



**Creative Edmonton:  
Envisioning a Culturally Vital Community**

# **City of Edmonton Cultural Inventory**

## **Overview of Past Cultural Research**

April, 2007

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper, as part of Phase 1 of the City of Edmonton Cultural Inventory Project, is to provide a contextualized overview of a selection of various research projects, undertaken over the past couple of decades, dealing, exclusively in part or analogously, with the assessment of the value of arts and culture to the City of Edmonton. A selected sampling of studies of interest to this undertaking, in no particular order, includes:

- *Edmonton: A City for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Report of the Cultural Futures Project—1988*
- *Consumers Spending on Culture in Canada, the Provinces and 15 Metropolitan Areas in 2005—2007*
- *Economic Impact of “Arts and Culture” in the Edmonton Alberta Capital Region—1996*
- *Economic Impact of “Arts and Culture” in the Greater Edmonton Region—2005*
- *Foundation Report: The Arts in Edmonton—1996*
- *Building Creative Capital An Investment Plan for the Arts in Edmonton, Report of the Mayor’s Task Force on Investment in the Arts—1994*
- *Artists in Canada’s Provinces, Territories and Metropolitan Areas a Statistical Analysis Based on the 2001 Census—2004*
- *Relieving Symptoms in Cancer: Innovative Use of Art Therapy--2006....<sup>1</sup>*

It would, of course, be highly unrealistic, due to the obvious practical constraints of this endeavor, to attempt to present a comprehensive exposition of these studies in the following pages. Therefore, some of the overview will be more focused while some, naturally, will have to be viewed from a grouped broader spectrum perspective. This tactic will entail:

- a collective examination of applied methodology
- a summary of findings (focusing on economic and non-economic impact issues) and
- a summary of recommendations.

## 2. Methodologies

For the most part, the studies being looked at exhibit some general methodological overlap. This, of course, is not surprising as there are a finite number of effective approaches that can be utilized in performing this kind of research. However, the respective thematic demands of each and every individual study naturally also provide for some level of methodological variability. Arguably, the research methods employed by the studies in question can be subdivided into two main categories, those being the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach. What need be clearly understood here, however, is that while to a point distinct, qualitative and quantitative approaches are

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<sup>1</sup> See the Sources Consulted page (p. 8) for a complete list of studies looked at and bibliographical details.

mutually complementary and indeed symbiotic in nature; thus, each study looked at here, while perhaps favoring one approach, in fact contains a braiding of both.

The quantitative approach, as manifested in some of the studies listed above, tends to be characterized by what can be termed as soft data collection methods, which deal with the collection of less easily quantifiable and, to a point, subjective data. This in part includes the use of focus groups, direct interviews, telephone and mail out surveying, as well as meta-analysis of existing literature.<sup>2</sup>

The quantitative approach, as manifested in some of the studies listed above, tends to be characterized by what can be termed as hard data collection methods, which deal with the collection of more tangible and more easily statistically quantifiable, by and large, objective data. This approach generally focuses on the use of governmental as well as private archives and statistics banks, also mail out and telephone surveying, and at times utilizing research done in various areas of the natural sciences.<sup>3</sup>

All of the above mentioned research projects quite effectively employ a combination of some or all of the methodological approaches listed here.

### **3. Findings**

Simply put, the findings of all the studies mentioned here are essentially homogenous in nature. All the available data presented, generally speaking, indicates that the arts and culture contribute substantially to the overall economic and psychological growth, health, and wellbeing of any host community. Where the data specifically focuses on the city of Edmonton, the findings display no significant variance from the overall picture.

Without doubt, as is partially evidenced by the studies looked at here, the most common approach to arts and culture themed research undertaken in recent times has been to assess the level of economic impact of arts and culture on their host community's economy. However, as these studies also make clear, in general terms as well as in terms directly applicable to the Edmonton situation, economic impact of arts and culture is hardly the sole criterion which contributed to the findings outlined here.

#### *3.1 Economic Impact*

In the last two decades there have been a number of important studies (some of which are central to this paper), conducted on both the national as well as local levels, which have shed some light on the nature of the contribution of arts and culture to the overall economic health and well being of Edmonton. It seems that, to a point, it has actually

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<sup>2</sup> From the studies looked at here the *A City for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Report of the Cultural Futures Project* of 1988 is a primary example of a qualitative approach study.

<sup>3</sup> From the studies looked at here the *Consumer Spending on Culture in Canada, the Provinces and 15 Metropolitan Areas in 2005*--published 2007--is a primary example of a quantitative approach study, while the *Relieving Symptoms in Cancer: Innovative Use of Art Therapy*--published 2006--is a primary example of a relevant quantitative approach study performed in the natural sciences area (medicine).

become an accepted standard to justify the arts and culture, and not only in Edmonton, in terms of economic returns.

In actuality this is not entirely a bad approach in its own right. As the research indicates, the arts do contribute substantially to the bottom line of any community visionary enough to champion them, Edmonton included, and arguably “it,” of course, all revolves around money. That is not to say that the economic realities of our world lend themselves to the conclusion that everything should or can be seen in terms of its dollar value, even if a particular dollar value associated with something is indeed substantial, but paradoxically the societal proliferation and dissemination of intrinsic value laden concepts goods and services, like the arts, is quite simply contingent on funding.

While a comprehensive treatment of the economic impact of the arts in the City of Edmonton is a discussion for another time, the research has generated some attention-grabbing facts pertaining to this issue that do need to be mentioned here. For instance, according to the recently released report from the Department of Canadian Heritage, in 2005 Edmontonians spent a total of 930 million dollars on culture and the arts.<sup>4</sup> Of this, 110 million was spent on art works and events; this includes 50 million dollars spent on live artistic performances alone.

The report does make a distinction between spending on *cultural goods and services* and *art works and events*. In 2005 Edmontonians on average spent 952 dollars per capita on cultural goods and services (earning a national ranking of fifth out of fifteen metropolitan areas examined in this category) and 116 dollars per capita on art works and events (in this category Edmonton earned the ranking of fourth).<sup>5</sup> Those are staggering figures in their own right, but when one considers that as of the most recent city census, published on April 01, 2005, the population of Edmonton proper was only 712,391 inhabitants,<sup>6</sup> those figures do indeed take on additional significance.

What needs also be clearly understood is that the above figures are but an indication of levels of public patronage. Arts tend to have a much farther-reaching impact on their host community’s economic well being. There are, of course, also the operational economic benefits to consider. One ought not to overlook the fact that artists are also consumers — they need supplies, they need to eat, they need work and living space, etc. The arts and culture sector employs people and stimulates employment and other growth in all sectors of the economy. According to a report from the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, in 2005, the arts and culture sector contributed \$123.7 million to the Greater Edmonton’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>7</sup> This represents an impressive increase of \$29 million in less than a decade, as a report published in 1997 by Economic Development Edmonton lists the economic impact of arts and culture to the Edmonton

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<sup>4</sup> *Consumer Spending on Culture in Canada, the Provinces and 15 Metropolitan Areas in 2005*—published 2007.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The census also estimates the population of Greater Edmonton to be 1,014,000 inhabitants. City of Edmonton website, Election and Census Services: [www.edmonton.ca](http://www.edmonton.ca)

<sup>7</sup> *Economic Impact of “Arts and Culture” in the Greater Edmonton Region 2005*—published 2006.

Capital Region's GDP to be \$94.7 million for the year 1996.<sup>8</sup> The true breadth of impact of these figures can be put into further perspective by pointing out the fact that, according to a report released in part on behalf of the Canada Council for the Arts in 2004, artists represent less than one percent of Edmonton's total labour force.<sup>9</sup>

Paradoxically, as beneficial as arts and culture appear to be to Edmonton's economy, in many cases, the reverse does not seem to be true. Again, according to the 2004 report, artists in Edmonton on average earned 40% less per annum as compared to the overall earnings average.<sup>10</sup> The report states that in 2001 the average overall labour force per annum earnings in Edmonton totaled \$31,999, while the artists' per annum average earnings totaled \$19,200.<sup>11</sup>

Even without an in-depth analysis, it becomes apparent that the arts have been and continue to be a tremendously important contributor to, and arguably a necessary part of, the City of Edmonton's economic superstructure. Suffice it to say, that without the overall contribution from the arts, even during a time of unprecedented economic growth, Edmonton would find itself a much poorer community indeed.

### 3.2 *Non-Economic Impact*

The contribution of the arts to the well being of any community's economy is unquestionably substantial; there can be no doubt about that. However, it would be a tremendous mistake to focus solely on economic criteria when assessing the societal value of the arts. It is to an extent unfortunate that, as has been noted in the previous section, the vast majority of research dealing with assessing the benefits of arts and culture to Edmonton focuses mostly on economics. Research dealing directly or indirectly with non-economic benefits of art and culture, to the community of Edmonton, is admittedly comparatively sketchy.

In attempting to provide policy guidelines for Edmonton's direction in relation to the long-term future of arts and culture in the city, the Cultural Futures Project of 1988<sup>12</sup> found that arts and culture are fundamentally beneficial to the proper functioning of essentially all sectors of the Edmonton community. The benefits discussed, apart from economics, included:

- evidence of increased social cohesion and

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<sup>8</sup> *Economic Impacts of "Arts and Culture" in the Edmonton Alberta Capital Region 1996*.—published 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Based on information from the 2001 census artists in Edmonton represented 0.70% of the total labour force. *Artists in Canada's Provinces, Territories and Metropolitan Areas: a Statistical Analysis Based on the 2001 Census*—published 2004.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Title abbreviated from original: *Edmonton: A City for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Report of the Cultural Futures Project*. Submitted to [the Edmonton] City Council by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Advisory Board, December 1988.

- civic pride and identity building, particularly across ethnic boundaries, in all sectors of the community exposed to and participating in arts and cultural activity.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, based on anecdotal evidence, the general psychological perception of those institutions within the city (be they educational, multicultural, recreational, religious, civic, or etc.), which have a strong connection to the arts and culture sectors, was that of being healthy, well functioning and generally evolving in an overall positive direction.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the findings of the 1988 report were indeed echoed by the Mayor’s Task Force report of 1994.<sup>15</sup> This report found that “...the arts sector...helps to retain and attract residents and businesses, draws tourism, is an engine of municipal revitalization and gives the city its identity. The arts represent an important industry nationally, provincially and locally.”<sup>16</sup> Arguably, the more interesting findings of the 1994 report, as partially testified to by the above quotation, deal with the connection between artistic and cultural activity and urban identity and renewal. The importance of this, in the context of Edmonton, cannot be overstated as the city grapples with ongoing issues of growth stimulated reinvention and inner-city decay.

Perhaps what could be viewed as a more tangible example of primarily non-economic impact of the arts on the community can be found in the realm of medicine. While the discussion that follows only peripherally relates to Edmonton, it deals with issues of importance which both warrant discussion and are, debatably, directly applicable to Edmonton, and indeed to any community.<sup>17</sup>

The discipline of Art Therapy, as it is known today, is a creation of the twentieth century. Having originated in Europe in the early twentieth century, Art Therapy was transplanted to North America, first to the United States and shortly thereafter to Canada, in the 1940s.<sup>18</sup> Since then, Art Therapy has become an accepted form of treatment utilized primarily but not exclusively in the areas of psychiatry and psychology. However, as of late the potential benefits of art therapy to other regions of medicine have become the subject of increased study. Shortly after, the City of Edmonton hosted the Annual International Conference of the Society for Arts in Health Care in June of 2005 (which, incidentally, was the very first time the conference was held outside of the United States)<sup>19</sup> a study from the Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago published some very intriguing findings about the use of art therapy in pain management.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Title abbreviated from original: *Building Creative Capital: An Investment Plan for the Arts in Edmonton. Report of the Mayor’s Task Force on Investment in the Arts*, October 05, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Pointe has implemented some of these initiatives at the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton and it is worth documenting these initiatives because of their leadership and potential.

<sup>18</sup> *Art Therapy in Canada: Origins and Explorations*—published 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Capital health website news release, [www.capitalhealth.ca](http://www.capitalhealth.ca) ; Edmonton Arts Council annual report for 2005.

<sup>20</sup> *Relieving Symptoms in Cancer: Innovative Use of Art Therapy*—published 2006.

This study, in part, found that a one-hour art therapy session administered to cancer patients resulted in a significant reduction in eight of nine symptoms measured by, coincidentally, the Edmonton Symptoms Assessment Scale (the scale is used to assess the level of patients' symptoms of pain, tiredness, nausea, depression, anxiety, drowsiness, lack of appetite, general well-being and shortness of breath); the only symptom that remained unaffected after the therapy session was nausea.<sup>21</sup> One of the truly significant and to an extent surprising findings of the study revolves around the actual physiological changes brought about by the therapy session. Apparently the session had a significant analgesic effect on the subjects as well as resulting in the reduction of physical fatigue and the actual increase of levels of energy (i.e., feelings of being physically reenergized).<sup>22</sup>

The findings discussed here arguably lend themselves to the conclusion that arts and culture contribute significantly and overall positively, from an economic as well as non-economic perspective, to the overall health and wellbeing of Edmonton as well as any community. This, of course, brings up the question of how a community like Edmonton should proceed in order to create an environment of sustainable support for its arts and cultural resources.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The studies examined do provide a resource base of recommendations, aimed at community leadership structures as well as at the citizenry at large, as pertaining to the maximization of mutual benefits within the relationship between arts and culture and their host communities. While again it is not practically possible to present a comprehensive examination of all the recommendations provided, some of the more notable are highlighted here.

Perhaps it is a controversial statement to make (less so today than at the time when the study was released and John Geiger of *The Edmonton Journal* attacked it and succeeded in casting doubts in the mind of City Council as to the study's recommendations), but it seems that the Cultural Futures Project of 1988, in many ways, was ahead of its time. For example, the project strongly recommended that the internet and other electronic and digital modes of information dissemination and sharing be adopted to provide citizens of Edmonton, and tourists alike, with access to art and cultural resource information.<sup>23</sup> Keeping in mind that this recommendation was made in 1988, it truly does exhibit a quasi visionary characteristic.

Furthermore, the project went on to recommend that the future treatment of arts and culture should avoid the practice of compartmentalization.<sup>24</sup> This, arguably, has since become a partial feature of most contemporary research dealing with the issues at hand;

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> *Edmonton: A City for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Report of the Cultural Futures Project*—published 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

as the idea that art and culture are not simply separate entities existing within their host community, but are actually integral interwoven elements of, and interacting with, all other elements of the host community superstructure becomes widely accepted. In many ways it is a quasi *gestalt* approach.

Another important recommendation from the project, which has stood the test of time, is the suggestion that through encouraging participation in artistic and cultural activities, among all citizens of Edmonton, the community can achieve a sense of personal and communal ownership of the artistic and cultural resources within the city. This would be a sense that entrenches the intrinsic value notion of arts and culture in Edmonton, and which would become an acquired, eventually inherent, value handed down generationally.<sup>25</sup>

The research that primarily concerns itself with the economic benefits of arts and culture suggests that, given the obviously substantial economic benefits of arts and culture to Edmonton, sustainable resources ought to be made available to cultivate those economic benefits. The Arts in Edmonton report of 1996,<sup>26</sup> for instance, suggests that, to paraphrase colloquially, one has to spend money to make money. Thus, the recommendation is that Edmonton as a community must continue to invest in arts and culture on an ongoing basis in order to continue to reap maximum returns from that industry.<sup>27</sup> This sentiment is, of course, to an extent echoed by all the economic benefits focused studies looked at here.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated with a reasonable level of confidence that, by and large, the available research clearly points in one direction. Indeed the general consensus, to put it simply, of the studies examine (which span two decades) appears to be that the overwhelming economic and social benefits of the arts and culture, in Edmonton and in general, are an important resource not to be squandered and require ongoing sustainable financial, emotional and sociopolitical support.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Title abbreviated from original: *Foundation Report: The Arts in Edmonton 1996*.

<sup>27</sup> *Foundation Report: The Arts in Edmonton 1996*.



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