



CULTURAL CAPITALE
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Comox Valley Case Study

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Case Study: Cultural Development in the Comox Valley

History of Cultural Activity in Comox Valley

Comox Valley was identified by First Nations as a place of abundance from before time began. Tangible evidence of the earliest artistic expression is the petroglyphs carved into the rocks along the shore, the dramatic house poles and architecturally stunning 'Big Houses'.

Exploration of the region by Europeans began perhaps as early as Francis Drake in 1578 but modern documented exploration started with Cook in 1778, Vancouver in 1792 and by 1849 James Douglas had established the colony of Vancouver's and Quadra Island. In 1862 pioneers began arriving to pre-empt the lands, uninhabited as small pox took its toll among the First Nations.

Exploitation of the coal reserves was underway by 1890 and the communities of Cumberland, Courtenay and Comox began their development.

From the outset, performance, music, appreciation of nature and community gatherings to celebrate the seasons and traditions were key to the fabric of the settlements whether they were First Nation, European, or Asian. The residents of the Comox Valley have utilized fields and parks or developed purpose built facilities to meet their cultural needs. Places for music, fall fairs, concerts, performances, celebrations and gatherings.

Although the first settlers arrived in 1862, it was not until the mines opened in Cumberland that the population swelled rapidly. By 1891, 400 miners were employed in Cumberland and the Comox Valley boasted a well - established settlement of about the same size.

The first concert hall was the Agricultural Hall in Courtenay, built in 1887 and rebuilt in 1902. Early settlers, although primarily from the UK, came from diverse backgrounds – rural and urban, and brought diverse talents - craftsmen, instrumentalists, vocalists, performers and artists.

Sailors stationed at Goose Spit often performed at sold-out concerts for the locals in the Knights of Pythian Lodge (now Martine's bistro).

A hundred years ago the Valley had fewer people but more theatr seats than it has today. In Cumberland, the Chinese Free Masons (Chee Kong Tong) built a Masonic Hall in the 1890s and constructed the first Chinese theatre in 1900. By 1914, the Chinese Opera House Company was holding performances in its new 300-seat theatre, complete with balcony. The Cumberland Opera House was built in 1910. The Ilo Ilo Theatre was built by the Cumberland Electric and Waterworks in 1914. The Cumberland Italian Band 1906 – 1914 was very popular but lost their members to the Great War.

In 1910, Otto Fechner, a Cumberland barber and taxidermist built the 500 seat Courtenay Opera House on main street. This was rebuilt after a fire in 1917 as the 'Maple Leaf Theatre'.

The Gaiety Theatre (1920) rose from its ashes to become the Bickle Theatre in 1924 was renovated in 1971 by a volunteer committee to become the Civic Theatre and renamed again as the Sid Williams Civic Theatre. Other stages were provided by Booth's Hall, (1921) and the Native Sons' Hall (1928).

Dusty d'Esterre, an early tourism entrepreneur, recognized the Valley's recreational potential and invested in the first golf course. He also appreciated the natural beauty of the area and artistic needs of painters when he advertised in Vancouver papers in 1922 offering "unsurpassed beauty to inspire the artist" in his the promotion of his first class accommodation, the freshly updated Elk Hotel.

Artists and naturalists Alan Brooks and Mack Laing moved to Comox in the 1920s to study and paint wildlife. The beauty of the landscapes has attracted notice from Sir James Douglas and E. J. Hughes to Brian Scott and Bev Byerley. The thriving artist community includes sculptors, fiber artists, ceramic artists, weavers, and more. The artistic community is represented by associations such as the Canadian Federation of Artists, Brushworks, and they show and sell their work in galleries in the Valley. It is estimated that there are more than 1,000 individuals in the Comox Valley who earn at least part of their living from sale of works of art.

After World War II the Comox Valley experienced a renewed spurt of growth of cultural organizations. Music, drama, arts and historical societies all added to the cultural mix. The Courtenay Concert Orchestra was formed in 1948.

The Courtenay and District Band 1949

The Courtenay and District Historical Society began in 1951.

The Comox Valley Drama Club 1954

The Comox District Men's Choir formed in 1927

The Co-Val Choristers formed in 1958

The Comox Valley Arts Council 1966

Courtenay Youth Music Camp launched in 1967

The first Comox Valley Arts Festival started in 1978

The last 30 years has seen the full range of artistic expression expand and flourish in the Valley. Easier access to the Valley, through the new Island Highway and the recently opened international airport, has made the 'quality of life' features of the Comox Valley far more accessible and the population growth has reflected the interest.

Characteristics of the Region

The five areas that make up the Comox Valley have distinctive, authentic and unique characteristics that make it difficult to provide a singular overview. They form adjacent neighbourhoods of personality.

Courtenay, the largest area by population, is characterized by its rivers - the Tsolum and Puntledge merging with the Courtenay River. It has a cultural precinct with a professional theatre, art gallery, arts centre, and museum. A traditional centre for commerce, it is the lively retail hub.

Comox is focused on the sea, with its working harbour, popular Marina park and formative naval heritage. Its picturesque location, golf course in the centre of town, make it an easy going, location attractive to an older demographic.

Cumberland is comfortably nestled beside the Beaufort range on the western slopes of the Comox Valley. It is a proud and vigorous promoter of its mining history but in a present-day context. Taiwanese Lantern Festivals, Chinese New Year, Empire Day Parade (every year since 1893), The Big Time Out are unconventional celebrations expected here.

The most visible part of the K'ómoks First Nation reserve stretches along the shore of Comox Bay looking across the water to the glacier. Its long house, gallery and community centre welcome the public to traditional celebrations and it is a central and popular location for community events.

The Comox Valley Regional District wraps around and between these areas and is home to the highest concentration of artists, the significant parks and greenways, and the dramatic landscapes that gives the area its rural feel.

Culture – It is how we live!

Just as the districts are authentically different, the broader community views or understandings of culture are also different. The transformation in approaches to cultural policy over the past twenty years is indicative of the growing awareness of the importance of knowledge, lifestyle and creative expression in the health of a community and its economy.

Examination of cultural policies in the 1980s indicates that cultural organizations were usually referred to as the 'arts' and included orchestra, theatre companies, art gallery, and opera company. Cultural policy was a means of identifying and narrowing the organizations that qualified for funding. There was no desire to adopt the anthropologists wider definition:

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.¹

¹ www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html

By 1989 Victoria's policy was regarded more as a companies rather than individuals, however it did call for integration of "arts industry' into all aspects of municipal decision making."²

Through the 1990s, the notion of culture as something larger grew and the Vancouver³ Board of Parks and Recreation, in 1993, defined culture as: "An integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes thought, speech, action and artifacts, it is the way people pass on experience and explore values and beliefs. It is the way we communicate, interact with the environment and organize ourselves." This definition is similar to the one adopted by the Town of Comox about the same time. Comox is the only municipality to attempt a specific definition of culture.

By the end of 1990s, communities like Sechelt, were adopting cultural policies with the stated "belief that arts and culture important to economy, social health and community development."⁴

In 2001 in the Comox Valley, the Comox Valley Community Arts Council and Tourism Comox Valley (as it was then known) established a steering committee mandated to develop a valley-wide cultural policy. The process involved surveys, community meetings, focus groups and the identification and collection of data on arts organizations. Although this initiative eventually failed to gain municipal and regional district support, it did provide substantial fundamental research for the subsequent development and adoption by the City of Courtenay of a Cultural Policy in October 2003.

The Courtenay Arts and Culture Policy contains 25 recommendations ranging from inclusion of the policy in the next update of the OCP, to infrastructure considerations, marketing, planning, and youth programs. Although it does not address the meaning of culture, the Arts and Culture Policy was incorporated into the OCP adopted in February 2005. The vision expressed was to "Enhance Courtenay's reputation as the premier regional centre for arts and culture." In addition to the adoption of the policy, the key strategy is to "Demonstrate how our community values, preserves and manages, for the benefit of the community, its cultural heritage and its build, natural, historical and national heritage."⁵

Cumberland states its cultural perspective very clearly in the OCP adopted by the village in 2004. It firmly identifies with an eco-cultural focus as the core new economy and adds it "will be significantly complemented by both the graphic and performing arts – music and theatre – reflecting the vibrant artist community within and about the Historic Village".⁶

The Town of Comox adopted a cultural policy that falls predominantly to the Comox Recreation Commission for implementation.

The K'ómoks First Nation nourishes, protects and preserves its cultural heritage through its daily practice.

Current thinking on cultural policy is much closer to the anthropological concept. It is widely

² An Arts Policy for Greater Victoria, 1989

³ Arts Policy Report, Vancouver Department of Parks and Recreation, 1993

⁴ Arts and Culture Plan, Sechelt, 1999

⁵ City of Courtenay, Official Community Plan, February 2005

⁶ Village of Cumberland, OCP 2004

recognized as an important economic driver, source of a creative knowledge sector and evidence of a healthy and vital community.

Each local government in the Comox Valley holds its own views of culture and defines it within the community perspective. To embrace them all, culture must be defined in the broadest sense.

The residents of Comox Valley value the natural heritage and human history because it helps to understand and value the past on which the present is built, and gives a deepened awareness of common roots and shared identity.

They have a deep connection to the land. They believe the natural glories are among the most beautiful and inspiring in the world. And their attachment to environment through parks and wilderness areas is an important part of what constitutes an understanding of culture and quality of life.

They define culture in a broad sense, to include not only the arts, but also heritage, sport and recreation, and the natural environment. Culture also includes creativity and innovation, especially in business and the arts. At the heart of the understanding of culture is the idea of personal and island identity, of community, of shared heritage. Living the cultural choices and interests gives a sense of belonging and a confidence in who they are.

They believe that culture is the glue that connects individuals to communities, fostering unity, civility and a sense of belonging, pride and caring for fellow citizens.

Experiencing the cultural expressions of neighbours allows a better understanding of each other and makes the places we live in more interesting. They believe it is important to celebrate cultural distinctiveness as well as cultural similarities and by sharing the diverse cultures, create something new and uniquely Comox Valley.

Definition of Culture for the Comox Valley – It's the way we live.

State of the Cultural Sector

The Comox Valley's cultural assets include the following:

- 6 commercial galleries and professional art studios
- A cooperative artist-run gallery showcasing 29 local ceramic artists
- A cultural centre housing an art gallery, community arts council and several cultural organizations
- Three theatres and three+ presentation spaces for theatrical performances, concerts, local talent competitions,
- Five museums run by local heritage societies, including an air force museum
- A botanical garden and countless gardening enthusiasts and clubs
- 14 shops selling art, craft, collectables and books
- 12 fine dining restaurants
- Comox valley farmers market from May to December featuring local produce, specialty foods, bakers, and musical entertainment
- An internationally recognized writer and winner of the Governor General's award and Giller prize
- 40 festivals and events celebrating craft, music, heritage, food, first nations with a diversity ranging from Taiwanese lanterns to nautical days
- A concentration of artisans, dancers, actors, craftpersons, painters, sculptors, producers and directors that is nearly double the national average
- An historic village and mine site
- A vibrant first nations gallery and 'big house'
- International award winning cheeses, specialty foods produced locally including shellfish, bison, chocolates, wine and a scotch distillery
- CVMC – an international summer youth music school and festival
- A college offering a fine arts program that graduates 20+ artists annually
- A range of heritage, nature, and other touring services originating in the Comox valley
- A support network of arts councils, business associations, clubs, and volunteer recruitment agencies
- 10+ locations for informal live music entertainment (34 live shows advertised in February 2008 alone)
- A range of media outlets, web and graphic designers, illustrators, architects, furniture designers and sound and multi-media
- Canada council support for local artists in 2006 was \$46,000
- BC arts council support in the region was \$102,769

The festivals and events in the Comox Valley attract attendance of roughly 125,000 visitors annually. The population base for the area is 62,000. Most events rely on a substantial volunteer component that speaks to the value and importance of these events to the region.

Community Approach to the Cultural Sector

The cultural sector receives modest support from funding agencies. BC Arts Council annually provides grants of \$102,769 for operating and project funding. Special project Canada Council grants amounting to \$46,000 were awarded to artists/musicians in 2007. There are approximately 74 culture-related not-for-profit societies operating in the region and several for-profit organizations presenting festivals and events. Artists deriving a living from their work are classified as private. There are countless amateurs and hobbyists not included in these figures.

The number and diversity of groups breaks down as follows:

| Cultural Category | # Non Profit Societies | Private | Characteristics |
|---|------------------------|---------|--|
| Music | 13 | | Youth, Jazz, Highland |
| Musicians | | 50+ | Members of bands, jazz groups, individuals, - small private businesses |
| Music Stages | 4 | 10 | Outdoor stages, legion hall or private pubs |
| Performing Arts | 4 | 5 | Theatre/Dance |
| Visual Arts | 12 | | Galleries and Groups |
| Artists | 11 | 1000+ | Individual small business - painters, sculptors, fiber, ceramics, wood |
| Enabling Organizations and Associations | 14 | | Arts councils, volunteer and business associations |
| Festival Presenters | 30 | 10 | Throughout the year running from one day to several |
| Museum and Galleries | 9 | 14 | Private includes artist run studios and galleries |
| Presenting Facilities | 9 | 1 | Art Gallery, Theatre, North Island College |
| Media | | 14 | Web, newspapers, software developers |
| Food/Beverages | | 12 | Specialty food and beverages |
| Natural History & Horticultural Societies | 6 | 4 | Garden clubs/ natural history and other clubs – 650+ members |
| Writers, Poets, & Literacy Groups | 3 | 3 | Learners to writers plus libraries |
| Multicultural Groups | 8 | | Celebrating traditions, language and foods |

These events and organizations are supported by volunteer boards, volunteer or minimum wage administrations, and a diverse assortment of community in-kind donations.

Most festivals are not held in support of tangible community assets but rather reflect community interests and feature the best of local talent while attracting national and international guests. Music is the main ingredient in many events including Vancouver Island Music Fest, North Island Hot Jazz Festival, and Comox Valley Youth Music Centre Festival. These attract large audiences through the summer. Music is also supplementary to everything from the Comox Valley Farmers Market to the Highland Games.

In many instances, festivals are a celebration of an anniversary – Canada Day, Empire Day, Solstice Festival, Miners' Memorial Day, Chinese New Year Festival.

In a region whose name is often translated as 'land of plenty' we see an increasing number of festivals celebrating or featuring food and flowers as the main ingredient - Comox Valley Fall Fair, Shellfish Festival, Beer Fest, High on Chocolate Festival, Wine Festival. Art in Bloom, Winter Festival, Denman Island Home and Garden Tour, North Island Rhododendron Society Garden Tour. The annual Fall Fair goes back to 1893 and is a reminder that local produce has competed internationally since the first potatoes won an honourable mention at the Paris World Fair in 1900 to the internationally acclaimed cheeses produced by Natural Pastures.

Cultural diversity and cultural heritage also attract festival celebrations National Aboriginal Day, K'ómoks Multicultural Festival, Taiwanese Lantern Festival, The Highland Games, Heritage Week and The Association Francophone de la Vallee de Comox, another membership driven volunteer organization presents the Maple Sugar Shack, Lobster Fest, to promote French culture and traditions in the Comox Valley.

The region is the home to several hundred painters, sculptors, ceramic and fiber artists and craftpersons with artists making up double the national average as a percentage of the labour force. Their work is displayed often in conjunction with other festivals but also through annual shows such as Originals Only, and Cumberland Winter Faire and Craftopia, Hornby Festival of the Arts, and the Comox Valley Art Gallery Studio Tour.

The festival mix is rounded out with the Readers and Writers Festival, World Community Film Festival, Reel Youth Film Festival and Poetry Festival.

Municipal and regional district support for festivals is minimal despite the impact on hotel and restaurant spending, valley reputation, economic activity generated through sale of art work, craft and local produce. The level of creative activity is an authentic, sustained expression of the community and is made possible primarily through the extensive volunteer support and community effort.

Economic Impact of Culture and Creative Industries

The Comox Valley with its thriving cultural activity, outstanding geographical location and climate has historically experienced one of the fastest growth rates in the Province of BC and has continued this trend over the past 5 years by achieving an increase of 9%. The population of the Comox Valley currently estimated at 62,326 (BC Stats) is projected to increase by almost 2% a year over the next 5 years. (CVED) The region links to markets through its international airport and mainland ferry terminal. A regional hospital, post-secondary college, diverse recreational opportunities and tourism attractions complete the key amenities for qualifying the Comox Valley as a candidate for the International Awards for Livable Communities.

⁷

Recent awards of the Comox Valley include
2007 Named a Cultural Capital of Canada in
2007 BC Airport Council Airport Management Award
2006 Canadian Parks and Recreation Association Award of Excellence for Innovation Comox Valley Centre for the Arts
2005 Community Leader BC Council of Forests

In 2006, the BC Arts Council funded Comox Valley groups in the amount of \$102,769 in operating assistance. Canada Council grants to local artists, musicians and writers were \$46,000. What is the direct and indirect impact of this?

Direct impact is the revenue generated from the BC Arts Council funded investment (i.e. client budgets). Indirect and induced impacts refer to the additional revenues generated when people attend arts events, and to the taxes returned to the Provincial Government as a result of that spending.

Economic impact information is difficult to capture. Statscan data suggests that there are 858 individuals employed in the cultural sector. This breaks down to 575 technical and professional workers and 283 professional workers. The professional workers break down further into 71 full-time equivalent (FTE) artists and 212 other professional who are curators, gallery managers, event producers. Informal survey of the organization in the Comox Valley produce other numbers. The number of artists seem to be underestimated. As this number includes all artistic categories and assuming that they only work 30% of their time in their area this would produce more than 200 artists. However, executive committees of boards of artists, staff at North Island College and festival producers, and arts council estimate that people regularly earning a living from sale of art exceeds 1000 and musicians employed full time exceed 20 while another 30 have other jobs to supplement income. This is based on their knowledge of the community and mailing and contact lists. Translating this to FTEs would produce more than 350 artists compared with the 71 in the Statscan numbers. This difference changes the direct impact from wages from employment from \$12.75 million to \$25.3 million.

Detailed local data collection is required to make better estimates of the economic impact.

⁷ BC Arts Council Annual Report 2006/2007

Benchmarking this Sector

Capital investment in cultural facilities is extremely difficult to achieve through the budgets of the local governments.

For capital projects to be considered, significant provincial and federal funding sources must be identified and matched by local government and public donations and commitment. With so many groups vying for their own needs and no process for consolidating, partnering, collaborating or coordinating possible solutions the ability to get behind one shared project is difficult.

Cultural funding in the past ten years has been driven through two major awards: the Softwood Industry Community Economic Adjustment Initiative (SICEAI) in 2003 and the Cultural Capitals of Canada designation 2007. Both required local matching investment. Both projects consisted of several discrete projects/events that collectively met the specified funding requirements.

The former resulted in stand-alone capital cultural infrastructure construction while the latter stimulated new events or expanded existing events. Neither of these projects involved the face-to-face orchestration of the component parts or participants.

Courtenay has consolidated a cultural precinct in the centre of the City with significant investment in capital projects including the conversion of the historic Firehall into the Comox Valley Art Gallery and offices for five other cultural organizations. Through a long and determined effort the Comox Valley Cultural Centre was completed and opened in 2004 and houses the Art Gallery and offices for cultural organizations including the Arts Council, CYMC and the Fall Fair.

Other implemented elements of the cultural policy include revitalization of the Sid Williams Theatre. and renovation and expansion of the Courtenay and District Museum and Paleontology Centre. However, many parts of the policy are not implemented and include arts-lead partnerships, integration of cultural policy in broader community plans and maintaining communication links among municipal and cultural strategists. In Courtenay, no new capital expenditures are proposed in the next 5 years and the inclusion of upgrades and maintenance must still be funded.

Cumberland, a village of 2,900, does not have a cultural policy but has integrated core cultural values in its 2004 Official Community Plan. An extensive community collaboration of 48 meetings involving more than 300 community members provided a clear expression of the essential character of the community that people wished to maintain, enhance or change based on an examination of the communities social, economic and environmental values. By identifying the social and cultural foundation of Cumberland as well as economic and environmental issues the village was able to integrate a community vision, the “Voice of the People”, into a framework that endorses Performance-Based approaches to issue assessment.⁸

The Town of Comox provided a cultural policy, but its date of adoption is not clear (perhaps 1994?). It is the only document in use in the Valley, that provides a definition for culture.

⁸ Cumberland OCP June 2004
Pauline Thompson February 2008
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Implementation of the specific objectives lies primarily with the Comox Recreation Commission. From 2003 through 2007 the Town completed a Marine Pavilion in Marina Park, a full downtown revitalization plan, and approved the capital funding for the new library project. The only future capital project currently in the capital plan is for renovations to the Comox Recreation Centre. The Town has no identifiable cultural hub. Comox town council has recently invested in a new library, however the building housing the old library and former health centre is being converted (temporarily?) to retail space and away from community service and cultural uses.

The K'ómoks First Nation has 110 people on reserve and represents additional members in the larger community. They play a significant role in the culture of the Comox Valley through their successful I Hos Gallery featuring First Nations art, public celebrations, performances, distinctive presence and partnerships with other groups such as the BC Shellfish Growers Association for the annual Shellfish Festival.

The Regional District (CVRD) plays a role in cultural development through their commitment to service in the development and management of regional parks, greenways, recreations and exhibition facilities. The Comox Valley Regional District manages and protects 26 regional parks. Parks include boat launches, beaches, forests, skateboard parks over a hundred kilometers of forested trails. Through the Comox Valley Sports Centre Commission, they oversee the operation of the Comox Valley Sports and Aquatic Centres and the Comox Valley Exhibition Grounds contributing more than \$5.5 million annually. The Commission consists of representatives from the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland and CVRD electoral areas A, B, C, and School District #71.

The CVRD flows through nearly \$9 million in funds (16%) of their budget to a variety of cultural and recreational areas including: capital debt service for the Comox Valley Art Gallery, operations for Denman and Hornby Community Halls, Vancouver Island Regional Library, community parks, three recreational complexes and exhibition grounds operations and capital improvement. These comprise some of the major cultural facilities in the Comox Valley.

These five distinct districts are within a ten minute drive from the centre of the Comox Valley. Collectively they create a vibrant, livable community that has many personalities and possibilities.

Within this Valley are more than 1000 artists, several hundred musicians, actors, dancers, and other cultural practitioners who are constantly endeavouring to make a living from their efforts. There is no central agency that makes working with this sector their priority.

There is no central registry of cultural organizations or statistics relating to their performance, health, size, community impact or economic value. Public surveys of the valley citizens have not been undertaken in recent years to determine the cultural amenity preferences.

Visitor statistics are collected through the information centre. If the statistics are reflective of the composition of tourism activity in the region, then more than 70% of queries are generated by local and provincial visitors with the remainder evenly distributed among those from Alberta, the rest of Canada, Europe and the United States.

With three municipalities, a regional district and a First Nations community operating in the Valley the funding sources are generally uncoordinated, limited and where operating grants are made, they support the larger foundation institutions such as the museum and art gallery.

Anticipated and Suggested Capital Investment in Cultural Facilities

| Courtenay | Next 5 years | *Suggested |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Sid Williams Theatre | Upgrade 350,000 | |
| Native Sons Hall | Upgrade 500,000 | |
| Performing Arts Centre | | 1200 seat performing arts centre |
| Comox | Next 5 years | Suggested |
| Marina Park | | Interpretative Centre and facilities to support park activity |
| Filberg Lodge and Park | | Stage, power and washrooms |
| Library | New building near completion | |
| Comox Recreation Centre | Upgrade 800,000 | |
| Community Cultural Centre | | Gallery, 200 seat presentation space, classrooms |
| Cumberland | Next 5 years | Suggested |
| Ilo Ilo Theatre | Private investor | |
| Sage Development | Private Investor | |
| K'ómoks Band | Next 5 years | Suggested |
| I Hos Gallery | | Carving Shed |
| Regional District | Next 5 years | Suggested |
| CV Recreation Complexes | | Arena seating for concerts |

* Suggestions were proposed by individuals and are not part of currently plans or budgets.

Benchmarking Tools and Techniques

The Comox Valley has no current statistics on the size or impact of the cultural sector. Measurements produced by reliance on statistics Canada appear to be lower than local evidence would indicate. The economic impact is possibly underestimated.

Tangential evidence of economic impact is provided by some events such as the Filberg Festival. The Filberg Festival, celebrating its 26th year in 2008 attracts more than 250 volunteers annually. It has a part-time paid producer, a short-term contract for an entertainment director and hires a handful of student staff for setup and maintenance details. It was begun as a board initiative to raise funds for the maintenance of the Filberg Lodge and buildings. Without any annual municipal, regional or provincial funding, the festival has raised more than \$1.23 million dollars in support of a community asset while spotlighting the best in local and provincial craft. About 120 craftpersons are invited to this juried event and over the four-day period sell more than \$1,250,000 in products. Last year more than 25,000 visitors attended.

With most festivals acting as venues for artists, the economic impact for artists is substantial. Extrapolating the average wage of an artist or gauging numbers employed by the festivals does not get to the real economic impact.

Long-term evidence of the impact of events is frequently not held by the organization as part of its important financial archival record but is produced by the volunteer treasurer of the board and is at risk of being lost as volunteers turn over.

Marketing surveys were conducted in 2007 at two of the major summer festivals – the Vancouver Island Music Fest and the Filberg Festival. Visitor age and origin were similar with both groups attracting an older demographic- nearly half of the attendees at the Music Fest are between 46 and 65 years and 64% of Filberg Festival visitors are between 40 and 69.

Both surveys indicate that approximately 58% of visitors are from outside the Comox valley. Of this group 31% stay with friends and relatives and 60% stay for more than 2 nights. Comox Valley airport statistics also demonstrate a high percentage of visitors age 45+, female, traveling alone and predominantly visiting friends and relatives. This demographic is frequently cited as significant consumers of culture and cultural products and experiences.

Survey work to benchmark this sector would be useful in monitoring impact, growth, prosperity of the sector, influence on quality of life and other indicators.

Best Practices

The three communities chosen for the case study compare with the Comox Valley in interesting ways.

The communities of Annapolis county and Comox Valley are similar in their heritage, First Nations and cultural development contexts. They are situated in geographically similar areas with nearby mountains and ocean access and protected harbour. Adjacent to established First Nations traditional cultural practices and skills, new settlers quickly organized music, art, craft and other activities reflective of their own traditions.

Both regions have had economic challenges, however they have maintained an authenticity in their beautiful settings that consistently attracted artists, writers and performers. Cultural vigor is well rooted in the communities and it has been actively supported through a committed volunteer attitude.

Both areas are experiencing a steady growth. The Comox Valley benefiting from the improvements to the Island Highway and the expansion of the airport.

Collingwood, an agricultural and manufacturing community and Kelowna a resort and service community to an agriculturally based economy, both experienced transformations of their economies in the mid 1980s. In Collingwood, manufacturing suffered a steady decline after the shipyards left while Kelowna at the same time was emerging as the retirement capital of Canada. Both communities were however enjoying increasing numbers of tourists flocking to the areas for nature-based recreation that include hiking, beaches and water sports and skiing.

Kelowna's strategy has been to invest in a host of cultural facilities and cultural staffing. In 2000, the City began to purchase and assemble properties and invested in an arts development office, cultural services division, cultural services coordinator and cultural district project manager. While Kelowna had a museum and art gallery, it lacked a cultural precinct and signature festival that could be the basis of growth of the sector. With the award of the Cultural Capital Grant in 2004, the city of Kelowna positioned itself to launch a signature festival – the Life and Arts festival. This has grown substantially since its launch and is a tourism draw. The economic transformation has been in the growth of tourism but more importantly in the creation of 'quality of life' conditions that have attracted economic activity in technology, winery industry and real estate. Entrepreneurs wanting to establish their business in places where they want to live and retire.

Collingwood's strategy has been through a tourism focus rather than a culture focus. Lacking the strong cultural foundations that our other communities have, Collingwood has grown in the tourism service sector, insurance, financial and professional services with the largest gain in recreation, arts and culture. The emphasis here is on recreation as the majority of the marketing is focused at a sports tourism program and as a location for corporate and regional conferences. Collingwood is home to the Canadian Mist Whiskey distillery.

As ski areas transform into year-round facilities, to increase profits and reduce risk of poor ski conditions, the region benefits from year round employment and the cultural activities can be packaged and promote the predominant number of summer events.

Comparison of the Comox Valley with other Centres

| Characteristic | Comox Valley | Annapolis County | Collingwood Ontario | Kelowna |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Cultural region | Three municipalities First Nations Reserve, Rural regional district | Two municipalities Annapolis Royal – town Village of Bear River – secondary hub, Two First Nations Reserves | Small town Former manufacturing community | Largest city in Okanagan valley – one jurisdiction |
| Population | 63,000 | 21,000 | 10,000 | 110,000 |
| Geography | Beaufort Mountains, coastal plains, harbour, mild winters, lots of hours of sunshine | Mountain protection, harbour, mild micro climate conducive for apple and vegetable crops | Nestled in mountains of Niagara Escarpment on southern shore of Georgian bay | Nearby Monashee mountains, situated on Okanagan lake, mild dry climate |
| First European settlement | 1862 | 1605 | 1858 | 1859 |
| Cultural Capital Award | 2007 | 2005 | No | 2004 |
| Proximity to Major Urban Centres | Vancouver, Calgary by air – under 1.5 hrs | Two hours west of Halifax | 150 km north of Toronto | Vancouver, Calgary 5 hr drive or 1 hr by air |
| Ski resort impact | 450,000 visitors annually to Mt Washington | Cross country skiing | 600,000 visitors to Blue Mountain | Big White – large ski attraction |

COMOX VALLEY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

| Cultural Characteristics | Comox Valley | Annapolis County | Collingwood Ontario | Kelowna |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Excellence | Filberg Festival – juried craft, High caliber musicians at Music Fest, Federation of Canadian Artists Accredited art programs, Professional summer music camp | High level of professionalism Commitment to artistic excellence Juried exhibitions Professional theatre | Emphasis on tourism marketing | Active in cultural cities network Cultural facilities meet national exhibition presentation standards. |
| Collaboration | Potters cooperative - 13 years old represents 29 of 70 local ceramics artists Canadian Federation of Artists, Originals Only, and others work together to market products. | Most events organized in conjunction with other groups Co-operative marketing and sales outlets | Assistance from Ontario Ministry of Tourism to guide investment and develop successful partnerships and investment opportunities | Okanagan Cultural Corridor – to identify, develop, package and promote authentic and sustainable market-ready four-season cultural tourism experiences. Cultural District Task Force meets monthly. |
| Volunteerism | 2500 + volunteers on boards and event volunteers | Volunteerism is 'norm' and has built expertise in volunteer management and organization | Not mentioned | 1300 to 1700 volunteers involved in cultural organizations |
| Fundraising | Filberg Festival – annually raises funds to support heritage buildings and generates \$1.25 million in sales of craft and food Art in Bloom – for profit business providing a sales venue for artists | Attaches fundraising event to cultural activity – Paint the Town (based on artists donating 50%) balance supports arts council | No fundraising mentioned | Per Kelowna staff, events are designed to break even and for tourism strategy |

COMOX VALLEY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

| Cultural Characteristics | Comox Valley | Annapolis County | Collingwood Ontario | Kelowna |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Civic Leadership | All municipalities provide some operating funding to their cultural groups. No formal data collection No long-term cultural plan | Town of Annapolis, grants in aid to expand festivals, Operating and capital investment grants Regional development authority made culture a priority providing tools and training Offered capacity building support for organizations | Priorities are driven by economics | Very significant in building awareness, champion projects and programs, culture driven by policy |
| Arts Office | Community Arts Council – 43 yrs Operates to initiate, sponsor or stimulate cultural activities | Annapolis Regions Community Arts Council – started by professional artists to build reputation as a cultural centre | | Critical to success Encouraged compatible retail outlets, destination dining, signage, streetscaping |
| Support from the Top | Courtenay – policy adopted, difficult to maintain Comox – policy adopted without regular review Cumberland – cultural vision in OCP K'ómoks Band – supports cultural events | Town has adopted a cultural policy | Ontario Ministry of Tourism, the ski resort and the town collaborate to deliver tourism | Municipal gov't recognition of importance of cultural sector for tourism and as economic driver. |
| Advocacy and Lobbying | Undertaken by individual groups | Annapolis Region Community Arts Council and the | Business networks and Ontario Tourism | Engagement of business community, chambers, |

COMOX VALLEY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

| Cultural Characteristics | Comox Valley | Annapolis County | Collingwood Ontario | Kelowna |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| | | Regional Development Authority | | downtown associations, economic development to advance cultural agenda with City |
| Natural Beauty | | Actions to protect environment as key factor in visitor attraction and quality of life – both entwined in cultural sector | | Long dry summer, mild winter, lake, mountains |
| Innovative Programming | Cumberland has unique mix of heritage and Chinese celebrations | | Annual Elvis Festival | Signature festival - Life & Arts – showcase for arts and tourism draw |
| Critical mass – not competition | Courtenay has provided a Cultural Centre – but is it effective? | Evidence of extensive collaboration among artists and community to make events successful | Boutiques, restaurants and specialty retail have moved in as complimentary businesses. | Recognition of centres of cultural critical mass for importance to community |
| Recreational options | Diversity of winter and summer activities and sports from snow to surf | Proximity to national park, ocean and hiking trails | Ski resort has expanded to four season activities. Investment in hiking trails and other outdoor amenities | Golf, beaches, hiking, biking, water activities snowboard, skiing, boutique shops, commercial galleries, fine dining amenities |
| Four-season resort strategy | No apparent partnerships take advantage of the winter visitors packaging | Not specifically covered | Year round activities have attracted artists where there is a ready market | Year round activities can be packaged for tourism |
| Customized | None found | Not specifically | Ski resort | Cultural corridor |

COMOX VALLEY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

| Cultural Characteristics | Comox Valley | Annapolis County | Collingwood Ontario | Kelowna |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| packages | | covered | packaging with Elvis Festival and developing custom tourism packages | promotion of 3 regional districts, 25 communities, 210 cultural providers |
| Anchors | 19 th Wing, Mt Washington and Hospital are major employers. | Heritage designation and status, strong arts community | Ski resort is the key anchor | Summer resort activities, increasing number of technology financial |

Best Practices – What works in the Comox Valley

1. **Volunteerism:** Exceptionally high levels of support by the community for events. With more than 70 not-for profit organizations seeking board participation some skill training in this area is probably required. However, the high level of volunteerism combined with a skilled and mature demographic keep these and organizations functioning very economically and make it possible for the community to enjoy quality events and productions at low price points.

2. **Authenticity of Community:** Cultural activity has been part of the community from the beginning. Early settlement by non-aboriginal populations was very diverse with multiple cultures from China, Japan, India, and a multitude of European countries contributing cultural traditions, foods, languages and talents to the quality of life in the valley.

3. **Innovative Programming:** The creative capacity of the Comox Valley is demonstrated in the wide diversity of festivals and the themes and participation that make them so successful. The popular 'Build, Bail and Sail' boat construction at Nautical Days has hundreds of people out to cheer on their team. From the Taiwanese Lantern festival in spring to the Shellfish Festival, the 120th anniversary of the themed Empire Day celebration and open house at the Comox Air Force Museum, there is always a unique perspective.

4. **Excellence:** Although the number of 'professional' cultural organizations and performing groups is limited, School District 71, through the Arts Education program, gives all children an early start in creative expression. This cultural incubator produces a community that is engaged in performance and creative activities throughout their lives at a high level of quality despite their "amateur" status.

5. **Spectacular surroundings:** Rivers, mountains, glacier, ocean and gardens galore. The setting has everything. Various tourism slogans have tried to capture the beauty and diversity of landscape – *Alpine to Ocean – So Much So Close*.

6. **High level of community participation in culture:** Residents of the Comox Valley not only volunteer to support cultural events they are active consumers of the events and have a high level of participation as amateurs and hobbyists in a wide assortment of cultural endeavours and activities. Culture is not a spectator sport in the Comox Valley.

Opportunities for development - marketing

Custom packages for tourism

With the diversity of experiences available in the Comox Valley, it is possible to develop customized tours and cultural experiences to serve the special interest groups.

The statistical details for attendance at Vancouver Island Music Fest and the Filberg Festival, the two major annual North Island festivals, and the analysis of passenger information through the Comox Valley International airport tend to describe the same demographic. An older demographic, with a slight predominance of women, who have above average household income.

There is an opportunity to package custom Comox Valley experiences that include cultural, recreational and educational components. A Summer School of the Arts with culinary classes, painting classes, evening music performances and weekend hiking, kayaking and biking adventures are the kind of thing that individuals go to Europe for. Local enquiries could not discover any packaging for promotion outside the region.

Comox Valley citizens are participants in culture and there may be a niche market for tourists who want to experience art and culture through participation rather than as merely a spectator. The attitudes and programs availability in the Valley would support this approach.

Who are the visitors?

The Filberg Festival had an attendance of 25,000 and the Vancouver Island Music Fest 8,000 in 2008

70% of visitors to the Filberg Festival are over 40.

52% of Vancouver Island Folk Festival attendees are over 46

More than 62% of VI Folk Fest have a household income exceeding the Comox Valley average (\$37,000)

More than 57% of Filberg Festival attendees spent more than \$50 with 10% of visitors spending more than \$200 each (totally more than \$500,000 in four days out total sales of \$1.25 million).

33% of visitors cited word of mouth as the main source of information about the Filberg.

40% of people attended because they were going with friends and family.

46% of Music Fest attendees and 58% of Filberg Festival guests live outside the Comox Valley.

Of those visiting from outside the valley, 58% stayed overnight while 31% stayed with friends and relatives. Of 58% of Festival guests that stayed overnight 62% stayed more than 2 nights.

COMOX VALLEY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The InterVISTAS study of Customer satisfaction and benchmarking prepared for the Comox Valley Airport describes the demographic profile of the traveler as 63% female, 56% visiting friends and relatives and 54% traveling alone. 67% fly Westjet and they average 3.3 trips per year.

While 44% of travelers through the airport resided outside of BC, 21% traveled from Calgary and Edmonton. 31% of travelers reside in the Comox Valley.

Visitor centre statistics quantify visitor residency and number of over nights but do not capture information as to what the essential experience is or if the Comox Valley met or exceeded expectations. Better data collection and trackable marketing techniques are needed to develop tailored experiences, perhaps in partnership with Mt Washington, to improve cultural and tourism promotion.

Cultural corridor – Powell River, Campbell River, Comox Valley - North Island

Benchmarking – develop a case for collaborative data collection so that economic impact data can be tracked in a common system.

Ability to make the case for funding and support based on economic impact, activity and value.

Local assets in need of development and expansion include a water front walking and biking trails from Goose Spit to Union Bay.

Invest Comox Valley

Growth in tourist attractions and amenities is not the same as growth in culture. Although tourism and culture are closely tied, they are motivated in different ways and call for different kinds of investment strategies.

Additional conference, presentation and meeting space

Need for more hotels and mid-range accommodation

QUESTIONS

What kind of tourism data are you able to collect from Mt Washington? Is it seasonal?

Are they able to give you attendance figures for their festivals?

How many artists do they engage?

What is the economic impact of Mt Washington?