: A Nordic delegation of art and policy representative participates in the official celebration of Nordic Bridges in Toronto.
- December 2022: Nordic Bridges officially closes with Festival of Cool at Harbourfront Centre.

Nordic Bridges was the third major initiative in recent time, following the success of Nordic Cool at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC in 2013 and Nordic Matters at the Southbank Centre in London 2017. All three initiatives have been seeded by a grant from the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture.

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Concept for joint Nordic cultural initiatives outside the Nordic Region

Nordic Bridges in numbers

1
Project lead-
curator in Canada

12
Months of events

13
Locations from
coast to coast in
Canada

24
Canadian
programme
partners

220+
Participating
Nordic artists and
companies

1 270
Acts, events and
activities

150 000+
People attended

32 000 000
Danish kroner.
A 5 million funding
enabled a 32 million
programme

The Nordic Region has so many internationally sought-after artists and creatives, whose work is not only hugely significant for the development of the cultural sector, but also for the Nordic Region as a whole.

Paula Lehtomäki, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers (2022)



Gudrun Hassle: My Words / Randi Samsonsen and Justine Woods: Shared Terrain. Photo by Randi Samsonsen

OUTCOMES & LEARNINGS

Nordic Bridges has successfully enhanced interaction between the Nordic Region and Canada, primarily among participating artists and cultural organisations, through collaborations which fostered new networks and artistic partnerships.

Source: Oxford Research's evaluation of Nordic Bridges

The third-party evaluation of Nordic Bridges, executed by Oxford Research, concluded that the year-long initiative had been a successful programme, demonstrating how funding can create significant impact and benefits for participating stakeholders and artists. By aligning closely with Nordic culture policy goals, Nordic Bridges promoted democracy, diversity, and dialogue, providing a platform for ongoing conversation and new partnerships. The funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers led to substantial returns. The initial funding of DKK 5 million made a DKK 32 million programme possible.

The evaluation also stated that the programme received positive feedback from both artists and partners, highlighting its high artistic quality and relevance to local interests. Guided by four programming pillars, Nordic Bridges catered to Nordic and Canadian stakeholders and audiences, with audience attendance surpassing initial goals. The initiative enhanced interaction between the Nordic Region and Canada, fostering new networks and artistic partnerships.

Participants reported positive experiences and direct benefits, such as artistic growth and new market access. The initiative enabled artists to explore new directions and reach new audiences.

The Covid-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, leading to event cancellations, travel restrictions, and funding difficulties. However, it also offered extra planning time, which many found beneficial, and enabled more detailed curation. Artists had time to create original work, often sometimes through new collaborations.

Harbourfront Centre carbon offset all air travel and actively worked against single-use items and food waste. However, it is recognised that significant funds are needed to implement fully climate-neutral productions.

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Nordic Bridges has been a successful programme and a prime example of how funding can be leveraged to have considerable impact and provide benefits for participating stakeholders and artists.

– Oxford Research's evaluation of Nordic Bridges

Overall, Nordic Bridges provided substantial Nordic added value by uniting the regions and promoting their commonalities in Canada on a larger scale than possible bilaterally.

Furthermore, Nordic Bridges was organised in an efficient and effective way, with continuous dialogue between Harbourfront Centre and the key organizing Nordic bodies; the embassies in Ottawa, the national contact points at arts councils in the Nordic regions, as well as the Nordic Council of Ministers' secretariat acting as a hub and link to Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Culture.

SELECTED KEY RESULTS

Artists gained **artistic development**, exposure to new markets, and international networks

Nordic Bridges has led to **strengthened interaction** between the Nordic Region and Canada

Nordic Bridges provided an opportunity for Nordic **artists to promote and share their work**

Nordic Bridges was an effective platform for **cultural diplomacy** and presented the Nordic Region as innovative and creative

Nordic Bridges was successful in including artists from all Nordic countries and in **highlighting different artistic fields**

Audience numbers of 150.000+ people were achieved, despite the pandemic effects

A high level of **Nordic added value** was created, and in a way not possible by bilateral efforts

The programming pillars helped create a **diverse, inclusive and topical programme**

Recommendations for future Nordic joint cultural initiatives

Future initiatives should maintain seed funding with strong Nordic and local partners, and define focused, measurable goals while ensuring flexibility. Additionally, they should aim for a balanced programming period with a concentrated geographic focus and provide funding for sustainable collaborations and long-term impact.

- Consider programme length and geographic focus aiming for a balanced programming period and potentially concentrated area
- Define focused and measurable goals but ensure that flexibility is maintained
- Give generous amount of time for research and planning - multilateral collaboration takes time
- Establish clear definitions and expectation for each partner involved in the initiative
- Provide access to continued funding for collaborations created by the initiative for long-term impact

Source: Oxford Research's evaluation of Nordic Bridges and Harbourfront Centre's final report

Nordic Bridges is about cultural exchange and how we can use international co-operation to bring about change. New pathways for collaboration have been created and strong links between Canadian and Nordic artists and other professionals have been forged.

Marah Braye, CEO of Harbourfront Centre (2022)



ART SPIN: Mobile Sweat. Catrine Pedersen and Stina Fagertun: Under the Northern Lights –
Stories and more from Arctic Norway.
Photo by Eva Englund / norden.org



Photos on previous page (from the top, left to right):

Sara Ajnnak. Photo courtesy of the artist.

TOHU / Montréal Complètement Cirque Festival. 'PLAST'.
Photo by Jonatan Nylander.

Nordic Screendance at the National Arts Centre.
Still of Birds in the Earth by Marja Helander.

Iram Haq, still of What Will People Say (Hva vil folk si), 2017.
Photo: Courtesy of TIFF.

Outi Pieski's light installation Gorži at Nordic Lights Festival in Toronto 2022.
Photo by Brian Medina.

Story, story, die. Photo credit Mats Bäcker.

leoblu. Photo by Kseniya Apresian.

Mythe et Évidence by Mathieu Valade. Photo by Brian Medina.

Junior festival performance Spoiiiiiiiiing! by Kitt Johnson X-act.
Photo by Per Morten Abrahamsen.

Eivør. Photo by Sigga Ella.

BreakOut West festival performers The Magnettes.
Photo by Annica Zion.

Uyarakq. Photo by Worker Bee Supply / norden.org

Mundial Montréal performers Helsinki Cotonou Ensemble.
Photo by Eetu Linnankivi.

BreakOut West performer Cell7. Photo by Julie Rowland.

ARTISTIC COLLABORATION & PROGRAMMING

Participating artists experienced benefits such as artistic growth, exploring new directions, and expanding horizons through engagement with different cultures and markets.

Source: Oxford Research's evaluation of Nordic Bridges

The programming for Nordic Bridges started with the Nordic Lights outdoor exhibition in Toronto while the city was still in lockdown due to the pandemic in January 2022. As the world opened up during the spring, more and more in person events rolled out all over Canada and ran throughout the year.

The programme was built around four key pillars: Artistic Innovation, Accessibility and Inclusion, Indigenous perspectives and Resilience and Sustainability, with a focus on collaboration between Nordic and Canadian artists rather than showcasing Nordic arts in Canada.

Harbourfront Centre was lead-curator and 24 Canadian partnering venues and organisations were included through an open call conducted by Harbourfront Centre. Partners included museums, festivals, theatres and multidisciplinary art venues from Vancouver Island in the West to Newfoundland in the East, Yukon in the North to Toronto in the South.

Events and collaborations included e.g. performing arts festivals for children, design collaborations, songwriting workshops, residencies for visual artists, open air concerts, Nordic focus at film festivals, artist talks with novelists, exhibitions and much more.

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Connecting and working with excellent creative people, creating new work and reaching new audiences.

– Nordic artist on their experience from Nordic Bridges

The programme played out in 13 locations across the Canada, and highlighted both artists well known in the Nordics and new talents, as well as other creative collaborations never produced before. More than 220 Nordic artists, groups and companies participated.

They reported positive experiences and direct effects resulting from these partnerships, such as artistic growth, exploring new directions, and expanding horizons through engagement with different cultures and markets.

Artists also highlighted the importance of economic incentives to their participation, pointing out how the support from Nordic Bridges has allowed them to access new markets particularly in Canada but not only, enabling them to tap into new audiences.

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Nordic Bridges absolutely helped our organization participate in meaningful relationship building with other artists, individuals, and organizations based in the Nordic countries.

– Nordic Bridges Canadian Programming Partner

I have had the chance to become part of a new performing arts network for indigenous women from the Arctic region, started as a result of the participation in Nordic Bridges.

Nordic artist on their experience from Nordic Bridges

NORDIC BRIDGES PROGRAMME

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For more information about acts, events and activities during Nordic Bridges in Canada, please take a look in this [PDF](#) or visit nordicbridges.ca

For over two years we have worked with hundreds of Nordic and Canadian artists to get ready for Nordic Bridges, and we are thrilled to present their work, throughout 2022, from coast to coast to coast.

Iris Nemani, Chief Programming Officer at Harbourfront Centre (2022)



Multidisciplinary artist Jenni-Julia Wallinheimo-Heimonen was artist-in-residence at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto as part of Nordic Bridges. Picture from her solo exhibition "This is Not a Rehabilitation Project" at Harbourfront Centre in 2022. Photo courtesy Harbourfront Centre.

FELLOWSHIP FOR YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS

This program is important because it tackles the most pressing global issue of our lifetime – climate change – while offering opportunities for emerging journalists to build skills, develop networks across borders, and report from a community in the Nordic Region or Canada in a productive and sensitive way.

Lex Harvey, journalist and Fellowship Coordinator (2022)

Together with the Nordic Council of Ministers, Harbourfront Centre created the Nordic-Canadian Fellowship in Environmental Journalism, to give young aspiring journalists from Canada and the Nordic Region the space, time, and resources to investigate the climate crisis.

The participating fellows travelled to Attu, Greenland, to Old Crow, Yukon, and many places in between – to tell stories about the perils of fast fashion, about Iceland's efforts to replant its lost forests, about one Sami community's resistance to a mining proposal on their land, and more.

They had access to professional mentors and learned journalism fundamentals – from feature writing to podcasting to video storytelling – and engaged with some of the most important questions at the feet of journalists and policymakers today.

In preparation for the reporting trips a boot camp in Norway equipped the fellows with a deeper understanding of best practices when reporting in the field as well as how to decipher misinformation to ensure climate reporting remains fact-based.

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I've learned more about cultural similarities and differences between Canada and the Nordic region, and the power of both learning and reporting collaboratively with each other.

– Meral Jamal, journalist and fellow (2022)

Dispatches from the climate frontier

An exhibition featuring the work of the journalistic fellows was at display at Harbourfront Centre, and was followed by the launch of the anthology *Dispatches – Stories of Hope, Resilience, and Change*.

Common to the stories told by the young journalists is the aim to engage with people and communities affected by climate change and tell their stories eye to eye, in their own voice.

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We learned about how we detect misinformation, malformation and disinformation.

– Sara Tingström, journalist and fellow (2022)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CHECK OUT:

[Dispatches: Stories of Hope, Resilience and Change](#)

from the Nordic-Canadian Fellows in Environmental Journalism



Reflections from Attu, photo from the Dispatches exhibition at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto.

Photo by Diellza Murtezaj and Meral Jamal.

CULTURAL POLICY COLLABORATION

Nordic Bridges has aligned closely with Nordic culture policy goals by promoting democracy, diversity, and dialogue and provided a platform for ongoing dialogue and new partnerships.

Source: Oxford Research's evaluation of Nordic Bridges

The momentum created by Nordic Bridges and its expanding artist-to-artist dialogues offered a unique opportunity to also initiate an exchange between decision-makers within arts and cultural policy from the Nordics and Canada, and facilitate in-depth dialogue, knowledge-sharing to network-building on an intergovernmental level.

Policy-dialogues strengthened the Nordic-Canadian cultural cooperation

In the fall of 2021, leading up to Nordic Bridges 2022, a series of virtual Nordic-Canadian policy-dialogues on arts and culture took place. Almost 200 senior officials and experts examined topical questions related to the cultural dimension of sustainable development and the green transition, diversity of content online and the future of mobility and cultural export.

The themes proved relevant for cultural policy and beyond – both nationally and internationally. The dialogues also made it clear that the regions are committed to cultural sustainable development and diversity both in a national and an international context. Common concerns and initiatives show that Canada and the Nordics aim to promote strong democracies, social inclusion, cohesion and well-being in the societies by supporting and harnessing the arts and culture. A summary of the outcome is available in an online publication, presenting 12 interesting takeaways.

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The think piece *Changing the system – promoting cultural sustainable development and diversity: Expert opinions from the Culture and Arts Policy Dialogues between Canada and the Nordics in 2021* can be read online [here](#)

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Cultural experiences and institutions are key to supporting sustainability messages and outcomes.

– Stacy Wakeford, Director, Experience and Engagement, Canadian Museum of Nature (2021)

Nordic delegation took part in the official celebration of Nordic Bridges

In May 2022, a Nordic delegation, led by Anette Trettebergstuen, Norway's Minister for Culture and chair of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture 2022, with representatives from all the Nordic ministries for culture, industry organisations, and cultural agencies, embassies participated in the official celebration of Nordic Bridges in Toronto.

They experienced the Nordic and Canadian art and performances on site and met with artists, representatives of cultural institutions, and policy makers from Canada and the Nordics to exchange experiences, establish networks, and discuss ways of working together.

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We get the opportunity as five Nordic embassies to use this as a platform to reach out with public diplomacy to Canadians of all walks of life and all the provinces.

– Jon Elvedal Fredriksen, Ambassador of Norway to Canada (2022)

High-level Nordic-Canadian meeting

During the May visit to Toronto, a high-level meeting between the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture and the Government of Canada/Canadian Heritage was held. On the agenda were the post-pandemic recovery for the cultural sector, strengthening Nordic-Canadian cultural co-operation, and how to tackle tech companies' influence on freedom of expression.

The meeting resulted in a joint statement on combatting harmful content online.

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[Joint statement](#) from Canada and the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture

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Let's all take action to ensure that people everywhere can express themselves freely in the digital space, free from harm.

– Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage (2022)

Roundtable on the intersection between climate change and the arts

During a roundtable discussion on sustainability and the arts, policymakers, artists, and environmental activists dove into questions like *How can cultural places transform to reduce environmental impact?* and *What role can arts councils and government play in that transformation?*

Some of the take-aways were that governments should support grassroots environmental initiatives in cultural spaces, provide green resources, and help artists integrate sustainable practices through funding. Additionally, fostering an inclusive society can drive greater participation in climate crisis mitigation, while individuals and organizations should be mindful of their consumption.

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[Summary of the roundtable discussion on sustainability and the arts](#)

We want Nordic Bridges to be a platform where artists can meet new colleagues, gain new insight, and establish long-term international relationships. This exchange of art, culture and ideas has a positive influence throughout the culture sectors in the Nordic Region - from artists and programmers to policy makers.

Anette Trettebergstuen, Norway's Minister of Culture and Equality and chair of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture in 2022. (2022)



High-level meeting between the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture and Canadian Heritage (Government of Canada).

Photo by Worker Bee Supply / norden.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Nordic Council of Ministers would like to thank the dedicated team at Harbourfront Centre, led by Marah Braye, Iris Nemani and Laura McLeod, the Nordic embassies in Ottawa, the Nordic arts councils who acted as national contact points, the Canadian programme partners, funders, and last but not least: all the participating Nordic and Canadian artists and cultural stakeholders who are the foundation for the success of an initiative of this kind.



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Cover photo: Finnish deaf rapper Signmark, and his hearing collaborator (part of Nordic Bridges 2022). Photo provided by the artist.

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Project team for Nordic Bridges at the Nordic Council of Ministers: Eva Englund, Turið Johannessen, Elisabet Skylare, Lærke Winther

Nordic Bridges 2022 is the largest joint Nordic cultural initiative outside of the Nordic Region to date. It was initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture in order to promote the interplay between the Nordic cultural sectors and Canada. It was headed by Harbourfront Centre in Toronto and involved artists and programming partners from the Nordics and Canada. It was carried out in close collaboration with the Nordic embassies in Canada, Nordic arts councils, and the Nordic Council of Ministers. This publication gives an overview of the initiative and its results. It builds on evaluations, reports, and news items conducted, and in some cases earlier published, by the Nordic Council of Ministers, Oxford Research and Harbourfront Centre.



Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

The Nordic Council of Ministers
Nordens Hus
Ved Stranden 18
DK-1061 Copenhagen
www.norden.org

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