

**CULTURAL INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKS IN  
COMMUNITY INDICATOR PROJECTS:  
PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR  
CULTURAL INVESTMENT?**

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“What did this investment in culture do for our community in the long term?”

— municipal cultural services manager,  
at Creative City Network conference, Oct. 2003

“Indicators ... are presentation of measurements. They are bits of information that summarize the characteristics of systems or highlight what is happening in a system. Indicators simplify complex phenomena, and make it possible to gauge the general status of a system to inform action.”

— Peter Berry (2002)  
cited in Ottawa 20/20 Indicator Workbook  
(City of Ottawa, 2003, p. 3)

“Researchers should not confuse searching for clarity with expecting to find simplicity. There are two main theoretical and methodological challenges to documenting arts/culture/creativity impacts. The first is having definitions that are either too narrow to capture what we are looking for or too broad for policy use. The second is trying to establish simple causal relationships in an area that is inherently complex—with many interacting forces and about which not enough is yet known to justify efforts to build formal causal models, even complex ones.”

— Maria-Rosario Jackson & Joaquin Herranz Jr.,  
Culture Counts in Communities: A Framework for Measurement  
(2002, pp. 34-35)

## INTRODUCTION

The many dimensions, many perspectives, many audiences, and many possible uses of cultural indicators make a journey into the world of cultural indicators a complex one. The required linkages between models, policy frameworks, research foundations, purpose and application, data (availability and quality), the pragmatic realities of creation—and the dangers of inappropriate interpretations require all dimensions should be considered.

A number of recent publications and projects contribute significantly to the field. The goal of this paper is not to document all the contributions of these developments, however, but to act as a way-finding guide to notable resources.

The current paper follows up previous research which examined the rare inclusion (and more frequent exclusion) of cultural indicators in the burgeoning number of quality of life and sustainability projects in production in 2001 (Duxbury, 2001).<sup>1</sup> It continues to focus on local level projects and on national projects with a local essence. Today, however, the context is a bit different.

In the last few years, the field of cultural indicators has arrived as a fledgling newcomer to the community-level indicator world.<sup>2</sup> Many projects now contain some sort of cultural indicator(s), and collections of examples of cultural indicators are available in print and Internet-based collections (a few are listed in the References section). However, it is still relatively undeveloped as an indicator area and in only a few instances have improvements in the quality of the indicators been pursued with productive results. A number of disconnects are evident; and three key areas operate somewhat independently from one another: (i) the development of cultural indicators as a subset of the indicators field, (ii) the development of theoretical constructs to ground these indicators, and (iii) the practice and context of the creation and use of cultural indicators.

Context is an increasingly important factor in understanding the field's evolution. On one hand, the interpretive frames of quality of life, sustainability, and healthy communities are merging and evolving into comprehensive "community indicator" projects, while the scope of these projects is broadening. This is creating more opportunities for the inclusion of arts and culture as an element of this expanding scope. As well, lessons learned from the pioneering efforts in this area are now being assessed and are available for reference. On the other hand, cultural planners and administrators are experiencing growing pressures to quickly develop indicators for a wide variety of reasons, which may lead to launching indicators prematurely. The complex, multidimensional, and dynamic contexts for the emerging practice of the development of cultural indicators will influence how this area evolves. An additional development is also notable—the very recent emergence of networks among local projects involving cultural indicators.

A final note: This is a snapshot in time. Some projects are just now beginning, some final project reports are out, and others are not yet available but expected very soon. The

<sup>1</sup> Brief updates of two projects described in the 2001 paper — the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Quality of Life Reporting System and the Greater Vancouver Regional District's continuing work on Social Sustainability — are presented in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> In general, it appears that the earlier work of UNESCO (early 1970s) does not inform the current round of community indicator projects.

information in this paper is drawn largely from active projects and recent initiatives in Canada and the United States.<sup>3</sup> What's reported here is being produced as part of this process.

## **PART 1 – The evolving world of indicators**

### ***Merging frameworks, broadening scope***

Since the mid-1990s, indicator projects and analyses have been increasingly framed within a quality of life movement, an integrative model which is closely linked to sustainability and healthy communities models, two other integrative models that arrived in the 1980s (The Flett Consulting Group Inc. & FoTenn Consultants Inc., 2002).<sup>4</sup>

Most recent projects follow one of these integrative models, including measures and indicators addressing social, economic and environmental issues discretely and in an integrative sense which “identifies links and analyzes cross- and cumulative impacts among indicators” (p. A-9). The terrain incorporated into these models is broadening, with recent interpretations including measures of governance, the physical environment, and the ecological footprint.

Furthermore, while quality of life and sustainability labels are still evident, increasingly these projects are being subsumed into multidimensional, comprehensive community indicator programs:

Although initially there were significant differences among ... types of indicators and reporting, over time it has become evident that community reporting needs to cover economic, social and environmental aspects in a balanced and integrated fashion. In recent years the differences among these types of reporting are diminishing. (City of Ottawa, 2003, p. 3)

The sweeping collection of community indicator projects currently observed is described by some as a movement.<sup>5</sup> An overt link to action is an increasingly common characteristic, and relevance at the local community level is felt to be crucial for quality of life indicators, even in national (high-level) indicator initiatives, because “the opportunity for action by citizens is greater at the community level than the national level” (CPRN, 2003, p. 7).

The broadening scope of indicators is also reflected in a conceptual shift underway “to complement quantitative, objective measure with subjective, opinion-based measures and indicators” within projects. There is also evidence of “greater balance between quantitative and qualitative research methods in newer generation measures and indicators” (The Flett

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian information presented in this paper will be augmented in 2004 through a survey of Canadian municipalities about their involvement in the development of cultural indicators and the context in which this work occurs. A scan of the Australian situation also formed part of this project, but information has been more difficult to locate. Community and cultural indicator initiatives have generally been developed as projects of various local government associations (e.g., Australian Local Government Association, Local Government Community Services Association of Australia). Work continues to connect with additional organizations and individuals active in this area in Australia.

<sup>4</sup> The Flett Consulting Group Inc. & FoTenn Consultants Inc. (2002) provides a useful and succinct overview of the evolution of indicators through the twentieth century to the current day.

<sup>5</sup> One report argues that this movement is driven by “grassroots leaders seeking better ways to measure progress, to engage community members in a dialogue about the future, and to change community outcomes” (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001, p. 13).

Consulting Group Inc. & FoTenn Consultants Inc., 2002, p. A-11), an especially important development for culture, where quantitative data is usually economic.

***The emergence of arts and culture as an indicator area***

Within this larger world of indicators, the cultural and arts environment has gained increasing prominence, especially in neighbourhood-based models, with significant credit given to the inclusion of the Arts and Culture Indicators in Community Building project within the Urban Institute's National Neighbourhood Indicators Partnership. The Arts and Culture Indicators project brought research on cultural indicators into the broader discussion of "neighborhood indicators" that the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) promoted. The NNIP, in turn, more broadly sought to "improve methods for developing new indicators, examining neighborhood dynamics, and facilitating the advancement and establishment of neighborhood indicator systems around the country" and included partners in 12 cities across the United States (Urban Institute website).

The inclusion of arts and culture in individual projects is now generally widespread, although it varies from very prominent (e.g., Boston Foundation, 2000, 2002) to slight (or not at all). Indicators generally fall into two categories: what we do (actions, investments) and outside conditions (progress toward our goals). The linking (and evaluative) question of "What impact have we made?" lies between these two measurement areas.

The emergence of the newest wave of comprehensive indicator projects which incorporate arts and culture, while of limited numbers, provide robust examples to examine. Projects entirely focused on cultural indicators also exist but are rare (e.g., Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley, 2003).

In large part, developments in cultural indicators are linked to the involvement of U.S. foundations as funders. The Rockefeller Foundation funded the Urban Institute's multi-year project. The Knight Foundation's initiatives in developing and analyzing community indicators, and supporting experimental work to improve the development of indicators for arts and culture appears to be the next significant development (the Foundation's recent involvement in this area is presented in Appendix B).

Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley's Creative Community Index, funded by the Knight Foundation as part of a unique demonstration project, is notable. It features an engaging and cohesive conceptual framework that organizes and ties the indicators to rationales and educative information, which, in turn, is rooted in a summary of research literature. Significant analysis and careful explanation frame and ground the presentation of the indicators. The enthusiastic reception received by Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley's Creative Community Index in both the U.S. and Canada suggests that the work it represents may serve a "demonstration" function, and inspire others to conduct a similar program.

The next stage in the advancement of cultural indicators will be propelled by this newest wave of project examples and by developments in two related areas: (i) conceptual and empirical research and (ii) networking/sharing frameworks.

***Developing research frameworks and foundations***

The rise in research and practice examining the contribution of arts and culture to community building (and other social issues?) provides a base for theoretically grounding the arts and

cultural indicators used in community indicator programs. Such a research foundation would be most applicable in linking measures of inputs and outputs to outcomes.

In the United States, the Urban Institute is positioned as a knowledge hub in this area. In a recent report for the Arts and Culture Indicators Project, Maria-Rosario Jackson and Joaquin Herranz Jr. offer valuable insights on working in this area. They address theoretical, measurement, and infrastructure issues, outline multiple issues of complexity faced in this work, and present the results of literature reviews which point to promising avenues, including recently launched projects studying social impacts of the arts,<sup>6</sup> promising areas of research literature,<sup>7</sup> and the knowledge resources residing within practitioners in the community arts field.

Arts and Culture Indicators Project field research and literature reviews suggest that participation in arts, culture and creativity at the neighbourhood level may contribute, directly or indirectly, to a list of important positive impacts:

- supporting civic participation and social capital;
- catalyzing economic development;
- improving the built environment;
- promoting stewardship of place;
- augmenting public safety;
- preserving cultural heritage;
- bridging cultural/ethnic/racial boundaries;
- transmitting cultural values and history; and
- creating group memory and group identity. (p. 33)

In Canada, the work of the Department of Canadian Heritage and others on social cohesion may be applicable to this area. Municipalities, local/regional multidisciplinary arts service organizations, and local/regional arts councils may be useful partners in the empirical and theoretical development. The long established tradition of community cultural development in Australia is also valuable, as is its literature on cultural sustainability (e.g., Hawkes, 2002).

However, it is important to note that the community arts field comprises only a subset of the cultural policy and planning work of organizations in the cultural sector and all levels of

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<sup>6</sup> Jackson & Herranz Jr. (2002) lists some promising studies on social impacts of the arts that have been launched in recent years, but many of them are still in their early stages (see footnote 46, p. 47).

<sup>7</sup> A valuable outcome of the Arts and Culture Indicator project is the development of a holistic view of the research being conducted which could be applied to better understand the impacts of arts and culture to individuals and communities. Jackson & Herranz Jr. (2002) note that although “the direct impacts of arts, culture and creative expression on communities—particularly the roles participation plays in communities—are not, for the most part, either well documented or understood in the arts or community-building fields,” fields such as education, youth development, and economics have extensive literature on the direct impacts of artistic activities on individuals and communities (pp. 31-32). They also identify research with the potential to better describe the indirect social effects of arts, culture, and creativity in neighborhoods: “These include identifying community assets and their significant role in community building (McKnight and Kretzman 1991; Kretzman and McKnight 1993), social capital research suggesting that a broad array of civic activities promotes a stronger civil society and democratic engagement, and research on whether a community’s characteristics influence individual behavior” (p. 32). A literature review indicated that “with a few exceptions, these research approaches have so far overlooked arts and culture as a major influence and neglected the unique and considerable role they can play” (p. 32).

governments. Care must be taken not to unintentionally and inappropriately frame all cultural activity at the local level as community arts. Nonetheless, linking the broader realm of cultural activity into the impacts listed above would be of value.

From an economic perspective, Richard Florida's work (Florida, 2002; Florida & Gertler, 2002) has drawn renewed attention to the economic dimensions of cultural resources and investments, especially in terms of economic competitiveness. Florida's creativity index rankings for cities have sparked action in many communities across the United States (and elsewhere), and now appear as an indicator in many projects. Research to link arts and cultural dimensions and resources into broader concepts of creativity and innovative milieux may be useful here.

A third research dimension of interest is that of measuring changes in the cultural sector (or cultural sphere more generally). For an indicator to function as a useful measure of changes in a larger system requires: a good understanding (and model) of the larger system, the selection of appropriate points in this system which indicate broader changes in the system, the measurability of these points, and the availability of effective data.

From a different perspective, cultural indicators can also be viewed as tools of research, empirically grounding theory and assisting in its development. The inclusion of arts and culture indicators in larger projects could produce evidence to establish cultural rationales, produce empirical data, and develop theory. The trend towards a more integrative approach to indicator models which identifies links and analyzes cross- and cumulative impacts among indicators, combined with the recent emergence of arts and cultural indicators appears to offer an opportunity for the development of greater understanding of the roles of arts and culture within a quality of life / community context. The context of community indicators may provide a research setting to develop "theoretical or empirical research that speaks to how arts and cultural participation contribute to social dynamics" (Jackson & Herranz Jr., 2002, p. 19). Another outcome could be a richer understanding of cultural contributions to a community's economy.

### ***Emerging networking frameworks***

In large part, indicator efforts "remain decentralized and highly project-specific" (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001, p. 14). However, this situation appears to be changing, in small ways, gradually.

In general, networking initiatives and projects have two goals: to improve awareness and usability of the knowledge resources and wisdom available, and/or to develop new knowledge through central data collection and analysis.

In the United States some networking of local projects is now evident, with various levels of articulation/formality. A shared body of expertise is part of the picture: the names of a few experts appear repeatedly, most notably Maria-Rosario Jackson (Urban Institute) and Chris Dwyer (RMC Research). Comprehensive indicator analysis (e.g., Knight Foundation community indicators analysis and projects) also assist in building the connections and sharing knowledge. Multi-city research projects (on various cultural sector topics, such as participation and financing profiles) are incorporated into local indicator projects (e.g., Boston Foundation).

In Canada, some intermunicipal networking occurs through the staff participants in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Quality of Life Reporting System project (and

communications with their municipal colleagues), and through the Creative City Network. While still generally informal, further support is planned for the near future.

## **PART 2 – Practice in context(s)** **(The creation and use of local cultural indicators)**

### ***Why are indicators developed? / Why are indicators needed?***

From a municipal perspective, the environment in which indicators are developed and used is complex and dynamic. The level of pressure to develop indicators, while variable from community to community, is generally perceived to be rising.

Pressure to develop indicators typically originates from two directions: program review/evaluation/efficiency measures and the growing prevalence of quality of life/community indicator projects:

Many organizations have embraced the need to monitor and evaluate policy and program effectiveness. While the federal government has the most experience in this area, municipalities across Canada have developed and manage monitoring and evaluation systems. ... Many of these efforts address concerns over policy and program efficiency, and they are often oriented towards performance measurement. However, we see a significant and complementary movement towards monitoring and evaluation of sustainability, the healthy community, and finally quality of life. (The Flett Consulting Group Inc. & FoTenn Consultants Inc., 2002, p. A-3)

More specific contextual uses include tying cultural indicators to formally adopted plans with explicit goals and objectives (e.g., City of Toronto Culture Plan, Ottawa 20/20 Quality of Life Report Card and Arts Plan Progress Indicators), and in some cases to funding levels as part of core services review processes currently afoot in Canadian municipalities (e.g., City of Ottawa).

In the practice of developing indicators, the various pressures and rationales for indicators cannot always be cleanly separated. Tellingly, the City of Toronto's proposed measurements related to their recently adopted cultural plan are described as benchmarks of the "health of the Creative City" but also meant to serve an evaluative function: "Measuring the success of this Culture Plan is like measuring the efficiency of any other realm of government" (City of Toronto, 2003, p. 44).

### ***Challenges, issues, and constraints in operationalizing***

Comprehensive indicators of the cultural vitality of a community ... are difficult to come by. Though growing numbers in the arts recognize the value of collecting this kind of information, central sources for reliable data on the field are few. Further, many have disagreed about what markers best capture cultural vitality in their communities. (Rettig, 2002, n.p.)

Issues of measurability, data availability, and data quality cannot be removed from higher-level discussions of the selection of cultural indicators, and the possible, strategies and mechanisms for inserting arts and culture into these broader contextual projects and processes. Some of these issues are briefly described here as a reminder of their importance within the larger picture.



*Developing meaning.* Throughout the entire process, the question of intent and meaningfulness must permeate all actions and decisions. Why are we doing indicators? Why do we need them? What is important to measure? What are we attempting to indicate? This crucial step can be misplaced in the rush to address the needs of outside processes. A pragmatic side of this is a consideration of the resources available to do this, including people's time.

*Selection of indicators.* How should indicators be chosen? How are they constructed? What conceptual frameworks, administrative processes, and governance realities should be considered in this selection?

*Measurability of indicators.* Can what we want to measure be measured? The task of obtaining "evidence," especially causal evidence, presents many challenges in this area (see, e.g., Muir, 2003). At least two dimensions to this issue arise: beyond conceptual questions of measurability, there is a closely aligned question of data availability.

Gaps between indicator statements/topics and data available to address/measure are common. Basic data on community conditions may not be available. See, for instance, the variation in data availability for the cultural indicators of the Boston Indicators project, as well as the data problems with cultural indicators encountered by the Vision 2020 Hamilton Sustainability Indicators project, Sustainable Seattle, and others. More broadly conceived impacts are even more difficult to obtain. Many of the impacts of arts and culture to individuals, societies, and regions cannot readily be measured at present.

*Statistics ? Indicators, but Indicators may be Statistics.* In many cases, there is a conflation of indicators and statistics. What is measurable becomes a de facto indicator, of action/activity, of change, of progress. Available statistics may inappropriately be adopted as indicators.

What is unmeasurable may appear as anecdotes and examples (e.g., in a report), but may be excluded when "the list" is developed on its own. This situation can bias the intended presentation and received meaning.

Although there is a general indicator movement to include qualitative and subjective measures through the use of telephone surveys and focus groups, resource limitations limit the application of these methodologies and efforts, with the result that indicators typically resort to compiling existing administrative data.

*Data availability and "available data."* Limited resources can limit indicators to information on hand. In many municipalities, the creation of cultural indicators related to changes in the community rely on data submitted by the community, usually as part of a grant application. Statistics and indicators thus become a byproduct of this process. Validation of data is a significant issue among those attempting to create reliable indicators.

Alternately, data generated through government processes may not be sufficient to use as indicators. In the process of developing the City of Ottawa's quality of life report card (to measure progress on the City's 20/20 plans), challenges identified early on included "the weakness of data changes in a yearly cycle and difficulty in defining adequate indicators to measure access to City services" (in CPRN, 2003, p. 20).

How fine-grained an indicator do you need? As an example, within the rubric of Boston as an exciting regional destination, the Boston Indicator project relates the impact of cultural life and

the arts on the local and regional tourist industry to the total number of visitors to the area. For the moment, this may suffice (and may be the only data available), as a point in an ongoing evolutionary process. In a larger contextual analysis, this indicator can be supplemented with specific cultural examples (attendance figures; audience studies related to a particular exhibition or festival). This pragmatic approach of indicator development and use may contrast with that of researchers who seek to draw the associational or causal link as finely and as solidly as possible.

*The indicators–analysis value-added continuum.* The importance of rigorous analysis of indicator data is often forgotten, and yet is key to understanding the significance of changes in the data and interrelationships among data sets. Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley's Creative Community Index (2003) and, more generally, Listening and Learning: Community Indicator Profiles of Knight Foundation Communities and the Nation (2001) are good examples of the benefits realizable through careful analysis of indicators, and presentation of the indicators within this analytical context.

***Use with care, use with caution:***

***Indicators use and the measurement–evaluation–funding continuum***

Indicators are used in many processes — coordination, planning, evaluation, analysis, education, enlightenment, and decision-making — across contexts such as governance, philanthropy, and advocacy. Ideally, they are used in concert with other sources of knowledge being brought to bear in the situation.

***Indicators as a tool of governance and government***

Indicators can assist with effective coordination of distributed power, information, and resources (i.e., governance). Indicators can serve as a neutral resource shared among participants in a process, which can help level the playing field among various stakeholders (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001). As an analytic tool, indicators can succinctly present a picture of changing conditions and help improve understanding of complex social conditions. Combined with other information tools, indicators can assist with planning and making effective, strategic funding (or other) decisions:

Indicators projects contribute to – and do not displace – the value of other information tools. In many cases, ... they help stakeholders improve and refine their ongoing work. For instance, indicators help Foundation staff prepare for site visits. Indicators help us ask sharper questions in the due diligence phase of grant making. Perhaps most important, indicators force us to question our own biases and conventional wisdom. (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001, p. 16)

Indicators are also incorporated into evaluatory frameworks, as tools to evaluate governance/investment success and/or to assess investment impacts. The introduction to a cultural program impacts study (conducted by the Australia Council and the Australian Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts ) suggests the broadening scope for program evaluation that may quickly take it into the realm of community indicators:

Cultural programs serve cultural objectives. Their success is judged by their ability to increase the excellence, diversity and accessibility of cultural activity and to encourage

participation in it. However, cultural programs influence the communities in which they operate in other ways. Increasingly, they are seen as having economic and community impacts that increase the vitality of regional communities and contribute to regional development. (Muir, 2003, p. 1)

Administrative systems and controls may incorporate indicators on internal processes as well as outside community impacts. For instance, an administrative wave currently passing through Canadian municipalities (and other levels of government) is the core services review. The core services review focuses on, or articulates, local expectations, realities, and purposes and aligns civic operations to these expectations (Oksana Dexter, personal communication, November 5, 2003). In the case of the City of Ottawa this process is being used as a means to address a large operating deficit and pressures to cut operations/service levels. This process may link indicators more closely to budgetary processes and funding decisions. In this context, the impact measures should be sensitive enough to illustrate the impact of changes in budget levels in, say, 5% increments.

Indicators are also used to evaluate one's (competitive) position vs. other jurisdictions. In contrast with the more internal focus of a core services review, there is also a growing desire to be aware of what is being done elsewhere and, most importantly, to know "how we compare." The popularity of Richard Florida's creativity index in indicator projects and the attention it is receiving from politicians in many cities attests to this. The growing need for quickly available comparable information in the area of municipal cultural development was the impetus for the Creative City Network's intermunicipal comparative framework project.

Related to this is the desire to know whether a change in a community is a local issue or more widespread trend, which is in part fueling the desire for consistency in measuring cultural impacts across municipalities (see, e.g., City of Ottawa 20/20 website).

### ***Indicators as a tool for advocacy and communication***

As part of an overall educative process, indicators can play key roles:

Arts indicators can anchor discussions about arts and culture with objective evidence meaningful to decision-makers outside the sector. They can also track change over time. ... Indicators can also help uncover assets and needs in a community. ... But perhaps most important, the indicators numbers can do the talking in local debates about public funding for the arts. ... (Rettig, 2002, n.p.)

They can also assist in improving the receptivity of an audience to new ideas: "Numbers give people permission to support something they don't understand" and can increase individuals' "comfort zone" (Anne Russo, Creative City Network conference, October 2003).

However, their use must be tempered. Weighing heavily on the use of indicators brings its own dangers: Indicators can produce a "façade of scientific management" which can distort the artistic process and may not add clarity or understanding. And the eternal dilemma: "There is no objective way to measure the human spirit in contact with art."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Delegate comments at Creative City Network conference, October 2003.

The relationship between creators of indicators and the subject(s) of the indicators is crucial. Acceptance of indicators as meaningful and valid tools that can contribute to shared goals and objectives must be earned through their careful application and use. The allure of quantitative indicators as a basis for action must be accompanied by caution, reflection, and other knowledge:

Staff and local leaders must not forget what they know when in the presence of data. They must not follow data blindly in setting priorities. Also, indicators data do not dictate what ... stakeholders value. ... we want to identify grant-making priorities at the intersection of indicators information and local knowledge....

One thing we learned from the Community Indicators project is that our ability to make a difference hinges on our understanding of the local context. Taken alone, the customary statistics used to sum up the well-being of the nation are not enough. They mask the remarkable differences ...

Because each community is its own special case, explanations that fit one community may not fit another.

(John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001, pp. 16, 22, 61)

Mounting pressures to develop indicators are originating from multiple sources, and in practice their influences overlap. There is a general sense that if you aren't doing anything now, you will soon be asked to, especially in the context of benchmarking progress on a community plan, a community indicators project, provincial and other requests, and/or an administrative review of one's operations.

In some situations, cultural development staff feel trapped by the pressures from the system(s) in which they operate to provide indicators. The potential for misuse of these indicators, and the general fluidity in the use of indicators as measures and as evaluation tools have staff frightened that indicators of the state of their community's cultural sector may reflect negatively on them and their work.

The complexity of context(s) of use must be appreciated. Once developed, the indicators live within a dynamic, changing, and not always predictable environment. Once indicators or benchmarks are developed, their use is uncontrollable and may be inappropriate. Although careful development and framing of indicators can help, the various uses of indicators (e.g., measuring community conditions, measuring success, setting service levels, assessing impacts of funding) can't always be anticipated nor neatly unbundled. Misperception of the intent and meaning of an indicator can occur, especially when measures of a complex environment are used to evaluate performance and perhaps set funding levels.

On a more positive note, within the midst of this general obsession with indicators, some individuals feel a more moderate view of indicators may be on the near horizon. This echoes a growing awareness of the need to balance the use of indicators with other types of information and the importance of analysis in the process of producing meaning from them.

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## Selected websites

CitiesPlus project

<http://www.citiesplus.ca>

Creativity Index - City Rankings

<http://www.creativeclass.org/rankings.shtml>

Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley

<http://www.ci-sv.org/cna.shtml>

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

- Research section

<http://www.knightfdn.org/default.asp?story=research/index.html>

- Community Indicator Project

<http://www.knightfdn.org/default.asp?story=indicators/index.html>

- Vitality of Cultural Life Topic Index

<http://www.knightfdn.org/default.asp?story=research/cultural/index.html>

Arts and Culture Indicators in Community Building Project, Urban Institute

<http://www.urban.org/nnip/acip.html>

The Boston Foundation - Indicators Project (Cultural Life and the Arts section)

<http://www.tbf.org/indicators/arts-culture/index.asp>

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## Other resources

A significant amount and variety of resources on measures and indicators is now in print and on the Internet (e.g., the list of Canadian, American and other international experiences with sustainable indicators compiled by Redefining Progress and the Sustainability Reporting Program, and CPRN, 2003, Annex C). A number of organizations are developing central listings and compiling databases of indicators, including Partners for Livable Communities and Redefining Progress/International Institute for Sustainable Development (Internet-accessible). Increasingly, various examples of arts and cultural indicators can be located within these collections.

### *Redefining Progress / International Institute for Sustainable Development*

Recently, Redefining Progress and the International Institute for Sustainable Development have merged their database of indicators projects, and provides an annotated directory of projects around the world. As well, Redefining Progress is a very useful hub for indicator projects generally and operates a listserv on the topic to support inter-project communication.  
<http://www.rprogress.org>

### *Sustainability Reporting Program*

Affiliated with York Centre for Sustainability at York University, Toronto  
<http://www.sustreport.org>  
A useful general reference site on sustainability indicators and projects.

### *Partners for Livable Communities*

Of potential interest for its extensive compilation of Community Indicators. Over two years, the organization surveyed community indicator efforts to track quality of life. They selected 10 representative programs for in depth analysis and created a database of 2,000 indicators, which are sorted into three broad categories: People, Economy, and Environment. A printed compilation (roughly printed, no date) includes art/culture/heritage-related indicators in all three categories. Organization also conducting a Creative City Initiative and Culture Builds Community project. At present there is no indication that the indicator work relates to these other initiatives.



## **Appendix A — Project Updates**

### **Selected Canadian Projects with Relevance for Cultural Indicators**

#### *FCM Quality of Life Reporting System*

Opportunity for inclusion of arts and culture into the 2005 indicator set.

In 1996, in response to changes to the funding structure of federal transfer payments, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) launched a social indicator project to measure the quality of life in Canadian communities. Two reports were released, in 1999 and 2001, followed by an evaluation of the program in 2002. The 2001 report proposed the development of two cultural measures, both “input” measures in character (expenditures on ....., holdings of ...) which contrasted with the project’s overall intent to focus on social conditions (Duxbury, 2001). In large part, these proposed directions reflected the limited development of thinking about the role of arts and culture in the quality of life indicator field more broadly, and the ongoing challenge of creating meaningful social indicators related to arts and culture.

The evaluation process led to a complete overhaul of the program. At the core of this process was the development and clear articulation of its interpretation of quality of life, which would then guide the development of measures and indicators that relate to this definition. Within very real constraints of data quality, availability, and cost of acquisition and management, and an overriding need for relevance to local conditions, the concluding recommendations of the evaluation were that the FCM should:

1. clearly define its interpretation of “quality of life”
2. develop measures and indicators that help determine the quality of life, as defined
3. assuming a comprehensive definition of QOL, develop measures and indicators regarding:
  - a. the natural/physical environment
  - b. leisure, arts and culture
  - c. governance and leadership
4. complement quantitative, objective measures and indicators with qualitative, subjective measures and indicators.

(The Flett Consulting Group Inc. & FoTenn Consultants Inc., 2002, p. A-11)

When the FCM team decided to move from a social indicators model to a comprehensive quality of life model, they decided to use the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) template as a starting point (Rick Gates, personal correspondence, September 5, 2002). The FCM did not have the resources or time to do a nation-wide survey to determine the main factors people use to define and determine their own quality of life, and the CPRN had recently completed such an exercise (Michalski, 2001).<sup>9</sup> However, the FCM team also did not want to lose the work that had been accomplished to date. They drafted a definition of quality of life that lists factors (domains) for indicators:

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<sup>9</sup> The CPRN is exploring the pragmatics of moving from the prototype set of national indicators and report card to a regular reporting instrument on quality of life (CPRN, 2003). Given the exclusion of arts and culture from this prior work, it is doubtful this will be the instrument through which national cultural indicators may be created. Nonetheless, it also warrants monitoring.

## What is Quality of Life?

Quality of Life is reflected in individuals, families and groups as a result of a community's capacity to: meet basic needs; offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes or aspirations; facilitate social interactions, a sense of belonging and inclusion in community life; support the safety and security of its residents; promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources; sustain diverse economic opportunities and; limit the impact of built environments on natural environments.

The Quality of Life in any given community is influenced by interrelated factors such as: personal and community health; personal safety; affordable, appropriate housing; community and social infrastructure; meaningful employment; educational opportunities; the health and long term sustainability of the local economy and the natural environment; personal financial security; democratic rights and freedoms.

Quality of Life indicators are designed to measure and track changes in these factors over time. Analyses of these measures will inform and influence governments and decision-makers across Canada.

(Draft 2, August 14, 2002)

The measures selected for the next report (scheduled to be released in November 2003) are sorted into 11 domains related to this definition:

- Demographic Background Information
- Personal Financial Security
- Personal and Community Health
- Personal Safety
- Affordable, Appropriate Housing
- Local Economy
- Natural Environment
- Education
- Employment
- Civic Engagement
- Community and Social Infrastructure

(Acacia Consulting & Research, 2003)

These categories and many of the indicators within them do not correspond to measures in previous reports (see Acacia Consulting & Research, 2003; Low, 2002; FCM, 2001).

Within the Community and Social Infrastructure category, leisure is (partly) addressed by an Outdoor Recreation Areas indicator. No indicators yet address arts and culture, although it remains a part of the FCM team's discussions.

The exclusion of arts and culture from this "first round" is in part due to the origins of the new framework to the work conducted by the CPRN. When the CPRN did their survey, this area rated too low in importance to be included. In the process of revising the FCM system, team members had to be fairly rigorous about denying various subject requests if they were not backed with "good solid evidence that people really do consider them to be essential to their

well-being and happiness (i.e., QOL)" (Rick Gates, personal correspondence, September 5, 2002). In part this was tied to pragmatic reasons: the desire to get a report out in 2003.

Since this is the first year the FCM will be using the quality of life model, sticking closely to one that is fairly well established makes sense. However, after that, it might be amended to better fit the needs and priorities of municipal government (thus responding, for instance, to a great municipal desire to have arts and cultural indicators included in the next edition). In such a situation, would the inclusion of a few cultural indicators within the Community and Social Infrastructure domain be sufficient, or should Culture be a separate (new) domain containing 4 to 11 indicators (the range in the domains currently)?

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### ***Greater Vancouver Regional District Social Sustainability Framework***

Opportunity/Recommendation: Additional conceptual work on the role of arts and culture in social sustainability, in a social context as well as an environment one

The Livable Region Strategic Plan (LRSP), adopted by the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) in 1996, is the growth management strategy for the Greater Vancouver region. As part of the review of the LRSP, the overall framework for regional planning evolved from developing complete communities to sustainability. Sustainable development was described as having three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. A stream of work has addressed the concept and planning of social dimensions of sustainability, or social sustainability, defined to include components related to arts, culture, and heritage (see Duxbury, 2001, for an overview of the process to 2001).

The author has only engaged in this process intermittently since that point, and thus cannot relay the series of specific decisions made in the evolution of the framework since that point. Some of the key developments since that time are:

- To integrate social sustainability within the larger project, the work turned to framing components of social sustainability within a matrix of four guiding principles (Equity, Social inclusion and interaction, Security, Adaptability)<sup>10</sup> and seven themes (Working, Playing, Sense of Place, Living, Engaging, Learning, Moving).

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<sup>10</sup> The four guiding principles are defined as follows:

**Equity:** the recognition that individuals and groups require differing levels of support in order to flourish, and some individuals and groups are capable of contributing more than others to address disparities and promote fairness of distribution.

**Social Inclusion and Interaction:** the recognition that both the rights and the opportunity to participate in and enjoy all aspects of community life and interact with other community members and the environment, enables individuals and communities to celebrate their diversity, and recognize and act on their responsibilities.

**Security:** individuals and communities flourish when they have economic security and have confidence that they live in safe, healthy, supportive, and stable environments.

**Adaptability:** the recognition that sustainability requires resiliency for both individuals and communities, and the ability to respond creatively to change.

- A mid-2002 Social Sustainability Forum highlighted the ongoing need for an anchoring conceptual framework.
- A definition of social sustainability was created based on a two-part social component to sustainability: individual or human capacity, and social or community capacity.<sup>11</sup>

### Social Sustainability: A Definition

For a community to function and be sustainable, the basic needs of its residents must be met. A socially sustainable community must have the ability to maintain and build on its own resources and have the resiliency to prevent and/or effectively address problems in the future. Two types or levels of resources in the community are available to build social sustainability (and, indeed, economic and environmental sustainability)—individual or human capacity, and social or community capacity.

Individual or human capacity refers to the attributes and resources that individuals can contribute to their own wellbeing, and to the wellbeing of the community as a whole. Such resources include education, skills, health, values and leadership. Social or community capacity is the basic framework of society, and includes mutual trust, reciprocity, relationships, communications, and interconnectedness between groups. It is these types of attributes that enable individuals to work together to improve their quality of life and to ensure that such improvements are sustainable.

To be effective and sustainable, these individual and community resources need to be developed and used within the context of four guiding principles: equity, social inclusion and interaction, security and adaptability. (GVRD Social Indicators Subcommittee, 2003)

- At June 2002, the guiding principles and themes were frames to develop Objectives, Best Practices, and Indicators in each “block” of the matrix. By 2003, this had changed to the development of: Characteristics, Examples, and Rationales. This marked a significant change in tone and intent for the framework. It is now more illustrative than prescriptive. Notably the indicators are currently absent.
- It also appears that the wheel diagram of 11 dimensions of social sustainability that was developed in 2001 has been dropped.

The project continues to provide an interesting opportunity to explore the conceptual and operational roles of arts and culture infrastructure, opportunities, and participation in a socially sustainable community context. From a local perspective, cultural staff representatives on the subcommittee continue to participate in the process, so culture remains “part of the game” as phases unfold.

A related development is also notable. During 2002, the GVRD participated in and won an international competition on urban sustainability through the Sheltair Group’s CitiesPlus Project ([www.citiesplus.ca](http://www.citiesplus.ca)). The project planned the region’s future for the next 100-year timeframe. One component of this project was a Cultural Systems Foundation Paper and discussions with selected community and municipal professionals in the cultural field.

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<sup>11</sup> Definition developed with reference to the writings of Robert Goodland, World Bank (Rick Gates, City of Vancouver, memo to GVRD SIS, June 12, 2002)

## Appendix B

### The indicator projects of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The work of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in the development of community-based cultural indicators may launch the next wave of activity in this area. The origins and development of this stream of activity are presented here as reference.

#### *The Knight Foundation Community Indicators Project*

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is a private foundation that makes grants to non-profit organizations. A segment of the Foundation's grant-making is devoted to projects that have a national scope<sup>12</sup>, but the Knight Foundation also operates as a local funder in a fixed group of 26 communities. In order to better serve these local communities, the Knight Foundation developed the Community Indicators project to "document the social health of these communities" (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1999, p. 1). The initial surveys were conducted in 1999-2000, and again in 2002:

As an evaluative tool, the Community Indicators project will provide quality-of-life measures in the 26 communities that Knight Foundation seeks to affect through its local grant making. The indicators will establish baseline measures of social health that can be used in future years as evaluative benchmarks against which the progress of grantees' programmatic efforts can be measured. Once established, key indicators will be tracked over time and used to help identify opportunities and needs within and across communities. (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1999, p. 1)

The Community Indicators project has two paths of inquiry: (1) telephone surveys in each of the 26 communities, and (2) the development of community profiles for these communities using local, state and national data sources. The surveys measure "residents' civic engagement and their attitudes related to the seven priority interest areas in Knight Foundation's Community Initiatives Program: education; arts and culture; children and social welfare; community development; homelessness; literacy; and citizenship" (p. 1).<sup>13</sup> The profiles are intended to serve as a complement to the impressionistic data from the surveys, and help complete a bigger picture of community conditions. The results of all surveys for all 26 communities are available on the Knight Foundation website.

In March 2001, the Knight Foundation published "Listening and Learning: Community Indicator Profiles of Knight Foundation Communities and the Nation", which brought together the findings of the Community Indicator research conducted in the 26 communities and a national average.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Parallel to the Knight Foundation's Community Indicator work, it also supports research in the area of vitality of cultural life: "To provide all residents access to a wide variety of artistic and cultural pursuits. To nourish creativity in children, youth and adults." (Knight Foundation website). Research to date has focused on providing insight into how and why people participate in arts and culture (conducted by the RAND Corporation) and a classical music consumer segmentation study which included interviews with more than 25,000 adults. These studies are available on the Knight Foundation website.

<sup>13</sup> A module on economic development is planned, in response to the identification of this area as a priority by Foundation trustees (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001).

<sup>14</sup> "The national survey results are based on telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,206 adults 18 and older living in telephone households in the continental United States. Interviews were completed in either English or Spanish, according to the preference of the respondent" (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001, p. 162).

In examining indicators of Vitality of Cultural Life, the report begins by looking at two areas of current community conditions:

- 1) Types of Arts and Culture Organizations
  - Number of Arts and Culture Organizations
  - Types of Organizations Identified
  - Percentage of Organizations With \$500,000 or More in Annual Expenses
  - Number of Arts and Culture Organizations per 10,000 Residents
  - Assets of Arts and Culture Organizations Per Capita
- 2) Finances of Arts and Culture Organizations
  - Percentage of Arts and Culture Organizations Reporting a Deficit
  - Median Deficit of Arts and Culture Organizations
  - Median Surplus of Arts and Culture Organizations

(John S. and James L. Knight Foundation et al., 2001, p. 136)

Arts and culture is defined to include museums and performing arts, visual arts, arts education, history, humanities, cultural, craft, multidisciplinary and arts service organizations. However, the statistics “primarily capture organizations within the incorporated arts and culture sector.” The report acknowledges: “Many local arts and culture offerings are provided by small arts organizations, informal groups and arts programs embedded within non-arts institutions. Due to the nature of these activities, they are more difficult to capture and are thus undercounted in the statistics” (p. 137).

The report explains why the indicator group is important (but not each individual indicator), and presents key findings related to the individual indicators. Charts compare the individual communities to the national average.

Types of arts and culture organizations in a community - From the Foundation’s perspective, a comparison of the types of arts and culture organizations across its communities “helps to identify geographic areas that may offer fewer opportunities to participate in the arts,” which is tied to its interests in broad community access and participation in arts and culture (p. 138). (Due to limitations on data available, these measures do not include public and for-profit organizations which would contribute and shape the not-for-profit sector.)

Finances of arts and culture organizations “provides quantitative measures of the stability and financial capacity of the arts sector” (p. 141). Financial data is only available for non-profit organizations with more than \$25,000 in gross receipts (thus, the small nonprofit, public, and for-profit arts organizations are excluded). Data is based on financial information filed with the I.R.S. by these organizations. Measures include assets of arts and culture organizations per capita, as well as the prevalence and size of deficits and surpluses in organization operations.

The second part of the chapter discusses survey findings, which, as discussed above, relate to perceptions, attendance, and other forms of participation and involvement with arts and cultural activities. In many cases, the survey findings point to areas requiring closer examination, and the importance of full contextual understanding to relate perceptions and realities meaningfully. In reviewing this section, the importance of analysis of the results – identifying variations and

attempting to explain them when possible – becomes clear. The findings gained through the use of consistent benchmarks (survey questions) becomes meaningful only once careful analysis of the results, on a “national” (or overall) basis as well as on a community-by-community basis, has been conducted and articulated. It is at that point that the contributions and limitations of existing knowledge and the next steps are clarified.

*Improving community indicators on nonprofit cultural sectors: A three-community experiment*

In 2000, hoping to improve upon the few arts measures in the Community Indicators Project, the Foundation launched an experiment to determine whether three communities – San José (California), Fort Wayne (Indiana), and Charlotte (North Carolina) – “could build the capacity needed to agree on and collect useful information on their nonprofit cultural sector”:

The Knight-funded partnership provided arts service organizations with the time and technical assistance needed to identify, create and maintain accurate indicators of the vitality of their nonprofit arts and cultural sector.

Each community gathered information on 10 core indicators ... The core questions capture the variety of ways that organizations seek to engage audiences and describe the local environment for funding, artistic collaboration and entrepreneurship.

Our partners relied on their own deep local knowledge to create a further set of indicators specific to their communities. Charlotte, for example, investigated the diversity of its audiences. Fort Wayne measured the interest of the business community in arts and culture. San José did an extensive survey of how people participate in local arts and cultural activities. (Rettig, 2002, n.p.)

The three-city research project was designed to generate new types of cultural indicators for the nonprofit arts sector. Americans for the Arts, which helped coordinate the work, will publish a monograph about the accomplishments of the participating communities in late 2003 (author: Randy Cohen). Correspondence with individuals in Fort Wayne and Charlotte provided limited information. Geoff Gephart, president of Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne, noted that the Knight project was “not particularly successful in Fort Wayne” (personal correspondence, October 28, 2003). Inquiries to individuals in Charlotte were directed to the publication currently being written by Randy Cohen. The only independent project report available was published by Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley (2003).

*San José/Silicon Valley*

The Silicon Valley Creative Community Index was created through a partnership between Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley and the San José Office of Cultural Affairs. CISV is the organization charged with carrying out Silicon Valley's cultural plan.

Indicator Goal: to develop quantitative measures of cultural participation and creativity in the Silicon Valley region.

The Creative Community Index publication includes more than 30 indicators designed to gauge the “health and vitality of cultural activities” in the region and “the importance of creativity to the vitality of Silicon Valley” (CISV website). In the conceptualization of the indicators, they have addressed an array of rationales and have threaded them together in an innovative manner.

The index measures levels of cultural participation, expression and creativity as well as the impact of arts and culture on Silicon Valley's economic system. It also tracks the progress of the regional cultural plan and informs local leaders of critical gaps in the community's cultural environment.

### *The process*<sup>15</sup>

The development of quantitative measures for this project followed two parallel tracks:

1. interviews with local residents about their breadth and frequency of cultural participation

Going beyond the original study request from the Knight Foundation, Cultural Initiatives designed a multi-language public opinion survey to learn more about community attitudes and practices around cultural participation and how they differ across ethnicities. In-person interviews with 361 Silicon Valley residents were conducted in English, Spanish and Vietnamese at 18 locations throughout Santa Clara County. CISV believes this kind of multi-language cultural participation survey is the first of its kind in the country.

Reflecting on their survey in San José, Brendan Rawson of Cultural Initiative Silicon Valley said: "This process let residents describe in their own words what they considered cultural participation. As an organization, we learned how to discuss arts and culture in ways that were sensitive to how residents were talking about and participating in local activities." (quoted in Rettig, 2002)

2. in-depth survey of local arts and cultural groups throughout the region about their activities

The organizations cultural survey was designed to gather a range of data about the current health and vitality of nonprofit arts groups in the region. For this effort, Cultural Initiatives constructed an exhaustive database of 530 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and associations using information provided by the City of San José, Arts Council Silicon Valley, tax filing information from the IRS and incorporation filings from the California Secretary of State. These groups were surveyed on a range of programming, financial and management issues. Cultural Initiatives received responses from 125 organizations and conducted in-depth interviews with 22 of them.

### *Stated uses*

For Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley the indicators serve a governance function - as an "internal check-in" for the organization, and a means to "allow the community to tell us what we need to focus on going forward" (Rettig, 2002, n.p.). Spin-off uses of the data include: the addition of an arts and culture indicator to Joint Venture's Index of Silicon Valley, a comprehensive quality-of-life barometer; and use of the data by the Office of Cultural Affairs in planning the city's Strong Neighborhoods program (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, n.d.).

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<sup>15</sup> Derived from Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley (2002) and CISV website.