

Chapter One¹

International Comparative Research: Understanding the Past, Restructuring the Present and Rethinking the Future

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Introduction: Why Make the Effort?

International comparative research and analysis has become an important tool in the development of domestic public policies and programs. It offers models for understanding and, through the examination of similar efforts elsewhere, reduces the uncertainties inherent in policy making. As we witness the transborder effects of integrating regions, national authorities also recognize the effects of their decision making beyond their jurisdictions.

Distinct from traditional research fields of study, international comparative cultural research is multifaceted, multipurpose and multidisciplinary, and employs techniques from other recognized disciplines. It has, therefore, yet to receive its own academic legitimacy. In order for international comparative cultural research to achieve "disciplinary" status, it must be built upon an area of knowledge and comprised of basic assumptions, guiding principles and theories.

One of the main objectives of the Researchers' Forum was to take stock of some of the existing methods and strategies of international comparative cultural research and to develop a common understanding of related concerns with researchers from all over the world. It should be noted that the purpose of this one-day session was not necessarily to discover solutions to various scientific questions, but to unearth some basic assumptions about the work that has been done to date. With this preliminary information in hand, further in-depth discussion on specific methodological issues can be pursued.

Throughout the presentations and discussions over the three days of **Crossing Frontiers**, four broad themes emerged as comparative research priorities for reflection. These included:

- examining the economies of applied research for policy development, and exploring the linkages between public policy and international comparisons;
- recognizing the importance of both formal and informal networking in order to collect reliable information;
- evaluating and reconstructing our methodologies. There was an eloquent call by participants and researchers to rethink and surrender traditional research paradigms in order to ensure that methodologies are inclusive; and
- collecting and processing international cultural statistics with both qualitative and quantitative tools, and establishing new and better indicators.

This chapter will address each of these issues and will conclude with a compilation of recommendations made by speakers and participants.

¹ Published in D. Cliché, R. Butt and Robineault. *Crossing Frontiers: Issues of Heritage, Culture and Identity in a Comparative Context*. Symposium proceedings June 13-15, Ottawa/Hull, Canada. International Comparative Research Group, January 1995. This chapter makes linkages among the presentations delivered in the Researcher's Forum as well as comments made by participants throughout the Symposium. It also draws on the background paper prepared by Vladimir Skok for the Symposium, "International Comparisons for Cultural Policy Development: Perspectives from the ICP Group and on notes prepared by Forum rapporteur Charles Vallerand.

The Links between Public Policy and International Comparisons

In her address, Élisabeth Châtillon, Canada, reminded us that Aristotle in *Politics*, compared the constitutions of 128 city-states around the Mediterranean. Plato, Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant conducted comparative conceptual analyses, which formulated the basis of grand political theories. International comparative research has for centuries provided the basis for political strategies. Broad comparative surveys between city-states, kingdoms and principalities have been made for over 2,500 years. The development of international comparisons paralleled the legitimization of the "nation-state" between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While earlier observations were limited to history, philosophy and political analysis, the nineteenth and twentieth century saw the extension of its application in disciplines such as economics, law, anthropology, psychology and sociology. Following the First World War, international comparisons became increasingly indispensable during the formation of international organizations such as the League of Nations.

As "nations" grew in number, increasing from 30 in 1880 to over 165 by the early 1990s, public sector intervention at both the national and international levels increased significantly. Over the years, this growth stimulated the need for international comparative information to provide inspiration and alternative models for policy makers, especially when regional trade agreements were encouraging the harmonization of national policies.

International comparative research and analysis, an established tool in the political arena, has increasingly contributed to public policy making. Its inherent pragmatism, problem-solving orientation and emphasis on applicability have placed it at the crossroads of academic inquiry and policy development. As the public sector expanded and the demand for international comparative information and analysis increased, an ad hoc pursuit gradually evolved into a more reliable and systematic approach to research. Borrowing its legitimacy from other academic disciplines, researchers from around the world have developed independent methodologies and have investigated the feasibility of establishing international comparisons for public policy as a recognized discipline or field of study.

International comparisons have been most useful in increasing our understanding of other state policies and systems, and explaining the relationships rather than exploiting the differences. More often than not, the value of this approach is derived not from what we learn about others, but from what we learn about ourselves.

International Comparisons and Cultural Policy Development

Over the past 15 years, there has been an even more rapid growth in governmental interest in the development of international comparative information for the cultural sector. The Council of Europe, UNESCO, the Latin American Cultural Ministers conference and the European Union, for example, have supported numerous cultural policy-oriented comparative research projects. While these efforts established and assembled a valuable body of knowledge, the information has often been inadequate and unreliable, and is now dated.

However, efforts continue. Inspiration for comparative cultural researchers can be found in many institutional efforts, including those of Culturelink, the Council of Europe (program for the Evaluation of National Cultural Policies), the Boekmanstichting, Cultural Information Research Centre Liaison in Europe (CIRCLE), the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the East-West Centre² (University of Hawaii), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture (IQRC). Independent research initiatives from Cummings and Katz, Girard, Mitchell,

² Godwin C. Chu of the East West Centre is currently coordinating a comprehensive study of cultural change in countries such as China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and the United States.

Wiesand, Kleberg and Schuster are recognized published examples of efforts in pursuit of a sound comparative methodology for culture and arts research. Often, organizations such as the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development], APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation] and OAS [Organization of American States], which have a great potential for collecting and generating international comparisons, have all but ignored this sector because of a narrow view of culture 's economic importance.

In Canada, a small international comparative policy group, the International Comparative Research Group (ICP), was created within the former Department of Communications in 1989 to bring systematic international comparative analysis to the development of Canadian culture, communications and, more recently, heritage and identity policies. To date, its international research mandate remains unique within Canadian domestic institutions. ICP has produced a substantial body of new information and applied analysis on a range of issues, including arts funding, cultural industries, hate-group activities, copyright, heritage tourism and amateur sport. More than eighty policy-related comparative "studies" have been completed, ranging from short reactive briefs to enhance Cabinet proposals, to longer-term joint projects with international partners selected in anticipation of policy-related requirements of the Department. With limited financing and staff, the pressures of tight deadlines, which are more suitable to administrative bureaucracy, and a constant reassignment of priorities away from policy research, rigorous methodologies were often abandoned as "product delivery" became the priority. Schuster accurately depicts such an approach to international policy comparisons as advocacy research. Now, within an expanded research division of the Department of Canadian Heritage, it appears that the research environment for ICP will allow a more balanced approach between longer-term research and short-term "advocacy" work.

Applied Research for Policy Development

Is it not one of the goals of all researchers to be relevant and see their work applied -- whether it be contributing to the formation of a new social system or the creation of a new program in support of the status quo? Research is a process that begins with a series of critical questions, which may contribute to the creation of new ideas or paradigms. The desired result is that these ideas are fed into a system --whether it be political, social or economic --rather than collect dust on a shelf.

International comparative research is part of a system that enables domestic policy makers to understand what others are doing, and leads to the creation of innovative ideas and policies. Some of the most significant contributions of international comparative research have been the ability to offer explanations, test theories and evaluate strategic efficiencies. Its relevance to public policy making is that it provides us with choices.

There appeared to be a consensus among participants (who were both producers and clients of this research) regarding the value of comparisons, especially when directly applied to the policy development process. This approach ultimately provides meaning to both the researchers and the policy maker. Researchers, however, expressed concern about the credibility and quality of their work while maintaining a client focus that frequently demands "quick and dirty" analysis. Perhaps the search for policy relevance has compromised a rigorous methodology, standard procedures, common references and the creation of a base for theoretical assumption.

The Use of Applied Comparative Research¹ by Policy Makers

Based on presentations made by Ritva Mitchell, Council of Europe; Mark Schuster, USA; Pierre Trudel, Canada; Geoffrey Wall, Canada; and Vladimir Skok, Canada, the following list outlines the rationale for conducting applied comparative policy research.

- to gather baseline information on "what is being done" around the world;
- to relate national policy measures to changes in global developmental trends;
- to support political arguments and to relate policy measures and options to past and present geo-political conditions;
- to provide a range of options in the consideration of new and creative policy solutions;
- to compare policy achievements with those of other countries;
- to evaluate the relative successes and failures of already implemented domestic policy measures;
- to understand one's national policies and see other wider options;
- to argue for more resources;
- to remind decision makers that national or local-level policies originate in diverse experiences and constraints; and
- to develop "robust generalizations" necessary to ensure more successful policies.

An illustration of these assertions for the cultural sector was provided by Marc Nicolas, France. In his presentation, he shared his experience using international comparative research in the development of a European public sector support system for audio-visual productions. The purpose of the study, sponsored by the Council of Europe, was to create a common policy for this region based on program data and information collected from selected European countries and Canada. At the beginning of the research, it became clear that, although Europe was striving to harmonize its policies, there was little understanding of the various national aid systems in Europe.

An examination of the process of this study according to the rationale mentioned above will illustrate the importance of applied research to policy making. The following comments are from the presentation by Marc Nicolas and can be cross-referenced with the above list:

1. The goal of the study was to examine the way each country approached financing their respective audio-visual sectors.
2. The research examined the differences between national policies for financial assistance and the redistribution of public funds, including the identification of direct and indirect sources of funding.
3. The study attempted to understand the public policy systems in different countries that would provide insight for negotiators developing a common policy for all European states.
4. Success stories of each of these systems examined were presented in the report in the hope that they would provide some inspiration towards the creation of a common policy.³
5. One of the "secret" agendas of this comparative research was to provide an opportunity to reexamine, "at least intellectually", some of the mechanisms that were being used in France.

The end result of this comparative research was the creation of Eurimages, an important European fund in support of coproduction, distribution and exhibition of cinematographic and audio-visual works for 24 European states. Eurimages is a product of a successful comparative research project that was able to influence policy and program development. However, it is important to remember that not all comparative research projects have such beginnings and endings.

Policy researchers seldom have the luxury of resources to undertake such relatively elaborate, longer-term projects. The majority of "day-to-day" comparative policy research involves responding to the requests of ministers and policy makers who depend on the delivery of instantaneous policy advice at precisely the right moment --the "quick and dirty approach." This approach is both reactive and proactive. The information and analysis that is produced

³ Mr. Nicolas also made reference to the fact that the French television support system was strongly influenced by the Canadian and Australian models.

may take many forms, including comparative policy analysis briefs, comparative statistical charts, compilations of both global trends and unique domestic models, and words of advice on how to advance the policy process.

On the other hand, the "research and development approach" of comparative policy research tends to be more thoughtful and more developed --an investment that will perhaps one day contribute to the scholarly advancement of the "discipline" as a whole. Although this appears to create two "schools of thought" on comparative research --one that is more scientific than the other --the value of the variety of research products available must not be underestimated.

The Utility or the Quick and Dirty Approach

One important concern raised during the Forum was maintaining the quality of comparative research (information) when applying the less-than-scientific "quick and dirty" methodology. It was argued that this approach **excludes** rather than **includes** various representations of reality. According to Schuster, there are means to overcome this problem:

If we are self-conscious and humble, if we are careful in explaining what we think we know and what we still do not know, and if we are careful about our caveats and research compromises and muse publicly about their implications, we will have been honest and helpful. This is quite a lot to aspire to, because the political process that commissions much of our comparative research is not really interested in a subtly nuanced argument.

He also warns that, "If we spend too much time attempting to agree on the correct methodology, we will only become paralysed." Therefore, it is important to be quick and give the policy makers what they want while, at the same time, internally developing a rigorous methodology and discipline (e.g. the ICP strategy). Team work, international cooperation and networking will also enable comparative researchers to maintain some control over the quality of information they provide. According to Vallerand, "It is the collective responsibility of all researchers to give legitimacy to the discipline."

Networking and Reliable Information

What is a network? A desire, a place for meetings, discussions, of common interest, contacts, communication; a space which provides freedom to innovate (in contrast to the rigidity of administrative structures), a place for reflection, listening, change (of perspective, of global linkages), questioning, challenging which requires recognition of others, their knowledge and intrinsic value. (Translation from French)⁴

Nicole Bounaga, professor, University of Algiers

While the first session of the Researchers' Forum was dedicated to a discussion of methodology and research design, the second was devoted to networking. It attempted to address the following questions: What is networking? Why is it important? What are the implications for traditional networking activities in a borderless technological environment? This theme was also addressed by Mr. Rod Fisher, England, in his presentation *International Networking as Short-term Gratification or Long-term Commitment* at a working breakfast held on the third day of **Crossing Frontiers**.

⁴ This statement was presented by Biserka Cvjeticanin, Croatia, in her address entitled "The Role of Networks in Cultural Development" In her presentation, Ms. Cvjeticanin made reference to several cultural networks around the world.

Networking for Comparative Research

Networking is essentially a means of communication, and its purpose is to exchange information --whether it is face to face, phone to phone, fax to fax or computer to computer. As we alter the means of communication, questions about the process of exchange need to be examined. Is there equitable access to this process? What is the information that is being communicated? How is it being received, understood and eventually repackaged? Has networking become a privileged activity?

In both of their presentations, Ms. Cvjeticanin and Mr. Fisher defined the network as "part of the analysis of social processes," an important and essential sociological tool of the 20th century. More specifically, according to Mr. Fisher, networking, otherwise known as "social networking," is "the process of informal cooperation on a regular basis between individuals or organizations with a common objective. In this process, networking whatever form it may take --can lend permanence to interpersonal exchange and dialogue and, at the same time, enable professional and practical links to be established."

More precisely, and more importantly, networks are about people who are committed to **voluntary cooperation** at all levels – community, national or international. Without commitment from members of a given network, the system will fail because, in essence, networking is based on acts of good faith and reciprocity. However, it is essential to recognize that, while informal networks, such as the Cultural Information and Research Centres Liaison in Europe (CIRCLE), are crucial to facilitate and support research, they are not practical instruments to realize actual long- term research projects. This has been, perhaps, one misconception of networking. Institutions such as the European Research Institute for Culture and the Arts, (ERICArts), were founded to address this void and to provide a strong institutional focus for the execution of CIRCLE' s research.

Limited resources, travel budgets, and time pressures of policy research, have augmented the need for specialized networks and networking activities. CIRCLE is an example of this type of network. By contrast, "organized" networking is defined by a "formal structure and legal identity and a board or executive committee," whose purpose is to exchange information. An example is the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

The Utility of Networking

According to Mr. Fisher, there are several benefits to networking.

1. It enables information to be exchanged.
2. Participants learn from the experience of others and the exchange of ideas on issues of mutual concern.
3. Through cooperation, it can lead to joint projects or other collaborative initiatives.
4. It is a cost-effective method of cultural cooperation, which, through partnerships, can attract funding and enable financial risks to be shared.
5. It can provide solidarity in the promotion of special interests through campaigning and lobbying.
6. It can be an important instrument to effect change.
7. It provides added value, since it is as important a resource to the individual and/or institution as funding itself.

Applied international comparative policy research depends on the existence of both generalized and specialized networks. Participants of Crossing Frontiers did not hesitate to stress that international networking is fundamental for applied comparisons and that there is an urgent need to enhance the development of a network specifically for international comparative cultural research.

Electronic Networking and Access

The dissemination and circulation of information is key to democratization and is an essential element of human communication. Initially, networks acted as tools to organize information. Today, in the global information economy, the numbers are dramatically increasing with a greater need to organize both the information and the networks themselves.

Three electronic networks designed specifically for the cultural sector were presented during the Forum. These were Culturelink⁵ (Croatia), Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)⁶ (Canada) and CultureNet⁷ (Canada). Ken Hewitt, project manager of CultureNet, provided a live demonstration of this new service. The heritage law bibliography database, developed by CHIN, was available for use by participants during the Symposium. Each of these networks provides access to information on a range of general and specific issues related to the cultural sector. One of the most important features of each of these networks is the cooperation facilitated among researchers all over the world. This has enabled the development of a new community, one that shares information and expertise on a daily basis.

One of the greatest concerns raised by participants was the need to find measures that will ensure the quality of research and information that is circulating between and within electronic networks, like CultureNet (Canada), Artswire (USA) and the World Wide Web. Are we living in an environment promoting digital freemasonry? Will the information sent out on the Internet be used in an appropriate context? What are our new network requirements? Although few have answers to these questions, it was suggested that electronic networks have created the need to establish standards and international agreements between networks. The power of electronic information exchange is considerable, and, therefore, there is a risk and a requirement to assess the integrity of the information and the credibility of the research results in circulation. .

The need for networking is not only to communicate more efficiently but also to ensure access to information. In an environment where technology is widening the gap between the information rich and the information poor, when all countries do not have the same ability to benefit from the networks because of technological deficiencies, researchers must be conscious of all information-sharing techniques, particularly technological ones. The inherent danger for comparative researchers relying solely on electronic networking for information is that the control of information will lie in fewer and fewer hands. This would also imply the rise of a new class system of information users. If provisions are not made, the information

⁵ Culturelink, part of the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO) in Zagreb, Croatia, is a global network, which collects and processes information and research on cultural development and cultural policies. Culturelink has recently published a directory of institutions and databases in the field of cultural development and is currently working on a publication of cultural policies and trends in the UNESCO member-states.

⁶ In her presentation on the activities of CHIN. Barbara Lang-Rottenburg. Director of Museum Services, made reference to the following database services provided by CHIN. These include:

- **national databases:** humanities, natural sciences, and archaeological sites
- **reference databases:** heritage law bibliography (index to international and national cultural legislation pertaining to the protection of cultural property), artists in Canada, conservation information network, curatorial and historic index of publications etc.
- **future databases:** art and architecture thesaurus, the database on heritage legislation and an inventory of American sculptures.

⁷ CultureNet is a new Canadian information service, which will provide an electronic clearing house and dissemination point for cultural information such as performing arts directories or museum schedules. Access to CultureNet will be available in April 1995, as part of the Internet system in Canada, through the World Wide Web. It is a joint project by the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Calgary, The Canadian Conference for the Arts and the Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology.

highway will add another barrier for those currently excluded from obtaining information from mainstream organizations.

Evaluating and Reconstructing Methodologies

When we speak about international comparative cultural research for the purposes of public policy development, we have to reexamine the structure of this approach and look at the researchers involved, the methods they use, and whether or not the tools being implemented are inclusive or exclusive. Have we been using models that help to maintain the values and norms of a dominant culture?

A reevaluation of the research landscape and comparative methodology that would integrate, from the outset, tools to ensure diverse representation of ideas and community participation was proposed by participants in both the Researchers' Forum, as well as the Training and Diversity workshops.

If we examine how research affects the mainstream cycle of policy development and program creation, there are questions that must be raised including those of power, empowerment and access to decision making and information. One of the problems with the traditional methodologies is that they have ignored these questions and have served to exclude rather than include. As stated by Andreas Wiesand, (Germany) chair of the first session, researchers, "as agents of change," have a responsibility to ensure that their methods are inclusive.

According to Marta Vega, USA⁸, choosing appropriate research paradigms reflective of all cultural groups is essential, as these choices influence the articulation of methodology. Traditional paradigms are not producing the appropriate type of information for researchers and policy makers, nor are they providing the proper instruments to aid in the process of decoding information. This recognition questions the cycle of production and dissemination of information, and creates an urgent demand to redesign methodology, questions and approaches to data collection.

Throughout this Symposium, we were reminded that research, especially international comparative research, is about a process of discovering and constructing new ideas based on the experience of others. As researchers, we cannot develop our methodologies in isolation without regard for the growing diverse representation of peoples, experience and knowledge. In other words, we must employ methods that are "culturally grounded" in order to produce information that is encompassing and balanced.

New Indicators and a Wider Cultural Sphere

The use of semiotic analysis (one significant and one signifier) as described by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Canada, limits the results that can be obtained through international comparative cultural research. Traditionally, researchers have employed this approach in an attempt to understand the meaning of isolated events. For example, many studies have examined arts funding trends around the world. The value of these efforts is limited to a broader understanding of the economics of culture as defined by the state. Statistics on alternative emerging forms of creativity and activities are generally not gathered. What is officially collected tends to be data on the high or traditional arts such as opera. It would be unusual if data on indigenous dance were found. If many significant (including all art forms) and many signifiers (socio-economic, political, historical and cultural indicators) were used to evaluate arts-funding trends around the world, and these results were applied to the development of arts policies, these policies, based on a greater body of knowledge and information, would be

⁸ Based on her intervention as a participant of Workshop III: Arts and Culture: Sharing Resources for Future Growth.

more inclusive. Jean-Michel Guy, France, also raised the issue that indicators such as language, ethnicity and religion have been omitted from mainstream research methodologies. He proposed the inclusion of these indicators in the evaluation of, for example, national cultural policies and practices to ensure that we have a representative understanding of all social and cultural values in a given society or community.

In his presentation, Mr .Fritz Betz, Austria, expressed the view that the use of the nation-state as an isolated unit of comparative analysis reinforces the idea of collective identity and does not acknowledge minorities. Regional and local-level comparisons are fewer. One possible solution that he proposed is to examine and compare policies at the local level (city, district). This would also facilitate a shift towards conducting **regional** comparisons with more micro variables and a redefinition of the parameters that guide international comparative research.

Participatory Action Research

Throughout the Symposium, it became evident that there is a global need to make information more inclusive. One recommendation that was made by several participants was the need for more participatory-action research and the adoption of participant -observation methods in order to produce information that is inclusive. In his presentation, Fritz Betz, proposed the adoption of an "ethnomethodological perspective." He described this approach as using participation-observation techniques that would involve, for example, an investigation of public institutions and the ways in which they collect and administer data. In this case, researchers could examine the form and extent to which members of minority communities are part of the administrative and decision- making processes (participation); the mechanisms and the structure of budgets with respect to the distribution of grants and funds; and the guidelines with respect to "contents" (cultural perspectivism), whereby a promotion of "art" and "socio-culture" is suggested.

International Cultural Statistics: Not There Yet

Related to indicators, the Researchers Forum addressed some of the problems associated with the gathering, processing and presentation of international cultural statistics, and invited a new perspective on this longstanding debate. Although ambitious, this debate is not unique. For decades, as pointed out by Carl Johan Kleberg, Sweden, researchers, academics and experts in the field of statistics have attempted to develop indicators that would guide researchers in the collection and evaluation of cultural statistics for the purposes of cross-national comparisons. Some, usually within smaller sets of issues or countries, have had more success than others in producing reliable and relevant data and information. It was determined that, regardless of whether you are gathering comparative tourism, sport or cultural statistics, the problems remain the same.

To date, gathering and processing (encoding) international cultural statistics have been nightmarish tasks at best, and have relied heavily on the magic of subjective interpretation (decoding). Common problems expressed by researchers in this session were:

- different collection techniques in different countries resulting in the production of "incomparable" information and data;
- the complexities associated with comparing different political structures;
- the lack of primary data sources ;
- production of general information with indicators and frameworks that are too broad;
- culture being too narrowly defined; .limited time and financial resources; and
- lower priority on the government's cultural agenda.

Demystification of the Rationale

Professor Jean- Yves Charron, quoting Thomas Kuhn, said that, "Every scientific change is the product of a mystery." What is the mystery of international cultural statistics?

Comparative cultural statistics are rarely gathered for the sake of research and information alone. Politicians, especially in the 1990s, are requesting this type of information and data to support trade initiatives, justify public policies and evaluate competitive positions. In his lunchtime presentation, Mark Schuster stated that, "The political process is very eager for sound bites of information, particularly if they coincide with the politics of the moment". Given these motivations, it would appear that the mystery lies only in the motivation of the political will of the day. Mr .Kleberg further illustrated this point by confessing that many months following the release of a comprehensive report of Nordic cultural statistics⁹, urgently requested by the Nordic ministers of culture, "The ministers who ordered the study have not reacted yet." This suggests that the "urgency" had passed.

Despite this web of complication, what really matters is the quality of research and statistics gathered locally in each country. However, many pointed out that research is the last thing to be considered valuable and the first thing to be cut. Cultural research is on the political margins and, until it is more closely tied to mainstream issues, it will be viewed as less important. According to Mark Schuster, we need to convince the politicians at all levels that research is part of the learning process and, more importantly, part of the policy development process. Otherwise, we are at the mercy of propagandistic numbers and very short -term political expediencies.

What Can We Learn from Other Disciplines"

In his presentation, Mr. Scott Meis, Canada, discussed the work that has been accomplished over the past five years to harmonize the comparability of tourism statistics all over the world. The ultimate goal of this extensive exercise was to achieve consensus on the creation of a framework that would produce reliable international comparisons. Canada recently hosted a global initiative to harmonize travel and tourism statistics.

In 1993, the United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission accepted a new broad definition of tourism; provided standards; added "supply-side" statistics, standard classifications and a model to combine supply and demand information; and developed performance models for the industry. Following this initial and drawn out stage, the Commission initiated an extensive implementation process, including regional seminars. The purpose of these seminars was to ensure the adoption and application of the definitions accepted by the UN, to distribute technical manuals, and to establish educational and training programs for statistical agencies. According to Mr. Meis, one of the most surprising accomplishments was the realization that, within this framework, new statistical comparisons began to emerge that were never considered before. Unfortunately, he reported that, as a separate component, heritage tourism statistics are extremely underdeveloped because of their relatively "new" nature.

Pierre-Paul Tchindji, Cameroon, recommended that researchers gathering cultural statistics learn from the experience that Mr .Meis shared with the group. He believes that cultural researchers do not speak the same language (definitions, terms), especially when it comes to statistics, and he felt that the establishment of international working groups, congregating in different countries, was key to the success of creating universal indicators. Perhaps, as the United Nations sponsored the work of the tourism sector, UNESCO could provide support

⁹ Mansson, Sten. ed. *Cultural Indicators in the Nordic Countries: A Study in Comparative Cultural Statistics* Stockholm: 1993.

that would coordinate the establishment of an international working group to develop new indicators to set a framework for cultural statistics.

Sectoral Advances

Despite the many uncertainties, progress has been made in developing indicators for collecting statistics on participation in cultural life. A meeting of the Economic Commission for Europe ECE/UNESCO¹⁰ committee, comprised of statisticians and experts from around the world, was held in Ottawa prior to *Crossing Frontiers*. The priorities for this meeting, jointly hosted by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, were to compile a list of indicators for the evaluation of cultural participation rates and to examine standards, definitions and research practices. Consensus was reached on the need for developing common broad standards for categories, questions and coding intervals. The application of time-use surveys to participation surveys was considered a valuable approach. A critical reevaluation of the UNESCO Framework was recommended. Broad categories of indicators were preferred over narrow indicators, especially when conducting international comparisons, because of national differences. The participants at this meeting made recommendations on which cultural activities would be appropriate for international comparisons. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place in Germany in June 1995.

Questioning Traditional Practices

Perhaps at this time, we need to question whether we should be pursuing the development of universal standards for the evaluation of cultural statistics or developing a flexible framework, using both qualitative and quantitative indicators that would adapt to the needs of each country given its unique political, cultural and historical context. In her presentation, Ms. Auli Irjala, Finland, shared her experience with using the universal definition of an artist as prepared by UNESCO, while attempting to gather information and compare the socio-economic status of artists in Europe. She found that definitions created at the international level are so broad that the information produced from questionnaires using these definitions borders on being useless.

Perhaps standards are needed to homogenize the process as opposed to the tools. For example, everyone would collect statistics in the same way (process), yet not necessarily ask the same questions (tools). They would evaluate the information using universal methods (process), yet not necessarily use the same indicators (tools). In this case, questions and indicators would take into consideration not only the objectives of the survey, but the cultural context of each nation, region or community.

The Way Forward: Some Thoughts and Recommendations

Before one can hypothesize about where international comparative research in the cultural field is going in the future, there is a need to have a better understanding of what it is and what it is not. We need to know what kind of results we want it to produce.

Crossing Frontiers was a first step in taking stock of the elements that comprise this approach. The debate has, over the past five years, advanced in the area of statistics.

¹⁰ The joint Statistical and Economic Commission for Europe and the UNESCO committee held a work session on cultural statistics in Paris. April 26-28, 1993. Some of the main issues addressed at this meeting were cultural indicators and recommendations for future work on cultural statistics as well as a discussion on various national experiences in applying and using the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics.

Ironically, however, work towards harmonization of indicators has just begun. Reexamining our research paradigms involves a reassessment of the way researchers have structured, and have thus understood, knowledge. Can we say that we even understand what constitutes the cultural sector? Is it a sector?

According to participants, three needs were identified as fundamental to the advancement of international comparative research: the establishment of international teams of researchers; a framework for employing participatory methodologies; and the time to develop adequate indicators. Below is a more extensive list that amalgamates and identifies, more specifically, recommendations for the future that were made by participants throughout the Researchers' Forum.

Applied Research for Policy Development

Recognizing the linkages between comparative research in the cultural area and the policy process, participants called for:

- more policy-related comparative research;
- emphasis on international cooperation leading to joint research projects and the related establishment of international teams of researchers;
- training for comparative researchers in the art of international negotiations and international relations;
- acknowledgement that "advocacy" research is a valid, but not the sole, tool for public policy researchers;
- closer cooperation between policy researchers and those conducting "pure, scientific research";
- the improvement of "quick and dirty" research approaches;
- improved means for communicating and describing results of international comparative research; and
- comparative research that is more closely tied to current issues of concern to ministers. (This could facilitate a greater understanding and appreciation of this approach and perhaps bring cultural research out of the political margins.)

International Networking and the Collection of Reliable Information

Comparative information has acquired a strategic importance in domestic and international policy-making practices. Participants agreed that networking is fundamental in identifying and evaluating information received from around the world. Furthermore, they recommended:

- information systems that were made inclusive and thus granted access to all cultures regardless of socio-economic or political position;
- appropriate levels of education and training for all researchers for them to operate the new networks effectively and efficiently;
- the creation of a centralized clearinghouse of international comparative research that would be responsible for, among other things, the development of a bibliography of international comparative research projects. This was seen as an essential tool to help ground the discipline and to create a new dynamic in international comparative research. Support to this project was given by Culturelink and by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO as a possible World Decade Project;
- the establishment of indicators to evaluate the integrity and reliability of the information and research results on the electronic highway; and

- informal networks that require institutional focus and support to realize and execute long-term research projects.

Evaluating and Reconstructing Our Methodologies

An important contribution made by **Crossing Frontiers** was the launch of a process to reevaluate research paradigms with the goal of making methodologies more inclusive. Below are specific recommendations made by participants:

- there is a need for researchers who are grounded in their cultures and can understand and interpret terminology, definitions, methodologies and results, to be invited to work with other researchers in the execution of international comparative research;
- training for researchers and trainers themselves is essential in order to understand the meaning of diversity. Further training in participatory methodologies is also required;
- comparative researchers are encouraged to conduct cultural comparisons within their own national and regional borders. For example, Canadian researchers should compare the root cultures of the Canadian state. Regional and local comparisons are required;
- international teams of researchers need to be representative of countries and cultures. Participants advocated the formation of diverse teams that would incorporate a complementarity of perspectives and represent a wider range of networks;
- new indicators, including language, religion and ethnicity, need to be employed in comparative research methodologies;
- a shift from using the nation-state as a unit of analysis to conducting regional and local-level comparisons using micro variables is essential; and
- participatory-action research was recommended as a means to produce information that is inclusive.

New Indicators and International Cultural Statistics

Although the most developed arm of comparative research, comparative statistical analysis is hampered by the absence of reliable indicators. Participants made several suggestions in order to overcome some of the problems experienced by cultural researchers who were making statistical comparisons:

- more attention needs to be placed on the method in which data are collected, and in the construction of definitions and terms. This process could be treated as an object of investigation rather than a given;
- a balance needs to be reached between the utilization of economic indicators and other political, cultural, social, historical and philosophical signifiers; and
- an international task force for cultural statistics needs to be established, similar to the working group created by the United Nations to develop indicators for the tourism sector.

These guidelines have been compiled from discussions held both within the Researchers' Forum as well as the Symposium proper. The objective of this list was to amalgamate all those ideas presented during the three days that would advance the discussion of international comparative research as a discipline. As stated throughout this chapter, the legitimacy of a discipline relies not only on accepted assumptions but also on the practitioners of this research approach. At this time, ICP would like to invite criticism and comments from participants of Crossing Frontiers and other experts on the above guidelines. It is our goal to produce a discussion document, based on these guidelines and external contributions, to be elaborated at the next meeting scheduled to take place in Bonn, Germany.