Acting Now to Strengthen our Cultural Sovereignty in Response to the Challenges Posed by Digital Technologies and AI Systems

Priority Actions

Artists: Pinyao Liu and Keon Ju Maverick Lee Title of the work: ReVerie: Sense Photo: Martin Hieslmair

The international symposium Culture versus algorithms: How much room for sovereignty? brought together experts, researchers, artists, First Nations representatives, as well as Quebec and Canadian public decision-makers and civil society representatives in Québec City from October 22 to 24, 2025. Organized in the context of the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, adopted in Paris on October 20, 2005, the event provided an opportunity to **revisit the concept of cultural sovereignty** – enshrined at the heart of the objectives, principles, and commitments set out in the 2005 Convention – in light of the issues, opportunities, and risks posed by digital technologies and artificial intelligence systems.

These issues were explored from multiple perspectives during **six thematic workshops (or areas of reflection)**, each featuring presentations and a discussion period with the audience. At the end of each workshop, speakers and panelists proposed a **short list of priority actions to be implemented in the short and medium term** to strengthen our cultural sovereignty.

The actions identified for each of the six areas of reflection are presented below.

Priority Actions for Strengthening Our Cultural Sovereignty

Area 1 – Sovereignty, Cultural Policies and Discoverability

- Adopt legislative and regulatory frameworks to ensure the discoverability of our creative works, in particular through the continuation of the federal Canadian online broadcasting system, and the implementation of a new complementary provincial framework.
- Establish, in collaboration with the companies concerned, a *one-stop shop* providing access to all digital audio and video platforms, in order to facilitate access to content destined to Canadian and Quebec users and therefore to be better equipped to compete with American platforms.
- Invest in audience development, notably by creating a Collective Promotion Office with sector-specific committees (e.g., music, audiovisual), forging stronger links between culture and education, and ensuring exemplary and coordinated government action offline.
- Preserve and promote the diversity of cultural expressions in international forums, while also collaborating directly with countries seeking to counter cultural homogenization.

Area 2 – Digital Sovereignty and Cultural Concerns

- Raise awareness among decision-makers regarding the cultural dimension of digital sovereignty.
- Integrate issues related to the diversity of cultural expressions into any form of regulation concerning the digital environment.
- Invest in the development of Canadian digital infrastructure (e.g., sovereign clouds).
- Modernize the legislative framework on data protection, particularly at the federal level.
- Consider the working conditions and the rights of artists and cultural professionals in all reflection on the preservation of cultural sovereignty in the digital environment.

Area 3 – Digital Trade and Cultural Exemption

- Continue to protect our cultural sovereignty in all trade negotiations, including those aimed at revising the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA).
- Initiate a reflection on the definition of cultural industries with a view to preparing for an update of the Canadian cultural exemption as soon as the context requires it.
- Identify the risks associated with the CUSMA retaliation clause and consider strategies to remove or neutralize it.
- Promote non-binding cultural cooperation, for example by incorporating cooperation commitments into trade agreements.

Area 4 — Generative AI, Regulation and Copyright

- Involve representatives from cultural industries in government advisory committees on AI.
- Call upon the Government of Canada to clarify its position on AI and copyright, to reassure artists that the economic dimension is not the sole driver of its action.
- Demand that technology companies respect the rule of law, including the *Copyright Act*, without introducing any exception allowing "text and data mining" (TDM).
- Promote a free market for technology licensing.
- Establish transparency obligations regarding the disclosure of works used by AI and the labelling of content substantially generated or modified by AI.

Area 5 — Linguistic Diversity of Cultural Content

- To guarantee respect for First Nations sovereignty and self-determination, ensure that digital tools and data are created and owned by the communities, while supporting access to the expertise of allies to enable them to reclaim their knowledge and systems of governance.
- Explicitly include the Francophone arts and culture sector in federal investments in artificial intelligence. This entails establishing core, multi-year, and coherent funding to support the digital transition and ensure linguistic diversity in the digital environment.
- Urge regulatory bodies to strengthen intra- and inter-institutional coordination and cooperation, particularly with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), in order to open their innovation and training programs to cultural organizations. Also encourage these bodies to invest in human resources training, the creation of specialized positions and expertise, as well as the definition of benchmark digital competencies for the cultural sector and the establishment of requirements in this regard.
- Work towards the establishment of technical and advisory committees, bringing together various stakeholders (linguistic communities, government bodies, and standardization organizations), to support semantic standardization, interoperability, and the discoverability of cultural content in local and national languages within the digital environment.
- Stimulate mutual assistance between minority linguistic communities and encourage the exchange of best practices aimed at promoting their languages in the digital environment.

Area 6 — Digital Culture and Cultural Sovereignty in Indigenous Contexts

- Act to respect the guidelines of "The Digital Territory of First Nations Quebec-Labrador" document or ensure that these guidelines are respected by all actors involved in the creation and deployment of AI tools and systems.
- Create Indigenous resources for education on music rights management.
- Initiate a reflection to create a system for assigning copyright to the performer in the context of the recording of works of oral tradition.
- Support the creation and, where appropriate, the coordination of projects and training aimed at fostering the constitution of datasets and the development of decentralized and decolonized Indigenous AI systems to ensure autonomy over this data and these systems, in accordance with the right to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent.
- Adapt financial structures to the needs of First Nations, enabling, among other things, the creation of links and the connection of expertise between various cultural sectors, particularly in the music and audiovisual fields.

All stakeholders are invited to contribute to the implementation of these actions according to their means and expertise.

The UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the *Centre de recherche en droit public* (CRDP) commit to monitoring the implementation of these actions over the **next three years** and to **periodically publishing** a report to this end.

The symposium *Culture versus algorithms: How much room for sovereignty?* was co-organized by the UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the *Centre de recherche en droit public* (CRDP), in partnership with the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE), Canadian Heritage, the *Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec,* the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), the Law Commission of Canada (LCC), Friends of Canadian Media, and the International Observatory on the Societal Impacts of AI and Digital Technologies (Obvia).

UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions — Université Laval — UNESCO Chair — Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions — Law Commission of Canada / Commission du droit du Canada — obvia

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