

# **Municipal Cultural Planning and Cultural Indicators: Charting the Course**

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## **Abstract**

This article describes how cultural organizations in the City of Ottawa, Canada, recently engaged in a collaborative process to develop a sound evidence base for municipal cultural planning that involved a wide range of public, private and non-profit sector actors, the academic community, and arts and heritage professionals. It also provides a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a collaborative approach to cultural data gathering and research at the local level.

Keywords:

Cultural planning, cultural indicators, community engagement

## **Introduction to municipal cultural planning**

Municipal cultural planning in Canada has been defined as “... a process of inclusive community consultation and decision-making that helps local government identify cultural resources and think strategically about how these resources can help a community to achieve its civic goals” (Creative Cities Network of Canada 2010). This definition does not directly reference how cultural resources are identified, but implies that cultural decision-making at the local level will be based on sound evidence. Research and data analysis are therefore an obvious requirement in the development of municipal cultural plans.

Despite this need, municipalities in Canada and elsewhere have been relatively slow to develop indicators that would help cultural planners to track progress on cultural plans. There are many reasons for this. For example, Gray, in his critique of cultural planning, discussed the difficulties of operationalizing culture as a measurable component of policy effectiveness. He noted that the linkage between culture and policy outcomes is “exceedingly difficult to pin down in terms of causality”, and that “the failure to provide the forms of quantitative (or even qualitative) evidence that are required to justify state support for cultural interventions is likely to become increasingly significant (Gray 2006:111). Baeker, who cited “lack of access to tools, information and expertise” as one of five key barriers to cultural planning in Ontario” (Baeker 2005: 12), reinforced this point.

Kovacs, in a study of implementation and outcomes of cultural plans in the Province of Ontario, Canada, described how this lack of information and evidence affected the monitoring of cultural plans. He interviewed cultural planners in ten municipalities with cultural plans and noted how cautious they tended to be about attributing outcomes to the initiatives in the plans. Echoing Gray’s observation cited above, one planner stated that “cause and effect is tricky”, meaning that only operational indicators, such as the hiring of a cultural heritage planner or the launch of communications projects, could be clearly linked to cultural plan objectives (Kovacs 2010: 217). The interviewees were also hesitant to link cultural plans to other municipal priorities, except in the area of tourism, but even in this area they were only able to cite “strong connections” between cultural events and tourism strategies (Kovacs 2010: 218).

McDonough and Wekerle (2011), in another study of cultural and urban planning in Ontario, found “a disjuncture between vision and practice” and concluded that “... cultural plans that articulate new visions ... are often abstract and lacking in mechanisms for implementation” (McDonough and Wekerle 2011: 47). While these barriers to implementation were often of a regulatory and organizational nature, they also observed that lack of a common knowledge base makes it “difficult to integrate planning for culture with urban planning policy and practice” (McDonough and Wekerle 2011: 28). Without adequate information, municipalities may make decisions that have negative consequences for historic sites or emerging creative hubs that are important elements of local cultural life.

While the need for cultural indicators to help evaluate the success of municipal cultural plans may be self-evident, the development of such indicators is hampered by the other four barriers cited by Baeker above, namely: “the need for dedicated financial resources to support planning; lack of understanding and support on the part of elected officials and senior municipal staff; no convening body or agency to draw community stakeholders together; [and] lack of consensus (or division) within the local cultural sector” (Baeker 2005: 12).

These barriers are partially attributable to the position of culture within municipal organizational structures. Culture in many municipalities is still considered to be a service provided to residents (for example, art classes or museums), rather than a strategic resource that can help the community to become more economically or socially vibrant. Therefore, culture may be viewed as a cost, rather than an asset, and municipal cultural planners may have to align themselves with other areas of municipal activity, such as planning or economic development, to achieve their aims (Dick et al., forthcoming). March and Olsen have described these problems of organizational disadvantage in an article on “the new institutionalism” that links decision makers’ organizational preferences and priorities to “education, indoctrination and experience”. Such preferences shape not only public policies, but also the distribution of political and financial resources and the development of the “rules of the game” (March and Olsen 1984: 739-40). For example, organizational preferences for “hard facts” and statistics, usually linked to economic performance, often mean that resources for data development are not allocated to “soft” areas, such as culture and social programs. As a result, cultural planners and the communities they serve are frequently asked to produce evidence on the impact and effectiveness of municipal cultural initiatives, but are seldom given the means or the time to develop the indicators needed to provide such evidence.

Another possible barrier is the relative absence within the cultural sector of the type of collaborative research networks that have become more common in other areas, such as science and business. Adams has described how scientific research networks have “exploded” in recent years, driven by government’s interest in exploiting research for economic competitiveness (Adams 2012: 335). Singh has provided statistical evidence that

“interpersonal networks are crucial for management of complex knowledge, despite growing emphasis on formal knowledge management systems” (Singh 2005: 768), finding that denser networks tend to drive “more intense knowledge flows within regions and firms” (Singh 2005: 765). Instead of relying on formal bureaucratic structures to act as the knowledge developers and gatekeepers, many research domains are seeing greater advantages in knowledge development and transfer through collaboration.

## **Cultural indicators – parameters and challenges**

Indicators in any field must usually meet three requirements: they must be relevant, valid, and gathered in a systematic way.

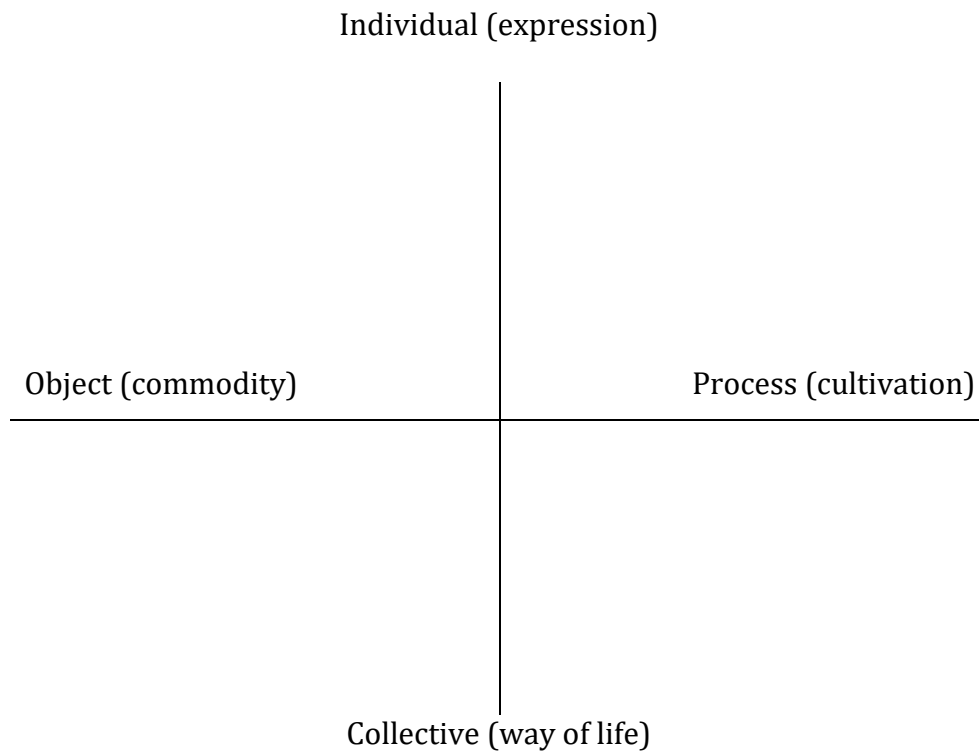
Relevance is a somewhat subjective requirement, since it is partially dependent upon what a cultural plan’s drafters consider important and of value. Academics, researchers, and cultural stakeholders have begun to develop conceptual frameworks for cultural value within which to situate indicators.

Blomkamp (2015) has developed an indicator matrix consisting of four conceptualizations of culture: as individual and collective entities and as both process and object (see Figure 1).

Culture as an individual means of self-expression is perhaps the most commonly understood value as it encompasses various types of artistic and creative activity, such as painting and writing. On the other hand, culture as a collective value is generally linked to the anthropological notion that culture is a set of material and spiritual activities associated with a particular group. However, collective value has also become a more common theme in municipal culture plans that focus upon what is unique about the community’s collective life. Culture as a process of “intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development” (Williams 1983:90) can be both an individual and a collective endeavour, but in terms of municipal cultural planning, it is most often associated with such ideas as “quality of life” and “well being”. Culture as object or commodity takes a mainly economic perspective on cultural value, seeing it as an instrument of wealth creation and prosperity (Blomkamp 2015: 17-19). Indicators can be developed for all four quadrants of the matrix, but in practice tend to skew

toward the upper left side of the grid, which may unintentionally make this the main focus of municipal cultural plans.

**Figure 1**



SOURCE: Blomkamp 2015.

The second requirement – validity of indicators in the context of municipal cultural planning – means measuring what is meant to be measured. This is often not as simple as it sounds. For example, a municipality may wish to know the number of visitors at local museums but discovers that each museum counts visitors in a different way. Alternatively, it may want to understand who is visiting these museums, but cannot do so because there is no way to distinguish the characteristics of specific visitors. While these problems are not insurmountable, they require regulation changes or additional research to overcome, neither of which may be possible in a resource-constrained situation.

The third indicator requirement is that data are collected systematically and consistently. However, municipalities are often challenged to do so, due to resource constraints, lack of adequate definitions of what is to be measured, unreliable data gathering protocols, or other limitations. It may be possible to work around these constraints by

utilizing data collected by others that can be adapted for use in cultural indicators, but this may require lengthy negotiations, additional expenditures, or complicated data manipulation.

In summary, development of municipal cultural indicators, while a requirement for cultural planning, is not necessarily a straightforward nor simple exercise. Decision makers may want certain types of indicators that do not exist or may not have foreseen the need for these indicators when the plan was developed. Even when decision makers are clear about the indicators they want, the data on which to base them may not exist or be inadequate. Often when the first two conditions exist, the municipality and cultural stakeholders may lack the resources or the expertise to develop the indicators that are needed.

## **Case study and methodology**

This article describes how cultural organizations in the City of Ottawa, Canada, recently engaged in a collaborative process to develop a sound evidence base for municipal cultural planning that involved a wide range of public, private and non-profit sector actors, the academic community, and arts and heritage professionals.

The methodology used to prepare this article consisted of a review of selected historical cultural planning documents produced by and for the City over the past 30 years and a case study analysis of recent efforts to develop a new cultural plan for the City. The case study focuses particularly on the measures that were taken to develop relevant cultural indicators as one of the bases upon which the new plan would be built. A variety of analytical lenses have been used, including:

- How the City's unique context has influenced past cultural planning and indicator development processes;
- How the most recent indicator development and cultural planning process has been conceptualized and organized;
- How the conceptual and organizational parameters of the most recent cultural planning and indicator development process have broadened the scope of

discussion on other related issues, such as governance and partnerships within the cultural sector.

## **Short history of cultural planning and indicator development in the City of Ottawa, Canada – 1988 to 2010**

The City of Ottawa is a metropolitan area with about one million residents, located in the Province of Ontario. It has a large number of cultural facilities and activities, but the fact that it is also the national capital of Canada has shaped the process of municipal cultural planning.

A 1988 study of arts and culture in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton (the predecessor to the amalgamated City of Ottawa) remarked that:

The region is endowed with marvelous national institutions. However, when we consider all arts and culture facilities, the Ottawa-Hull area ranks only seventh in Canada, despite being the fourth largest Census Metropolitan Area. Remove the national facilities and the region's cultural infrastructure would be an embarrassment (Ekos Research Associates Inc. 1988: i).

The Ekos report did not produce cultural indicators *per se*, but it did include a regional profile of arts and culture, including numbers of cultural facilities, numbers of artists and distributors, and public consumption of and participation in arts and culture (drawn from a national study that Ekos had completed for another client). More than two decades later, the Ottawa Arts Council continued to complain about the “lack of momentum towards the establishment of arts facilities in the urban core, threats from two successive municipal city councils in 2004 and 2008 to slash professional arts funding and the increasing competition from a growing federal cultural presence “, which had created “an environment of increased uncertainty and cycles of crisis” (The Council for the Arts in Ottawa 2010: 2).

The City of Ottawa confirmed in 1989 “its continuing commitment to providing cultural services to the community through the adoption of a ‘Corporate Cultural Policy’ for the City of Ottawa” (City of Ottawa 1989: Foreword), but also noted that “the federal institutions and agencies with their national mandate do not support the local artistic

community” (City of Ottawa 1989: 3). Within this context of federal government domination and perceived indifference, the City of Ottawa’s Recreation and Culture Department drafted the City’s first municipal cultural plan in 1989 in consultation with all city departments involved in cultural programs and activities, as well as with the cultural community and the general public. The bulk of the plan focused on cultural programs, facilities, and funding, but was largely silent on the issue of measurement and indicators, except for participation in an “Arts and the Cities” project that was scheduled for completion in 1989 (City of Ottawa 1989: 44).

The City’s next cultural plan, released in 2003, took a somewhat more proactive approach to the question of indicators. As its title implies, the *Ottawa 20/20 Arts and Heritage Plan* defined a twenty-year vision for the arts and heritage and identified a number of strategic directions that it would prioritize in the next five years:

- Broaden public access to the arts
- Keep Ottawa’s artists here and attract others
- Build creative capacity city-wide
- Revitalize public places and natural spaces through the arts
- Realize the economic potential of the local cultural sector
- Build (heritage) capacity with more public involvement and adequate resources
- Identify, collect and preserve
- Research, interpret and promote (City of Ottawa 2003).

Both the arts and heritage sections of the plan suggested possible indicators that could be used in an annual report to monitor progress. In the Arts section, these suggestions were grouped under three headings – the state of the city (e.g. municipal arts grants per capita), the state of citizen (e.g. perceptions of accessibility and affordability of the arts derived from a survey), and state of activity (e.g. attendance at arts events and number of participants registered in leisure arts instructional programs) (City of Ottawa 2003: 76-77). The Heritage section grouped suggested performance measures under each of the strategic directions. However, these measures used the language of goals, rather than indicators, making them aspirational but not easily measurable. One such performance

measure stated, for example, that “Capital and operating needs of current and proposed City-owned and funded museums are addressed” (City of Ottawa 2003: 42). Neither of the sections included a plan for how these indicators would be developed or tracked.

### **Cultural planning and indicator development in Ottawa – 2010-2015**

In 2010, Ottawa City Council asked for a progress report on the *Ottawa 20/20 Arts and Heritage Plan* in preparation for a renewed round of cultural planning. For the most part, this progress report consisted of a list of accomplishments and outstanding items under each of the strategic directions. For example, it highlighted new arts investment strategies and sustainability plans for festivals and museums, along with a list of new cultural facilities (City of Ottawa 2010: Annex 1). Interestingly, the report also included fourteen cultural indicators intended to measure the health of Ottawa’s local cultural sector. Several of these were based on estimates of attendance at city-funded cultural programs and events and volunteers in city-funded cultural organizations and events, but changes in per capita municipal cultural funding between 2003 and 2008 were also tracked (City of Ottawa 2010: Annex 1).

While City Council acknowledged that there had been some progress in local cultural development since 2003, it authorized an “Ottawa 20/20 Arts and Heritage Plan Renewal process” to be undertaken “in full partnership with Ottawa’s local cultural community” (City of Ottawa 2010: 6). This partnership was led by a Steering Committee of cultural and community leaders, and included 75 individual interviews with cultural and community leaders, feedback on 11 cultural plan renewal discussion papers, 11 facilitated focus groups, six geographically-distributed public open houses and a full-day event to gather input on a draft plan (City of Ottawa 2013: 8). Like previous plans, it noted that “Ottawa is both a dynamic city with its own cultural vitality and a national capital” and that “this dual status provides an opportunity to develop Ottawa into a truly international capital” (City of Ottawa 2013:7). The *Renewed Action Plan for Arts, Culture and Heritage in Ottawa (2013-2018)* encapsulated these opportunities in four strategies, encompassing 63 actions over the six-year 2013-2018 period:

1. Celebrate Ottawa’s Unique Cultural Identity and Provide Access to Culture for All

2. Preserve and Develop Cultural and Creative Places and Spaces
3. Get the Word Out About Ottawa's Vibrant Local Culture and Unique Identity
4. Invest in Local Culture and Build Cultural Leadership (City of Ottawa 2013: 9).

The plan supported these priorities with a number of indicators, including the economic impact of government investments in the cultural non-profit sector, cultural employment in Ottawa (using 2006 Census figures), numbers of volunteers in Ottawa's local culture sector, attendance at City of Ottawa direct and funded programs and events, and consumer spending on culture in Ottawa (City of Ottawa 2013: 12-13).

Several recommended actions under Strategy 4 in the *Renewed Action Plan* set the stage for a more focused approach to cultural planning, cultural governance, and cultural indicators in the future by both the City of Ottawa and the cultural community.

The first of these was an action to "Develop Increased Arms-Length Cultural Leadership and Participation", which included a sub-action "To discuss and plan for the development of an independent arms-length arts authority that provides leadership, service and support to the arts community" (City of Ottawa 2013: 23). The second was to "Refocus City's Cultural Development Role as Convener, Catalyst and Planner". This included a sub-action to "Increase the frequency and distribution of effective cultural reporting (including statistics, indicators and trends) to Ottawa's residents in order to build awareness and understanding around the value, economic impact, and social and environmental benefits of culture" (City of Ottawa 2013: 24). The third was a cultural investment plan entitled "Closing Gaps and Achieving Average Per-capita Cultural Investment" that made detailed recommendations for increases of almost CA\$5 million in annual base funding from the City in eight cultural areas over the 2013-2018 period (City of Ottawa 2013: 25-28).

## **Cultural planning and indicator development in Ottawa – post-2015**

When the City of Ottawa provided a status update on the *Renewed Action Plan* in 2015, it reported that only four of the 63 actions in the report had been completed, although 25 were in progress. Twenty-four actions had not yet been undertaken, and the remaining ten were either subsumed within other actions or not pursued due to cutback or cancellation of

funding programs (City of Ottawa 2015). With regard to the cultural investment plan, the City had provided over CA\$1.1 million in new base operating funding between 2013 and 2015, but no new increases were projected in the 2016-2018 period (City of Ottawa 2015).

Reaction within the Ottawa cultural community was swift and negative regarding the lack of support necessary to implement the Renewed Action Plan. The Ottawa Cultural Alliance (OCA), an umbrella group of six Ottawa cultural organizations with a collective membership of over 800, had been formed in 2015 to advance cultural priorities of mutual interest in the City of Ottawa, including advocating for the completion of the *Renewed Action Plan*. It issued a news release stating that it was disappointed by the lack of additional investment and was “concerned that no new investments now will limit the local cultural industry’s ability to leverage provincial and federal cultural investments in 2016” (Ottawa Cultural Alliance, 2015). Noting that the cultural sector had received a fraction of the funding increases promised in the *Renewed Action Plan*, the executive director of one major music festival was quoted as saying, “In terms of operation funding, Ottawa is near the bottom of the heap for major Canadian municipalities” (Abma 2016).

It was in this context that the Ottawa Culture Research Group (OCRG) was formed in May 2016 - initially as the City’s response to the *Renewed Action Plan* recommendation that it “Increase the frequency and distribution of effective cultural reporting (including statistics, indicators and trends) to Ottawa’s residents” (City of Ottawa 2013: 24). The OCRG membership included representation from the Ottawa Cultural Alliance, the City of Ottawa, the Ottawa Public Library, the City of Ottawa Archives, the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa Music Industry Coalition, the Ottawa Film Office, the Community Foundation of Ottawa, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, the federal Department of Canadian Heritage, and (until 2018) the Canada Council for the Arts. As an informal working group, the OCRG’s initial task was the production of a “culture progress report” that would include “a series of indicators whose purpose would be twofold: to report on the City’s support for culture; and to report on the state of Ottawa’s cultural sector” (Dick, 2016). However, it rapidly took on a broader and more collaborative role, not only with the City of Ottawa but also with the Ottawa Cultural Alliance, and expanded its mandate to:

- Improve knowledge and understanding of the presence, participation, support and economic and social impact and benefit of culture in Ottawa; and to look at this in the broader context (provincial, federal and other large Canadian cities).
- Identify, collect, analyze, and share reliable information and data pertaining to the state of Ottawa's culture sector, its economic, social, environmental, and cultural value to Ottawa, and support for the sector from all levels of government and the community;
- Collaborate with a wide range of government, community, and academic partners to analyze culture data with other datasets and research to achieve a more comprehensive understanding, analysis, and reporting; and undertake initiatives that advance the exchange of information and expertise.
- Work together to create cultural reports for Ottawa.
- Apply the knowledge and information gained to benefit cultural planning, analysis, evaluation, development, priority setting, resource allocation, collaboration, leadership and decision-making.
- Use the increased understanding to inform and improve decision-making, quality and effectiveness, leading to enhanced cultural services and experiences, increased audience engagement in culture and a more socially and economically thriving community. (Ottawa Culture Research Group 2019).

None of the organizations represented in the OCRG had the means to undertake this ambitious mandate by itself. However, by taking a collaborative approach and working together over the 2016 to 2018 period, the OCRG was able to pool financial and non-financial resources to purchase datasets, hire students, secure grants, carry out data analysis, share information, publish a major report, and hold a major symposium in 2018 to release its report. This occurred even though it temporarily lost the support of a City of Ottawa project officer, who coordinated the group's activities, as the result of a City reorganization and downsizing of the cultural division in the fall of 2016 (Porter 2016).

*Counting on Culture: Impacts and Indicators 2018*, the OCRG's first report, provided indicators on various aspects of Ottawa's culture, structured under four headings:

- Support – how is culture funded?
- Presence – where does culture live?
- Participation – who works in culture?
- Impact – how does it affect our city?

The Executive Summary acknowledged that “much of this report focuses on economic aspects of culture in Ottawa – not because that is the only way in which to view culture’s contribution to the city, but because these are the indicators that it has been possible to assemble using available data” (Ottawa Culture Research Group 2018: 4). Nevertheless, the report was able to include indicators on the total amount of grants for culture provided by the federal, provincial and municipal governments, the number of cultural resources in the city, the number of cultural jobs in the city (including comparisons with other major Canadian cities and between the years 2006 and 2016), employment incomes of cultural workers, culture Gross Domestic Product in Ottawa in 2016, and the economic impact of the Ottawa Public Library. The report also disaggregated some of this information into sub-categories, such as average income by occupation or cultural employment rates of demographic groups. In addition, the OCRG also released a literature review that examined frameworks for understanding and analyzing the social effects of culture, as well as methodological approaches and compilations of evidence on such effects (Jeannotte 2017).

In the meantime, in October 2017 the Ottawa Cultural Alliance (OCA) finalized a Purchase of Service Agreement with the City of Ottawa to complete a community-driven, community-wide Arms-Length Cultural Development Feasibility Study, which had been one of the uncompleted actions in the *Renewed Action Plan*. This study, led by an independent consultant, included research on best practices in cultural governance in other communities (Ottawa Arts Council 2018). The final report recommended further study of two possible alternative governance models to fulfill Ottawa’s cultural sector development needs: either a municipal fund/partner or service agency model, or a municipal fund/service contract model (Lord Cultural Resources and Nordicity 2018: 85).

In parallel with the above study, the OCA undertook a series of initiatives to develop a community-driven strategy for Ottawa’s cultural sector for 2019 to 2022. Entitled the *Cultural Roadmap for Ottawa*, this initiative aimed to recommend strategies and priorities for culture which would “inform Ottawa City Council’s planning for the next four years” (Ottawa Cultural Alliance 2019a). The Cultural Roadmap drew upon a significant research effort that up until the January 2019 Summit included:

- A data-grounded situational analysis (Hill 2019)
- Fifteen community consultations involving 240 people from diverse backgrounds
- The completed *Arms-Length Cultural Development Feasibility Study* (Lord Cultural Resources and Nordicity 2018)
- An environmental scan (Lord Cultural Resources and Nordicity 2019)
- The Ottawa Culture Research Group’s *Counting on Culture* report
- The Ottawa Cultural Tourism Working Group’s Cultural Tourism Pilot Project Report (Piccinin and Lindquist 2019).

The development of a long-term vision for culture in Ottawa is the ultimate goal of the Cultural Roadmap, which is scheduled for completion in June 2019. However, the OCA has already identified several key action themes. They can be summarized as follows:

- “Next generation”, committed, collaborative leadership approach
- Stable, more flexible funding
- Improved human resource practices
- Sustainable live, work, creation, and participation spaces
- Collaborative development and promotion of Ottawa as a cultural capital
- Greater diversity and inclusion (leading, working and participating) (Ottawa Cultural Alliance 2019b).

## **Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a collaborative, evidence-based approach**

What is perhaps most notable about the post-2015 cultural planning and indicator development process in Ottawa has been the degree to which it has been a collaborative effort. The emphasis is increasingly on involving a wide range of organizations and individuals from the public, private and non-profit sectors, as well as the academic community and independent cultural and heritage professionals and practitioners. In 1989 and 2003, the municipal government played an undisputed leadership role in the process, but after about 2010, the cultural community, along with its counterparts in the social services, philanthropic, and tourism sectors, became much more vocal and proactive in presenting priorities and in organizing to advance those priorities.

Another notable difference between Ottawa's first cultural planning report and the Ottawa Cultural Alliance's campaign to develop a cultural roadmap is the increasing recognition that evidence is required to support both the development and implementation of cultural plans. In Ottawa's earlier plans, scant attention was paid to indicator development, except perhaps as a "scene-setting" tool for the rest of the plan. In the more recent documents, as well as the current planning effort, the need for indicators has been explicitly acknowledged and, to some extent, provided for.

To what degree has this collaborative, evidence-based approach been successful, and what are some of its challenges?

Beginning with the development of indicators, a few observations from the Ottawa case study can be made with regard to the three requirements of relevance, validity, and consistent data gathering.

On the question of relevance, as the OCRG acknowledged in its report, *Counting on Culture*, its indicators mainly described economic factors and conditions, such as the amount of grant money provided to Ottawa cultural organizations and individuals or the employment incomes of various cultural occupations. The choice of these indicators was dictated partially by a collective decision making process within the OCRG, but also by the availability of data. In choosing to focus on economic indicators, the OCRG members recognized that this type of information would be of most interest to decision makers,

whose organizational preferences, as March and Olsen pointed out, have been shaped by values linked to economic performance and budgeting.

Indicator choice was also influenced by the third factor, in that data availability often dictated which indicators would be included and which excluded. For example, municipal level cultural employment data was available from two sources: the Census of Canada (conducted every five years) and the City of Ottawa's Employment Survey (conducted approximately every four to five years). Both these sources are comprehensive and reliable, whereas data on other types of cultural participation, such as visits to local museums or festivals, was not, as it was collected differently by different organizations.

An additional factor that influenced indicator choice was the cost of purchasing datasets, which can limit the availability of data, especially for an informal group with no budget supporting it. The OCRG has had to invest considerable effort in obtaining funding from multiple sources or from their individual members to finance research and data analysis. The Ottawa Cultural Alliance faces a similar challenge, relying on the support provided by individual members for most of its research, although the City of Ottawa did finance both the Arms-Length Cultural Development Feasibility Study and the Cultural Roadmap initiative.

With regard to validity, reference has already been made to the unreliability of much locally collected data. This is partially due to the small size of most locally based cultural organizations, which have only limited resources for data gathering, if they have any at all. A few OCRG members, such as the Ottawa Public Library, have the means to conduct rigorous studies on such topics as its economic impact, but even they are only able to conduct such studies at irregular intervals. Various "one-off" studies of cultural disciplines or groups in Ottawa have been carried out over the years, but they tend not to be replicated or applicable to other disciplines. Moreover, they are seldom used as tools for cultural planning at the municipal level.

Even when working with large national datasets, validity of indicators at the local level can be a problem. The OCRG found that disaggregated Census data at the local level can be unreliable if the sample size becomes too small. Other national surveys could

provide useful indicators on cultural participation in Ottawa, but often have sample sizes that limit their usefulness at the local level (although Hill (2019) in his work for the Ottawa Cultural Alliance tapped a few sources that provided participation indicators with some statistical validity).

Organizationally, the Ottawa cultural community is clearly moving toward a more networked and collaborative approach, not only in the area of research but also in the area of governance. After a long history of the local cultural institutions “going it alone” on data gathering and analysis, many of the major stakeholders have begun recently to collaborate on indicator development. While this is consistent with emerging practice in other fields, it is not without certain challenges. Research and data analysis, whether stand-alone or networked, requires consistent financial and institutional support, and local cultural organizations in Ottawa begin from a deficit position in this regard, given historically low levels of support from all levels of government and a lack of human resources (Ottawa Culture Research Group 2018: 16-26, Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada 2016: 39-42). Collaborative efforts can easily be de-railed, especially if key funding or personnel suddenly disappear. Both the OCA and the OCRG have so far been resilient and resourceful enough to overcome these types of challenges, but it remains to be seen if they can continue to move forward without the assurance of more financial and human resource stability.

Another challenge for the OCRG and the OCA will be to maintain the interpersonal networks upon which their success so far has been based. Social capital matters for many reasons, not just research. Christakis and Fowler, two researchers who have studied social networks, have gone so far as to say that the “Three Degrees of Influence Rule” governs the world. In other words, we influence and are influenced by people who are three degrees removed from us (Christakis and Fowler 2009). It makes sense to increase the validity and reliability of the information that these “nearby” nodes of the local cultural network are providing. Many cultural decision makers at the local level appear to be becoming more interested in culture’s role in economic development. At the same time, research networks are becoming more important to knowledge development and dissemination. Therefore, more investment in inter-organizational aspects of local cultural research networks may be

necessary to ensure that both municipal governments and cultural organizations are able to strengthen their capacity to develop and provide sound and reliable information.

### **Biography – M. Sharon Jeannotte**

M. Sharon Jeannotte is Senior Fellow at the Centre on Governance of the University of Ottawa. She has conducted research on a variety of subjects, including cultural policy and social cohesion, the role of culture in building sustainable communities, cultural tourism, cultural mapping as a tool for place-making, cultural indicators at the local level, and provincial / territorial cultural policy and administration in Canada.

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