

QUALITY
of life
quality of place

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Culture, long overlooked as tools for garnering quality of life, is now being recognized as a means to community building, encouraging outdoor activity, healthy lifestyles, life-long learning, increasing accessibility to programmes for all levels of society, and celebrating diversity and cultural differences.

Key arguments: Making the case for culture's contribution to quality of life

1. Cultural initiatives that celebrate diversity and culture difference lead to community building and cultural association.

Cultural associations and organizations create solidarity and community building within and between cultural groups (Green, 2004; Palmer, 2004; Fasenfest & Boza, 2001; Sénégal, 2002; City of Edmonton, 2004).

2. Quality of life is enhanced through arts and culture initiatives that also encourage outdoor activities and healthy lifestyles.

Cities that promote culture and the arts through recreational activities increase both the cultural and health aspects of quality of life (i.e., construction of recreational facilities, city-wide health activities, health months with arts and cultural activities) (e.g., City of North Vancouver; Summer Active, Saskatchewan; Niagara Community Centre).

3. Arts and culture initiatives that encourage public learning for all ages also encourage "life long learning" and subsequently support quality of life.

Many Canadian cities offer programs in which artists teach public and community forums. These initiatives encourage the arts and culture as well as quality of life (Piper, 2005; Cross Cultural Learning Centre, London, ON).

4. Arts and culture initiatives that are located in lower income and struggling communities enhance quality of life by increasing the availability of these programs to all levels of society.

Arts and culture initiatives that provide accessibility and opportunities to all income levels increase the quality of life for all residents of a city (City of Edmonton, 2001-2005; Mercer, 2001).

5. Arts and cultural initiatives that celebrate diversity and distinctive cultures, as well as offering accessibility to programs in a diversity of languages, increase quality of life by increasing civic accessibility and civic involvement.

Arts initiatives that invite a culturally diverse population, or artists, or diverse crafts encourage civic involvement and subsequently quality of life (Baeker, 2002; CPRN, 2002; Hanna & Walton-Roberts, 2004).

6. Multicultural festivals and festivals that celebrate diversity of lifestyles enhance quality of life by encouraging a community's tolerance of diversity.

Cities with highly culturally diverse population have measurably higher quality of living (Gagnon, Guibernau, & Rocher, 2004; Policy Forum, 2005; Stolarick, Florida, & Musante, 2005).

7. Cultural festivals promote celebration and pride as well as awareness of cultural differences.

PROFILES

Powell River, BC

Kathaumixw: An internationally acclaimed gathering of many peoples.
creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/PowellRiver-Kathaumixw.html

Saskatoon, SK

Saskatoon's writing culture: A naturally born character-enhancing industry.
creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Saskatoon-Writing-Culture.html

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

Quality of life and culture

Since the 1990s, the notion of Quality of Life has emerged as a new but essential measure of the health and success of Canada and its provinces. Influenced by the Human Development Index (HDI), elaborated by the United Nations Development Program in the early 1990s, national and provincial Quality of Life indicators expand the assessment of productivity by measuring, not only its economic productivity, but also the health, welfare, well-being, and social capital of the residents of the city. The goal of quality of life measures is to provide an assessment of the success of a city that is more comprehensive and broad reaching.

With the increasing growth of local and city-based sovereignty of governance, even cities have begun to elaborate distinctive “quality of life indicators.” Toronto and Kingston (and soon Vancouver) have established city-specific indicators. Several commonalities exist between national indicators, provincial indicators, and municipal indicators with many describing the following qualities as essential to high quality of life: strong physical and mental health, equal democratic rights and worthy civic involvement, high levels of education, superior environmental conditions, accessible social services, and elevated sense of safety.

This overview provides a concise history of the development of quality of life indicators and how this research has become essential for arguing the value of arts and culture for Quality of Life in Canadian cities. Cities that support the arts and culture contribute many elements to quality of life: civic involvement, tolerance of diversity, life-long learning, and accessibility to social services. Little research has connected quality of life with arts and cultural initiatives in Canada. Hence, two central goals are focused on in this overview: first, it aims to provide significant information for policymakers and researchers; and, second, given the fragmentary and piece-meal nature of the field, it also aims to thoroughly summarize the quality of life scholarship, so as to make an argument for the arts and culture in the developing domain of quality of life research.

Early research to redefine growth and progress

The work of the UNDP and the establishment of Human Development Indicators was the first international initiative to spawn deep interest in the research of new and more inclusive measures of progress and development. Numerous predecessors, however, have explored the development of new “measures” of economic progress and growth.

In the 1970s, William Nordhaus and James Tobin introduced the Measure of Economic Welfare (MEW). This measure gauged economic welfare on consumption rather than production, arguing that a nation’s GDP should remove amounts related to personal production and investment such as education and health expenses.

Xenophen Zolotas proposed another measure in the early 1980s. The Economic Aspects of Welfare (EAW), similar to the MEW, deducted from the GDP amounts spent on the investment of education, as well

as costs of commuting because of the subsequent cost of pollution control.

In the late 1980s, two American researchers, Herman Daly and John Cobb, introduced the notion of the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW), which removed commuting and advertising from the measure of GDP, and they also argued that dependence on foreign capital was a negative attribute.

Then, in 1995, Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe proposed the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), which factored in the value of volunteer work, the cost of crime and family breakdown, the cost of underemployment, ozone depletion, and the loss of old growth forests. It is possible, from this history, to see how contemporary quality of life indicators such as health, social welfare, environment condition, and democratic position have emerged over time.

History of quality of life indicators

In 1990, the United Nations published the first Human Development Report (UNHDR), which annually has included comparative rankings of countries worldwide based on the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI provides an aggregate index of human well-being and ranks nations according to their citizens' quality of life, rather than strictly by a nation's traditional economic figures. The first HDI Index measured the quality of life under three main components: the standard of living (GDP per capita and income above the low income cut-offs), educational attainment (adult literacy and years of schooling), and longevity or life expectancy (CPRN, 2002).

Since the first UNHDR the UN has elaborated four new composite indices for human development—the Human Development Index, the Gender-related Development Index, the Gender Empowerment Measure, and the Human Poverty Index. Every annual UNHDR also focuses on a topical theme in the current development debate, providing in-depth analysis and policy recommendations. The Reports' messages and the tools to implement them have proven to be extremely influential internationally; currently more than 120 countries conduct annual UNHDR reports as well as other research into social well-being, development, and growth.

The HDIs are deeply constructive, not only because they provide a more comprehensive measurement of a country's welfare, but also, being country-owned and country-led, they act as advocacy tools encouraging public involvement, civic dialogue, and debate. National HDI models provide custom-made measures that gauge “data that is often not published elsewhere—such as statistics disaggregated by geographic location, ethnic group or along rural/urban lines helps pinpoint development gaps, measure progress and flag early warning signs of possible conflict. They have helped to articulate people's perceptions and priorities, as well as serve as a resource for alternate policy opinion for development planning” (UNDP, 1990).

Quality of life indicators for Canada

The attention and accomplishments of contemporary human development research has also influenced Canada. Since 2000, different organizations and different levels of government across Canada have undertaken various initiatives to explore how Canadians define quality of life, and what would subsequently be comprehensive measures of Canadian growth and development.

GPI Atlantic applied the Cobb/Halstead and Rowe model to develop an Atlantic model of development and well-being. The Treasury Board of Canada publishes an annual report on Canada's Performance, which uses 19 societal indicators to gauge Canadians' health, the environment, the strength of communities, and economic opportunities and innovation (Mickalski, 2002).

Several government and non-profit initiatives have established measurement systems including: the Canadian Council on Social Development (The Personal Security Index), the National Round Table on Environment and the Economy, the Centre for Living Standards Well-being, the International Institute of Sustainable Development, the Canadian Policy Research Network, and the Centre for Policy Initiatives.

More recently, provinces and even municipalities have explored research into quality of life, and some have established personalized quality of life measures and models including: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, and the Yukon (Barbara Legowski, 2001).

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) conducted the most comprehensive Canadian study exploring quality of life at the city and community level. The study investigated 16 large urban centers and, given the growing connection between major urban centres and federal funding, sought to develop personalized reporting systems to monitor the quality of life in Canadian communities. In 2001, the FCM proposed eight sets of indicators of consequence to Canadian cities: population resources measures, community affordability measures, quality of employment measures, quality of housing measures, community stress measures, health of community measures, community safety measures, and community participation measures (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2001). The FCM quality of life reporting system now includes 20 municipalities (representing metropolitan, suburban, and small and medium sized cities) and represents 40% of Canada's total population.

Culture, the arts, and quality of life in Canada

Of all the arguments for the arts and culture in Canada, Quality of Life is quite unique because it is a relatively new argument. As this report details, quality of life research has only taken off in Canada in the past ten years and, because of this, most research has been conducted only at the national and provincial levels in Canada. It has only been in the past few years that cities have undertaken municipal and city-based research to establish local indicators of quality of life.

Aside from the newness, most initiatives that champion quality of life have supported health and sustainability rather than culture and the arts directly. Although it is assumed indirectly, many cities do not name arts and culture precisely as an aspect of their local quality of life. As a result, the cultural and arts related programming undertaken by many cities is not recognized as “also” serving a quality of life/place objective. For instance, the Roundhouse Community Centre in Vancouver, BC, is an arts-based community centre with a multicultural mandate. This mandate seeks to foster cultural integration, civic involvement, and often acts as host for community meetings. These mandates serve as democratic rights and community level quality of life indicators. And although these indicators are supported, the Roundhouse community centre does not proclaim directly that their programs serve to improve quality of life or place. These “understated” initiatives, must be highlighted so that quality of life research acknowledges the importance and connectivity to Canadian arts and culture.

REFERENCES

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