

## THE NEED FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

*Canada and Mexico share the need to maintain distinct national identities in the face of strong influences from the American media.*

The cultural industries make a substantial contribution to the economies of both Canada and Mexico. In 1994 they employed some 900,000 Canadians and generated direct and indirect sales exceeding \$29 billion. Comparable statistics are not available for Mexico, because so many participants are "informally" employed and not included in the official statistics. But the cultural sector is probably just as important to the Mexican economy.

In spite of its economic importance, the cultural sector cannot be assessed in the same terms as any other industry. Its significance goes beyond the creation of jobs and contribution to gross domestic product (GDP). Cultural expression is an essential element of any nation's national identity. Canada and Mexico have much in common in this respect. They share a special sensitivity to cultural issues, because of their proximity to the United States, and the massive exposure of their citizens to American culture. For this reason, both countries have consistently subsidized their cultural industries, both in terms of direct support and other incentives.

This public support has helped Canada's cultural sector to develop unique cultural "products," such as books, films, artwork, recordings and live performances. These products have received considerable exposure abroad as well as in Canada.

The opportunities for cultural products in Mexico have increased as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The elimination of tariffs and reduction of barriers to labour mobility are only part of the reason. The publicity and debate surrounding NAFTA in Mexico has raised awareness of Canada and interest in Canadians to new levels. Many thousands of Canadians have visited Mexico in pursuit of new trade opportunities since NAFTA was implemented on 1 January 1994. As a result, Mexicans have come to understand more clearly the differences between Canadians and Americans. This is creating an increased interest in various aspects of Canadian culture.